

Email is the fastest-growing medical marketing medium for good reasons. In today's bottom-line oriented world, it has by far the greatest return on investment (ROI) available. Email generates ROI as high as 57 to 1 according to the Direct Marketing Association. It is absolutely measurable in terms of click-through rates, thus ideal in this age of unprecedented marketing accountability. The world is moving online, and email is an outstanding way to reach out to medical professionals and consumers and drive traffic to websites for e-detailing, market research, product promotion, compliance sites and virtually any other medical marketing objective.

The phenomenal success of email paradoxically poses a challenge. As more and more marketers use email, the degree of difficulty in getting physicians and other health professionals to open, read and respond to email increases proportionately. How do medical marketers meet the challenge? The answer is to employ successful email marketing methods, based on proven direct marketing principles and incorporating ever-evolving delivery best practices.

Many of the latter are steps required to get a message delivered to the inbox as opposed to the junk mail folder. Most of these can be addressed by simply selecting the right email marketing source. Be sure to look for these attributes when "buying" email marketing:

- State of the art technology and excellent internet service provider (ISP) relationships—There is a technical arms race between legitimate email marketers seeking to deliver email and ISPs such as Microsoft, Yahoo and Google seeking to block spam. Do not try to do this yourself—hire a professional and be very choosy.
- Pharma/medical marketing experience—our vertical is different, and there's no need to bring neophytes up to speed when there are sources with decades of experience in medical marketing.
- AMA-based—the American Medical Association Physicians Professional Data allows you to target physicians by all AMA

selection criteria as well as industry standard prescriber profiles and even by medical education number (e.g., a called-on list). Relevance is crucial, targeting maximizes relevance and the AMA file enables optimal targeting to pinpoint prospects for your promotions.

■ **Permissioned**—A good list is essential to maintaining a good reputation, which is the key to high delivery rates. Since the AMA does not make its email addresses available, email addresses are acquired from other sources. Be sure your email marketing source obtains email addresses from physicians themselves with permission. Beware of counts that seem too high, because they may indicate that acquisition methods have been employed that pose legal and reputational risks. Also beware of counts that don't change over time—this may be a red flag that good list hygiene is not being used, another threat to your reputation.

But once you've fulfilled these email-specific prerequisites, it's essential that your creative is crafted properly to generate maximum response.

The attributes of a successful email are illustrated in the accompanying guide to developing an email creative template that works. The key elements are as follows:

1. Snippet. This is copy at the very top of the email that displays the ghosted box that appears when an email hits an Outlook mail box. Many times this copy is along the lines of "Click to view a web version of this message." However, it makes sense to begin with small type stating the offer—e.g., sign up for complimentary CME by Tuesday."

2. From Line. A crucially important element along with subject line, equivalent to the outer envelope in a direct mail piece. It should be a known and trusted brand name, e.g., company name or product name. If an individual name is used, it should be someone well known to the recipient, e.g., the doctor's sales rep.

3. Subject line. Works in tandem with the FROM line to deter-

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Email is one of the most effective ways to drive traffic and get your preferred marketing message across. **Terry Nugent** looks at what attributes help make a campaign effective and offers advice on the right way to go about 'buying' email marketing

ANATOMY OF AN EMAIL

mine the fate of the message. Must be compelling to survive the sword of Damocles that is the delete button. Should be brief and to the point. Conventional wisdom is that it should be under 40 characters to display in comprehensible fashion on mobile devices such as Blackberries. The most compelling subject lines are honoraria for market research opportunities.

4. HTML message. Less is more in email. Use graphics sparingly—email is predominantly a copywriter’s medium. Copy needs to be brief and to the point. It should be written in journalistic style, utilizing the inverted pyramid method with the most important points first, above the fold in newspaper parlance, which translates online into the first two inches of the message that appear in the preview pane. Copy should be quickly scannable, using bulleted style for quick, easy online reading. Clear calls to action are essential and should be placed at the beginning, middle and end of the content with hyperlinks in blue to landing pages that are consistent with the message in terms of graphics and content.

5. The end of the email. Sometimes referred to as the footer, several elements are essential to comply with the federal CAN-SPAM law that governs email marketing:

- Clear disclosure that the message is promotional in nature
- Marketer’s address—this can be a street address or a PO Box
- An opt out mechanism

Use of these techniques and you will be well positioned to win the competition for healthcare professionals’ attention in the inbox.

Having been involved with email marketing since its early days, I have witnessed both the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Here are a few tales from the email marketing trenches that illustrate the importance of using successful email marketing methods:

■ **Image issues**—the classic disaster is using creative that consists of one big image. Outlook blocks images by default to shield recipients from undesirable graphics, but all marketers suffer from this feature. So if your creative is one big image it will display in outlook as a small red x unless the recipient clicks on the link to unblock images.

■ **Links rule**—another basic pitfall is not employing hyperlinks. Response mechanisms should be “in medium”, that is a hyperlink to a well-designed landing page. You may wish to include other options such as toll-free number, but don’t rely on it.

■ **KISS**—keeping it short and simple is the path to success. Brevity is the sole of wit—Short attention spans prevail in email, so be brief and to the point. Multi-page emails are rarely read. Animation, complex designs, and the like tend to trigger spam filters and lead down the road to the oblivion of deletion. Save the pyrotechnics for the landing page.

So, to achieve your objectives in email marketing, do it right—employ successful email marketing methods. ■

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The image shows a screenshot of an email client window with several red callout boxes pointing to specific parts of the email content. The email is from PlaceboXL and is titled 'Nothing for longer'. The main body of the email features a blue header with 'PLACEBOXL' and 'It Does Nothing...For Longer!' and a yellow starburst that says 'NEW!'. The text describes the product as a placebo that does nothing, but is safe and cost-effective. The footer includes the sender's name, Gideon Corporation, and an opt-out link.

From Line Accurately and clearly represents sender per CAN-SPAM. Uses brand name to maximize open rates. From address is Med-E-MailSM to maximize delivery.

Subject Line Consistent with message content, not deceptive, under 40 characters, uses brand name.

Header Connects to hosted version of message for reference in case of rendering issues.

HTML Message Short, minimal graphics, multiple links, strong call to action, consistent with subject line, minimal images to maximize rendering integrity.

Clear, Conspicuous Disclosure that message is a commercial advertisement per CAN-SPAM.

Marketer's Postal Address per CAN-SPAM.

Opt-Out Mechanism Ideally, marketer's opt-out is used to ensure CAN-SPAM compliance, in which case suppression file must be provided for future broadcasts. An alternative is an opt-out, in which case suppression file is provided to client for applicable fee.