

The Four T's of Effective Email Campaigns



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Most marketing strategies these days are based on email marketing, so it helps to understand the basic elements of a successful email campaign. Some of the following tips and tricks have been hard won by others who are using email marketing to its fullest potential. Consider this collection of advice as a set of best practices for email campaigns.

The elements of a great email marketing campaign are based on what we like to think of as the **Four T's**. To get the optimum results from your campaign, you need to **tailor** it, **test** it, **time** it, and **track** it.

The Four T's of Effective Email Campaigns

1. Tailoring
2. Testing
3. Timing
4. Tracking

Tailoring

The foundation of any good email campaign always lies in the design itself—those carefully chosen words and pictures that make up an email advertisement or invitation. Spending sufficient time laying the groundwork here will pay off later in the form of greater response rates, better branding, and stronger customer relationships. Clearly you shouldn't take shortcuts in improving your creative, but marketing automation has made the process considerably less tedious and time-intensive while also enabling the customization, or tailoring, of email campaigns for more personal, customer-friendly messages.

Creating Content

Marketing automation platforms with a “what you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) editor make it easy to design and author professional-looking HTML emails. A WYSIWYG editor provides a user-friendly editing interface that resembles familiar word processing applications and approximates how the page will actually be displayed in a web browser. The familiar interface eliminates the need to learn HTML and allows for fast editing of content that can be tailored to your desired messaging. The interface also facilitates the easy insertion of images like headers or logos, as well as custom HTML code for further tailoring to your brand. Aside from the WYSIWYG editor's capabilities, you will still have the ability to achieve advanced formatting using HTML, as well as the option of using pre-designed templates to get the look you want.

Content Do's and Don'ts

- ✓ **Do make sure your message is readable and simple to act on.**
- ✗ **Don't underestimate the power of a good subject line.**
- ✓ **Do make your content relevant.**
- ✗ **Don't overload your recipients with too much information or too many offers.**
- ✓ **Do make unsubscribing easy.**

Tailoring

Let's expand upon the **Do's and Don'ts for content creation** highlighted above:

Do make sure your message is readable and simple to act on. Get your message across in as few words as possible; make sure you choose those words carefully. Naturally, all of your content should be clear and straightforward enough to be understood without further explanation. But no line demands more clarity and readability than your subject line.

Don't underestimate the power of a good subject line. The vast majority of email inboxes today are crowded and cluttered with competing demands for the reader's time and attention. Your subject line can make the difference between getting your content read and having your message trashed instantly. Subject lines should be relevant to the recipient and should correspond to or sum up the content of the email. Don't underestimate the sophistication of your recipients. A subject line with catchy or clever wording could elicit a smile or generate a little goodwill, which ultimately means getting your email opened and read. But tread carefully: Corny, cutesy, or misleading subject lines will most likely backfire and alienate prospects.

Research shows that while shorter subjects optimize open rates, longer subject lines tend to optimize click-through and click-to-open rates. Subject lines that contain key pieces of information make it easier for recipients to decide if an email is relevant to them.

Do make your content relevant. It's simple: Your message must be important to its intended audience. Some of the burden of ensuring relevant content falls on the task of building the email list itself. An outdated list that includes inappropriate recipients will almost certainly ensure that your content won't be meaningful for many of those who receive it. There are ways to get cleaner, better data; these will be discussed later. The main takeaway here is that having a murky message or irrelevant content will prevent you from reaching your target audience.

Don't overload your recipients with too much information or too many offers. People are already suffering from information overload as it is. Don't let your email further overwhelm your prospects with superfluous information or multiple calls to action. Keep it simple and focus on getting your main message across concisely.

Do make unsubscribing easy. The damage to your reputation that can result from a missing or buried unsubscribe link just isn't worth it. Make sure you include a clear way to opt out or unsubscribe in the email template.

Tailoring

Writing Persuasive Content

The copy writing and copy editing phase of your campaign message is critical to how it will be perceived by its recipients. What you say is important. But so is the way you say it. To get the best results, your emails must distinguish themselves from the typical generic sales pitch. Blatant sales emails get ignored; informational, conversational messages get results. The winning formula is a combination of tone and substance.

Guide to Writing Persuasive Content

- ✓ **Cut the hype**
- ✓ **Know your audience**
- ✓ **Keep it simple and to the point**
- ✓ **Strike the right tone**
- ✓ **Back it up**

To make your email campaigns more persuasive, you should:

Cut the hype. Avoid the meaningless superlatives and sales buzzwords. Savvy consumers can see right through overblown hype, and more often than not, they will interpret it as a smokescreen for an insubstantial product. Think of those TV infomercials with the outrageous claims and over-the-top testimonials. The featured items come off more like bogus potions peddled by a snake oil salesman than quality products sold by a credible company. That's

not the impression you want to leave with your prospects.

Know your audience. You should really know your audience, from their needs and wants to the kind of language they use. What are their problems? How can you offer solutions? Blanket emails targeted at generic problems are a turn-off because they suggest that you haven't taken the time to really get to know your prospects and their needs. Every prospect wants to feel as if you understand them and their problems and have their best interests at heart.

Keep it simple and get to the point. You certainly don't want to patronize your recipients or dumb down your message. But prospects don't want long-winded messages that seem to harbor an ulterior motive. They want a simple, straightforward message without any marketing mumbo-jumbo. They don't open your email thinking, "I wonder what the special offer could be?" They're thinking, "OK, what's the catch?" It's important to get right to the point.

Tailoring

Strike the right tone. Use the same conversational tone you would use with a respected friend or colleague, making sure to balance formality with familiarity. Ideally, you want to create the impression that you are a trusted friend sharing valuable information with your prospect—not an obnoxious interruption trying to make quota.

Back it up. The cardinal rule of persuasive writing is being able to back up your argument with evidence. It follows that a successful marketer should be able to provide concrete examples or hard data to support the claims they make. Ultimately, you want your emails to be persuasive enough to get a conversion, and the best way to persuade prospects is to give them the proof they're looking for.

Marketing trainer and coach Karen Talavera has pointed out that getting a good response rate to any email campaign often depends on engaging the customer in a dialogue. Ideally, your communication should resemble a two-way exchange rather than a one-way announcement.

Talavera offers these additional tips for **getting that dialogue going**:

- ✓ **Adopt a conversational tone, not a promotional one.** Approach the message as if you are writing a friend to share something important with them. Avoid sounding like you just want to sell them something.
- ✓ **Use your brand to add personality to your message.** Talavera mentions some current examples, such as the GEICO gecko's endearing spiel or William Shatner's goofy Priceline antics. Elements of your brand should come across in your message, whether through tone, style, or even graphics.
- ✓ **Get customers involved.** Customers love getting interactive, and one of the easiest ways to do this is to invite them to give feedback on your site or product. You can invite them to submit reviews, testimonials, or success stories. This essentially amounts to free promotion and is a win-win situation for both customers and marketers. User-Generated Content (UGC) has been the key to success for web companies like Amazon.com. It gets your customers involved by making their experience interactive, all while adding significant value to your own website.

Tailoring

Personalizing Content

If the least effective email marketing campaign is the generic blast—a widespread electronic blanketing of your customer database with an impersonal, undifferentiated message—then it follows that the most effective campaign would be a personalized one-to-one message sent thoughtfully to each of your prospects. It may not always be possible (or economically feasible) to achieve true one-to-one messaging. But marketing automation tools make it easier than ever to customize your content to make emails more upfront and personal.

Methods of Personalizing Content

- **Dynamic Content**
- **Variable Substitution**

Dynamic Content

Dynamic content is messaging that can be changed based on preconditions you determine. The dynamic content made possible through marketing automation allows you to further tailor customized prospect messages. This functionality can be set up to perform a variety of customizations, such as displaying unique content to different demographics or market verticals.

Variable Substitution

The message templates offered by marketing automation platforms contain fields which represent values or recipient attributes that can be tailored to fit specific marketing goals. These fields can be used for personal greetings, reference to specific purchases, and similar variables.

These days it's not so much the "To" variable of an email message that gets our attention. More often than not it's the "From" line that matters. The ability to tailor reply addresses can greatly improve the probability that an email will be opened by its recipient. People are accustomed to receiving marketing communications from generic email addresses, but B2B marketing is about building a relationship. A form email from a generic address is not nearly as effective as one sent directly from the sales rep who has already been working with the customer. Most B2C-focused email tools force you to adopt one "From" address. Make sure your email system can send from the recipient's assigned sales rep.

Tailoring

Segmenting Lists

One of the easiest tailoring operations you can perform on your database—but also one of the most powerful—is list segmentation. Segmentation divides your database into unique groups, enabling you to deliver a different group-specific message to each segment. Segmenting allows you to match content to recipients' interests, thereby forming a connection in a way that can't be achieved through a generic email blast.

There are many options for segmenting these key groups based on your specific product. Targeted email campaigns can be easily created and distributed by using marketing automation tools to generate segmented lists.

Example Segmentation Types

- **Geographic**
- **Behavioral**
- **Purchasing Power**

Geographic Segmentation

This is one of the most obvious ways of dividing up prospect lists for targeted campaigns. Adding a little local flavor to your emails can help give prospects the feeling that you know and understand their interests, even from halfway around the world. For example, one promotional products company was able to increase its open, click-through, and buy rates 20-50% simply by crafting targeted emails that

contained product samples featuring local sports teams that correlated with each respective geographic segment. Geographic segmentation is one of the most straightforward and effective ways to connect with your prospects.

Behavioral Segmentation

Behavioral segmentation divides your prospects into groups depending on their behavioral profile. For example, you could classify frequent visitors to your website as belonging to one segment, while another group might be comprised of prospects that have downloaded white papers. You can then send targeted communications to groups of prospects based on their interests.

Tailoring

Setting up a group of automation rules that sends messages based on user activities and behaviors is known as drip marketing. Drip programs help you to easily create a multi-touch campaign to reach new and returning visitors. For example, you can set up rules to automatically send out an introduction email to a prospect who has requested information, followed by a pricing list three days after their last visit to your site, and a special offer one month later if they still haven't responded to your call to action.

Purchasing Power Segmentation

Segmenting according to purchasing power is one more way you can create targeted email campaigns. Collecting data on your prospects allows you to create campaigns that specifically target key leads. This kind of data can be especially helpful if you sell multiple products to different industry verticals. For example, a particular software solution might be appropriate for IT departments, but another one might be more helpful to HR departments. A targeted campaign would ensure that the HR manager receives only relevant information on the latter product, rather than a generic catalog of all your offerings. You can also use this technique to ensure that your email goes to CEOs or other decision-makers instead of less targeted prospects.

Segmenting is nothing new for B2B marketers, but it is no longer the tedious manual process it once was. Marketing automation makes list segmentation not only worth doing, but easy to pull off as well. Using segmentation as a tailoring technique can significantly boost opt-in and click-through rates while allowing you to create more personal messaging that speaks to your prospects' interests and needs.

Tailoring

Look and Feel

The first decision you'll need to make in determining how your campaign email will appear to recipients involves deciding whether your email formatting will be in HTML or plain text. This decision is made within the email template itself, and most marketing automation solutions also allow for a multipart (text plus HTML) option.

Plain Text vs. HTML

Senders today almost always prefer HTML for its flexibility and visual appeal, but you should weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each format before ruling out plain text altogether. These are laid out below.

Plain Text offers:

- **Universal readability.** While HTML is undoubtedly more visually appealing, it lacks the universal readability of plain text. Every email client can render plain text emails, so using it means that you never have to worry about your formatting being a stumbling block to deliverability. Also, the rise in popularity of mobile email clients (cell phones and PDAs) means that some people actually prefer plain text over HTML because the text-only format displays cleanly and easily on mobile devices.
- **Higher deliverability rates.** Plain text messages generally achieve a slightly higher deliverability rate. Since spam filters can't read images, HTML emails are more likely to be classified as spam. Another issue related to deliverability is file size. Plain text emails are smaller and require less bandwidth to deliver than HTML emails, so they're more likely to be delivered successfully.
- **Consistently accurate rendering.** Government agencies and large corporations in certain verticals routinely strip out HTML elements from incoming emails to protect against viruses, causing such emails to display improperly. If you want your email to render exactly as you intended, plain text is best.

Tailoring

HTML offers:

- **Better click-through rates.** The click-through rates of HTML are close to twice that of plain text emails. This can be largely attributed to the visual appeal of HTML over plain text. It is more inviting to click on a button or an image than it is to simply follow a basic embedded link with no visual cues. If you want to ensure better click-through rates, HTML is vastly preferable to plain text.
- **Tracking codes.** HTML offers the ability to place tracking codes in links to help you determine the effectiveness of email offers. Such codes can make the link look long and scam-like in a plain text newsletter, for example. Also, while plain text emails don't allow you to track open rates, HTML makes this possible.
- **Enhanced aesthetics.** Your message's attractiveness and readability can be appreciably improved with color, graphics, and font choices. However, having these options can make HTML formatting more expensive.

The **plain text vs. HTML decision** is one that email marketers continually struggle with, and for good reason. Marketers want the impact that HTML offers, but they also want their message delivered, understood, and appreciated. There are three important "big picture" points that should be taken into account when assessing the alternatives. You should consider that:

- **HTML is not a universally interpreted language.** An unfortunate consequence of using HTML is that different programs can render HTML differently. For example, the creative that looks flawless in Microsoft Outlook 2007 may be misaligned in Outlook 2003.
- **Email clients don't always load images by default.** The client might not support HTML, or recipients could have images turned off. Perhaps of more relevance is the growing popularity of mobile devices, where HTML features won't render correctly.
- **Content is king.** The final point to remember when assessing the plain text vs. HTML debate is that content rules. Don't let the tail wag the dog when designing your creative. Images should add to, not detract from, your message. An email cluttered with too many images and objects is frustrating due to its implied demand on the reader's time and attention.

Tailoring

In the end, it really comes down to knowing your audience. B2C firms that market directly to consumers tend to go with visually appealing HTML emails. If your target audience is in an industry with strict email regulations, such as government entities and public agencies, you might want to consider going the text-only route. Most B2B marketing automation platforms allow you to send out both options at once (*multipart formatting*) so that recipients will receive emails in the format most appropriate to their preferences or their email client's requirements.

Key Design Decisions

- **Text vs. HTML**
- **Branding consistency**
- **Mobile compatibility**

Color and Design

While the color and design elements of an email marketing campaign need to be consistent with your branding, there need not be a slavish insistence on making every piece of a single campaign part of a perfectly matched set. The marketing creative for your email marketing should be consistent with that of your website and landing pages, but sometimes it's even more effective to have a creative that varies slightly from medium to medium. Maintaining a

harmonious creative provides a consistency of experience for your brand, but introducing slight distinctions might stimulate more curiosity.

Regardless of the decisions you make in terms of images, it's crucial not to miss the opportunities that your top-line message presents. Since your message may be viewed in a preview pane with images turned off, or on an email client or PDA that doesn't support HTML content, your top-line message should include a link to a web-based version—just in case. You can also use informative alternative text for when images are turned off.

Testing

Once you have the creative that satisfies your marketing goals, and once you've made the decisions that will best tailor it to your customer base, you'll want to monitor your campaign's look and feel by testing it in several different email providers. It's important to see how your email will look, not only in different readers like Yahoo!, Gmail, and Outlook, but also in mobile environments like Blackberry and Windows Mobile.

Using Campaign Preview

Although some marketers have numerous email accounts set up for testing purposes, the easiest way to view any email in the 50+ email clients available today is through a campaign preview feature like the one in Return Path or LitmusApp. A campaign preview feature can identify content and delivery issues and test against spam filters, ensuring that your email renders exactly as you intended.

Make sure to test just one variable at a time. Identify content issues like spelling and grammar errors that will affect your reputation. Also take note of your message's appearance. Do your images display correctly? What does your creative look like in the preview pane or with images turned off? You should also test all links in the email to confirm that they work properly. To ensure optimum deliverability, send the test email to multiple addresses, including ones with business and free email providers.

Outsmarting the Spam Filter

A campaign preview feature is also invaluable for determining if your marketing creative will trigger leading spam filters. This testing technique will also help you detect whether the problems are with links, poorly formatted HTML, or a high concentration of "spammy" words and phrases.

Spam filters are always changing, so it can sometimes be difficult for marketers to get legitimate messages delivered to prospects and clients. If you find that your test emails are getting sent to the "Junk" folder, follow these steps to remedy the issue:

- ✓ **Test a text-only version of your message.** This will help you diagnose if the issue is content-related or code-related. If the text version gets through to your inbox but the multipart version does not, the issue may be with your images or the source code for the HTML. Make sure you're not using external Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) links. All styling should be inline.

Testing

- ✓ **Avoid spammy words.** If you have determined that the issue is with your content, remember that certain words and phrases can be interpreted by spam filters as spammy, especially those related to money, discounts, or free offers. Try changing a few keywords until you pinpoint the problem. You may need to strip out content sentence by sentence to find the issue. It's also a good idea to study the Readme file for Microsoft Office Junk E-Mail Filter, as well as any similar documentation for spam filters within other email clients.
- ✓ **Check your image-to-text ratio.** Too many images or images that are too large in comparison to the amount of text in an HTML email can be considered spammy. Adding more text or reducing the number and size of images may help. Also, make sure that your images include alt attributes that contain the alternate text that should be displayed when the images don't load.
- ✓ **Check your text styling.** Excessive use of all-caps text, too many different font colors (especially red, green or blue), or smaller- or larger-than-average font sizes (10-12 point fonts are standard) can all be interpreted by filters as spammy.
- ✓ **Make sure your content does not include styling from Microsoft Word.** If you are pasting in content from MS Word, use the "Paste from Word" button in the WYSIWYG editor to avoid having extra styling tags pulled in, which can make the HTML spammy.
- ✓ **Check for SenderID and DomainKeys records.** As a final precaution, verify that you've added SenderID and DomainKeys records to your Domain Name System (DNS).

All of these steps will improve the deliverability of your emails, but the single most important step you can take to outsmart spam filters and get your messages delivered is to set up email authentication.

The Benefits of Email Authentication

Even ethical marketers find it difficult to get past automated spam and phishing filters that can't differentiate a legitimate email from a dangerous message. One way to improve your deliverability and prevent cases of mistaken identity by spam filters is to set up email authentication. This step is sometimes ignored by marketers because it is not required to send emails and can often require the assistance of the IT department. But because such measures are a reflection of a company's integrity, the price for ignoring authentication is really too high for marketers to bear.

Testing

Authentication Standards

Email authentication involves equipping automated emails with enough authentic information so that recipient mail servers can recognize the nature of each incoming message. This differs from content filtering, whereby an email is blocked or allowed based on an analysis of its content rather than its source. Authentication standards attempt to separate the unethical “black hats”—spammers and phishers—from “white hat” marketers who operate legitimately.

There are no universal authentication guidelines, but there are some widely-adopted standards used by a growing number of ISPs and other mail servers. The most commonly accepted standards are SPF, SenderID, DomainKeys, and DKIM.

- **Sender Policy Framework (SPF)** authentication allows network administrators to specify which internet hosts can send email claiming to originate from that domain by adding a specific SPF record to the public DNS record. Mail exchangers can then verify the sender's identity against the list published by the email administrator.
- **SenderID** authentication validates the origin of email messages by verifying the IP address of the sender against the alleged owner of the sending domain. Sender ID is the email authentication tool supported by Microsoft, while DomainKeys (below) is Yahoo!'s tool.
- **DomainKeys** is a Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) protocol for authenticating email that employs a public and private key. Senders publish a public key for their domain, and all outgoing email is signed using the corresponding private key. The advantage of DomainKeys is that it protects the integrity of the sender *and* the message. This method not only verifies the validity of the sender, but it also allows third parties to relay or forward the message without breaking the authentication.
- **DomainKeys Identified Mail (DKIM)** is Yahoo!'s and Cisco's combined attempt to enhance the DomainKeys standard. This protocol bases acceptance of messages on the sender's overall reputation and trustworthiness. DKIM uses the cryptographic validation technique of DomainKeys to evaluate whether to accept email from the sender's domain.

The major ISPs and many corporate spam filters check for one or more of these types of authentication when deciding whether or not to allow emails into a recipient's inbox. A solution that allows you to send emails from your actual domain (rather than the dummy domain typically used by email service providers) and automatically authenticates using these four commonly accepted standards will go a long way in ensuring that more of your emails get delivered.

Timing

Sometimes it seems as if you've done everything right. You're pleased with your marketing creative, and you've customized it to meet your business goals by being as dynamic, personal, and customer-friendly as possible. You've proofed your content, checked for image display issues, and tested for technical errors. It looks great, and everything works as it should. Yet your campaign is just not making the impact you had hoped for. Could the problem be with bad timing? What *is* the best time to send emails to prospects, anyway?

The unequivocal answer is: *It depends*. If you're a B2C marketer promoting a Caribbean vacation package, the best time for your offer to arrive in a prospect's inbox might be on Friday evening or Saturday morning, when her mind isn't on the office and she can daydream about sunshine and ocean breezes at her leisure. But if you're a B2B marketer, that same timing probably couldn't be worse.

B2B marketers should follow these general rules of thumb about timing in order to increase the chances that their messages get the attention they deserve:

- ✘ **Don't send emails over the weekend or on Mondays.** Prospects are already dealing with a stack of weekend email, and you don't want your best efforts to get lost in the shuffle.
- ✘ **Avoid sending emails over major holidays or typical vacation times.** Email tends to pile up during these periods, so be sure to time your message so that it doesn't get overlooked.
- ✘ **Don't send emails first thing in the morning.** You'll be competing with the usual barrage of early-morning email. What makes you think your message will stand out?
- ✘ **Don't send emails at the end of the day.** They might get brushed aside as your prospects knock off work and go home for the day. Then you're back to square one, and your email must compete with the next day's inevitable early-morning deluge.
- ✘ **Avoid sending emails when prospects are likely to be away from their computers.** Try to time emails to arrive during the workday while prospects are actually in front of their computers. Lone messages that pop up in cleared-out inboxes during regular working hours tend to get opened and read instantly. This is exactly the kind of placement you want for your message. The times just before lunch or just after lunch are ideal for this strategy.

Timing

Marketing analyst Mark Brownlow has written about the importance of getting the timing right when sending out emails. He offers the following helpful advice on how to analyze the best time to send out emails:

- ✓ **Analyze send times and response rates from past campaigns.** Try to identify any patterns that emerge, especially with regard to particular send times that seem to have the highest or best response rates. Brownlow suggests going back about six months and graphing your time-of-send against the response rate. You can then alter your send times to maximize response rate.
- ✓ **Compare opens-per-hour to send times.** If you graph this relationship, the standard curve should be smooth and even. Bumps in your own data's graph might indicate special patterns or anomalies you should pay attention to.
- ✓ **Try segmenting your lists by time-of-open.** There is no single send-time that will be optimal for *all* of your prospects; there are going to be different ideal send-times for different segments. Segment your list by time-of-open (e.g., *Opened between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.* vs. *Opened between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.*) and you'll be surprised at how easy it is to determine the best send-time for each grouping.

One final aspect of timing marketers should consider is the frequency of your contact with prospects via email. You should be sending emails frequently enough to stay top of mind with prospects, but not so often as to become an annoyance. Three emails per year is probably not enough; three per day is definitely too many. The nature of your product or service and the campaign tracking data you gather will help you find the sweet spot between too often and not enough. Marketing automation tools help you strike this happy medium by automating campaign actions based on decisions you've made ahead of time regarding timing and other variables. A marketing automation solution offers considerable time and labor savings by allowing you to create emails and schedule them for future deployments, ensuring that your campaign is timed right while requiring minimal investment from you.

Tracking

When it comes to discussions of tracking, it is important to make a clear distinction between *testing* (what works persuasively and technically) and *tracking* (analyzing the results of, or customer reactions to, a campaign). Testing comes first; tracking happens later. Testing ensures that your campaign will be deployed correctly. Tracking produces actionable metrics that can be used to judge the efficacy of an entire campaign or any of its elements (such as the timing of particular email offers) and to compare campaigns to each other.

Email tracking helps you learn whether an email ever reached its intended recipient and whether it was opened or not. Most tracking tools record when the email was received as well as when it was opened. Tracking tools also note the recipient's IP address and let you see which links the prospect clicked on after opening the email.

Most marketing automation solutions include built-in tracking features that measure things like open and click-through rates, as well as bounced (not received) messages and unsubscribe messages. Email tracking yields a number of helpful metrics that can be analyzed to measure the success of a marketing campaign or webpage.

Tracking methods

- **Web bugs.** A web bug is a piece of code that is embedded in an email or webpage to track user behavior. Also called *web beacons* or *pixel tags*, web bugs are invisible to the user because they arrive as small, transparent GIF files. Web bugs can track the IP address of the computer and the type of browser, as well as the time it was viewed, the URL of the web bug or the page on which it was located, and a previously set cookie value.
- **Click-throughs.** Click-through rate (CTR) is most commonly calculated by dividing the total number of clicks by the total number of impressions. For example, if an email offer was delivered 100 times (total impressions), and its included link was clicked only once, this would result in a 1% CTR.
- **Bounced messages.** A bounced message occurs when you send out an email that gets returned by the recipient's mail server. Bounces can be either synchronous, which reject the email immediately after you try to send it, or asynchronous, wherein you're able to send the email, but you later get a notification that it was not successfully delivered.

Tracking

Bounces are also categorized based on the reason for the failed delivery. Hard, or permanent, bounces can occur for a number of reasons. Maybe the domain does not exist or the recipient is unknown, or perhaps the receiving mail server is refusing mail due to a network failure or some other technical issue. This is the sort of bounce you'd expect when you have a bad or invalid email address that needs to be scrubbed from your lists.

Soft, or transient, bounces result from a temporary failure to deliver an email. Soft bounces don't necessarily indicate a bad or invalid address—they're more suggestive of some temporary issue that prevented your email from being sent, so in most cases you should try sending the message again later. Full mailboxes can cause soft bounces, as can trying to send a file that's too large.

The bounce management features of marketing automation platforms typically catch both soft and hard bounces. These are sent to the return path address so that you can process them, scrub any faulty addresses from your email list, and display the bounces in reports. Marketing automation solutions make this process easy; for example, some platforms automatically scrub an invalid email from your list after the first hard bounce occurs, or after a certain number of consecutive soft bounces. Bounce management data is usually fairly intuitive and easy to use. You can easily see who has either been tagged as hard bounce or has opted-out of your email communications altogether.

Mastering the Four T's

Marketing automation solutions offer significant value in helping you master each of the **Four T's** that determine the success of an email marketing campaign:

- **Tailoring** your campaigns to appeal to prospects on an individual level is effortless when you use marketing automation tools to personalize your emails with relevant content and messaging.
- **Timing** your emails for optimum effectiveness is no longer a perplexing trial-and-error process when you follow best practices to get your timing right.
- **Testing** can be simplified and automated to ensure maximum deliverability and to protect your reputation as a legitimate company.
- **Tracking** features within marketing automation platforms provide a wealth of information for performance evaluation and list management that you can leverage for improving your ROI.

About Pardot

Pardot is a B2B Marketing Automation Software provider that increases revenue and maximizes efficiency for companies with multi-touch sales cycles. Prospect Insight, Pardot's lead management software features CRM integration, email marketing, lead nurturing, lead scoring, and ROI reporting to help marketing and sales teams work together to generate and qualify sales leads, shorten sales cycles, and demonstrate marketing accountability. Pricing plans start as low as \$500 per month and plans do not require contracts.

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