

Small changes can make a big difference in e-mail opt-in, study says

Online marketers from Neiman Marcus to J.C. Penney are using e-mail to reach customers, but of 175 of them reviewed by permission-based e-mail services provider Silverpop in a new study, many have a long way to go in learning how to use e-mail for best results.

“What we found was actually quite surprising,” says Bill Nussey, CEO of Silverpop. “There are a few very simple changes retail marketers can make that will go a long way to distinguish their e-mail campaigns from those of their competitors.”

Silverpop reviewed the registration procedures, marketing messages and opt-out practices of the 175 companies against best practices. In a preliminary release of results that will be rolled out in June, the study found, for example, that three-quarters of the companies reviewed don't take one of simplest opportunities to build relationships with customers: their responses to customers' e-mail queries don't include personalization such as the customer's name.

Marketers also can achieve better results in getting web site visitors to sign up for e-mails with stronger calls to action and by better placement of registration information on the site. One-quarter of the companies reviewed didn't offer any explanation of benefits to provide incentives for visitors to sign up for e-mail. When a call to action was offered, 45% offered notices of sales, 14% offered news, and 11% offered a catalog or other type of direct mail.

“As many as 23% of the companies we looked at failed to include e-mail registration requests on the home page,” says Elaine O’Gorman, vice president of strategy for Silverpop. “The company that wants to establish a relationship with its customers through e-mail should never bury the call to action by placing it off page.”

O’Gorman also noted that the ability to provide content preferences and a variety of choices can help increase the number of people who will opt in to receive e-mail from a company, yet only eight out of 10 companies studied offered only one choice, such as notices of sales, or newsletters.

A total of 37% of retailers asked only for an e-mail address, while 39% asked registrants to fill in a short profile and typically, a postal address. About 25% of the companies asked for a more extensive profile including a phone number. When customers complete a registration, 43% of the companies sent a confirmation, but only 25% of the confirmations were personalized with the registrant's name.

“Marketers should think about how they respond when they meet someone for the first time,” says O’Gorman. “Just a few simple practices can make a big difference in the success of an e-mail campaign.”

InternetRetailer 05/01