

Email marketing trends shaping the year ahead

 By [Warren Moss](#)

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Despite what the doomsday predictions say, email will not become irrelevant due to the rise of social media. As one of the most cost-effective and efficient eMarketing service offerings, email marketing is expected to continue to be a crucial part of the digital marketing mix in 2012.



Here are six trends that are expected to further strengthen the case for email-based marketing.

1. Building sales, and relationships

Social media plays an important role in building brand loyalty and rapport, but lacks some of the key strengths that have established email as the go-to tool if you want to drive sales.

There is an ever-increasing awareness in developed markets that email marketing can seal the deal, and substantially so. Data from these markets show that users, who have received email communications about a brand or product, tend to spend more than consumers targeted through other digital channels.

In addition to being the backbone of successful organisations' direct sales campaigns, email marketing has the added advantage of being able to funnel users back to social media platforms. This cross-pollination of communications is further enhanced by, for example, the tendency for users to subscribe to a brand's newsletter from its Facebook Fan page.

Such is the power of the relationship between social media and email marketing that a [trends survey by StrongMail](#) (2MB pdf) shows that 68% of business executives worldwide plan to integrate their social media marketing efforts with email this year.

I predict that these lines are likely to become further blurred, particularly once you throw mobile messaging into the mix, and that more marketers and agencies will have to develop new terms to define these services. A couple of terms are already floating around: from "digital communications services", "digital direct marketing" and, a personal favourite, "digital messaging".

2. A trusted medium

The symbiotic nature between the online experience and email is further demonstrated by the massive increase in 'triggered emails' or notifications that are driven by online interactions. Consider the role of 'welcome' mailers when someone signs up for a service, a notification of a friend's birthday, or when someone updates their shopping cart or status. The list is endless.

These types of interactions rely on and support emails' considerable trust factor, and research has shown that these types of mails have some of the highest open-rates because customers expect them, as the notification is relevant to their actions.

I believe more marketers will be paying closer attention to these "no-brainer" mails, which at first appear to be a hygiene factor, but may actually be an extremely powerful conduit. Expect a number of innovative marketers to leverage these types of mails to greater benefit.

3. Not only social media is mobile

The role of mobile devices in South Africa may still be the dominant communication and connection tools, but the trend in more developed markets is toward a more platform-independent approach. This is in response to consumers becoming more device-indifferent, leading marketers to rely more on communication channels that span devices.

Email fits this bill perfectly, as users are increasingly able to access their email on a smartphone, tablet, laptop, PC, and even remotely, such as at an Internet café [*yup, cloud computing in action again - managing ed*].

I therefore expect email marketers to be dedicating a lot more energy to creating new email formats better suited to today's touchscreen generation, and email designers will most probably start adopting responsive design techniques in greater numbers.

4. Not stuck in one-way traffic

Social media has not only popularised two-way conversations with brands that had previously been able to hide behind call centres and bureaucratic red tape, it has created the expectation of real-time communication. Email enables this type of conversation, but requires clear and open return paths to email and mobile marketing messages.

I expect the use of 'no-reply' email addresses to wane as users expect to be able to talk back to advertisers, and brands that ignore those incoming messages do so at their peril [*I'm currently trying to talk back to a brand on BBM, but it seems to be one-way communication only and it's annoying me immensely; this same brand doesn't respond to me on Twitter either... - managing ed*]

5. Know your users

A distinct advantage is that email marketing has the ability to leverage improvements in database technology and segmentation to target users more accurately by demographic and user preferences. Customers are also more attuned to choosing the types of messages they receive on various platforms.

This means that marketers will quickly be turning to profiling their base and even straight out asking their recipients what they're into and what kind of communication they will not be averse to receiving. This approach will increasingly become part of marketers' toolset to increase conversions and avoid messages being relegated to the junk mail folder.

Following this, personalised email newsletters and content will become pivotal to successful brand campaigns. Doing so to best effect will lead to a greater reliance on data and reporting, such as users' purchase history, website activity and CRM data.

For this reason, I believe that 2012 will see many more on-the-fly deals created on a per-user basis, which will be concluded through email to close the sale.

6. Fun, but effective

The final trend I expect to see taking shape this year is [gamification](#) ([Wikipedia](#)) creeping into email and mobile marketing.

This powerful mechanism has shown the ability to improve loyalty and interaction, and email and mobile marketing are stand-alone channels that can be effectively leveraged to this purpose, rather than simply acting as a notification for them.



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