



Generating Responses Using Email Marketing

Andy this month looks at how to write effective emails and outlines the significant differences between the techniques required from that of direct mail.

Oh dear. Listen to this...

According to recent research I saw the other day, accredited to some people called IDC, over 36 billion person-to-person emails will be sent daily by 2005.

And...

Draft Worldwide's US Office reckons that in 2004 we will receive an average of 50 junk emails a day.

I think they're wrong. I think it will be closer to **100...**

I get over 50 NOW...!

99.9% of them are garbage. Most are irrelevant, an increasing amount of them try subterfuge, but virtually all are badly written...

...and we thought direct mail copywriting was bad...!

So, with the certain fatigue that the above predictions will generate, getting attention and generating responses using email marketing is undoubtedly going to get harder...

Email is a wonderful new arrow in the marketer's quiver. But, as with all contemporary communication channels, it needs careful thought.

What's more, it will always benefit from the personal touch of someone who knows what they are doing.

Contrary to the beliefs of some out there, it is not about mass. It is, as one of my favourite US colleagues would say...about class.

And you won't find much of that in your in-box these days...

Some people believe that email can be an inexpensive alternative compared to direct mail. I don't believe that, judging by what I see...

For every email that reassures, persuades and influences me to respond, I must see over 100, that in my eyes, have seriously damaged their brand by sending out such rubbish.

These days, with competition at an all time high in most business sectors, this can be very costly indeed. You rarely get a second chance...

It's only the same with direct mail, I hear you say. Not so, actually. Just because I don't respond to a mailer, doesn't mean I haven't been impressed by the quality of the approach and the brand message.

I will have been 'softened up' for the next time...

So, if you are looking to run an effective email campaign in the near future, here are a few tips that might help. These apply to both text and html emails.

A screen relationship is much more intimate than a letterbox. We all feel very differently about our email boxes than our letterboxes.

It's a more personal space. So, we have to tread a little more carefully, whilst always recognising that our message has to sell.

A lot of the proven techniques for writing effective direct mail copy apply to emails as well. Benefits not features, AIDA sequence, clarity, verisimilitude etc...

As with direct mail, it's all about the recipient not the writer - and benefit is king.

You should use the words "you," "your" and "yours" as often as you can.

But, there are significant differences too...

Long copy still outpulls short copy in head to head direct mail tests, but with emails it is necessary to keep it short. Especially with your first message.

Ideally use two or three short paragraphs. Indented is working best at the moment.

The object should be to influence the recipient to request further information via a hyperlink, visit to a website or a follow-up email message.

When they respond, you can then use that 'warmth' you have generated to sell yourself just a little bit more...

...softly softly catchee monkey, remember?

Don't use those proven direct mail words like Free, Win, Guaranteed, Introducing, Cheap, Save, New, ££££'s and others like them. Avoid exclamation marks like the plague. And ALL CAPS in the 'Subject' line will almost certainly result in your message being deleted instantly.

In his superb book on email marketing, Aussie mate Malcolm Auld wrote:

"The key to getting your e-mail opened can be described in one word - 'trust'. Without trust your recipient won't open your e-mail. They'll trust you if they know who you are and understand why you are contacting them.

If what you type in the two fields of the heading, 'From' and 'Subject', don't engender trust, you'll get deleted as quick as blinking"

He's so right. I don't know anyone these days that opens an email attachment if they don't know or trust the sender. It is so dangerous and can have a huge amount of very unpleasant implications.

Writing a 'Subject' line is regarded by some to be pretty much the same as writing headlines for direct mail letters, envelopes, or off the page ads.

I personally think it is much harder than writing headlines for direct mail.

Mainly because at the moment of message delivery - that vital 2-8 seconds - the recipient evaluates your promotional message purely by the 'subject' line and the 'from' box.

Whilst, of course, that same recipient is looking at a screen with, on average, over 20 'one line' messages. Most of which are total rubbish...

At least with direct mail, the recipient can see, touch and be involved with the elements of the dm pack. The PS can be viewed, the pack contents speedily evaluated and the writer identified.

With email messages you don't enjoy that level of attention. So, in my view, it's much harder. The subject line HAS to grab.

There MUST be relevance in there. And it's VITAL that it contains a benefit.

And you only have a maximum of 35 characters to play with...!

As I mentioned in my previous Copycat article on headlines;

“On average, five times as many people will read the headline of your ad and letter, than will read the body copy. Therefore it is absolutely essential that the winning idea, the proposition, must be in the headline, not in the copy. If it's not, there will be no selling proposition to 80% of your audience.”

It has been proven through testing that if you can incorporate the recipient's name in the 'Subject' line, response will go up. The reason is simple - people enjoy reading their own name - and they'll spot their name before they see the rest of the copy.

Try to keep the subject line under 35 characters, or your headline may not be displayed in full. Keep your line length to 60 characters tops otherwise your copy will suffer from 'word wrap', resulting in a messy layout, which most won't bother with.

Serif typefaces are best. They enjoy far higher screen comprehension than sans serif. Remember, every little bit helps....

There's a very irritating trend at the moment of people who trick you into opening their email. I dislike them with a passion, don't you? Who are these bozos anyway?

Don't they realise that using a scam to get you to open their e-mail is going to result in you hating them and never doing business with them again? What's more, of course, it sends out a strong message that these people are dishonest and not to be trusted.

Here are a few selected emails I received recently that I would like to share with you:

CustomerService50250

Resorting to trickery NEVER works. The subject line demands I open this.

When I do, I find it refers to a Mortgage offer. Unfortunately, this kind of nonsense is on the increase.

I hate them and will never do business with them now or in the future - whoever they are, CustomerService50250...

Hard to believe isn't it?

Subj: **Re: Your Phone**
Date: 11/03/03 08:51:53 GMT Standard Time
From: CustomerService50250@hss1888.net (CustomerService50250)
To: dmmems@aol.com
CC: dee61948@aol.com, cath234@aol.com, bluelightband@aol.com, crackerboxpalace@aol.com, crossneedl@aol.com

MORTGAGE APPROVED!!!

- Interest Rate to High?
We Are Poor Credit Specialists

We Can Help You!

- Refinance -
- Second Mortgages -
- Debt Consolidation -
- Bad/Good Credit -
- Home Improvement -

[Click Here!](#)

Good Signs

A very poor email. Subject line offers no benefit. In fact, it offers nothing at all.

Subj: **GOOD SIGNS INTRODUCTION**
Date: 12/04/03 19:32:31 GMT Daylight Time
From: goodsign@grn.co.uk (Goodsigns)
To: info@andyowen.co.uk

DEAR SIR / MADAM,

WE WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE OURSELVES AS SILK SCREEN PRINTERS, BASED IN NORTH WALES. OUR FACILITY CATERES FOR SMALL TO LARGE FORMAT PRINT RUNS IN EITHER FLAT OR FULL COLOUR. WE CAN ACCEPT ARTWORK EITHER BY ISDN, CD OR WE CAN PRODUCE ARTWORK TO YOUR SATISFACTION. IF A VISIT FROM OUR REPRESENTATIVE IS REQUIRED PLEASE LET US KNOW, OR ALTERNATIVELY WE COULD FORWARD YOU OUR BROCHURE.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO RECEIVING ANY ENQUIRIES YOU MAY HAVE, AND ASSURE YOU OF OUR BEST ATTENTION AND WILLINGNESS TO BE OF SERVICE TO YOU AT ALL TIMES.

Body copy is badly written and features led (well, it is a printer after all, what do you expect?)

And, on top of all that, the text is in caps, which shouts at me.

No thanks...goodbye...

Trade Show Training

Subj: **Are You Responsible?**
Date: 24/03/03 19:06:18 GMT Standard Time
From: julia@tradeshowtraining.com (Trade Show Training)
To: andyowen@aol.com

Newsletter

Are You Responsible ... ?

...of course you are. In today's economy everybody is responsible for a firm's success, so it's important to take a critical look at every aspect of your business.

You know that trade shows remain the best face-to-face component of the marketing mix. And, like any business investment, your trade show program must be reviewed frequently for competency and bottom-line results.

You should start the review with these tough questions and give honest answers -

Yes, I'm responsible. But these jokers obviously aren't.

Spelling mistakes in the subject line are instant death. And deserve to be.

Even if it had been spelt correctly, it's still very poor.

The question in the subject line is lazy and totally uninteresting and very, very zappable, which is what I suspect most recipients did with it...

APS Advertising

Another subject line with zero benefit and even less attraction...

Subj: **Expand your thinking**
Date: 15/04/03 08:39:36 GMT Daylight Time
From: info@apsadvertising.com
To: andyowen@aol.com

Sign Design is expanding! With the arrival of our brand new Ultra-Wide Blaze XL Jet printer, we can print your images on a huge range of media at truly massive sizes. Outdoor banners, signage, flags, vehicle liveries (including plane graphics!) - if you can imagine it, we can print it. Posters, light boxes, front-lit, back-lit, indoors, outdoors, vinyls, fabrics, even carpets.

And big is also beautiful. Our Blaze XL jet is fully specified to offer true 6 colour colour printing for ultimate image quality, and we use fade-resistant inks as standard.

In fact, our new machine is so big we had to move to a whole new factory!

If you want to be big in Dubai, contact us today!

Email :
info@apsadvertising.com <mailto:info@apsadvertising.com>

Phone : 04 3245266
Nicola Stewart
Business Development Manager

Written by the cleaner on a quiet night.

The copy is 100% about them. Nothing about what they can do for me.

I am not in the slightest bit interested about their expansion or their brand new printer.

I thought I WAS big in Dubai anyway...!

Lets leave the final word with the master...

My old chum Drayton Bird recently stated that, in his opinion, the main barriers to development of the e-mail marketing industry will be no different than with the introduction of most new technology:

"You'll see lots of incompetence as people will be in too much of a hurry to plan and execute properly; techno-jitters caused by unreliable technology; a failure to understand that the rules of direct marketing will apply to this as to everything else in marketing; and a failure to co-ordinate, measure or test enough".

More relevant to this article, the great man also foresees problems arising from lack of skills and commonsense:

"... a shortage of people who can write"

In the case of writing for email, in my view this becomes even more critical.

Because, you are looking for a knowledgeable writer who can write effectively, with strict discipline, within almost impossible technical restrictions.

Not easy. Not easy at all. There are not may out there that will be able to do it.

But, the best of luck in your search...and...

Keep the faith...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy', with a small dot at the end.

See you next month.

If anyone would like complete copies of any letters reviewed here, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com

About the Author

Andy Owen is Managing Director of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International Strategic Marketing Consultancy specialising in all aspects of contemporary direct marketing. The company has offices in UK, Middle East & North Africa, with Associate Offices in Europe & The USA.

The company's corporate website is www.andyowen.co.uk The specialist copy division has its own site at www.copywritingthatsells.com

As well as his International speaking engagements, Andy runs in-house copywriting and direct marketing sessions and workshops for companies and organisations all over the world. If you feel your company could benefit from one of these, please contact Andy for details.

If you would like further information on any aspect of copywriting for direct marketing, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com

Don't forget to check out Andy's superb new DVD on Copywriting called "*How To Write Copy That Really Sells.*" To find out more and see excerpts from the DVD, visit <http://www.andyowen.co.uk/buy-online.html>