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Email Marketing Myths, Experiments, and Inspiration

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Myths

Some common email assumptions you might have that may not be true.

Like many ideas in marketing, email is rife with myths and assumptions that can lead your program astray. Below, you'll find some of the most common email marketing myths along with the facts that demonstrate how they're untrue.

Check this list and make sure you're not operating under false assumptions and guidelines.



1

Never remove recipients from your list

Unengaged recipients (those who don't open or click messages) should be dropped from your list through an established sunseting process.

The average email list loses 25% of its active contacts every year.

2

Unsubscribes are THE WORST

Unsubscribes aren't bad. In fact, an unsubscribe is simply someone telling you they no longer want your messages. By removing them, you can improve the quality of your list and prevent unengaged recipients from marking your messages as spam.

3

Only spammers end up on blacklists

While it's true that blacklists can use spam traps to find people sending unwanted email, anyone is at risk of ending up on one. You can make sure you don't by using confirmed opt-ins, engagement-based sunseting, and real-time address validation.

4

Sending more email means more revenue

Email marketing is a great revenue driver, but the more you send to your list, the less people will engage. Increasing your sending frequency has diminishing returns, so it's better to test and find the right frequency for your recipients.

5

The more images, the better

Images should be used thoughtfully. While some can make an email more visually appealing, too many can impact deliverability. **Make sure your text to image ratio is closer to 60:40 or 70:30.**

6

Always use GIFs

GIFs within messages absolutely make them appear more interesting, but they don't always render correctly. Prior to adding GIFs, make sure they're necessary and will render on your recipients' devices.

7

Always include discounts in your subject lines

Including a discount in your subject line doesn't always mean that people will be more inclined to open your email. If you're going to do it, make it stand out with something unique, instead of the common 20%, 50%, or 75%.

8

Emojis make emails more fun and increase open rates

Before including emojis in your subject line, evaluate your audience, content, and the purpose of your email. An emoji in a fun marketing email to a younger audience may make sense, but including an emoji in a password reset email or receipts might be inappropriate.

9

Never send marketing email on the weekends

While the day of the week may seem extremely important, if your recipients are eager to receive your email, it doesn't matter when you send your message. However, people are more likely to read email on a mobile device on weekends, so if you do send, make sure your messages are mobile responsive!

10

Always send messages by 11am EST

Like the day of the week, the time that you send your message isn't as important as making sure your recipients are engaged with all (or most) of the messages you send in general.

11

Messages don't NEED to be mobile responsive

They do! These days, half or more of your recipients will be checking email on a mobile device of some sort. As a result, your messages must render correctly and be engaging on any platform.

12

Personalization is overrated

Personalization drives a connection between the recipient and the sender, so we encourage you to use it wherever possible. That may mean substitution tags for names or sending messages to specific segments of customers.

13

The more links in a message, the better

You may be inclined to give recipients a lot of options within your messages for interaction. More information, new resources, or new products all compete for clicks. The truth is, recipients should know exactly what to click as soon as they open your email. This means including one (MAYBE two) calls-to-action per message.

14

All recipients are basically the same and should get the same content

Every now and then you may send a marketing email that can go to all recipients, but for the most part, if you want to increase engagement, it's better to segment recipients and target them with purposeful content as much as possible.

15

Preheader text doesn't matter

The preheader is the text that appears after the subject line in an inbox. Many senders ignore this content preview, but more savvy senders use it to their advantage by incorporating it.

16

There's one perfect time to send

In general, there's no magic time for sending email to your recipients. However, if you watch the engagement statistics of your recipients, you may be able to determine which segments of your customers open mail at different times of the day. Armed with that knowledge, you may be able to schedule sends based on when they're more likely to open your email.



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17

“Free” in the subject line leads to more opens

Many marketers believe that including large discount percentages or the word “Free” will lead to more opens. This may be true sometimes, but in general, if people are interested and engaged in your email, they’re going to open your messages regardless of “free” or the discount offered.

18

The best place in Gmail is the “Primary” tab

Gmail’s “Primary” tab is meant for messages from direct contacts. The likelihood of messages arriving there is low. As a result, most marketing messages are going to end up in the “Promotions” tab. Rather than trying to get your messages to appear in a different tab, make sure your content is valuable and wanted by recipients.

19

Millennials don’t use email

Many email marketers wrongly assume that millennials are only interested in push notifications or MMS. The fact is, millennials, like other generations, are more inclined to read, keep, and trust email messages.

20

Your “From” address should always come from your company

Depending on the message and the purpose, this may not be true. For instance, an account-related message could be sent from “support@” while a survey request may come from a specific person at your company. Test some variations of your “From” address to see what gets the most engagement.

21

Always avoiding spam trigger words will keep you out of the spam folder

It is true that there are trigger words that make it harder to reach the inbox, but that’s not to say they can NEVER be used. We suggest you limit the number of “spammy” words, and make sure they’re used as necessary.

22

If it looks good in my test send, it’s good enough to send

A lot of times marketers will send a test message to themselves to make sure the email looks okay. Unfortunately, that only shows you the email in one browser or in one device. Try using a service like [Litmus](#) or [Email on Acid](#) to make sure your messages are rendering correctly on all devices and clients.

23

Seed testing is always necessary

Seed testing is good for many email campaigns, but it isn't always necessary. For instance, if you're sending a very targeted email to people you've sent to numerous times before, seed testing may be unnecessary.

24

Any email list works

One of the biggest misconceptions is that any recipient list will work. The fact is, using a list you "acquired" is the best way to get blacklisted or damage your sending reputation. To maintain a good reputation and improve your deliverability, you should only send to people who want and expect your emails.

25

Buying lists is a fast, easy way to get new contacts

Many marketers **assume that buying a contact list will give them access to thousands of people instantly**. In practice, these contacts have no idea who you are. When inbox providers see those recipients ignoring messages or marking them as spam, they're going to block messages from getting to the inbox.

26

Attaining 100% delivery rates is possible

Unfortunately, getting 100% of your messages delivered correctly to every recipient isn't the best goal to strive for. Instead, try to send the right message, to the right person, at the right time, with the right frequency. Doing this will ensure your messages are valued and read more often.

27

A new IP will solve everything

Unfortunately, a simple change to your IP address will not improve your delivery rates. In fact, a new IP address has no reputation, and will be throttled by inbox providers even more. The best thing to do is to reevaluate your sending practices and your lists so that people are getting messages they will open.

28

A dedicated IP address doesn't need to be warmed up

A new, dedicated IP address has no relationship or reputation with your email or the inbox provider you want messages to go to. This means **it's critical that you warm up your IP** by slowly increasing the amount of email you send from the address until inbox providers know you are sending trustworthy, wanted email.

29

EMAIL IS DEAD

Another false assumption is that email is no longer a viable place for marketing communications. In truth, unlike social or search advertising, email provides more accurate tracking statistics that allow you to know your recipients at a much more granular level.



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30

Sending transactional and marketing email from the same dedicated IP is fine

If you're sending any significant amount of email (more than 1,000 messages a month), you want to separate your email and send marketing and transactional emails from separate IP addresses. You can [learn more about why in our blog](#).

31

Every email has to be in HTML

Your email is not required to be coded in HTML at all. In fact, if you are sending messages in HTML, we encourage senders to [include a plain-text version of the message](#) in case those messages don't render properly.

32

Sending an email that's just one huge image is popular and fun!

The appeal of sending an email that is just an image is clear. The message looks better, and it may be more intriguing for the recipient. The problem is that this is a common tactic used by bad actors. Make sure your messages include both text and images to ensure you're getting inboxed correctly.

33

If a recipient gives you their email, you can send them as much email as you want

When someone provides you with their email, make sure the types of email you'll be sending (and the frequency that they'll be receiving those messages) is clear. If you bombard a new contact with numerous marketing emails, they may flag you as spam.

34

Link shorteners are great shortcuts

A link shortener may make links appear shorter and make it easier to send your message, but this is **another tactic used by bad actors** to hide phishing links. As a result, many inbox providers will block your messages if you use shorteners. We encourage all senders to use the full link (even if it includes long tracking parameters).

35

The only metric you need to worry about is clicks

While clicks do provide good insight into the effectiveness of your call-to-action, and help you learn about the traffic that comes to your site from your email, it is not the only metric worth looking at. Look at the ratio of opens to clicks to determine if there's a disconnect between your subject line and your content. Keep an eye on spikes in spam complaints and unsubscribes to learn if you're sending too much or too often. Learn more about other industry metrics and benchmarks in **[SendGrid's Global Email Benchmark Report](#)**.

36

Delivery rate is the same as inbox rate

This may be one of the largest misconceptions in email. The fact is, a “delivered” email simply means that the email was accepted by the inbox provider. This is good because you at least know that it wasn’t blocked. Unfortunately, that doesn’t mean the message landed in the inbox—it could be in the spam folder too.

37

Just send the email again if the recipient didn’t engage the first time

If a recipient hasn’t engaged with an email, DO NOT repeat the send. An unengaged recipient is a signal that they aren’t interested in that message. By sending a copy of the message a second time, you’re more than likely going to get marked as spam, which will negatively impact your reputation.

38

Email is only good for some industries

Some industries (like [ecommerce, travel, and daily deals](#)) are clearly very dependant on email, but that’s not to say that other industries shouldn’t use email as a customer communication channel. Email continues to be the best way to reach customers in a secure and trusted way. In addition to that, it provides insights that other channels can’t. No matter what industry you’re in, email is a great tool to use.



Experiments

Tweaks and changes made to small sends or to your entire email program can have large impacts. Here are some to consider.

The only way to make sure your email program is cutting edge and getting the engagement you want is to constantly have tests and experiments running. By evaluating the aspects of your messages that definitely work, and those that fail, you can make sure your recipients are getting the best messages possible.

Below is a list of test and experiment ideas that you can use to improve your email campaigns.

39

CTA colors

Change the colors of your CTA buttons to determine if recipients engage more with a certain color palette. It may not seem impactful, but some colors can stand out and convert more.

40

CTA placement within the email

CTAs don't have to be included at the very end of messages. You may think about adding CTAs to the top or middle of the message to see what resonates most with your contacts.

41

Segment

Create targeted campaigns based on different customer segments. Customers who come to your website (or make purchases) often should be treated differently than people who seldom visit.

42

Content

Use content to your advantage by experimenting with longer-form messages or short requests to leave the message and come to your website. You may be surprised by what customers prefer!

43

ALL CAPS

Using caps in the subject line may generate a spike in interest, so you could try it for one-off campaigns, or maybe putting a customer's name in caps may grab their attention more.

44

From address

Who the message is coming from plays a big role in whether your recipient will open your message or not. Experiment with sending from the company, a department, or an individual.

45

Should customers be able to respond?

Consider allowing customers to reply to messages instead of including a "do not reply" address.

46

Use different CTAs

Rather than using something bland, like visiting your site, you may try different wording or offers in your CTAs to make them stand out more.

47

Consider emphasizing different features or highlights

Mix up your product announcements or pair them with new, unique offers to make sure your emails never get stale.

48

Test types of images

Not all images resonate with all contacts. Test GIFs, infographics, or images of videos to see what drives the most engagement.

49

Test HTML5

While not all browsers or email clients are HTML5 compatible, if you can determine which of your contacts do interact with HTML5, you may be able to make your messages even more valuable.

50

Use interactive elements within messages

Messages don't have to just be words, images, and CTAs. Ask contacts to engage with messages more directly to make them want the next message you send them.

51

Personalize more than just the name

Making sure you incorporate your recipient's first name is a great first step, but what else can you personalize? Consider sending messages based on their actions or other information you know about them.



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52

Subject line emojis

Emojis are great for some contacts and come across as less professional to others. Test to see what types of subject line characters your contacts prefer to see.

53

Templates

If you've been using the same template for a while, consider making some tweaks so that content is presented differently. Perhaps a new change will be your go-to from now on.

54

Switch up your newsletter formatting

Like your templates, you might want to test whether one column with lots of scrolling or multiple columns with modules are more effective for your contacts.

55

Send frequency

If you're sending a daily update, consider testing a new frequency. Perhaps a once-weekly or once-monthly digest gets more clicks and conversions than a daily message that's ignored most of the time.

56

Sending time of day

Many senders are committed to sending at a certain time each day. Test whether or not this is the optimal time for your recipients by spreading a campaign out over the course of the day and measuring engagement.

57

Buttons vs. hyperlink text

A large CTA button may make sense, but depending on the type of message you're sending, a simple hyperlink in the text may make more sense.

58

One link vs. multiple

While it is good to give recipients one clear CTA in an email, offering another option may make sense. For instance, measure if a welcome email performs better sending people back to your website or app, or if a link to educational materials garners more engagement.

59

Copy length

Determine if a short amount of text along with a CTA, or a longer, more descriptive amount of text is better for your campaigns.

60

Fonts

Whether you're testing size or type, using different fonts can highlight various portions of messages or make them stand out from the other messages in the inbox.

61

Plain text vs. HTML

A plain text email provides the reader with nothing but text and information, while an HTML message may provide a more media-focused message. Send both types to see what your contacts engage with more.

62

Number of images or image:text ratio

We generally recommend that messages are not entirely image-based, but testing the number of images used in messages is a good way to see if recipients prefer to visualize or read your content.

63

Offers/discounts

While steep discounts and other offers may drive additional opens and clicks, you should test what discounts work best. Perhaps using an uncommon discount in the subject line will help your message stand out in the inbox.

64

Change the tone of your messages

Marketing emails can feel redundant after awhile. Test what kind of tone resonates with your contacts the best. Maybe your messages can be more playful instead of professional.



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65

Preheader text

There's more to an email than just the subject line, content, and CTA. Use your preheader text to inform contacts of what else is in the message, or ask a question in the subject line, and then answer it in the preheader preview.

66

Social sharing widgets

Evaluate your goals with your messages and determine if you want people sharing the offer or discount you're providing. If you do, test whether your social widgets are placed further up in the message or made larger.

67

Use different copy for high-engagers vs. low-engagers

If you've already segmented your recipients based on their level of engagement, you may also want to create copy that speaks more to high engagers than low engagers and vice versa.

68

Different personas? Different copy!

There are many different types of people using your product or service, so don't communicate with them in the same manner. Use more technical language for a technical user, and use more descriptive and fun language for others.

69

Daily updates vs. weekly digest

Test to see if your daily messages to contacts could be replaced by a weekly digest.

70

Clicking through to your site vs. providing info in your message

Some marketers prefer to hint at promotions offered on-site, while others provide the full promotional content within their messages. Determine which is better for different segments of your contacts.

71

How are you appealing to contacts?

Are you letting them know how much money they're saving? Perhaps you're telling them how your service will make their job easier. Either way, test to see what type of emotional appeal resonates best with your recipients.

72

Subject line length

As always, subject line length can (and should) be tested to see what works best. We've seen **3-word subject lines resonate well**, but depending on your contact list, longer lines may be best for you.

73

Subject line A/B testing

While it may not be necessary for every send, A/B test which subject line resonates best for the same message to a small segment of your list. Depending on the winner, send that subject line out to all contacts.

74

Subject line hint vs. description

While some people like to be teased by the subject line of emails, others want to know exactly what the message includes. Make sure you know what types of subject line wording your contacts prefer.



Inspiration

Ideas and tips for improving your email program.

An evolving email program doesn't stop at testing and evaluating things. Sometimes you need to be inspired by outside influences or get ideas for new email elements.

The inspiration tactics below will help you identify things you can add or try out to switch your emails up.

75

Substitute thumbnails for videos

Embedding a video can be difficult (or impossible) for most email marketing campaigns. Instead, try including an image/thumbnail of the video, and link out from there.

76

Brevity is best

Consider making your message as brief and to-the-point as possible so it can be viewed and interacted with on any smartphone screen.

77

Experiment with hero image placement

Are there opportunities to include hero images in more of the email, rather than having it push content down?

78

Expand your segmentation strategy

Segmentation doesn't end with demographics; try to segment customers based on their past actions or purchases.

79

Test out a live Twitter feed

Go beyond social widgets by including a live Twitter feed in your email, and allow recipients to see what's happening when they open your message.

80

Go interactive

Making email as interactive as possible, and getting recipients involved with your messages, is another way you can generate interest and excitement about the email you're sending.

81

Make it personal

By using advanced segmentation strategies and dynamic content, like name tags or other substitutions, you could be making your campaigns more personable than ever before.

82

Give your designs a makeover

Refresh designs so they aren't stale. If you've been using the same design for multiple emails, it may be time to give them a facelift.



83

Ask your customers what they think

Surveys are a great way to find out what your customers like and don't like. These don't need to be limited to your brand, consider sending surveys about email campaigns or other business-related ideas.



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84

Seek out inspiration

Make sure you look at print and other media outlets to keep your designs and styles modern and intriguing for your recipients.

85

Keep up with current events

Make content timely and relevant with holidays, large news stories, or other events. If you're sending a newsletter, you can make it themed, or refer to a well known event to make it more topical.

86

Having a plan is the best plan

To keep your emails interesting throughout the year, create a sending calendar and plan your messages as far ahead as possible.

87

Keep an eye on competitors

Make sure you have a fast-action plan in place to take advantage of new, topical events, or changes in your competitive landscape.

88

Get internal support

Demonstrate your expertise and highlight your email campaigns by encouraging other people at your company to sign up for your campaigns.

89

Use welcome emails to your advantage

Use your welcome emails to demonstrate the types of content your recipients can expect to receive, including educational tips and special offers.

90

Give your subscribers a break

If you aren't already, use a preference center to learn exactly what recipients want to receive from you, and give the option of pausing your messages instead of completely unsubscribing from your list.

91

Use history as your guide

Many times, inspiration can be found in tests that you've run in the past. See what you've learned from and if there are new alterations you want to try.

92

Learn from those you *don't* admire

To keep your emails interesting throughout the year, create a sending calendar and plan your messages as far ahead as possible.

93

Saying “sorry” goes a long way

Everyone makes mistakes when sending email, so it’s important that you learn from your mistakes, and acknowledge them with an apology email if necessary.

94

Save yourself from surprises

It’s always important to test your assumptions. Even if you’re sure you’re right, you might surprise yourself. So always test every change you want to make, whether it’s big or small.

95

Remember that there’s strength in numbers

If you’re looking for new design, template, or content ideas, bring in other team members. There is often wisdom in the group, and it’s likely that your teammates have seen something new and interesting that you might want to apply.

96

Catalogue and save emails you love

You can create an inspiration folder to pull ideas from in the future. You can also create an email inspiration address that other team members can forward great messages to.



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97

Reward your VIPs

Rather than simply testing new campaigns to brand ambassadors and high-engagers, consider giving them a **special promotion or offer to thank them for their interest.**

98

Coordinate all of your communications

You don't want your recipients receiving multiple emails from you in a single day (or even week), so coordinate email campaigns with other notifications and limit the number of appearances you're making.

99

Consistency is key

Make sure your brand messaging and appearance is consistent. This means your email templates, images, landing pages, and website should all share similar attributes, making a seamless experience for contacts.

100

Consider other uses for email

Email doesn't always have to be used to send marketing messages or promotions. Use email to amplify other assets at your organization and help educate or coach your contacts.

101

Look to your customer data for inspiration

Are there trends that you haven't discovered? Are there additional ways to segment your contacts?

102

Consider triggered email

See how you can use data to trigger some messages. Actions like cart abandonment, repeat purchases, or visiting a product page multiple times are all signals that you may be able to capitalize on.

103

Give quiet recipients one more chance

If recipients have been unresponsive for a few months, it may be time to try running a re-engagement campaign to bring them back to your website.

104

Play by the rules

If you think your email is being blocked by inbox providers, review the domestic and foreign email laws that apply to your contacts. You may need to make some adjustments.

The background of the slide is a dark blue gradient with a bokeh effect of out-of-focus lights in shades of orange, yellow, and white. In the upper right and lower right corners, there are faint, stylized representations of fireworks or sparklers, adding a celebratory feel to the design.

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