StrongSuccess Guide to Cross-Channel Marketing

13 CROSS-CHANNEL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR 2013

Boost your marketing program results with these innovative and actionable tips designed for today's multi-channel world

StrongMail®

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INTRODUCTION

Email remains one of the most effective channels at a marketer's disposal, but maintaining – and increasing – its effectiveness requires evolving your programs to take advantage of the latest trends and best practices. In today's multi-channel world, email needs to break out of its silo and become integrated with other relevant channels. The 13 cross-channel strategies provided in this StrongSuccess Guide will help you break into the world of integrated cross-channel marketing.

From mobile and social media to the rise of big data, learn how you can take advantage of the trends to deliver more effective campaigns that properly reflect the relationships you have with your customers, and how they spend their time online. Read on to find out how real-time relevance can help you generate significant performance increases that enable you to outpace your competition.

STRATEGY 1 MOBILE-FRIENDLY EMAIL EXTENDS PAST THE CLICK

Nearly half of all Americans own smartphones[1], and mobile open rates are exploding. These days, subscribers have the opportunity to open your email on one of almost 100 different screen sizes. Can you afford to ignore subscribers' desires to read your emails on their device of choice?

The best solution to this daunting situation is to create a responsive email template that automatically adjusts to the best user experience for the screen on which subscribers view your email. While you cannot design independently for every device, you can start by designing with different platforms in mind. For instance, a desktop user probably has more time than someone reading an email on a smartphone. Smartphone users are more likely to be on the go and under a time crunch while thumbing through your email. Bringing the most relevant information to their fingertips will provoke action. Mobile optimization can do this by hiding the secondary information and displaying what's most relevant.

But making your email easy to engage with on a mobile device is just the beginning. Don't forget to extend the mobile experience to your website. For the best user experience, it's important to mobile optimize landing pages, presenting a fluid multi-channel experience to the mobile user.

In short, email remains the leading consumer touch point, but it now exists in a world of multi-channel interactions. You must give your customers the best experience possible regardless of the device or channel they choose to interact through.

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[1] Nielsen Mobile Insights, Q3 2012

STRATEGY 2 GET A 360-DEGREE VIEW OF YOUR CUSTOMER

Data and relevance are the keys to creating an engaging experience for your customers. Most marketers crave data – they thrive on what they can extract from the information and then find a way to make the data actionable and creatively market with a better understanding of their customers.

In thinking through the type of information you may have in your database (or what you want to have), don't limit yourself. Consider any and all engagement points or profile data – from contact and demographic, to data from website clicks, email opens, calls into customer service and redemption of coupons at brick-and-mortar stores. All can provide valuable insight into that consumer's interests and preferences. Leveraging both offline and online behavior and engagement is imperative to creating the most relevant experience in your marketing communications.

Having the right technologies in place to collect, analyze and act on this data is critical. Careful consideration should be given to analytics tools (for the web, search, email) and business tools (CRM, call center, marketing automation tools, etc.) – systems that allow you to collect, consolidate and act on behavioral and other types of data, enabling a 360-degree view of your customer. Having the right tools and solutions in place allows you to go from big data to big results, driving better marketing and better ROI from your efforts.

"In order to truly achieve long-term success with marketing programs, you must understand the contribution each channel is making to the bottom line."

STRATEGY 3 ATTRIBUTION MODELING IS INTEGRAL TO LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Unfortunately, most digital marketing channels have evolved as separate and distinct silos. In order to truly achieve long-term success with marketing programs, you must understand the contribution each channel is making to the bottom line. Recognizing these trends, spends and successes in channel combination will help optimize your marketing mix successfully for years to come.

Achieving this insight can be a daunting task for marketers; even knowing where to start can be a complicated decision. But not to worry – it can be as simple or complex as your data will allow. To get started, take a look at your marketing efforts. You don't have to start with the entire company – pick a department or a group and work your way out from there. Once you have a good idea of where you are communicating, you will need to build out a test plan that leverages various combinations of the media and channels to ultimately determine the incremental lift a channel brings to conversion. Get crunching!

STRATEGY 4 DATA IS KING, CONTENT IS QUEEN

Data is all too easy for marketers to come by these days, but that hasn't always been the case. The challenge now is that we have so much information at our fingertips that we could be completely consumed in analyzing it. Data is the key to relevance, but leveraging data alone does not automatically guarantee relevant communications. If data is king, content is queen, and that means you need to pair data with context and content that is really going to resonate with your audience. Be sure that you don't spend so much time on the data analysis that you short-change the content. To truly achieve the relevance that marketers strive for today, you need the King and the Queen to be getting along harmoniously. Don't lose sight of that.

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STRATEGY 5 BE PREPARED TO ADDRESS AUTO INBOX FOLDERING

There has been a lot of conversation recently around the increasing presence of auto-foldering for managing inbox clutter. With companies like OtherInbox, SaneBox, and AOL Alto, having your email communication being filtered out of the inbox and into another folder may be a reality you already face. And if not, it will be one you will face soon as adoption of these types of tools continues. Be sure you are considering this possibility when it comes to offer length, metrics tracking and overall engagement, as all of these elements can impact your results. It is still not certain what the overall consumer adoption for inbox foldering will be, but it is clear that consumer relevancy will always be critical to effectively reaching your consumers.

STRATEGY 6 SERVE UP AN EXPERIENCE RELEVANT AT THE OPEN

Because of the growth of tools such as auto-foldering, identifying opportunities to optimize your email communications for relevancy at the moment of the "open" are increasingly important. This can cover a variety of elements, including device detection, countdown clocks, weather-driven offers and offer optimization to present the most relevant content to your recipient.

Having the resources and technical capabilities to allow your messaging to be tailored specifically to actions that are initiated by the recipient not only shows that you're aware of what they're doing, it also confirms that you're paying attention to how they're doing it.

STRATEGY 7 BRING GEOGRAPHIC RELEVANCE TO YOUR MESSAGING

What use is an email about Tucson when you're in San Francisco? Delivering relevant content based on the location of your subscribers can be a very effective way to increase engagement, and it's very likely that you can leverage existing tools and customer data to make it happen.

Good examples of location-based messages include weather information, local deals, event times or local shipping offers. The traditional way to accomplish this is through stored IP address or physical location data, but you can also leverage new tools to automatically sniff out customer location.

Geographic relevance doesn't stop with a one-time recorded location – customers are mobile and on the go. A travel company can pay attention to the location a subscriber is traveling to and email them at the right time with appropriate information. Even better: integrate geographically relevant content into regular communications, even when the subscriber is travelling.

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STRATEGY 8 GET PERMISSION TO ENGAGE ACROSS MULTIPLE CHANNELS

While it is rare these days, you may still occasionally encounter a marketer who thinks that permission is "not really necessary." Additionally, many organizations are "channel-siloed" when it comes to getting permission to communicate. However, multi-channel is a must, and permission to message in all channels creates a more engaged, complementary and transparent relationship.

Make sure you capture multi-channel communication preferences at any point where you can reach the consumer (e.g. on your Facebook page, in the store, via the call center, etc.). On top of that make sure you have a preference center available online for your subscribers to clearly indicate their desire to receive your messages across multiple channels and modify those preferences if they desire. Don't hesitate to occasionally remind your subscribers to update their preferences, directing them to the preference center. Hopefully they can discover new compelling options since they last checked. People's preferences change over time, as do your offerings, so make it easy for individuals to tell you how they want to hear from you. Doing so will go a long way in maintaining a valuable relationship between you and your customer.

STRATEGY 9 USE THE CUSTOMER BUYING CYCLE TO ACHIEVE TIMELY RELEVANCE

We've known for a long time that consumers need different information at different times as they move from product consideration to making the purchase, and then interacting with the item or service. The key is to determine where they are in the buying cycle and deliver the right message that drives them forward to the next stage.

Customers can both explicitly and implicitly indicate where they are in their purchase decision and when they are ready to buy. Your strategy must shift for the stage they are in: people earlier in the process should get more information about the brand, the product, and its quality, while those later in the process might react better to competitive information, and perhaps even a promotion.

Aside from explicit indicators, you can infer the customer stage by creating content targeted to different parts of the buying cycle. Then, based on how they engage with this content, you can infer the customer's needs and follow up with additional content targeted to that stage of the customer lifecycle. The targeted content can exist in stand-alone emails, or as dynamic content inside of your regular batch emails.

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STRATEGY 10 COMMIT TO TESTING ON A CONTINUOUS BASIS

Testing: it's easy, cost effective, immediate and a "must have" for marketing success. As your database grows, testing becomes more important for each campaign sent. Testing helps understand performance at a moment in time and continual testing is a requirement for continual improvement in your marketing campaigns. Over time, you should be able to identify trends and opportunities for future messages and leverage those trends to make constant adjustments and improvements. The small improvements implemented from the results of your testing programs can add up to significant benefits in both consumer engagement and marketing ROI.

Testing must move beyond a one-time test, learn, adjust and execute cycle. It must be a central part of your marketing processes and part of how you optimize for performance over the long haul. For instance, just because you've tested a subject line and it performed well last year doesn't mean that the same subject line methodology will perform equally well today. This is why you should test elements of your campaigns during every email you send. Rather than taking your learnings and automatically applying them to all of your customer touch points, test with a subset of your audience in real time to determine what the right combination of elements is for one specific message and channel, and send the winning result to the remainder of your audience.

This type of continuous experimentation and testing is the quickest path to peak performance. Only through testing and optimization will you find out what works best for your brand and customers.

STRATEGY 11 LEVERAGE MOBILE TO ACQUIRE PERMISSION TO ENGAGE

Integrating mobile into your email marketing programs doesn't have to be a daunting task. A simple campaign where subscribers can text a short code with "Subscribe" and their email address is a great means to connect with your customers in the world at large and gain permission to open up a dialogue. Through SMS based opt-in, on-the-go customers have an easy way to opt in for further engagement with your business.

Consumers don't think of SMS, email and social as different silos – for them, it's all just communication with your business. Each channel has its pros and cons as a means of creating that customer connection, and it's our jobs as marketers to reach out with the channel that is most appropriate for the content, the unique needs of the customer and facilitating seamless cross-channel engagement.

"Progressive profiling means making the extra effort to constantly expand upon what you currently know about your customers, building richer data and deeper customer profiles."

STRATEGY 12 LEARN ABOUT YOUR CUSTOMERS OVER TIME

Just like dating…you don't learn everything about someone overnight. It can take months or years to really know a person. Getting to know your customers is really no different.

Progressive profiling means making the extra effort to constantly expand upon what you currently know about your customers, building richer data and deeper customer profiles. This can be accomplished by both explicit and implicit data about that consumer's preferences. A simple follow-up, such as a preference survey or post-purchase questionnaire, allows your customers to tell you what their interests are. For example, after a customer purchases an album of music, asking them about other artists they regularly listen to gives you valuable insight and a better means of creating relevant content for that person in the future.

A person's interactions with your brand can also be used to infer their interests and build out their customer profile. If a customer spends most of their time browsing jazz music on your site, you can ensure the emails you send to that person relate to artists in the jazz genre. By building this profile data over time, you're learning more about your customer and building deeper, more personal relationships with them.

STRATEGY 13 THINK PROGRAM, NOT INDIVIDUAL MESSAGE

Audiences love a good story and great experiences. Thinking about the overall customer communication experience as a whole and building campaigns that tie together across individual messages brings more depth to each individual message, and a more engaging customer experience. As consumers, getting introduced to a brand's program and offerings should develop over a period of time and in stages that have a natural flow and rhythm.

The first stage is the introduction. This is your opportunity to set the stage, give a glimpse into what you have to offer, and set expectations on what's to come. This is your communication onboarding phase. Follow that with the early engagement communications, which are more nurturing in nature. Your goal is to continuously nurture your customer relationships, helping them to deepen, persist and build towards your eventual goals. Rewarding engaged customers with incentives and offers is just as important as winning back customers who are lapsing. Each type of engagement should be thought of within the greater context of the lifecycle stage for that customer.

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CONCLUSION

Marketing is not a static discipline. The rapid consumer adoption of emerging channels like mobile and social, as well as the explosion of available data sources, has led to a revolution in digital marketing that requires marketers to continually evolve and advance their strategies. The tips provided in this StrongSuccess Guide can help you evolve your marketing campaigns, but you also need to consider the technology, resources and ongoing strategies required to keep pace with the continual changes in digital marketing. You need to work with the right technologies and partner with the best companies to drive cutting-edge marketing programs and the most relevant communications for your customers.

A top-tier, enterprise-level marketing service provider should provide you with the technology foundation for accessing the data, the marketing channels you need to remain relevant, and the services required to implement the most effective strategies for engaging with your customers. For more information about marketing best practices or how our technologies can keep you at the cutting edge, we encourage you to visit StrongMail's website **(www.strongmail.com)**, or give us a call at **800-971-0380**.

ABOUT STRONGMAIL

StrongMail empowers marketers to achieve their acquisition, retention and loyalty objectives with powerful email and cross-channel marketing solutions. With StrongMail's market-leading solutions and services, brands can quickly, simply and effectively employ these vital communication channels to expand both reach and revenue. StrongMail provides marketers with the tools they need to drive more value from their marketing programs: a drag-and-drop interface for lifecycle marketing, real-time testing and optimization, dynamic reporting and unparalleled data access. StrongMail has a proven track record helping leading brands with sophisticated data needs boost the performance of their marketing initiatives across email, mobile and social channels.

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