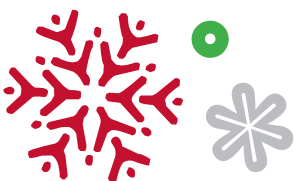


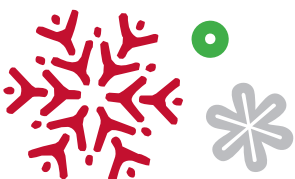
12 Tips for Optimizing Your Email Program for the Holiday Season



- 1. Review last year's email campaigns.** Do a methodical post-mortem of your 2010 campaigns. What worked? What didn't? What KPIs were tracked? Did your unsubscribe rate increase as a result of a higher frequency during the holiday period? What creative was most effective? Which offers drove the most conversions? Did you experience increased complaints due to the heavy promotional nature of your content? Dive into what resonated and what didn't before creating a strategy for this year.
- 2. Monitor your sender reputation.** Your emails aren't going to deliver a return on investment during this critical end-of-year period unless they are consistently getting delivered to the inbox. A change in strategy, content or frequency could impact email deliverability and it's important to closely monitor the effect your holiday campaigns are having on your sender reputation. Set yourself up for success by making sure your IPs have a high reputation and aren't on any blacklists prior to deploying your campaigns for the holiday season.
- 3. Prevent complaints.** Complaints are often linked to high frequency or poor expectations set during the sign-up process. If you plan to increase frequency during the holiday season, consider using a separate permission level and ask subscribers if they would like to sign-up for your holiday-themed campaigns to receive special content and offers that will benefit their holiday shopping experience. At a minimum, allow subscribers to opt-out of your holiday messaging or offer them the option of decreasing frequency. The easier it is for subscribers to opt-out, the less likely they will be to complain and mark your message as spam with their ISP.
- 4. Consider email certification.** The default setting for the majority of email clients is "images off." If you want to ensure the beautiful creative with attractive product images and seasonal colors you've worked hard to design can be viewed by your recipients, consider joining Return Path's Certified network and gain access to the largest, broadest and most respected whitelist in the email universe, covering more than 2.5 billion mailboxes worldwide. For Certified senders, images are automatically enabled at Windows Live Hotmail and Yahoo! so you can focus on optimizing your campaigns for higher response and improved subscriber experiences.
- 5. Optimize your holiday creative to drive response.** Is your email creative working as hard as it could to demonstrate the value of your products or services, differentiate your brand from your competitors, drive opens, clicks and conversions and keep subscribers informed, engaged and entertained? Ensure your templates are designed for image rendering and preview-pane viewing and make adjustments that will lower the hurdle for subscribers to take an action and engage with your messaging.



6. **Know your audience.** Incorporate subscriber-level data that will allow you to target your messaging for increased response. Use information about past purchase behavior, email activity, preferences, demographics, length of time on the email file and website activity to create relevant messaging, rather than sending the same content and offers to everyone on your email file.
7. **Develop your inactive strategy.** With ISPs using engagement metrics to affect filtering decisions, getting a handle on the inactive portion of your file can positively impact deliverability as well as response. If your holiday marketing plan includes sending a higher frequency of messages to subscribers, you may experience engagement-related bulking and blocking at the ISP level. Implement a strategy for trying to reengage with the non-responsive portion of your file and remove subscribers that have lost interest.
8. **Optimize transactional messages.** Because transactional messages traditionally have high open rates, these messages provide an additional opportunity to engage with your subscribers. Use your transactional messages to make recommendations about related products, feature customer reviews and testimonials, ask subscribers to submit their feedback, include helpful links to customer service, promote your preference center and encourage subscribers to sign-up for your various email marketing campaigns and message streams.
9. **Determine the size of your mobile audience.** How many of your subscribers are using their mobile devices to access your email messages? What devices and mobile environments are they using? Do you have a mobile site to support customers who may prefer to shop and browse while on the go? Incorporating mobile data and options into your holiday email marketing campaigns can significantly affect response and overall performance. Return Path's Campaign Insight tool can provide data on mobile viewership and help guide your mobile strategy.
10. **Design for the mobile screen.** Once you know the percentage of your subscriber base that is viewing your messages on a mobile device, it will be important to implement best practices for designing for the mobile screen. Do you have the right balance of images and text? How does your creative render on an iPhone or iPad as compared to an Android device? Can your message be understood and easily acted upon regardless of the environment or device being used to view it?
11. **Integrate social media and email.** The holidays are a great time to provide subscribers with useful offers and content that makes their lives easier. Whether your messages are helping them save time or money, people are more inclined to connect at this time of year and share your emails with friends and family. Effectively integrating your email and social media efforts to boost growth and engagement across both channels will be integral to the success of increasing your fan/follower and subscriber bases, as well as driving overall engagement. Consider including SWYN links at the article/content level, encourage subscribers to share their product ratings and reviews and make what's happening on your social media pages part of the featured content in your email campaigns.



- 12. Welcome new subscribers.** As you increase promotions for your products and services around the holiday season, you may see an uptick in the number of subscribers opting-in for your marketing campaigns, especially if you offer incentives or discounts. Make sure you start the relationship off on the right foot and increase the potential for lifetime value with an effective welcome message or series of messages that reaffirm the benefits of the email program, set expectations about content and frequency and encourage subscribers to interact with the brand by becoming customers.

Need more help?

The Professional Services team at Return Path can help ensure you have a successful strategy to achieve your email marketing goals. Whether your timeline is focused on the busy holiday season or any other time of year, Return Path can help. From designing email templates that are optimized for response, outlining a segmentation strategy, creating a testing plan and much more, the Professional Services team is focused on providing you with measureable results. For more information, call 866-362-4577, visit us at www.returnpath.net/proservices or email rpinfo@returnpath.net to get started today.

