Writing Effective E-Mail Copy

Many e-mail users go through dozens, even hundreds of spam messages mail (unsolicited commercial e-mail, the online equivalent of mass direct mail) every day. And just as many people throw away junk mail, Internet users often delete spam e-mail without reading it. Though it's nearly impossible to craft direct e-mail that everyone will read, there are some effective techniques for increasing response levels.

The most important part of the message is the subject heading. Often this determines whether or not a user will open the message or just delete it immediately. Try to develop a brief, relevant subject heading that will persuade recipients to open your message. Summarize exactly what the message is about, or include an offer that will compel them to act. As tempting as it may be, you should always avoid sneaky headings unrelated to your message. Once users read the message, they are likely to become frustrated and delete any future messages from the same address.

Use a conversational and informal tone to make the message seem more friendly, open and intimate. If the message appears stuffy or boring, users will quickly lose interest. Always write in the language of your audience, but don't use too many slang words or your message (and company) will appear unprofessional.

Keep the message short and sweet. Get to the main points quickly as you can flesh out the important details afterwards. Make sure your message is clear and all pertinent details (i.e., price, ordering instructions, product specifications, etc.) are easy to locate. In the age of the soundbite, most users lose interest if your message takes too long to comprehend.

Try to motivate readers to act immediately, whether through a "limited time offer" or another premium. Your call to action should include specific instructions on how to proceed. Whether it's calling an 800 number, visiting your Web site or purchasing the product outright, make sure the action step is clearly stated and easy to execute. When appropriate, include automated links to your Web site. If a customer wants more information before making a decision, this will allow them to do so without feeling pressured.

Even if you have a great product, effective copy and a list of prospects who solicited your information, it's inevitable that some recipients will want to remove themselves from your list. It's important to be respectful of their wishes and include an "unsubscribe" link at the bottom of your message. Internet users appreciate the ability to control their e-mail traffic, and you can ensure that your e-mail is reaching only those who want to receive it.

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