

A CONVINC & CONVERT REPORT

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# 7 DIFFERENCES IN MAJOR BRANDS' **ACCEPTABLE VS. EXCEPTIONAL** EMAIL PROGRAMS



**A GUIDE FOR BRANDS**

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BY JAY BAER



**CONVINCE&CONVERT**  
CONSULTING

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CONVINCEANDCONVERT.COM

**W**e all experience it, routinely. We quickly scan the email inbox, identify the sender, maybe read the subject line, and sometimes take a quick glance at the email content. Then, delete. In less than three seconds, that email was deemed not relevant so now it's gone. And worse, if this happens too often, it gets labeled as spam or your hard-won recipient unsubscribes, permanently. The

most engaging emails, those sent by exceptional brands, have acted on what the recipients have been telling us for decades; if it isn't immediately relevant to me, delete. It's not about what we as marketers want to say or send. The key to relevancy is abandoning the notion that our service or product sales message is what the recipient wants to receive.

### 3 Ts OF RELEVANCY

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**Topic:** *"This is just what I wanted to know!"*

**Timing:** *"This is what I need right NOW!"*

**Type:** *"This is the format I prefer!"*

Every other industry's customer experience improvements have raised expectations for your brand, your prospects, and your current customers. These seven areas of focus are essential to move from acceptable email marketing, to exceptional email marketing.

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## THE 7 DIFFERENCES

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### 1 RELEVANCE

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**Sends Email Based on an Internal Calendar vs. Delivering Advanced, Real-time Transactional, and Event-Based Triggers**

Brands doing an exceptional job with email have moved, significantly, to activity-based email versus product-based email. They craft the message and interval based on what each recipient has done lately, not on what product they're trying to sell. That requires knowledge of the recent subscriber email interactions, what content was consumed, and where it was consumed. To really deliver relevance,

we need to infer what each recipient is looking for next, and what questions we need to answer. So, we need to ask questions. A simple two question survey, via email, phone, direct message, any channel, can illuminate the way for us to lay out a path for each responsive prospect. We need to know if the recipient called customer service or visited a local office or engaged in some other channel.

Additionally, we need a content plan and content inventory that addresses a variety of topics beyond product and price. That content needs to be accessible in channels and formats of the recipient's choosing. Exceptional brands provide content that tell stories, they inject human elements, they provide great *Youtility*, and they do a better job at delivering something the recipient is willing to engage with, as opposed to yet another weekly product-centric email.

Activity-based email should also be crafted based upon non-activity. If a subscriber fails to take the expected next step, no open-read or account log-in for an extended period of time, no site visit or revisit, exceptional brands change the approach. It may still include email as a tactic, but not the same 'ole same 'ole. Exceptional brands make a content change, activate alternate channels of communication (e.g., retargeting in social, or an outbound call from sales) or send a quick survey to glean why engagement has declined.

The way exceptional brands deliver the experience and appearance of one-off, hand-crafted emails is to use a lot of pre-planning and conditional logic. They have set the bar higher – for all brands in all industries – so we must rise to this new level of consumer expectation. That requires embracing technology, planning, and content marketing to bridge all the canyons in any prospect's or customer's journey. A

key component is the liberal use of conditional logic: If this, then what? We as marketers can help alter the information and experience landscape for any prospect or existing customer by anticipating which crossroads exist, what questions are unanswered, what barriers to engagement we can remove, or any other decision inflection points that should be addressed.

## THE 4 Cs OF RELEVANCY

- 1 Cadence
- 2 Content
- 3 CTAs
- 4 Continuity

The Cadence, Content, CTAs and Continuity available via email is the ideal place to maximize the use of conditional logic. But, it must be based on data, not supposition. Exceptional brands hone this process continually in an ever-increasing effort to improve the user experience and optimize results.

## 2 CADENCE

### Deploys Campaigns as Static Email Sends vs. Marketing Automation

Exceptional brands have already transitioned away from the outdated model of batch-n-blast, (or spray-and-pray) to a more sophisticated model for email delivery. The expectations amongst prospective and current customers in the areas of email relevancy, *Youtility*, and timeliness are at an all-time high, and they are not receding. Rather than batching a list or segment to be sent within a particular time frame,

Marketing Automation utilizes predetermined rules to decide which recipients should receive a particular email message, and when, on a one-off basis.

This is particularly effective when the campaign rules are mapped to the customer journey, thus providing increasingly relevant content as the recipient moves through the consideration funnel stages.

## 3 CONTENT

### Sends the Same Message to Everyone, vs. Deeply Personalized Messaging

Sending the same message to everyone in your list is like expecting everyone who comes into your restaurant to order the same meal. We're individuals,

with different tastes, likes, and dislikes. Adding personalization to your email campaign has never been easier, yet it is often still sorely underutilized.

It's more than [First Name]. Personally-addressed emails are nice, but *passé*; pretty much everyone does it, so it's to be expected.

More engaging personalization is achieved through ongoing data collection for each recipient, audience segmentation, persona modeling, nurture rules based on engagement or lack thereof, and pretty much anything else that can be used to craft a more unique, one-off email message.

The airline industry has many carriers who are particularly good at content personalization. Beyond addressing the recipient by name, they routinely include other elements of personalization based on flight reward status, weather forecast for the customer's destination and date, confirming meal choices (well, for those that offer meals), destination maps, and a variety of content that goes beyond confirming day, time, and flight details. They reach out to strengthen the connection to each customer with a message that is very close to unique for each recipient.

Another aspect of exceptional content relevancy lies in other data storehouses. By accessing third-party databases, content that may otherwise lie dormant can be used to supplement your email content and/or delivery schedule. We see this frequently in natural disaster preparation-oriented emails, where

an upcoming event influences the content and email delivery plan. The same holds true for seasonality, weather, geo-location, warehouse inventory levels, subscription or warranty expirations, etc. Those other data elements can add a higher level of urgency, relevancy, or both, to an otherwise "static" message.

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In most cases, it's not wise to ask a litany of questions on the initial lead-gen form, and even if you did, you would expect to see a commensurate decline in conversions. It is possible to use some qualifier questions to help with lead scoring, prioritization, lead routing, and subsequent nurture and content paths. But on that initial conversion

event, there's a practical limit. If we want to learn more about our prospects – and we all do – exceptional marketers will employ progressive disclosure to learn more. By asking questions over time, we can continually build upon the profile data we have for each individual prospect or customer. By inserting into your email nurture campaigns questions, simple Yes/No CTAs, links to short-form surveys, links to the email preference center are easily implemented techniques that many recipients will value, because if you use their responses correctly, you'll deliver a better and more relevant user experience. The same holds true for your existing customers; by capturing their content consumption and prior purchase history, content can be more accurately tailored to each individual's preferences.

## 4 CTAs

### Blanket Catch-All Invitations vs. Align Invitations to Email Nurture Program

The Calls-to-Action (CTAs) invitations for that anonymous visitor to engage with your brand are ubiquitous. Marketers utilize them in an ever increasingly battle to garner attention within anyone's 24-hour day. Lead generation is the life-blood for many organizations, and certainly for all sales-driven organizations. And the reality is, most leads do not originate from a random visit to a brand's website. Initial awareness usually occurs elsewhere, on search results pages, on other websites, blog posts, forums, social media posts, conventional advertising, news stories, etc. So, it makes sense for our CTAs to be integrated with social channels and anywhere else that can cost-effectively extend our reach.

Retargeting is not a new tactic, but content retargeting for lead generation as a lesser known tactic for lead-generation. Rather than retargeting with, "Buy Now," instead retarget with an offer of relevant content, which is paired with one or more CTAs for lead-gen purposes. There are numerous ways to execute on this. Think of retargeting in social with a compelling, humorous video on the brand's YouTube channel, which has embedded CTAs, offers, or promotions. Not, "Buy Now" messaging but "Engage Now." Then, let your highly relevant email nurture program do its magic to cultivate the opportunity from prospect to customer to brand advocate.



## 5 OPTIMIZATION

### Tests Sporadically or Superficially vs. Ongoing, Iterative Testing of all Facets

Email testing plans require at a minimum two mandates:

1. Something will underperform, and;
2. Something will exceed what underperformed.

And we have to be OK with that. Because without trying new things, trying something different, and stepping out of the, “that’s how we’ve always done it” mindset, improvement is unlikely. The standard operating procedure exceptional brands follow is to always challenge and test against the status quo. Data gives the answers – the unequivocal winner in a properly constructed test plan. And that is what exceptional brands do every time. They don’t guess

at which email variable will or won’t work best, they’ve already tested it and they’re testing against it again, continually.

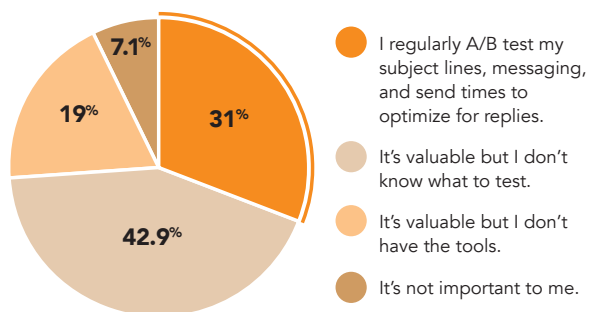
There are **two core elements of a properly constructed test plan** – and exceptional marketers adhere to them both, every time.

1. Test only one variable at a time within a control group (exception made for data-driven multivariate testing).
2. Test with a minimum sample size from which the resulting data/engagement is statistically significant.

There is a hierarchy of a dozen or more elements from which an email test can be constructed. User segmentation, sender name, subject line, content format, content itself, price/offer, day/time of delivery, multi-variate, etc. The challenge isn’t in deciding what to test; the challenge is implementing a repeatable process, based on your prior data, that builds upon an ever-increasing knowledge base of how your emails perform with your audiences.

And your audiences are not stagnant. They change devices, change work/life schedules, become enamored with another brand, or become bored. Each individual recipient of your audience is an individual moving target; the only way to maintain and improve email marketing effectiveness is to keep track of where those individual targets are moving.

### SURVEY OF BLOG READERS FROM YESWARE.COM



## 6 LEARNING

### Relies on Rudimentary Stats vs. Advanced Analytics

One of the important byproducts of strong email programs is data. LOTS of data. The only way to make all this data actionable is with advanced analytics.

Email remains the most measurable, personal, customizable, and cost-effective marketing channel for lead nurturing and customer retention. Apply advanced analytics to maximize the learning and results for your customers, and your company.

No matter how advanced and elaborate your current email programs are today, you’re not done. The intersections of artificial intelligence, machine

learning, and marketing communications are now beginning to outperform the best and brightest human beings – marketers utilizing these new technological capabilities will deliver superior results. Yes, in the not too distant future, your job may be in jeopardy, so read on.

AI and machine learning introduce capabilities that surpass what our prior education, cumulative experience, and intuition can muster. The data will be there to prove it. The exceptional brands’ email communications will implement these capabilities to provide a superior prospect/customer dialog, and savvy

marketers should embrace these capabilities, not shun them. Imagine for a moment, a computer algorithm, initially written by a human and automatically refined by machine learning over 1,000 times, bounced against each individual recipients' recent web page visits, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, crossed referenced with geo-location, and probable household income, to craft the next in a series of individually composed messages, delivered by email.

That's not tomorrow; that's today.

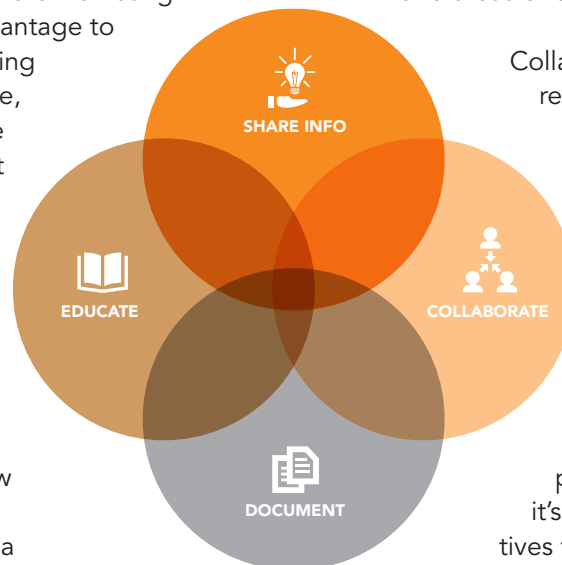
The most advanced CRM platforms have already developed the tools to deliver these types of capabilities. Many others are in the works. You may already be the recipient of emails with content influenced or created by these technologies. And ironically, you may not even know it. It's becoming increasingly difficult for us as consumers to discern when we're dialoging with an automated Chabot vs. a real human. The same holds true with email marketing and messaging.

## 7 OPERATIONS

### Silo Email Management vs. Cross-Team Support of Email Strategy

Email practitioners working in isolation, without insights into the efforts of the entire marketing machine are at a severe disadvantage to those who know of all the moving parts in other channels. It is rare, and unwise, for email to be the sole marketing tactic utilized; it behooves our marketing efforts to work in concert, not in isolation, with channels. Establish recurring marketing team meetings during which all channel managers share their insights into current and future campaign activities with the objective of identifying how email can best support other channel initiatives. Creation of a formal Center of Excellence is an effective way to share information, collaborate, document, and educate throughout the extended marketing team. Inclusion is by invitation, attendance is mandatory; it is an honor to be included because marketers

are celebrated and appreciated for their knowledge and areas of expertise.



Collaboration includes invited representatives from disciplines of copywriting, graphic design, development, email specialists, analysts, etc. Perspectives and participation should also include individuals representing sales, customer service, public relations, product marketing, product development, and even legal.

In circumstances where the participants are not all internal personnel, it's imperative to include representatives from external agencies (for example, your advertising, search, or social agency), freelancers, and contractors. Valuable insights can be gleaned from the wider team of other channel practitioners and their operational perspectives.

### To win with email all marketers must recognize these two truths:

1. Email is not dead. In fact, email presents a massive opportunity if you commit to transcend the acceptable and seek the exceptional.
2. Customer expectations are continually increasing, regardless of your industry. Yesterday's great email program is just okay today.

Through continual investment in email marketing tools, processes, and training, exceptional brands have demonstrated, and proven, the value of email marketing. Utilize these seven focus areas to build an email marketing journey that is *exceptional*.

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## ABOUT CONVINCING & CONVERT CONSULTING

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Convince & Convert Consulting, led by Jay Baer, is an experienced, highly focused analysis and advisory firm that creates effective, best-in-class word of mouth and digital marketing strategies for the world's most interesting organizations. Your audience expects more from you than ever. And what is required to be remarkable continues to escalate. Are you certain you are meeting that demand today? Do you know how to get there specifically, and in what sequence of steps? We do. For more information on our comprehensive, research-backed strategic plans for word of mouth marketing, content marketing, social media marketing, email marketing and messaging, and/or website and online reputation, please set up a no cost consultation call with a Convince & Convert analyst at [ConvinceAndConvert.com/contact](http://ConvinceAndConvert.com/contact).



**CONVINCE&CONVERT**

ConvinceAndConvert.com  
info@ConvinceAndConvert.com

