



Get personal.

Part 2: How the right approach builds better relationships.

Spam remains one of the most aggravating aspects of e-mail. According to Google, e-mail spam during the beginning of 2009 increased at a rate of 1.2 percent *every day*. Marketers know they must tread lightly when using e-mail marketing.

In the first article of this series, I discussed different types of e-mail marketing. Transactional e-mail marketing works best with impulse-buy commodities or well-known products that simply require reminders. Because it's relatively inexpensive to "batch and blast" thousands of e-mails to meet reach and frequency goals, it can also be confused with spam. It doesn't take too many of these types of e-mails to sully a reputation.

Relational marketing, on the other hand, is based on the rules of reciprocity. As discussed last week, relational e-mail marketing starts with an attitude of asking and listening, not telling. Its goal is to build a relationship through a two-way process of gathering insight and responding with relevant content.

By learning how to ask good questions and listening carefully to the answers, relational e-mail marketing can become a market-research channel.

The heart of a campaign

At the heart of a relational e-mail marketing campaign is the database. Campaigns can be run using an in-house database or, more often, a third-party service provider. The key to success, however, is that the marketing model is built to capture everything and consider every piece of data as an asset.

It's not enough to get typical reach and frequency reports (deliverability, opens and click-throughs). Relationship marketing collects data from the e-mail campaign at the individual level and allows for analysis at the individual level.

A large global pharmaceutical firm has been experimenting with this approach for a new product with a unique mechanism of action. By incorporating attitudinal, behavioral and practice management questions over the course of several e-mail campaigns and website visits, the brand has been able to capture valuable insight into its target physician audience. For example, one question asked whether a physician's willingness to try a new therapy was based on whether there were samples in the office. Although the average response was that samples were not important, more than 25 percent of the physicians claimed that it was very important. What is unique about this e-mail marketing approach to market research is that now the marketing team knew specific customer needs at the individual level. When physicians begin to see that there is a tangible benefit to their providing personal information, then there is increased trust and confidence in the integrity of the brand.

Three steps

There are three steps to turning an e-mail marketing campaign into a market-research channel. The first step is to audit your e-mail marketing provider and determine whether it has the capability and willingness to help you build a custom database. This database will hold the proprietary market research data that will come from your e-mail marketing campaign, and it shouldn't be

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shared or available to your provider's other customers. Your provider should have the capability to analyze the data and provide you with detailed profiles of your customers. You and your team will use these profiles to look at segmentation differently and to begin to consider how you will communicate and serve your customers differently.

The importance of Golden Questions

The second step is to create the master list of “Golden Questions,” or those questions that will help you better understand your customers and learn how to serve them more effectively. These questions will help to fill in research gaps or may be used when market-research reports a lack of unanimity on a particular issue and you need to know how individual physicians feel. Golden Questions can cover beliefs about a disease state or treatment options, practice habits or attitudes

about novel therapies. You might ask 8–10 questions in the course of a multi-wave e-mail marketing campaign, but only one or two at a time. Or you might develop a regular McKinsey-esque survey that captures attitudes and provides aggregate results back to the participants.

Finally, develop a pilot and look for ways to include sales, market research and managed markets in the experiment. Each group has questions about their customer base or would welcome the opportunity to test the validity of some of their assumptions. By leveraging an existing e-mail marketing budget to ask questions, these various stakeholders will get value from your efforts and, by sharing the results, you will help to shape the sales and marketing messages so they are more relevant and valuable to your physician audience.

Avoiding the pitfalls

There are potential pitfalls to committing to a relational e-mail marketing approach. Trying to bite off too much too quickly or attempting to move to relationship marketing with an e-mail provider who is more adept at delivering transactions can lead to frustration and failure. Providers who compete on the size of their database or the speed of getting an e-mail drop out the door may not be the right partner.

True relationship marketing involves not only recognizing customers when they respond, but also capturing and analyzing their responses. Using the online channel to simply increase brand awareness is becoming a vanishing tactic. Social networking has raised the bar of expectations for trust and engagement, and e-mail marketing, if it wants to survive, has to meet those expectations.

Visit closerlook.com to see the first article of this series, “Are you listening? The give and take of e-mail campaigns.”

Want to continue this discussion? Get in touch with [DAVE ORMESHER](mailto:dormesher@closerlook.com) at dormesher@closerlook.com.