

## Marketing for Internet-savvy consumers

# How to reap profits through e-mail communication

E-mail communication has become a cornerstone in marketing, sales and customer-service activities in today's enterprises. The benefits of near-instant results, cost-effectiveness and the ability to reach segmented customer lists with razor-sharp marketing messages have all contributed to making e-mail communication an indispensable tool.

However, despite the benefits, you face a definite challenge with your online marketing efforts. How do you reach an increasingly Internet-savvy consumer in the midst of increasingly effective online marketing campaigns from the competing entertainment and travel industries?

According to World Waterpark Association President Rick Root, "One of the consistent themes I hear from visiting many of our members is the need for better tools to manage online efforts, especially how to rise above the clutter and reach waterpark customers with productive e-mail campaigns."

Theme parks can find many ways to use e-mail marketing to drive sales and enhance customer relationships. Parks, such as Wild Rivers in Irvine, Calif., have proven that an integrated approach works well. In fact, this approach achieves results that please park owners. (See page 36, "Case study: Wild Rivers, Irvine, Calif.") As General Manager Greg Briggs puts it, "Our recent emphasis on cultivating our customer e-mail lists is now paying off. We are now able to generate fantastic off-season sales within hours of sending out e-mail promotions."

The best results seem to be in striving for quality, not quantity. Large e-mail blasts of generic messages have proven ineffective. Understanding your customers' behaviors and sending fewer and more targeted messages are showing responses that are exceeding even high expectations.

Whether you leverage all your customer touch points into an integrated marketing system, such as that done by Wild Rivers, or just send out a regular newsletter offering discounts to your customers, you should focus on the best practices for permission e-mail marketing. Problems can occur when people don't understand the practices and rules related to permission-based e-mail. The online industry is now creating "white lists" of quality permission e-mail senders and "black lists" of senders who don't follow the rules. If you get on a

black list, your e-mail will likely get automatically intercepted by *spam* filters, which are becoming more common every day.

The following practices will help you get started in e-mail marketing as well as make sure you stay in the quality e-mail marketers' category. Because the return on investment with e-mail marketing can be impressive, it's clearly worth the effort of doing it right.

### **BEST PRACTICE NO. 1:** **Develop a communications strategy**

Who are you trying to reach? What value are you bringing to your customers with the communication? What is your brand strategy and how are your communications augmenting that brand? Do you want just to keep your name in front of them or motivate them to take action? What is your ultimate goal? Most likely it is to build stronger relationships with existing customers so they come back to your park. With that goal in mind, think about how you are going to get there. One nice element about e-mail is that it doesn't cost much to experiment. Try different kinds of communications and track the responses. Customers only have to hit the reply button to tell you what they think.

### **BEST PRACTICE NO. 2:** **Choose the right e-mail service provider**

The e-mail-service provider you choose should do most of the heavy lifting involved in an e-mail marketing program. If you are to have e-mail marketing success that results in more sales and better customer relationships, you must select the right service provider. The following are features to look for in key functional categories:

**Creating and delivering the message.** Your provider's system should:

- Offer a variety of layouts for your newsletter or e-mail message as well as custom layout for your use.
- Allow you to create e-mail and Web links.
- Allow you to format text with font size, color, bold, italic, underline, etc., and quickly add borders and backgrounds.
- Allow you to deliver messages in HTML, text or multipart and personalize each message with the person's name and any other user-defined field (such as *Last Year's Season-Pass Holder*).

## TOP 8 BEST PRACTICES FOR E-MARKETING

- 1) Develop a communications strategy
- 2) Choose the right e-mail service provider
- 3) Collect e-mail addresses and permission
- 4) Create quality content that's relevant & concise
- 5) Test, track and optimize
- 6) Use viral marketing
- 7) Keep your list clean
- 8) Respect permission & the new spam law.

❑ **List management.** Your provider's system needs to:

- Make list management straightforward and easy.
- Integrate customer data from any of your customer databases that have information on season-pass purchases, ticket or other purchases and Web visitors.
- Automatically manage mailing-list subscriptions and removals.

❑ **Message tracking.** Your provider should allow you to:

- View the campaign's real-time results online immediately after launch.
- View online reporting that includes e-mails sent, undeliverables, unsubscribes, e-mail opens and click-throughs in real time.
- Track user response for each individual link.
- Download customer lists by action taken (open, click, etc.).
- Track Web conversions.
- Analyze campaign success.

❑ **Viral marketing feature.** Your provider's system should:

- Provide a *Forward-to-a-Friend* option that encourages your subscribers to forward e-mails to their friends and colleagues as well as add their own personal comments.
- Provide tracking of viral forwards and new subscribers.

❑ **Database profiling and segmentation.** Your provider's system should:

- Allow you to add demographic and interest data for each subscriber, then easily create list segments based on that data.
- Allow you to personalize e-mails with other subscriber data such as season-pass holder, group sales purchaser, ZIP code, birth date, purchasing history, etc.

❑ **Dynamic content.** Your provider's system should:

- Allow you to send unique content (copy and images) to each individual subscriber on your list.
- Customize your content around subscriber purchasing history, age, income or other custom data you select. This ensures you deliver the right message to the right customer.

❑ **Conversion tracking.** You need to be able to determine the success of an e-mail campaign. The most important metric may not be opens or clicks but rather the number of leads or sales conversions. *Conversion tracking* integrates with your Web site and enables you to track Web visits and conversions generated by your e-mail campaigns.



Source: Forrester Research, 2002

### BEST PRACTICE NO. 3:

#### Collect e-mail addresses and permission

Start by building your permission-based e-mail list. If you're just starting your e-mail marketing program, you might want to capture your customers' names and e-mail addresses—but probably not much more. When the time comes, and relationships evolve, collect other valuable information to enhance future campaigns.

You can get people to join your mailing list from your Web site. Collect names and e-mail addresses whenever you interact with your customers. Create a point-of-purchase display. Offer exclusive promotions or communications to e-mail customers. Engage your employees and sales people in collecting e-mail addresses. Whenever and wherever you can, collect the e-mail addresses of your customers.

### BEST PRACTICE NO. 4:

#### Create quality content that's relevant and concise

The simplest format is the straightforward message—perhaps a special offer or promotion. However, the format that attracts the most attention is the tried-and-true newsletter model. Ideas include special-offer promotions (discounted tickets, season passes, etc.), park announcements, event-driven communications, holiday updates, Members-Only Club announcements and coupon promotions. Depending on your style, you may want to develop something less boilerplate and more appropriate for a one-to-one communication piece.

Regardless of the method you use, you should always keep in mind the following:

❑ **Always get to the point quickly.** Users are more likely to appreciate and read your message if it is short and sweet. Additionally, you want to put your best and most catchy information toward the top. If you have a special promotion or event about which you want the user to read, a good practice is to put the first few sentences in the e-mail message.

❑ **Make return communication easy.** Provide e-mail address links, departmental information and other useful data so your clients can reach you. After all, the idea is to increase human

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first name:

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I would like special information on:

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 Birthday Parties     Season Passes

Forward this to a friend:

friend 1 name:

friend 1 email:


friend 2 name:

friend 2 email:

type your message here:

your name:

**SUBMIT NOW!**



Wild Rivers, in Irvine, Calif., uses e-marketing techniques such as these (above and above right) to appeal to guests.

## CASE STUDY: WILD RIVERS, IRVINE, CALIF.

Wild Rivers has invested in a complete online platform that includes reservations, season-pass sales, e-mail marketing, promotion tracking and advance-content management. The implementation gave Wild Rivers the tools necessary to track customer behaviors and responses to marketing messages so that it could better deliver the right messages and information. The efforts have resulted in better customer acquisition and retention.

Randy Josselyn, director of admissions at Wild Rivers, points out several benefits. "While we have always had a fairly strong customer-retention program, placing an emphasis on e-mail communications and e-commerce has been truly rewarding. More than 70 percent of season-pass purchasing is now done online, and we have dramatically reduced the cost of sending out 'snail mailers' to past customers. Additionally, the ability to deploy e-mails to specific customer types, including purchase types or geographical areas, is invaluable to our marketing department."

The system does more than just send out e-mail. It integrates most of Wild Rivers' sales, marketing and customer-interaction functions into a system that provides automated e-mail communications as well as return-on-investment (ROI) tracking for various marketing efforts. For example, the system unifies Wild Rivers' marketing efforts across multiple customer touch points, such as:

- Online purchasing
- Ticket purchases at the gate
- Strategic partner sales
- TV and radio advertising (using promotional codes for ROI tracking)
- E-newsletter subscriptions (opt-ins)
- Sweepstakes promotions
- Loyalty club membership

By using an integrated platform to gather customer data, Wild Rivers is now pro-active with its e-mail communications, creating an automated "dialogue" with its customers.



**Wild Rivers targets its e-marketing messages bases on seasonal and holiday aspects.**

*"By providing the right message to the right customer at the right time, you can increase, measure and eventually predict sales."*

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interaction to build better customer relationships. However, because they've given you permission to communicate with them, respect that permission by offering them an easy and obvious method for unsubscribing.

❑ **Provide links to helpful areas of your Web site.** The idea is to gain the opportunity to communicate and educate the user on your products and services.

❑ **Carefully choose subject lines and sender names.** Once you have an ongoing relationship with a user, it becomes easier to personalize and learn what works. However, before that happens, you should test different subject lines but stay consistent with regard to who is listed as the sender.

**BEST PRACTICE NO. 5:  
Test, track and optimize**

If you are presenting a promotion, a coupon or some other type of offer, try testing different messages with varying subject lines and message content. You can usually expect results within 48 hours, so take advantage of this and optimize your campaigns by testing.

A good e-mail system allows you to keep statistics on what links are clicked the most and those that draw no attention at all. The name of the game is finding out what your customers find interesting and providing them more of it.

**BEST PRACTICE NO. 6:  
Use viral marketing**

One of the great things about the Internet is its ability to spread information of interest through social networks—friends sending information to friends. All e-mail campaigns should have a Send-to-a-Friend component, especially in the entertainment business. Additionally, you can develop programs—such as sweepstakes—that provide referrers with added chances of winning prizes for forwarding the offer to friends. When done correctly and in good taste, viral campaigns yield amazing results.

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**BEST PRACTICE NO. 7:  
Keep your list clean**

Choose an e-mail service provider that supplies list-integrity services. Remove duplicates and test for bogus e-mail addresses before you do a mass mailing. Most e-mail providers charge per e-mail, so doing this will save you money.

**BEST PRACTICE NO. 8:  
Respect permission and the new spam law**

The CAN-SPAM Act went into effect on Jan. 1, 2004. This is good news for companies that follow the rules of permission e-mail marketing and bad news for spammers who have no regard for true permission-based e-mail.

If you practice quality permission e-mail, you shouldn't have to worry about complying with the CAN-SPAM Act. However, you should use the following tips as a guide to ensure lawful practices.


- ❑ **Identify yourself.** Because your customers have given your company permission to contact them, make sure the e-mails going to them are clearly identified as coming from your company (in the header of the e-mail).
- ❑ **Be forthright.** Use clear and honest subject lines. Never mislead recipients just to get them to open an e-mail.
- ❑ **Give contact information.** Add your postal address to all e-mail.

❑ **Give them a way out.** Provide a clear and prominently visible method for recipients to unsubscribe to your list. Then, make sure your system processes their requests automatically and promptly.

❑ **Handle unsubscribing quickly.** Set up operational procedures to manually process unsubscribe requests that come through regular e-mail. You should do this within a 10-day window.

❑ **Respect an unsubscriber's decision.** Don't share the address of a person who unsubscribed with any other entity that might send that party an e-mail.

❑ **Develop your own contacts.** Don't harvest e-mail addresses from other Web sites or through other automatic means. Build and use your own list of customers and prospects, not someone else's.

By providing the right message to the right customer at the right time, you can increase, measure and eventually predict sales. Relationships with customers are enhanced and your theme park's brand stays top-of-mind. 

*Jeff Huggins, EVP of marketing at Convergence, Aliso Viejo, Calif., has worked with many global companies in entertainment and automotive. Convergence is an interactive agency providing e-marketing services and interactive platforms and services to theme parks. Convergence representatives will be presenting a seminar on e-commerce solutions at the 24th Annual World Waterpark Symposium and Trade Show in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Visit [www.convergence.net](http://www.convergence.net).*

**FOLLOW THE LAW:  
DON'T BE A SPAMMER**

Always adhere to these rules to ensure you follow the law in sending out any e-marketing messages:

- **Identify yourself.**
- **Be forthright.**
- **Give contact information.**
- **Give recipients a way out.**
- **Handle unsubscribing quickly.**
- **Respect an unsubsubscriber's decision.**
- **Develop your own contacts.**