

## Three easy ways to make email work during the holidays

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As a marketing channel, email is brilliant. At once entirely personal and incredibly scalable; email has no barriers to entry, no inherent production costs, and inexpensive distribution platforms. Unfortunately, now that almost everyone has recognized these advantages, our inboxes are being bombarded with marketing messages that are often poorly thought-out, disappointingly generic, and devoid of strategic value.

To help Anthill readers get ahead of the game, we looked at the most common issues we address with our own clients and came up with the three tips below. Most commercial email platforms will give you the tools you need to implement all of them; if yours doesn't, and email is (or could be) a strategic channel for you, consider switching to a more advanced system!

### 1. Measure what matters

If you can't compare email with your other online marketing activities (such as SEM, affiliates/partners, and SEO), you're probably wasting your money! While traditional open and click-through reports can be useful in assessment of the relative performance of individual broadcasts, they have little to do with your bottom line, and do not provide the information you need to extract maximum value from your marketing budget.

Advanced email platforms support end-to-end tracking of every subscriber from open, right through to "conversion" (whether that's an ad impression, a purchase, a download, or a form submission); even if yours doesn't, Google Analytics [google.com/analytics] makes it easy (and free!) to keep tabs on your broadcast performance. Just follow their instructions to add the tracking code to your site, run each URL in your email through the Google Analytics URL Builder [tinyurl.com/3wf7jt], and view the results in Traffic Sources > Campaigns.

### 2. Personalize your messages

Many marketers struggle with declining email performance and high list turnover because they still view email as a mass medium. It's much more helpful to view email as set of simultaneous conversations you're holding with every individual member of an often highly diverse subscriber database. If you don't respond to their cues, relate to them on a personal level, and hold their interest, they'll disengage and ultimately unsubscribe. (Or worse, stay on your list and never respond—which can cost you much more!)

Unless you're targeting a very tightly defined niche, you can't afford to treat your database as a single entity. No one strategy or set of content will meet the needs and expectations of every subscriber, so segment your database into key groups and formulate individual acquisition and retention strategies for each.

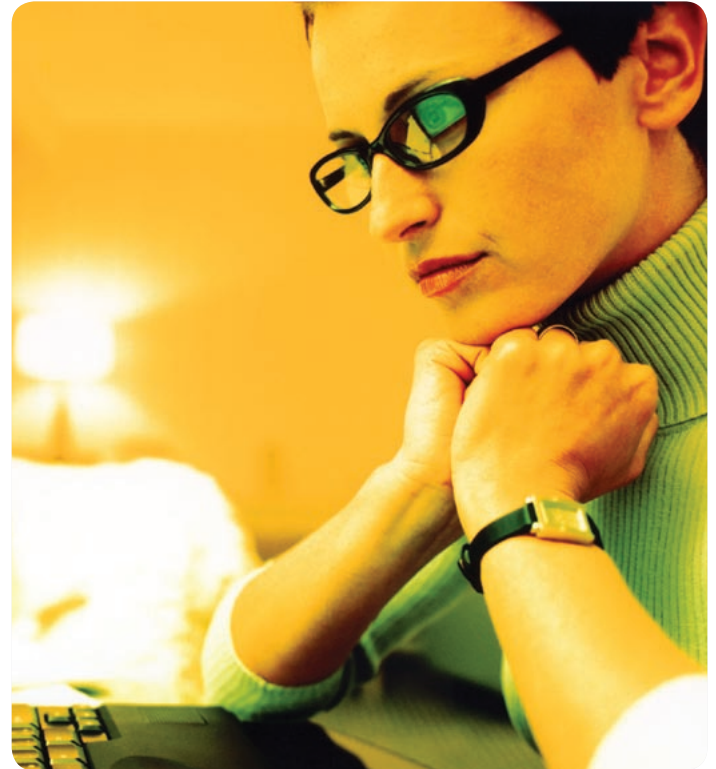
A simple starting point is to use your email platform's reporting functionality to assign subscribers to the following high-level groups:

- Disengaged: no clicks or opens in the last 6 months
- Neutral: at least one click or open in the last 6 months
- Engaged: clicked or opened least 25% of messages in the last 3 months (or since they were added to the list)

Most lists will have only 10–20% of subscribers in the Engaged group (and 50% in Disengaged is not uncommon), so you'll often be able to boost your results substantially by increasing broadcast frequency to Engaged subscribers and reducing broadcast frequency to Disengaged subscribers.

In the longer term, you can send each group personalized content designed to re-engage Neutral subscribers and interest Disengaged subscribers, while improving retention of Engaged subscribers by giving them access to unique content or special offers.

If your platform supports advanced behavioural targeting, much of the identification classification and tracking described above is handled automatically, so there's no reason not to use these techniques!



### 3. Test subject lines

Picking the right subject line can dramatically improve the performance of your broadcast. However, even experienced email marketers often resort to guesswork when it comes to making a final decision.

To use a real-world example, last month, we struggled to select from subject lines similar to the following two:

- "Beat the Widget Price Rise!"
- "Get your widgets before the price hike"

As it turned out, when we tested those two subject lines, the second had a 38% higher conversion rate than the first!

Most email platforms provide a split-test option (often limited to A/B tests). There's no excuse not to use it—coming up with two subject lines rather than one will add a maximum of 5 minutes to your setup process, and is often quicker than trying to decide between two strong contenders anyway.

Once you've set up your broadcast, send each subject line to a fraction of the list, wait for results, then send the winning subject line (based on the metrics you identified in Tip 1) to the remainder. As a rule of thumb, if you're testing two subject lines over a three-hour period, you should send each one to a number of subscribers equal to 10,000 divided by your average conversion rate. For instance, if the rate is 5%, you'll need to send each subject line to 2,000 people, wait a few hours, then send the winner to the rest of your list.

Sophisticated email platforms will perform all the above steps automatically, so all you need to do is set and review; some also allow you to test images and content within your email as well (this is known as "multivariate testing" or MVT). With experience and a little effort you should be able to improve the performance of most broadcasts by 50–70%.

We hope you can save money and improve your broadcast results by applying these tips to your own email marketing efforts. If you'd like to provide feedback on this article, or if you have any questions about email best practice, just contact us at enquiries@taguchimail.com.