The Final Step: the Email Subject Line and from Address by Sophia Myles

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It may seem as though getting users to open your email would be the first step in designing a successfulÂ email marketingÂ campaign. In fact, setting the "from" address and determining theÂ email subject lineÂ is typically the last step. Unfortunately, for many companies, "last step" often translates to "quickly done and not thought out." Having a compelling "from" address and email subject line should be a task that you spend an ample amount of time for thinking about. It all begins with users choosing to open and view your email, and in many email clients that don't automatically load a portion of your email into a preview pane, that begins with the "from" address and email subject line.

The From-Address: Personal or Professional?

It would be easy (and quick) to default yourÂ email from addressÂ to something simple like info@yourcompanyname.com or email@yourcompanyname.com. However, the from-address that you choose at the beginning of your campaign should never change (you'll be asking people to add it to their contact and address books to avoid having your email go to the spam or junk folder), so it's worth considering whether you want that email from address to be personal or impersonal, as well as what email address may help incentivize open rates. You essentially have three options:

Impersonal:Â This is the most common format for a "from" address and looks similar to those described above. info@yourcompanyname.com and email@yourcompanyname.com are two of the most common. However, you can really select any word that is non-personal and non-incentivized and use it.Â Remember, though, that it's an email address that people will not be able to reply to or will be using as an automated tool for unsubscribing from your email list. For that reason, don't use an email address that you use for other purposes at your company. The benefit of using an impersonal email address as the "from" address is that it will be unlikely to experience any problems with spam filters. The downside is it may not "help" yourÂ email open rateÂ in the same way that personalized or incentivized from-addresses may.

Incentivized:Â An incentivized from-address will utilize the "from" address field to include a word that may help to get users excited about opening your email. Examples include deals@yourcompanyname.com or specials@yourcompanyname.com.Â What's the benefit? Every opportunity to excite a subscriber about opening your email should be leveraged, and the subtle reminder that they may be about to get a deal or discount can be effective. What's the downside? You may experience problems getting through spam filters in certain instances depending on your sender reputation and the content of your email.

Personal:Â The third type of email address for your mass email campaign is personalized. Examples include sally@yourcompanyname.com or joe@yourcompanyname.com. This type of from-address can be particularly effective if your company has a recognizable spokesperson or executive. However, it can also be effective if your business segment is one where one-to-one relationships can be helpful, such as the non-profit sector or even some retail emails.Â The upside is that it makes the email experience feel more individualized to the reader. The downside is that it can also negatively impact open rates just as easily as it can increase them by making your email look less professional.

What's best for you? Because you don't want to change your "from" address very frequently, you'll want to limit your testing with this one. Certainly, however, one test using only different "from" lines can't hurt. Another option is to take an informal poll of your best customers. Either way, make sure that your "from" address is at least thought through and be aware of the other options if you're

finding your open rates to be unsatisfactory.

Remember that it's aÂ CAN-SPAMÂ requirement that the "from" address accurately reflect whom the email is from. No playing around with fake company names or clever url domains!

The Email Subject Line: Research, Research, Research

There is nothing that we would like more than to tell you exactly what subject lines will work the best for your email! However, subject line and what will work can vary dramatically by industry and email list segment. While we can't tell you for absolute certain what will work for you, we can give you a list of common best practices for email subject lines.

Personalize:Â Using a personalization feature such as the one offered by Comm100 to insert a first name or user name into the email subject line can almost always improve your open rate. It's important, however, to use only a first name or user name and not a first and last name.Â Most subscribers will consider the inclusion of their last name in an email subject line to be a privacy concern given how easy it is to hack into an email. Also, as noted when we discussed personalization earlier in this chapter, keep in mind whether your industry segment lends itself to using personalization or whether your customers would rather not have their name publically displayed on an email from you.

Create Urgency:Â You want subscribers to open your email as soon as they see it. The longer a recipient waits to open your email, the more likely it is that he or she will simply end up deleting it. How do you increase the chances that your email will get opened promptly? Creating a sense of urgency in the email subject line is effective in increasing this metric. "Limited Availability Sale Items" and "Clearance Sale for a Limited Time Only" are examples. Write subject lines that make readers or subscribers feel as though they may miss out if they don't open the email and get the contents immediately.

Create Urgency Without a Date!Â However, while you certainly want to create urgency, you don't' want to write an email subject line that makes your email outdated in the near future. Though email still offers the highest return on investment of any marketing channel, with the rise ofÂ social network users often check their inbox less frequently.Â If you send an email that clearly says that an offer is out of date by Friday, you may miss out on potential lagging opens that only happen on the weekend. You'll want to walk a fine line between creating urgency and also not making your email appear out-of-date too soon.

Keep it Short and Put the Important Parts First:Â Log into a Hotmail, Yahoo! or Gmail account and look at how your subject lines display. You'll notice that you don't see that many characters of your email subject line. Generally speaking, you have about thirty-five to fifty characters of text to display in a subject line that a user will actually see. Keep your subject lines short and make sure the most important content, such as the offer you're making, is at the front of the subject line. Also, remember that the longer you make your email subject line, the more likely you are to end up in a spam or junk folder. Even if it takes you a while to craft your email subject line masterpiece into just thirty-five to fifty characters, it will be worth the time and effort in improved deliverability and open rates.

Repeat Your Company or Newsletter Name:Â Users will open their email from you based on two things after a scan of their inbox. The first will be the content of the subject line, but the second will be their relationship with you. Not everybody will scan the "from" address or even see it, so it's often beneficial to put your company or newsletter name in the email subject line as well. Of course, you'll need to balance between subject line length and reminding subscribers that the email is from you. Most likely, you'll need to do some testing to determine the best course of action for you.

Be Careful of Spam Words:Â Finally, there's nowhere that the use ofÂ spam wordsÂ can come back to haunt you more quickly than in the subject line of your email.Â Subject line content is given huge priority by most email service provider spam filters. While it's a fine line, be careful of words like "free" and "cash." Yes, you want to use words in the email subject line that will encourage users to

open your email, but doing that at the expense of getting into the inbox isn't worth it.Â As always, be sure to test your email to a list of seed addresses before you send it to your main list. If you end up going into the junk or spam folder, one of the first "fixes" that you should try is removing any questionable spam words from your email subject line and making it shorter.

And, of course, again remember that it's a CAN-SPAM requirement that your subject line accurately reflect the content of the email. Don't be misleading.

The Most Important Best Practice for Email Subject Lines: Test! Test! Test!

There's nothing easier to test (or more important to test) than email subject lines. It's incredibly easy to break your email list into two parts and simply send a separate subject line to each and see which one gets a high open rate. Of course, make sure that all other variables such as the time of the send, the size of the list, and the breakdown of email service providers on the list are basically the same. Because subject line performance can vary so much based on industry segment, it's important that you test a variety of keywords, calls-to-action, lengths, personalization, and other factors and then make your own list of what is most effective at generating opens of your emails. Starting with the above best-practices can help ensure that you don't have a subject line that is designed to fail. Ultimately what's best for your email campaign program will need to be determined over time.

Of course, the most important thing to remember is to take your time and think through the "from" address and email subject line. A little thought can go a long way to improving open rates.

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