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Email Marketing Works: But What Are The Rules?

By Tommi Pryor

Political campaigns and advocacy organizations are turning more and more to email marketing to ge awareness, raise funds, recruit volunteers, acquire members or subscribers, distribute their calls-to-a to get out the vote. This article is the first in an ongoing series designed to help political marketers ur how to utilize this medium most effectively.

Before getting into the meat of subject lines, message content, image-to-text ratios, email metrics and it is important to examine how email marketing should and shouldn't be used. It is equally important t examine how it compares with other media and to establish the right set of expectations regarding ou

We all get weary at wading through the countless unsolicited email ads ("SPAM") that show up in our inboxes every day. But, is this really any worse than the telemarketing calls that interrupt our dinner hour, the television commercials that interrupt the movie we are watching with our family or the direct mail letters that jam our mailboxes and have to be sifted through and disposed of?

Nonetheless, political marketers are well-served to only deploy their email campaigns to opt-in lists, whether their own or opt-ins to a third-party

list of individuals who have agreed to receive partner offers and communications. Despite that non-commercial email broadcasts are not governed by the CAN-SPAM Act, certainly this will hold you stead and will prevent you from alienating constituents who do not care to be contacted by email. Ho many seem willing to throw the baby out with the bath water believing that email should only be used intended recipient has specifically opted-in to the sender's list, typically via their web site. This limits political campaign or advocacy group from growing their housefile through acquisition email broadcas prospecting) that generally cost far less than direct mail or telemarketing.

Where many reputable commercial sources exist for email lists of recipients who have opted-in to re third-party offers and communications, it is interesting to note that rarely if ever has a direct mail recip telemarketing call recipient "opted-in". In fact, typically, those on commercial direct mail and telemark lists are considered fair game unless they expressly take action to opt-out through the DMA "pander" national Do Not Call Registry.

The point is that if you have no philosophical problem contacting a prospect by direct mail or telemark where it is very likely that the recipient has not opted-in at all, there is no reason to feel that you shou also prospect using email marketing—particularly because this medium lets you target only those wh opted-in to receive third-party communications.

This is important to understand as the debate wages on about whether it is legal, ethical or generally appropriate to prospect with email versus only deploying email broadcasts to those who have expres opted-in on your own web site. When you break the argument down, and apply the same standards direct marketing media, a strong case can be made that marketing to third-party opt-in email lists hol higher standard than other types of contact lists compiled through the public record (including voter registration lists), through survey responses on mail-in warranty and product registration cards, throu rental of magazine subscriber lists, or countless other means by which list compilers source their dat

But how about the political campaign or advocacy group that only prospects to response lists or exchanges? The first, response lists, are typically rented out by a list manager who handles the marketing of an organization's database of responders to its own appeals (typically referred to as a housefile list). Exchanges are just what the name implies. These are housefile lists that one organization exchanges with another organization either directly or through their list managers. These practices are widespread yet those who naysay the practice of prospecting to a third-party opt-in

email list fail to hold prospecting to other types of direct marketing lists to the same standard. Let's fa because another organization is willing to make their response list available to you on a rental or excl

basis does not mean that those on the list have opted-in to hear from you.

The bottom line is that email marketing provides a less costly and more immediate way to build your l
than is the case with conventional direct marketing media. In addition, email marketing offers addition
passive circulation potential because its recipients can forward it on with a few keystrokes and mouse
clicks—and at no cost to you! No other medium offers this level of viral marketing capability.

There is simply no legitimate reason to shun email marketing as a prospecting medium, and there are
reasons to embrace it for this purpose. For the start-up campaign or advocacy effort, or the one with
resources, email prospecting may provide the only real hope for reaching critical benchmarks and go
distance with its lower relative cost. For the political campaign or advocacy group with fuller coffers,
prospecting nonetheless provides a way to reach a wider audience for fewer dollars enabling them to
out more often.

This being said, caution should be taken to ensure that any third-party email list that you acquire is fr
legitimate and trustworthy source with good credentials and that the email addresses are truly opt-in,
harvested off of web sites. Indicators of the latter are a source that will allow you to have a copy of th
deploy your message yourself, or even who will outright sell you the list instead of renting it to you. Ir
contrast, most opt-in list owners require that they broadcast your message in order to protect their list
assure that it is not misused.

Another such cue is when this list is offered at a price that is far below typical industry pricing. Such lists are likely to be riddled with undeliverable email addresses that are outdated and inaccurate. These are also likely to have a high bounce factor because the email alias (the prefix before the @ symbol) is "info@", "sales@", "webmaster@", etc. instead of a consumer's personal email alias. Only a small percentage of these will likely ever reach a legitimate target.

The last cue is a lack of technological
capabilities as relates to list upkeep and hygiene, merge and suppression, and deployment and track
Chances are, if the list source lacks these basic capabilities, they are not a true list compiler, manage
broker and may have used bulk email address harvesting software to build their database. Aside fror
poor response that a harvested list will likely yield you, it is just as unlikely that the source will stand b
their list if it turns out to have a significant undeliverable or bounce rate as they likely lack the resourc

Understanding that "permission marketing" to an opt-in email list is entirely different than "spamming"
harvested list, the argument should be settled concerning the place that opt-in email has in a political

marketer's media mix. This controversy, where it still exists, is no different than the controversies tha

pre-date it relating to direct mail, telemarketing, fax broadcasting, commercials airing on cable televis

stations or even the current debate over "Robo-calls". These media remain in wide use today due to

industry lobbying and effective self-regulation. All, including email marketing, used responsibly and p

can play a very valuable role for the political marketer.

Tommi Pryor is CEO of American Information Marketing, LL

a database marketing company and new media agency

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This article will compare and contrast the characteristics and benefits of email marketing versus other key marketing media typically utilized by political campaigns today.

Email marketing vs. direct mail
While both email marketing and direct mail deserve a place in the political campaign's media mix, there are several benefits that an email campaign offers that a direct mail campaign doesn't.

There is the issue of turnaround time. Each component of the direct mail package must be designed, written, printed, addressed, possibly personalized, and mailed. Even if an agency is acting as a single point of contact in coordinating the project, the project must often move from one vendor to the next . . . from the copywriter to the graphic designer to the printer to the lettershop. In contrast, an email ad can reasonably be designed, produced, and launched in the space of a few hours, often with a single turnkey provider. In addition, where it might be expected to take 2-3 weeks to get the bulk of the responses back from a direct mail campaign, 80% of the responses from an email campaign are within the first three days of launch.
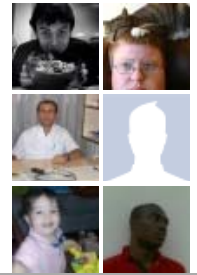
There is the issue of cost. In examining this, let's take a small hypothetical budget amounting to $5,000. Based on an email cost of five cents to deploy, the advertiser would be able to contact 100,000 prospects. In contrast to this, based on a cost of sixty-five cents to produce a direct mail piece, the advertiser would only be able to contact 7,692 prospects. Beyond this, as compared to direct mail, email has been reported to

generate an ROI that is 40 times higher than direct mail. It has also been reported to drive traffic to the advertiser's web site at a rate that is five times higher than with direct mail (and 50 times higher than from banner ads).

This having been said, the political advertiser should set its expectations for email prospecting performance no differently than it sets its expectations for direct mail prospecting. The objective in both cases should be to build the campaign's housefile roster--not to expect that either effort will pay for itself or yield a net return. The fundraising gain in both cases occurs in the next phase after the prospect has responded by subscribing, joining, opting-in, or making a (typically small) initial gift. Once an affinity is established through such an action, the relationship with your new supporter can be cultivated through subsequent housefile appeals. This is why it is so important that the primary objective when you are prospecting is to build your housefile whether you are utilizing direct mail or email. Email presents another advantage in this regard, however, as its lower cost means that breakeven can be achieved much sooner than with direct mail (but remember—this occurs over time during the housefile cultivation phase).

In closing out on this point, a word to the wise: make certain that your email content includes a link or button to subscribe, not just a donate link or button. If the only call-to-action in your email is for a donation, you may drive off those who want to learn more before making a contribution. Of greater concern, you will then also lose the opportunity to build your housefile since you have not provided the prospect with the option of signing-up via a link or button in your email or landing page.

Email also compares favorably to direct mail in that you can precisely micro-target to your defined audience. Both media can be highly personalized. Both are also highly trackable in terms of results as well. However, email presents the added advantage of precise numbers as to how many opened the email, how many clicked-through and who responded to your call-to-action. In addition, these stats are available in real-time. By contrast, one can only infer how many recipients actually opened the envelope to get into a direct mail package and how many were intrigued enough to reach into the envelope for more information (which might be likened to clicking through to your web site to read more). Of course, both can give you an actual response rate to your call-to-action, but the additional information you learn with email tracking eliminates a lot of the guesswork as to where response may be falling off that you can tweak the next time out.

Why would a political advertiser continue to invest in direct mail for prospecting if email presents so many additional advantages? The reason is simple: the number of consumer postal addresses available in the marketplace is far greater than the number of email addresses that are commercially available. In addition, though the trend is rapidly changing, some donors are still reluctant to make their gifts online and prefer to send a check in an envelope. The bottom line is that both these media have a place in the political campaign's marketing mix.

While both would be the ideal, for the political campaign that is just starting out or is low on funds, email might be the only prospecting option that can practically be pursued due to its dramatically lower cost. A political

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campaign at any stage can also leverage its existing housefile or voter list by having a reputable email provider append email addresses from its email universe to matching records on the political advertiser's file. The advertiser only pays for the email addresses that are matched and appended. In addition, the advertiser is permitted to use the appended information on an unlimited basis as opposed to renting the data each time it is needed.

Email Marketing vs. Spot Television
But how does email marketing compare with television, the mainstay of political marketing?

Many advertisers are reallocating their media spend by increasing their investments in online advertising and email marketing ("New Media") while decreasing their investment in television advertising. The reasons for this come down to two things: First, that the CPM (Cost Per Thousand) for online ads and email campaigns is substantially lower than for television. Second, with more and more viewers multi-tasking while watching television and using TIVO or their DVR to skip commercials, the actual television commercial reach is diminishing. In addition, where actual "net reach" for television remains elusive, and is generally concluded by inference, email and

online banner ads provide precise real-time reach/response rates through tracking and click-through data.

On the other hand, television presents advantages when it comes to audience reach. This is because it could take hours or even days to deploy the same number of emails that can be reached through a single 30-60 second broadcast. However, when one considers how people actually watch television today in light of all the possible distractions mentioned above, and including the TIVO and DVR fast-forward factor, the playing field dramatically levels. This is particularly true when you compare the significantly lower CPM of email marketing as compared with television advertising. Moreover, while television can deliver a message to a vast number of people simultaneously, it can take weeks to create and produce a television spot in contrast to an email ad since the latter can be completed in as little as a few hours.

So, while the emails must be delivered individually, the entire process can be launched much faster than with television. When a political campaign needs to get out an immediate response to an opponent's statements or to a local or world event, emails can start deploying in a matter of hours.

In addition, the finished email can be tested to a small percentage of the target list and tweaked or even changed completely over the space of three or four days before the full budgetary commitment is applied. With television, this is not possible in the short-term. For one thing, it takes longer to evaluate the success of a television spot since real-time tracking is not possible. Even if this data could be ascertained, and in real-time, it would be both time-prohibitive and cost-prohibitive to try to pull the spot, re-edit or re-shoot it, etc. when time is of the essence.

An email campaign also provides for immediate interaction with your web site using the same device so that

responses, or even contributions, can be generated immediately when the impulse to act is highest. The political advertiser can then begin to cultivate a relationship immediately with the respondent using thank-you pages, welcome aboard emails and so forth. Although a television spot can be used to drive viewers to the advertiser's web site as well, there is more inertia to overcome since the prospect has to then stop viewing television to switch to a device that can be used to access the Internet.

Finally, an email can be forwarded to friends and colleagues resulting in pass-along circulation. This can increase the reach of your message exponentially at no additional cost to you. Termed "viral marketing", this is something you can promote by incorporating a refer-a-friend button or link in your email ad, on the landing page that your respondents click-through to, in your thank -you page and your welcome aboard email. Of course, television does not have the capability of pass-through circulation and cannot multiply the value of your investment using a viral strategy.

The long and short of it is this: political marketers should follow in the footsteps of commercial marketers in building email into the marketing/media mix. It offers many of its own unique benefits and also serves to compliment and boost the response to other media when used collaboratively. Where leading commercial marketers are reporting an allocation of 15% of the media budget to email marketing on average, this is creeping up and can be as much as 100% of budget when funds are limited.

This being said, this article will close by reiterating the important point that the political advertiser must set appropriate expectations for email campaign results and must remember that the goal of a prospecting campaign should be to build the housefile unless the objective is branding or GOTV.

Tommi Pryor is CEO of American Information Marketing, LLC ("AIM")
a database marketing company and new media agency providing
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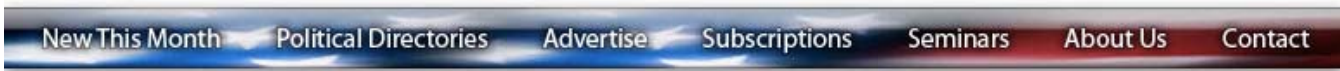
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The subject line of your email plays a crucial role as to whether your email is opened or even if it makes it into the "inbox" in the first place. Because if its importance, this article will focus entirely on this all-important topic, the email subject line. More consideration needs to be given to the subject line, than the rest of the email.

Subject Lines Impact Delivery

ISPs and web-based email hosts such as AOL, MSN, GMAIL, and Yahoo are known to utilize spam filtering technology that score incoming emails for spam characteristics. The higher the score, the more likely the incoming email is spam. Each ISP and email host sets the score threshold for blocking the email or diverting it to the junk folder based on a preferred tolerance level. If your email message scores above the tolerance level, it will never make it into the recipients' inbox on their ISP's email server.

One of the elements heavily weighted in the scoring process is the email subject line. Some of the variables that factor into the subject line score are subject line content, use of punctuation, and use of uppercase characters. These factors are key to subject line evaluation because they may typify how spammers utilize subject lines.

For instance, spammers like to use words that they believe will bait consumers to open their email messages such as "Free", "Discount", "Sale", "Guarantee", "Act Now!," and "% off". However, if you do a quick check of your own junk folder, you'll see that your spam filter has captured numerous emails using keywords similar to these expressions. Political marketers may feel their email messages are not at risk because they aren't

selling anything. However, this is certainly not the case.

Other keywords known to red flag an email message as spam include such seemingly innocuous ones as "Reminder", "Act Now", "Help" or even "Your family." This means that a political marketer's email subject line like "Reminder to cast your vote on Friday" or "Reminder to mark your calendar for our event" can red flag your email. So can "Don't let the opposition outspend us. Act now!", "Senator Doe needs your help!" or "Support the candidate who will lower taxes for your family."

So how can you make certain that you aren't unintentionally inserting keywords into your subject lines that will trigger the spam filters? One good gauge is the list of trigger words listed on SpamAssassin's web site at: http://spamassassin.apache.org/tests_3_2_x.html. (SpamAssassin is an open source spam filter program in wide use on commercial email servers).

If you peruse this list, you'll also note other subject line red flags are created from mis-spelling of words such as "Fharmacy" instead of "Pharmacy" or spaced spellings such as "F R E E" instead of "FREE." In addition, you'll note that the substitution of symbols for letters in a word acts as a score trigger ("L@@k" instead of "Look" or "L00K" instead of "LOOK"). And, you'll note that the use of uppercase words and punctuation in subject lines, especially question marks or exclamation points, also add to a negative spam score.

Subject line length also comes into play with respect to deliverability. The conventional wisdom is that you should keep your subject line to no more than 50 characters or risk triggering the spam filters.

Impacting Open, Click-Through, Conversion Rates

Until recently, there was really only one school of thought regarding subject line length. For a variety of reasons, industry experts agreed that a shorter subject line was a better subject line.

In addition to impacting deliverability, email subject lines over 50 characters are often subject to word-wrapping (places the subject line on two or more lines) or truncation (the line ending is cut off by the recipients' email client).   This can have disastrous results. For instance, take a subject line that is supposed to read "Senator Doe comes out in favor of XYZ policy". Now let's say Senator Doe is a conservative candidate running on a family values platform. Look what happens when the subject line gets truncated at 21 characters: "Senator Doe comes out". The intent of the subject line is completely altered and, in this case, likely to the detriment of the candidate. (In reality, it is unlikely that any email client would truncate a subject line at just 21 characters but this example serves to illustrate the possible impact of subject line truncation).

IE browser users can test their subject line appearance with a free online tool available online at: http://www.emaillabs.com/tools/from_subject_line_tool_popup.html. Many will utilize multiple email accounts with the major ISPs and free web mail accounts in order to test how their subject lines affect the delivery of their message throughout the major ISP's. Taking the time to "test" your message, can clearly determine if your email will be delivered to that ISP's inbox.

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Interestingly, some recent industry studies have turned the conventional wisdom on subject line length on its ear. One study reports that shorter subject lines increase the open rate while longer subject lines increase the click-through rate (while decreasing the open rate). Another reports that short subject lines under 50 characters increase the open rate as do long subject lines over 70 characters, but that those falling in between at 51-69 characters decrease the open rate. It is clear that it is difficult to figure.

So now what do you do? The answer is qimple. To increase your rate of success, you must test, test, test. What works may be counter-intuitive. And, what works with one list may not be what works with another, so you should keep testing. Here's how to conduct a simple A/B Split-Test to determine the impact of subject line on the open rate:

Create your email content remembering to minimize the ratio of graphics to text as we advised in our previous articles. Incorporate several links back to a dedicated landing page containing a quick and easy sign-up form requiring minimal fields that need to be completed (you can gather more information from the subscriber during the welcome process). Now create a minimum of two subject lines. Make them similar so that you are testing only one thing: subject line length. Subject Line "A" should be fewer than 50 characters (we actually usually recommend fewer than 39 characters), while Subject Line "B" should be greater than 70 characters. Now take 10% of

your list and send your email with the "A" subject line, while taking another 10% of your list and sending your email with the "B" subject line. After 6-8 hours, look at your open rate and identify the method with the higher success rate. Deploy the email to the remaining 80% of your list using the more successful subject line.

If you are testing the click-to-open (CTO) rate, you will want to track whether subject line "A" or "B" produced the higher number of click-throughs to your web site as a percentage of those who opened the email. Or, if testing the click-to-delivered-rate (CTD) rate, you will track your winning subject line against the number of emails transmitted with each subject line less bounces. Similarly, If you want to track which subject line produced the higher response to your call-to-action (sign-ups, donations, etc.), then you will want to evaluate which subject line produced the higher number of call-to-action responders as a percentage of click-throughs (Conversion Rate).

One thing that the industry seems to agree on is that straightforward, no-nonsense subject lines outperform sensational subject lines and teaser subject lines. This being said, you should still test this premise. In the heat of a political battle, it could well be the more sensational subject line that peaks interest despite the conventional wisdom. You'll only know for certain if you test the straightforward subject line against the

sensational subject line (but in this test, you should keep their lengths similar so you are again testing against one aspect).

While we always encourage testing of major variables such as email content, images, message length, etc., we understand that political marketers do not always have the luxury of time or resources necessary for sophisticated testing. However, testing one subject line against another is simple to undertake and simple to evaluate. Considering that it impacts whether or not an email is opened, or delivered at all, this is advice worth heeding!

Tommi Pryor *is CEO of American Information Marketing, LLC ("AIM") a database marketing company and new media agency providing opt-in email addresses with turnkey deployment and tracking, Tommi previously owner-managed a full-service political marketing and fundraising agency in the nation's capital. Tommi can currently be contacted at Click here to contact this Author.*

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The first step toward optimizing the results from an email campaign is to understand the metrics used to measure its effectiveness. Some novice email marketers "throw the baby out with the bath water" based on a lack of understanding of how an email marketing campaign should be evaluated. Others set unrealistic expectations hoping that a single email message pushed out to a prospect list will fill their coffers (this rarely happens).

Setting realistic expectations

In addressing the latter, the political marketer should bear in mind that a direct mail fundraising appeal to new prospects may cost up to 200% more than it raises, and that the gains will be realized when those who respond are re-solicited multiple times into the future. Although break-even is achieved more quickly with email fundraising since it is less costly to produce than direct mail, a similar expectation should be set. The primary goal of an email prospecting campaign should be to build the campaign's housefile list. Once an affinity has been established between the mailer and recipient, subsequent fundraising solicitations to the newly affiliated supporters should be fruitful.

Properly evaluating an email campaign

In measuring the performance of an email prospecting campaign, the most important metric is the "conversion rate". This equates to the number of email recipients who clicked-through to your web site and then responded to the specific call-to-action requested in the email. Your call-to-action might be an invitation to

opt-in for future communications or a call to donate, sign a petition, etc. However, if the "conversion rate" metric is not what was hoped for, especially the first time out to a given email prospect list, there are other important metrics that should nonetheless be considered.

First is the "open rate". This is the number of recipients who actually opened up your email to read it (wouldn't it be great if you could learn the number of audience members who actually view your television commercials?). Bear in mind that email, and online advertising for that matter, are both "response media" and "branding media". Even if you do not get the desired click-through rate (the next metric to be addressed), you have succeeded in creating awareness if your email is viewed. By getting the email opened and presumably read, you have also contributed to name or issue recognition just as would be the case with, say, an investment in print advertising or signage.

Next is the "click-through rate" (CTR) metric. You'll want to evaluate your click-through rate in two ways: 1. the number of clicking-through to your web site out of the total number delivered "Click-to-Delivered rate" (CTD), and 2. the number clicking-through to your web site out of those who opened your email "Click-To-Open rate" (CTO). A high CTR but low conversion rate may mean that the landing page or web form is suppressing response and should be reconsidered and perhaps, redesigned. Bear in mind that a low click-through rate, but high conversion rate, counts for more than the other way around.

One should also keep in mind that where a list may not perform to expectations for one purpose -- it may perform above expectations for another. For instance, some prospect lists may not perform very well as far as fundraising goes, but the recipients on those lists may be quite willing to respond to other calls-to-action such as attending an event or rally, helping to canvass their neighborhood, signing a petition or going to the polls to cast their vote for your candidate. Conversely, a list may perform very well for fundraising but not so well for calls-to-action that require the prospect to invest time doing more than providing you with their credit card number.

When it comes to the list, you get what you pay for!
Political marketers who have not yet been schooled in email best practices may conclude that a given email list is a poor performer, or even that email marketing as a medium does not work, because a given campaign doesn't test well.   This can be because they have not set their expectations and objectives properly for the use of this medium, or because they have not evaluated all of the email metrics they should be considering, as discussed above. This can also be due to list quality and appropriateness or email design and content.

Regarding the list, novice email marketers may not realize that the least expensive lists can actually wind-up being the most costly! If you get the lowest price in town on an email list, it may be because the list is not permission-based (opt-in) and comes from a bargain CD purchased from an online auction site. These typically consist of a high percentage of outdated and undeliverable email addresses, corporate email addresses that hold no value to the political mailer (such as "sales@" or "info@"), and email addresses of individuals who will be disgruntled at receiving your emails because they did not opt-in to the sponsoring list

Voice Broadcasting

owner.

Email campaigns deployed to such lists usually produce very poor results with respect to all metrics. In addition, these may lead to a high number of SPAM complaints that can cause your IP Address to be blacklisted by major ISPs. This could negatively impact the delivery rate of all of your electronic campaign communications including to your proven donors! If your IP Address gets put on one of the universal blacklists, the outcome to your campaign or initiative could be devastating.

When you utilize a genuine opt-in list, the list owner or manager will often do a "permission pass" to allow the recipient to opt-out of receiving your email marketing messages. This will help assure that your messages will be welcome even though political email is not subject to CAN SPAM requirements.

The old axiom that "you get what you pay for" truly applies when you consider all the elements of email marketing!

Test for success!
If you are using email marketing for fundraising, as opposed to awareness or GOTV, you should consider testing a random segment of the list before committing to a larger deployment. We recommend an A/B Split of email content when testing. For instance, Email "A" builds a case for making a contribution and drives recipients to the donor form on your web site. Email "B" drives the recipient to your "Join" or "Subscribe" page. You can also test the performance of one list versus another but bear in mind that you must be prepared to do a complex response analysis if you undertake testing of multiple lists and email content at the same time.

It is important to emphasize, however, that when testing the performance of a list itself, it is wise to test at least three times to that group of recipients. This is because research has shown that it takes at least three contacts to build affinity and to optimize response.

Tips to avoid the SPAM filters
Be prudent about loading your email with assorted graphics. Designers of today's SPAM filtering technology understand that personal emails between friends and colleagues rarely would have a lot of graphic images if any embedded in the body of the email. While photos, large banner headers and animations can make your email message more attractive and interesting, too high a percentage will cause your email message to be routed to the SPAM filter instead of the In-box-- or even to be bounced altogether. To be safe, we recommend that graphic content not exceed 10% of the message body for a prospecting campaign.

Other things to avoid are long subject lines (we recommend under 40 characters), uppercase subject, use of punctuation in subject lines (especially exclamation points and question marks), and certain subject line keywords that are in wide use by purveyors of SPAM.

I will cover these topics in greater detail in next month's article.

For our own email marketing clients, we run the email ads they submit through a "content checker" that scores the email for probable deliverability to the in-box before it is sent. The rating system not only considers the percentage of images used in the email ad, but it also considers subject line length and a variety of other factors that the SPAM filters use to determine if an incoming email should go to the Junk Folder or the Inbox. By running the Email Ad through the Content Checker, we can work with the customer to make adjustments to their ad before it is deployed to ensure maximum delivery.

Don't bury your call-to-action

Even if you succeed in getting your email past the SPAM filters in significant numbers, there are other factors that can dramatically affect the outcome of your email campaign. For instance, burying your call-to action too far into the email can cost you response. Certainly, it helps to build your case but it is generally best to summarize your call-to-action early then restate it later in the email after you have made your key points. This is because many people read just the first couple of lines in an email ad. Think of this like you would when writing a direct mail piece. Your subject line is like the envelope teaser and should compel people to open it. Your lead sentences should get the reader right into your call-to-action with a good reason for responding.

You should also consider putting multiple links or buttons back to your web site's opt-in page throughout your email message. You should strategically position these throughout the email message.

Call-to-action forms should require minimal information

Speaking of landing pages, you would be ill-advised to run banners ads or to undertake an email marketing campaign without a strategically chosen landing page that supports your call-to-action (donate, subscribe, volunteer, etc.). If you link them to your Home Page, instead of to a dedicated landing page with your call-to-action form, many of these visitors will abandon the web site without ever having navigated to your opt-in or donate form. Ideally, you want the person who clicks-through to land on a page displaying a simple interactive form that will allow the email recipient to provide you with the minimum information required to effect the call-to-action. Notice the emphasis on "minimum".

We have often reviewed tracking/click-through reports that show a very good open rate and equally good click-through rate. However, the opt-in or call-to-action rate is very poor. This suggests that the effort lost the person somewhere after the click-through. Was the visitor required to fill out a long form asking for a lot of personal information before they could leave? Never forget the short attention span of most visitors and remember that the motivation of many will wane quickly. A web form that has too many fields to fill out for a first-time contact can be a put-off. We would all like to know as much about our responders as possible, but you can acquire additional information in response to subsequent communications such as your Welcome email.

Keep it short!

The rule-of-thumb with a direct mail prospect

appeal is that a longer letter typically out-performs a shorter one. This is attributed to the space needed to build the case for responding. With email prospecting, this is not typically the case. Shorter email ads tend to are better. Try to keep your email ad brief enough to be viewed without scrolling down more than one screen. Again, if it looks like it's going to take a lot of time to read the email, some recipients will open and then close it immediately without reading any of it. The recipient may intend to come back to it later but research shows that they rarely will. You can likely get away with longer email messages to your existing supporters, but you must remember that when prospecting the interest-level and commitment-level of the recipient has not been established. You do not want to drive them off with a message they perceive is going to take too long to read before you have them firmly on the hook.

Remember, the first goal of a successful campaign strategy is to get your email message delivered in the first place. Following these suggested rules will increase your deliverability and assist you with the growth of an invaluable email contact list.

Tommi Pryor *is CEO of American Information Marketing, LLC ("AIM")*
a database marketing company and new media agency providing
opt-in email addresses with turnkey deployment and tracking,
Tommi previously owner-managed a full-service political
marketing and fundraising agency in the nation's capital.
Tommi can currently be contacted at _Click here to contact this Author_.

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By Tommi Pryor

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According to Pew Research Center, the likely reason why the U.S. Hispanic vote has not measured up to its potential is because of the large number of individuals in that population who are ineligible to vote.

Each month, some 50,000 U.S. Hispanic youth turn 18 years of age with 87% of them eligible to vote according to Maria Teresa Petersen, executive director of Voto Latino. In fact, the Hispanic teen population is predicted to grow 62% by 2010, just a scant two years away. By comparison, the growth rate among all U.S. teens for the same period is forecast at only ten percent making for a stunning contrast.

Although U.S. Hispanics have traditionally registered to vote in far fewer numbers than their Caucasian counterparts, this is likely to change as the number reaching voting age continues to rise. Demonstrating the potential of this, a study by Pew Hispanic Center (PHC) determined that if Hispanics registered and voted at roughly the same rates as whites in 2004, they would have cast 2.7 million more votes (36%) in 2006 than they did in 2004. This would have more than enough to affect close races according to PHC.

The bottom line is that there is an opportunity today, and likely a necessity tomorrow, to engage these young would-be voters who can, and likely will, become an influential force in U.S. elections.

The first step in the engagement process, quite obviously, is to motivate Hispanic youth to register to vote. But, the question remains on how best to reach this emerging group and, in fact, all U.S. Hispanics if desired.

According to a recent article by Associated Press writer Laura Wides-Munoz, citing another Pew affiliate's study, "one of the most effective ways to reach Hispanic teens is online." The study found that approximately 56% of U.S. Hispanics use the Internet as compared with 71% of non-Hispanic whites and 60% of non-Hispanic blacks in the U.S. However, the most compelling finding presented is that the number of Hispanics online dramatically increases to 67% in the 18-27 year old age group.

Wides-Munoz goes on to make the point that "this is the group reported to be most likely to visit and participate in social networking sites to support a cause." She tells how this translates to the real world using the example of Voto Latino, which successfully registered 38,000 young Hispanic voters in under eight weeks. This was accomplished "by entering their world of cell phone text messaging and online social networks" the article stated.

Among the general social networking sites, Hispanic teens reportedly have a much bigger presence on myspace.com than facebook.com. The sites that specifically court Hispanics, or specifically

Hispanic youth, include MiGente, an English-language social networking site targeted to Hispanics, and bilingual sites such as elHood.com, QuePasa.com, MyGrito.com and Vostu.com.

Increasing the ante, research shows that "Hispanic online users tend to be more affluent, more educated, and "more Americanized" than the overall Hispanic population in the U.S. —and on average they're ten years younger than the general online market."

In fact, according to Lee Vann, CEO of Captura Group, there are more than 16 million Hispanics online making this the fastest-growing segment of Internet users and outpacing the overall U.S. market by 15 times.

In addition to social networking sites and blogs, advertising placed on the web editions of newspapers and magazines that draw an Hispanic audience are also a great place to push a voter registration or candidate message.

Another strategy, and one that provides the opportunity for micro-segmentation and targeting, is direct marketing.

A multi-channel approach utilizing digital direct mail, email marketing, voice broadcasting, and click-through web landing pages--all capable of data-driven customizations using advanced technologies--can be very powerful. By going beyond the direct marketing personalization of yesterday, to messaging tailored to the individual recipient, these prospective voters can be engaged in greater numbers.

The important thing to note is that these technologies can only be as effective as the data behind them. Simply put, not all direct marketing data resources offer deep demographics and selection criteria. While the best resource would be one offering attributes that fit into such categories as lifestyle, interests, behaviors, finances, and beliefs, these are limited in number and need to be sought out. Most particularly, experience gained by commercial advertisers to Hispanic consumers has demonstrated that "country of origin" and "language preference", are essential direct marketing list attributes.

The reasons are simple if not obvious. Regarding "country of origin", this becomes important in realizing that U.S. Hispanics come from some 20 counties spanning South and Central American, the Caribbean, Mexico and Spain. While typically sharing the Spanish language, although not always, each group has its own customs, beliefs and cultural influences and practices.

In addition, the political issues of interest to one geographic segment over another may differ. A classic example is the ongoing debate over the fence being constructed on the U.S.-Mexico border. While a hot button issue for U.S. Hispanics with Mexican roots, this may not engage those of Cuban or Caribbean origin at the same level. The ability to vary a campaign's messaging by "country of origin" can, as a result, be very empowering.

The same is true regarding the "language preference" attribute offered by several direct marketing data companies that make Hispanic lists available. Once again, research in the consumer advertising sectors demonstrates that much higher open and response rates are achieved by delivering messages in the recipient's preferred language.

For those campaigns with the resources to micro-target at a deeper level, attributes such as married/single, number and ages of children, homeowner/renter, senior or veteran in the home, age, gender, education level, occupation, income range or net worth, donor causes supported, political conservative/liberal, political party, hobbies and interests by category, and others can be utilized to drive message content.

While external lists will need to be utilized for voter registration purposes, political campaigns can use these same principles to optimize response to their calls-to-action to (already) registered voters and donors. The data provider that provides the campaign with its external Hispanic lists should be able to enhance the campaign's housefile lists (voter, donor and volunteers) with these same attributes.

Given the potential to draw vast numbers of prospective Hispanic voters to their candidates and

issues, political parties at every level should start building affinity with this potential future voting pool now. Candidates and initiative sponsors should use these strategies to register additional voters of all ages and get them to the polls.

Tommi Pryor is CEO of American Information Marketing, LLC (AIM), best known for its direct marketing data including its Conexión del Consumidor file of 23 million registered Hispanic voter email addresses with matching postal addresses and phone numbers. She can be reached at *tpryor@aimonline.us.*

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