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Email Marketing

Best Practice Guide

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Email Marketing



Published 2010

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1. About Econsultancy

Econsultancy is a [digital publishing and training group](#) that is used by more than 200,000 internet professionals every month.

The company publishes [practical and timesaving research](#) to help marketers make better decisions about the digital environment, build business cases, find the best suppliers, look smart in meetings and accelerate their careers.

Econsultancy has offices in New York and London, and hosts more than [100 events](#) every year in the US and UK. Many of the world's most famous brands use Econsultancy to [educate and train](#) their staff.

Some of Econsultancy's members include: Google, Yahoo, Dell, BBC, BT, Shell, Vodafone, Virgin Atlantic, Barclays, Deloitte, T-Mobile and Estée Lauder.

[Join Econsultancy](#) today to learn what's happening in digital marketing – and what works.

Call us to find out more on +44 (0)20 7269 1450 (London) or +1 212 699 3626 (New York). You can also [contact us online](#).



2. About the lead author

Dr Dave Chaffey (www.davechaffey.com/blog) is a specialist Internet marketing author, trainer and consultant providing services direct to clients through his company Marketing Insights Limited (www.marketing-insights.co.uk). Dave also works as an online marketing consultant for the Customer Engagement Unit at cScape (www.cscape.com). Dave is proud to have been recognised by the Chartered Institute of Marketing as one of 50 marketing "gurus" worldwide who "have shaped the future of Marketing".



Dave has worked with Econsultancy as an analyst for several years and maintains an in-depth knowledge of the key areas of digital marketing. His previous reports include:

- Managing an E-commerce team: Integrating Digital Marketing into your Organization
<http://econsultancy.com/reports/managing-digital-channels-best-practice-guide>
- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) Best Practice Guide
<http://econsultancy.com/reports/search-engine-optimization-seo-best-practice-guide-2007>
- Paid Search marketing Best Practice Guide
<http://econsultancy.com/reports/paid-search-marketing-ppc-best-practice-guide>
- Web Design Best Practice Guide
<http://econsultancy.com/reports/web-design-best-practice-guide>

Over the last 10 years, Dave has trained or consulted on the full-range of online marketing approaches with a range of B2C and B2B companies from well-known brands to smaller businesses. Companies he has worked with include 3M, Actel, Bank of Scotland Corporate, BP, The Carbon Trust, CIPD, CMP Information, Eurooffice, HSBC, i-to-i (Tui Group), Mercedes-Benz, MessageLabs, NCH and Tektronix.

He is a prolific E-business author whose books include *‘Internet marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice, E-marketing Excellence, Total email Marketing’*, and *E-business and E-commerce Management*.

Internet marketing pioneer, Jim Sterne, chairman of the Web Analytics Association (www.webanalyticsassociation.org) and organiser of the annual E-metrics summits (www.emetrics.org) comments:

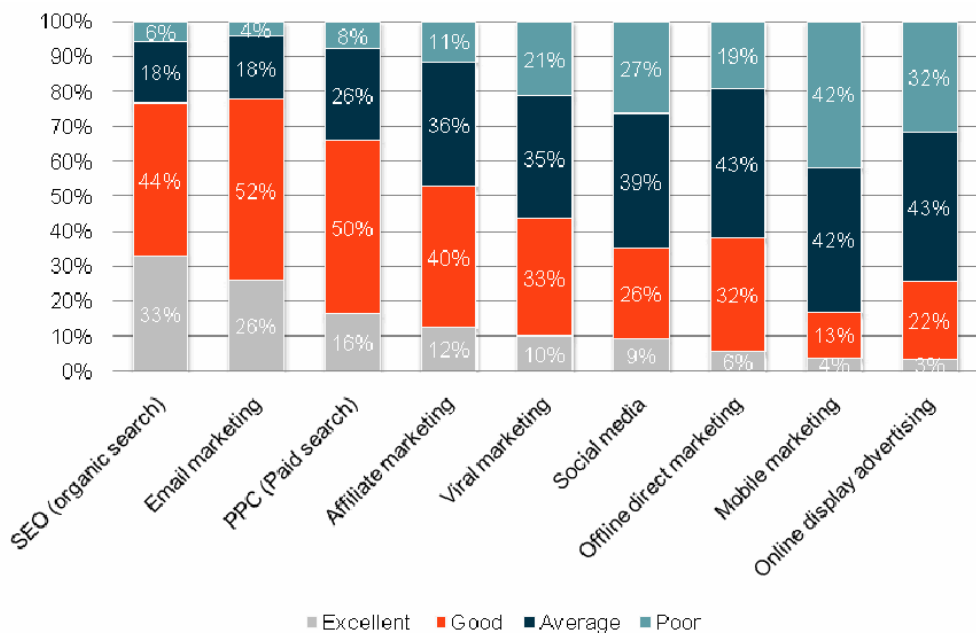
“Dave layers a keen understanding of marketing with in-depth technical and heuristic knowledge about doing business on the Internet. Top down or bottom up, Dave has an astonishing grasp of strategy as well as tactics.”

3. Introduction: Smarter email marketing

3.1. Email: the unsung hero of digital marketing

Email marketing remains one of the most important tools available to digital marketers since it provides a cost-effective technique for a company brand to reach prospects and customers with relevant, timely communications.

Investment in email marketing reflects the results delivered, with respondents to our email census rating email as the best channel for return on investment after search engine optimisation, with almost two thirds of company respondents (78%) rating email as either “excellent” or “good”. Only 4% say that email is “poor” for ROI, with a further 18% describing it as “average”.




Respondents: 368

Figure 1 Return on investment digital marketing channels. Source: Econsultancy/Adestra email marketing industry census, 2009

Econsultancy believes that email excels as a customer communication tool. This is the focus of our guide, although many of the principles we describe apply to both acquisition and conversion email campaigns.

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3.2. Strategic benefits of email marketing

Best Practice Recommendation 1

Define the strategic benefits of email marketing

Review the strategic and practical communications benefits of email marketing to ensure you are taking full-advantage of the benefits and to help build a business case for future investments or additional resources.

1. **Relatively low cost of fulfilment.** The physical costs of email are substantially less than direct mail.
2. **Direct response medium encourages immediate action.** email marketing encourages clickthroughs to a website where the offer can be redeemed immediately, thereby increasing the likelihood of an immediate, impulsive response.

This is an obvious benefit, but it can be harnessed best when email is integrated with other media. For example, many event marketers send an email out a week after an event brochure has dropped since email is better than direct mail in achieving a response. Likewise catalogue retailers send follow-up emails. Which brings us to...

Practical Tip 1

Deliver topical emails

Enable flexibility in your campaign schedule to deliver messages which are contextual to current issues

3.3. Email marketing challenges

As with all digital marketing techniques, it is simplistic to describe email marketing as "Cheap, Quick and Easy". Instead, many practical issues need to be managed for campaign success to be achieved and we will explain recommended approaches in this report.

Best Practice Recommendation 2

Review the practical challenges of email marketing

You should identify the main constraints on your email marketing and then assess your success and capabilities in dealing with these issues.

We believe that the main challenges of email marketing which need to be managed are:

1. **Achieving relevance.** If your messages aren't relevant it's inevitable your subscribers will unsubscribe or tune-out and response rates will fall. Selecting the right segmentation and targeting approaches to deliver relevant, compelling content is the biggest challenge of email marketing.

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3.5 How is this guide structured?

This guide is designed so you can apply it both to review your existing email strategy or to create a comprehensive email marketing strategy from scratch.

Within each section there are also lots of practical tips that you can apply to an individual campaign when reviewing your campaign plan and creative.

We have structured the guide around all aspects of email marketing which are necessary to maximise effectiveness. We don't just concentrate on creative as many books do, but look at approaches to **segmentation, targeting, communications strategy** and **testing** which are ultimately much more important to a successful campaign.

There are 10 key aspects of an organisation's email marketing capability implementation which need to be managed for a successful project.

These cover both **effectiveness** and **efficiency** factors.

3.5.1 Email marketing effectiveness factors

We find that much that is written about improving results from email marketing focuses on a limited number of efficiency factors, especially creative and copywriting. While discussion of subject lines, template design, layout and the position of the calls-to-action are all important and interesting, this misses the bigger picture, which is relevance and its context – does it arrive at the right time?

Error! Reference source not found. provides a summary of the main effectiveness and efficiency factors for email marketing which are covered in this report.

The effectiveness factors control the relevance of a message:

- **Effectiveness 1: Aims and goal setting.** As with all marketing activities, improvement occurs if we compare results from our email activity with our intended goals. Through this approach we can identify areas where we are underperforming and so try to improve those areas.

Practical Tip 2 Example

Practical tips to improve the effectiveness of an email campaign

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4

Effectiveness 1: Aims and goal setting

As with all marketing activities, improvement occurs if we compare results from our email activity with our intended goals. Through this approach we can identify areas where we are underperforming and so try to improve those areas.

Before we can set goals for email marketing, we need to run through the main measures used to evaluate it. If you're actively involved in email marketing then you may want to skip this section, although we may have some measurement tips for you.

Key email activity	1. Measuring email marketing effectiveness
	Tracking campaigns and the success of email programmes
What is it?	Using email marketing, web analytics and business reporting systems to assess the effectiveness of email marketing activities.

Example(s) of best practice: These are the most important response measures which will be reported for an email campaign by an email service provider.

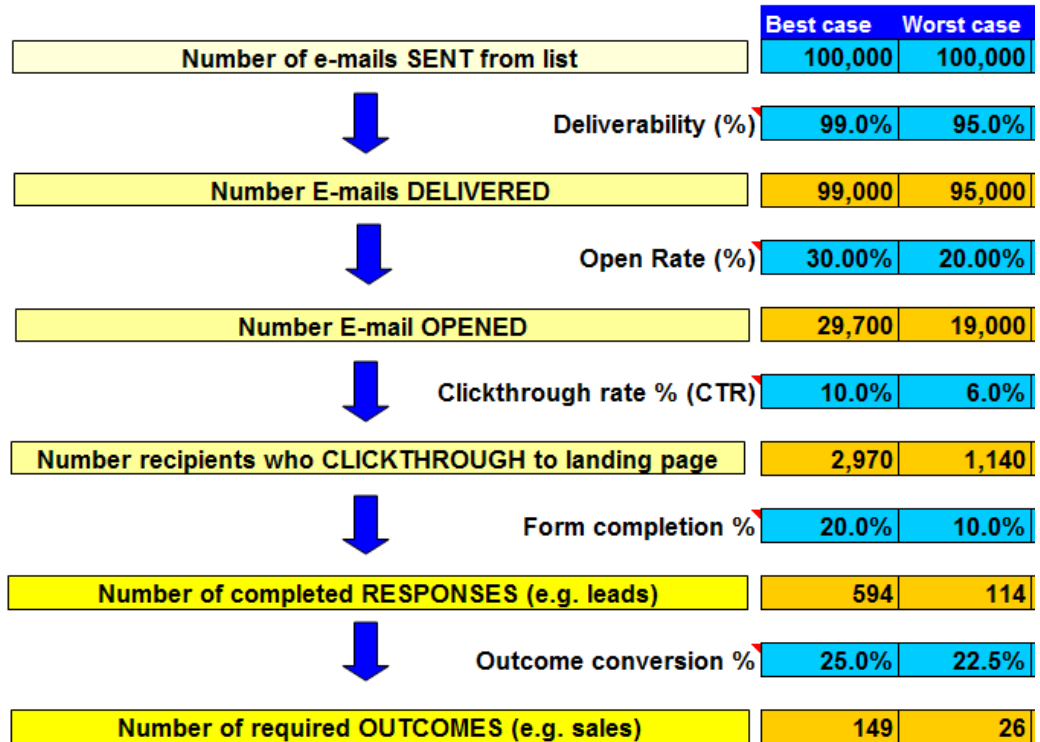


Figure 2 Conversion model for email response showing worst case and best case scenarios

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4.6 Measuring email campaign effectiveness

Setting sales goals for direct mail campaigns is routine, because the cost of the mailing must be recouped by the value from the response. It seems that since email is cheaper to send specific response goals aren't always set, but for major campaigns it is best to set specific goals from campaigns.

Best Practice Recommendation 3 Set goals for major campaigns

Use response and conversion-rate based models to compare campaign performance.

To create an estimate of campaign response you can use a spreadsheet model. Set this up to show a best and worst case scenario for each of the stages (these models are available for download as part of the Templates). Figure 2 gives an example. It shows that with a 100K list, modelled response of sales can vary between 149 and 26. That's a massive overall attrition, but it shows the value of working hard to maximise opens, clicks and landing page response.

Many companies have blinkers on with regards to their email marketing in that they do not facilitate offline response through a prominent phone number, call-me-back or live-chat option. This makes sense if you are a retailer within thin margins, but not if you have complex, higher value products. So these offline messages and higher response rates can be incorporated into your campaigns.

Practical Tip 3 Incorporate offline response in email response

Practical tips to improve the effectiveness of an email campaign

7. Effectiveness 4: Creative & copywriting

Email is a challenging medium, in that the majority of subscribers will act immediately on their first viewing of an email, if they act at all. A small proportion of visitors may return to an email at a later point. Blending creative copywriting to engage visitors the moment they review the email for the first time is vital.

Practical Tip 4 Encourage readers to act immediately (or to return)

Use copywriting to create a sense of urgency and where appropriate use time-limited offers to encourage visitors to act now.

7.1 Copywriting for email

In this section we start with an overview of copywriting best practice for email and then look specifically at the issues of From, Subject lines and Headline.

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1. **Practice Brevity.** Remember that your email recipients will quickly scan your emails. They will not read your email carefully from start to finish. This tendency to scan echoes the now well-known research by Jakob Nielsen on Writing for the Web:

[useit.com](http://www.useit.com) → [Alertbox](#) → Mar. 1997: Writing for the Web

Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox for March 15, 1997:

Be Succinct! (Writing for the Web)

The three main guidelines for writing for the Web are:

- Be **succinct**: write no more than 50% of the text you would have used in a hardcopy publication
- Write for **scannability**: don't require users to read long continuous blocks of text
- Use **hypertext to split up** long information into multiple pages

Short Texts

Reading from computer screens is about **25% slower** than reading from paper. Even users who don't know this human factors research usually say that they feel unpleasant when reading online text. As a result, people don't want to read a lot of text from computer screens: you should **write 50% less text** and not just 25% less since it's not only a matter of reading speed but also a matter of feeling good. We also know that users don't like to scroll: one more reason to keep pages short.

<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9703b.html>

In 2009, tests by Nielsen (<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/nanocontent.html>) confirmed our intuition that in links, the first two words are the most important. We would also argue that this finding applies to headlines, sub-heads and in the body copy of each paragraph. This approach ensures that each section of the email text has an important 'hook' that draws in the eye of the reader and improves attention and engagement.

Practical Tip 5

Check you have the two-word hooks

Since email subscribers scan incorporate powerful word hooks into your email copywriting, particularly the subject line, main headline, sub-heads, the start of paragraphs and within link call-to-action!

13. Efficiency 5: Email Marketing Management Systems

Many organisations now use email Service Providers (ESPs) to broadcast emails while some broadcast from internal servers. Selecting the right combination of services is challenging since there are many suppliers and different formats with a range of costs. This treatment is brief, since there is a separate, in-depth [Econsultancy Buyer's guide to email Marketing Platforms](#).

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14. Glossary

Bounce rate:

See **hard bounce** and **soft bounce**. Note that in web analytics, bounce rate typically refers to the percentage of people who visit a landing page who do not visit a subsequent page.

Behavioural targeting:

Email subscribers are sent specific messages dependent on previous actions such as opening or clicking on an email, browsing a category on a website or, more generally, purchasing particular products.

Blacklist (or blocklist):

Blacklists include two main types: broadcast server-based (DNSBLs) and destination domain/link based (SURBLs).

1. DNSBLs which stands for domain name service-based spam blocking list which lists the IP address of servers it is known spammers use. Web mail providers access these to identify spam.

14.1 Email metrics Glossary

Measures to assess email marketing have been discussed and agreed by the National email Benchmarking Council of the UK DMA. These are presented in full here for reference:

Average Total Click-through Rate:

Definition: Number of total clicks divided by number of emails delivered (as a %).

Things to take into consideration: If comparing results with other campaigns, make sure the click-through rate is measured using the same metrics. It can be click against emails sent, emails delivered or emails opened. Always compare like for like, and know which option has been used.

15.2 Appendix 2: email Marketing Creative Best Practice Checklist

Table 1 Diagnostic questions used to assess email marketing capabilities

	Statements and questions about the management of email marketing in your organisation	Capability level criteria	Capability rating (Select Yes, No, N/A)
	A. Goal setting and evaluation		
	We can evaluate overall campaign open/click/delivery rates	1	Yes
	We have a basic email marketing strategy based on a review of opportunities and challenges of email marketing	2	Yes

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16. The Expert Reviewers

Dave compiled this report with the aid of an expert team of contributors and reviewers ranging from clients, agencies, consultants and email service providers to ensure the recommendations reflect current best practice.

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