

# Email marketing in a complex world

*A story of brains and beauty*



The ever-changing digital communications landscape demands a paradigm shift when it comes to email marketing. Sending emails to a prospect or customer was simple at one point. However, with the growth of mobile devices and popularity of social networks, your customers have discovered newer ways of communicating with you and engaging your brand. Your emails now have to work harder, smarter, and proactively to reach out and engage your audience.

Successful email marketing is a combination of brains and beauty. This is what IBM calls relevancy and deliverability. Providing relevant content that reaches your prospects and customers, regardless of device, makes your email marketing efforts the centerpiece of the constant conversation that helps your brand engage and reengage, building loyalty and lifetime value.

### **The brains – relevancy**

It is a well-known fact that the quality of your interaction with the customer has a significant impact on your sales. Email blasts targeting an entire set of customers at any given point are an outdated practice. The more you know about your customer, the more personalized and targeted your interactions can become. Having a focused approach and relevant content is what drives customer actions, builds communities, and extends the reach of your brand. The most effective message is the one that is crafted for each customer segment and goes even to the extent of catering to an individual.

Making full use of the wealth of customer data such as transactions, responses, searches, and website visits is often critical to ensure that your emails are relevant. It is usually in the details that one can find subtle differences that can make a message or an offer have more appeal to an individual customer. This data includes timely and relevant information about the response to each email. Responses include whether the recipient opened the email, if the recipient clicked through to a landing page or website, if the recipient converted once they got there, if the recipient ignored the email, or whether the email bounced back. Sending multiple emails without factoring in these possibilities is like using a “shoot, ready, aim” approach to marketing.



### **The beauty – deliverability**

Experts estimate that approximately 20 percent of emails never make it to the inbox. Sometimes an email is mistaken for SPAM and either blocked by the internet service provider (ISP) or routed directly to the junk mail folder by the email client or the SPAM filter. Given the diversity of presentation styles of email clients – from Outlook to webmail systems to mobile devices – it is likely that a number of emails that do arrive do not render properly resulting in a poor representation of your message and brand.

Some of the chief considerations to ensure deliverability and readability of your email marketing messages include:

- If you properly limit the volume of emails sent out to each ISP
- If you actively maintain your email permission policy
- If you monitor and address SPAM complaints to keep your email reputation intact
- If the content of your email lowers your chances of going straight to the SPAM folder
- If you have a bounce back policy
- If you routinely remove invalid email addresses from your list
- If you check how your email appears on various email clients and adjust the design if necessary to ensure the best possible representation of your brand
- If you can check your landing pages to make sure that they are aligned with emails and if they are readable on various devices

## The traditional trade-off: In-house or email service provider

Previously, email marketers had to choose between building or buying the complete email system, infrastructure, and the skill sets needed to execute marketing campaigns. These approaches are referred to as taking the in-house approach or outsourcing email marketing to an email service provider (ESP). However, neither of these approaches is optimal when it comes to relevancy and deliverability, thus reducing the effectiveness of email marketing programs.

Taking the in-house approach has its own advantages such as bringing greater control over messaging, data collection, and measurement. Who knows your customers better than you do? You also have the advantage of utilizing the complete history of data useful for personalizing messages sent to the customer. Using that knowledge and data, you can create rich, engaging email messages that connect with your customer base. However, this approach may also require you to introduce additional infrastructure. Most companies lack the expertise in deliverability. This exposes marketing efforts to issues that could potentially reduce the effectiveness of email marketing or even damage brand reputation. Hence, the in-house approach gets high marks for relevancy, but receives low marks for deliverability.

Using an ESP as an alternative relieves you of the burden of building email delivery infrastructure. It also provides the expertise to ensure deliverability and readability. However, outsourcing everything to an ESP has its own drawbacks such as the need to transfer data back and forth to target messages, personalizing content, tracking responses, bounce backs and other important information. Usually, the lack of integration means slower email marketing processes and an incomplete set of data that impacts email marketing effectiveness. Integrating your systems with an ESP is expensive and increases the cost of switching to a new service provider. Hence, the ESP approach offers some benefits in terms of deliverability, but the timely data that drives relevancy suffers.



## The ideal solution

The ideal email marketing technology solution provides the best of both worlds—timely data access to develop segmented and personalized content that is relevant, while offloading the responsibility for managing the delivery infrastructure, and ensuring deliverability.

The ideal solution also takes email marketing out of its silo and connects it with what is happening in other marketing channels in regards to website personalization, search marketing, and other outbound marketing efforts (for example, direct mail, phone calls, and customer interactions at other touch points such as call centers, stores and branches). Effective email marketing is an essential part of an “Interactive Marketing” approach that engages each customer in a cross-channel dialogue that builds upon their past and current behavior. This is impossible to do when you rely on an ESP because of the lack of connection that such a relationship creates for your email marketing efforts. However, it is possible with the in-house approach, although only with the right technology solution in place.

## About IBM Unica solutions

IBM Unica products are innovative marketing solutions that turn your passion for marketing into business success. Our comprehensive approach to interactive marketing enables organizations worldwide to understand their customers and use that understanding to engage buyers in highly relevant, interactive dialogues across digital, social, and traditional marketing channels.

Recognized as a leading integrator of enterprise systems for multiple industries, we help organizations with a wide variety of projects, analyzing real-time information and returning measurable value to stakeholders. In addition, we provide worldwide support for a variety of industry-partner content, services, and applications.

## For more information

IBM offers an email marketing solution that combines the best of both worlds—an on-premise solution allowing you to manage, segment, and mine your data—with a hosted element that can take on the most difficult aspect of the SMTP delivery. To learn more about IBM Unica solutions, please call 1.866.277.7488 (North America) or +1.781.487.8600 (International) or visit [ibm.com/software/info/unica](http://ibm.com/software/info/unica). Or visit our [Interactive Marketing Resource Center](#) for expert advice to help you move along your path to Interactive Marketing success.

## Smarter Commerce: An integrated approach

IBM Unica products are part of the IBM Smarter Commerce initiative. Smarter Commerce is a unique approach that increases the value companies generate for their customers, partners, and shareholders in a rapidly changing digital world. To learn more about Smarter Commerce, visit: [ibm.com/smarterplanet/commerce](http://ibm.com/smarterplanet/commerce).



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