

So when exactly is the best time to send?

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The factors you should consider when choosing the broadcast time of your campaigns to help maximise the return on email marketing for your business.

Yes, segmentation, list hygiene, the creative and the offer itself are all fundamental to the success of any DM campaign – but emarketers seem to be obsessed with timing at the moment. Email Service Providers are constantly being asked by clients ‘when is the best time to send my email campaigns?’ And that’s a difficult one. Repeat after me: there is no universally correct answer.

An industry perfect time?

Studies have been released that show that there is a specific day and time that email marketing is responded to most. For example, eROI Q1 2006 study shows that most marketers send email promotions on Tuesday and Wednesday. So does this mean that emails should be sent on Monday, Thursday, Friday or the weekend when email volumes are down?

In the real world, there are too many things to consider that make this impractical:

- Response handling: if promotions are sent at a certain time of day are your call centres resourced to handle the inbound enquiries?
- Web site capability: If you’re pushing people to the web site, can your web site handle concurrent users at once or will it crash?
- Audience: when I open my inbox on a Monday morning, I delete the majority of the emails received over the weekend. However, email received throughout the day seems much more interesting. As a B2B marketer, broadcasting promotions on a weekend may mean your message is lost. Likewise, as an international marketer, consider time differences and local holidays

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- Competitors: if your competitors are email heavy, do you want your marketing message to land at the same time encouraging comparisons?

Frequency and targeting

The next major area of consideration is that of frequency. Major brands seem to get into a cycle.

According to my inbox, B&Q send their emails every Friday, and Marks & Spencer on a Thursday. With limited communication in-between (unless triggered by a transaction) brands are missing out on serious opportunities. Assuming that all responses happen over the three days after sending, a follow-up campaign to the non-openers can significantly raise deliverability and hence ROI.

So migrating your email marketing from a 'load and blast' scenario towards action-based promotions/behavioural targeting makes a lot of sense. Essentially the question about day of week becomes redundant.

For example, Expedia runs a timely action-based campaign which arrives as you come back from your holiday – with the basic message of 'Welcome back, how was it for you?' Also this is another opportunity to gain valuable user data.

Ultimately, using action-based systems means more relevant communications are automatically delivered as the recipients themselves trigger the sends. Examples include: abandoned cart campaigns to encourage completion with an incentive; incomplete action – where they have clicked but not bought, offer free delivery; reactivation – not visited the site/ordered for months – send a 'have we upset you?' message; cross-selling – pushing recent buyers towards complementary products, e.g. having bought a digital camera, highlight bags, media cards etc.

Attack waste

Taking each campaign and making it work harder by attacking waste in separate 'waves' is an important area to build response and loyalty. For example, when customers don't open campaigns send again the next week, and if that continues try telesales or DM. If they abandon the cart, offer incentives to complete or survey them and ask why.

Working week and holidays

Don't assume our working week is the same as abroad. While this might be true for most of the Western nations and East Asia, in the Middle East for example, Friday is the weekly day of rest. Also as we head towards the festive season don't forget, for international marketers, many of your contacts in predominantly Muslim nations will be working hard over Christmas and won't want reminding that you're not working!

So what is the answer?

The conclusion is that there is no perfect industry time to send emails. However, there are methods to discover the best time for your company's individual email promotions.

The alternative to scheduled mailings is to develop relevant communications which are sent to contacts based upon their behaviour. Following up an individual based upon a trigger or an action (form completion, click through etc), is much more relevant and effective than a load and blast every Tuesday. Companies embracing email marketing are finding this behavioural targeting is fast become the essential way to improving campaign response.

There is a huge opportunity for UK marketers to capture more market share now simply by improving their email marketing process. Don't forget the industry average for click-throughs is 11 per cent for retention campaigns (and 8 per cent for acquisition), according to the DMA Email Benchmarking Report Q1 2007, and if you're below this, or want to improve, you need to start asking questions urgently.