



Best Practice Checklist:

Email Campaigns

Tips, tactics and tools from Internet Content Marketing Consultant Bill Baird



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Use the campaign checklist at right before you push the button to send your next email campaign.

It's based on a **SPARK-watch Best Practices** survey we recently completed of 20 top email marketers.

You'll get more for your money and avoid a catastrophic oversight in the inevitable rush to get a campaign out. Keep this list for reference (or cut out the abbreviated version in the sidebar listing at right):

1. The Rollout Strategy: Staged or Blast? You need to ask yourself, "should I be rolling out this email in staged waves ... or as a single blast?"

If you are making major operational changes, consider replicating the rollout strategy on a smaller level by pre-testing the campaign to a reduced quantity of names.

Then, 48 hours later, you can confidently roll out to the entire file knowing what to expect.

Examples of changes that warrant a strategy like this include switching to a new email service provider, using A/B test splits or appended email addresses for the first time, or rolling out with a radically different offer.

2. Subject Line Count/Structure. Limit this to 50 characters, with the best copy upfront.

Many email browsers show less than 50 characters in your subject line—and some clip it off unless the reader opens the email.

Also be sure to consider what the recipient will see the in the first 20 characters, as those are often the most important.

3. "From" Header Familiarity. Don't change the "From:" header without testing it first, or, at a minimum, back-testing the change.

When you get an email, the first thing you look at is who sent it, right? Your recipients do the same thing.

4. The Top 1 ½ Inches. Check to be sure that your most compelling copy appears in this space.

It's the most commonly-seen part of the email, because most recipients make their decision to open the email based on what they see in the smaller browser window below the listing of inbox email headers.

5. Whitelisting Reminders. Reminding the recipient to whitelist your sender address at the top of your email improves deliverability and complies with the prefer-

6. Image-Delivery Tactics. Many email browsers have a default setting which blocks any graphics from their users. So remember to provide:

- * A link at the top to a Web page version
- * <ALT> tags for each image
- * Both text and graphics in the top 1½ inch of the email.

THE LAST-MINUTE EMAIL DEPLOYMENT CHECKLIST:

1. Rollout: staged or blast?
2. Subject Line Count/Structure
3. "From" Header Familiarity
4. The Top 1 ½ Inches
5. Whitelisting Reminders
6. Image-Delivery Tactics
 - A link to a webpage version
 - <ALT> tags for each image
 - Text as well as graphics in top 1½ inches
7. Driving the Eye
8. Landing Page Reiteration
9. Fields Above the Fold
10. Operational Tests: Popups and Links.

7. Drive the Eye.

Extensive eye-tracking studies have shown that higher response rates come from simple, straightforward designs using “islands” of color mass and page location to guide the eye to a specific, actionable marketing goal.

Here’s a great way to see if your design is producing this. It’s called the “Mirror Trick”. Print a screen shot of your email and hold it up in the mirror.

Pay close attention to where your eye goes in the very first

8. Landing Page Reiteration.

Make sure that your click-through page reiterates what the user saw in the email. It should reflect a similar copy appeal and graphical “look,” and emphasize the same offer benefits.

9. Fields Above the Fold.

A painfully-obvious but often-forgotten oversight: on the Landing Page, try to pack the most important information and fields above the bottom of the average browser’s window. People are lazy and they won’t scroll down unless they’ve been

most common mistakes:

Landing page abandon pop-ups. Check to be sure that the pop-up appears consistently for each of the 3 routes that visitors take to abandon your landing (i.e. click-through) page in the two most common email browsers (Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox). These routes are:

- * “Browser-closers”—those who simply close the browser.
- * “Url-leavers”—those who go to another page in your site.
- * “Main site-leavers”—those who go to another website.

Link Tests. This one’s simple: make sure every link goes to the right landing page for the right list and offer!



The Mirror Trick. In this example, most peoples’ eyes go to the word “sale” and the giant orange circle with the low price in huge letters. Graphics should send the eye to a great offer, benefit or action button.

millisecond. It should go to a prominent button, compelling benefit, a great offer, or an action component. If it dances around the page, you’ve got the “Pinball Effect,” and you’ll lose people (see the example above).

given a very good reason.

10. Operational Tests.

If you are the one who set up the campaign, have another person do these for you. If it’s been set up by your IT group, you can do the checking yourself. These are some of the

Based on the 20 marketers we surveyed, these are their own self-reported past oversights. By covering each of these bases before you hit the “launch” button, you can help ensure a successful campaign every time.

Bill Baird is a leading authority on the use of digital direct marketing tactics to generate revenue from publisher content and services on the web.

A frequent speaker at tradeshow and conferences, his consulting clients include EducationWeek, Vance Publishing, Consumerreports.org and numerous others.

He is also the creator of SPARK-watch, an industry best practices intelligence service.

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