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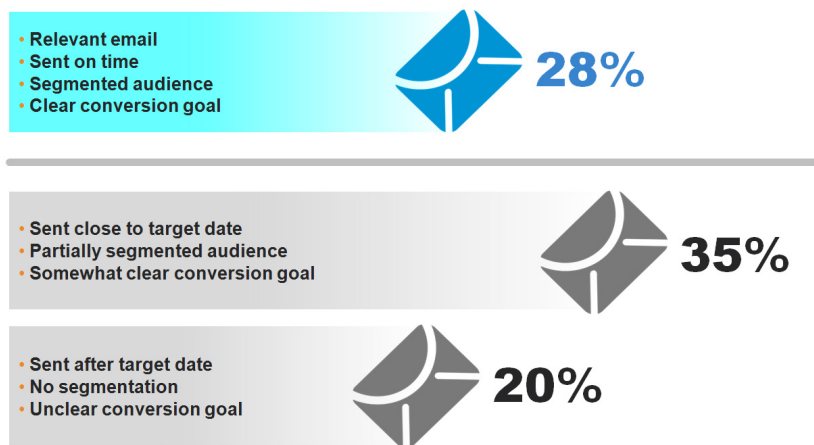
## **Boost Email Relevance: 8 Steps that Drive Results**

**Marketing Guide**

The average professional gets 75 - 100 emails every day. Further, 44 percent of the U.S. population is now triaging their inboxes with smartphones. People are moving through their inboxes more quickly, looking only for the information they need and want. They don't have the time to waste or the attention span to focus on anything else.

So how do you keep a step ahead of these challenges, meet your subscribers' expectations and ultimately succeed with email marketing? Relevance is the key.

Recent MarketingSherpa research highlights the good news that almost one-third of marketers surveyed were sending relevant email communications, on schedule to a segmented audience with a clear conversion goal. Unfortunately, the other two-thirds were broadcasting less relevant emails.

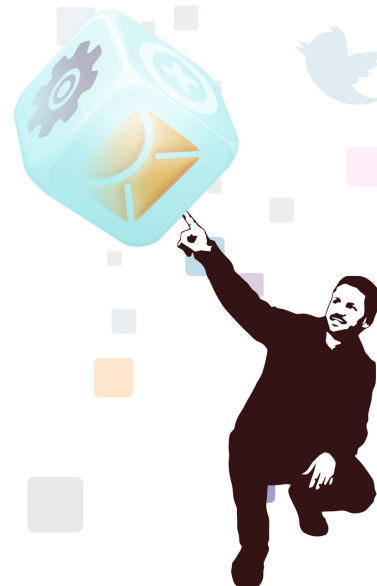


Source: MarketingSherpa 2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report, n=2,735

As the MarketingSherpa report surmised, these results are not especially surprising given the complexity of sending relevant communications, not to mention the time and resource constraints of email marketers today. At the same time, there are proven tactics that can overcome these challenges.

**This guide outlines eight actionable steps** you can take to improve the relevance of your email marketing campaigns to optimize results and return on investment (ROI):

1. Leverage short-burst communication.
2. Develop compelling content and subject lines.
3. Use subscriber information and behavioral data to drive relevancy.
4. Personalize your messages directly to your audience.
5. Implement segmentation tactics that drive results.
6. Test to hone your messages and offers.
7. Apply social networking techniques that tap into real-world customer insights.
8. Create relevant content for the small screens of mobile devices.



## 1. Leverage short-burst communication.

Over the last 100 years we've gone from writing long hand-written letters to one another to jamming our thoughts into 140 characters or less. These days, even what fits on a postcard appears verbose. Email plays a very important role in this environment, and this short-burst type of communication is having a major impact on how we perceive and read content.

In order to take advantage of and benefit from short-burst communications, marketers need to keep a few things in mind when developing your messages.

**First, be concise.** You only have about five seconds to hook the interest of your subscribers, so you need to get them to notice your message immediately. In this case, more is not better – avoid content overload and keep your messages clear and uncluttered:

- Make sure that subscribers clearly and immediately understand what you're offering. If you survive the subject line review, make sure that your core benefit is clearly stated upfront – don't bury it "under the fold." Your subscribers aren't going to scroll to find your content.
- Make sure your call-to-action is designed to be readily obvious and accessible.

**Second, be compelling.** In today's overwhelming digital environment, these three things can make the difference between messages that get opened, or ignored.

- Make your messages easily consumable. Avoid long email messages that go on for pages. Instead chunk up content into smaller nuggets. This will make it easier for the multi-tasking and fragmented subscriber to quickly read the content as well as act on it.
- Make your messages easy to share. With smaller nuggets of content making up the body of your messages, it's easier for subscribers to share the parts that are relevant to them and their social networks. Experience has shown

that subscribers tend to share just parts of an email message rather than the entire message itself, similar to how they share information on Web pages – stories and pictures, not the complete page.

- Make your messages actionable. Making your call-to-action readily obvious and accessible is just the beginning. You also need to get to the point of your message quickly and tell the rest of the story through a link to a landing page. Using links to direct subscribers to a landing page pushes them to click on those call-to-action links in order to find out more.



## 2. Develop compelling content and subject lines.

As an email subscriber yourself, you know that content and subject lines that are more relevant to you are more likely to get you to open that email marketing message, click on a link and take time out of your busy day to dig a bit deeper. So keep that knowledge in mind as you develop content and subject lines for your marketing campaigns.

Here are a few high-level strategies for making sure your email campaigns are relevant and have value:

- **Clearly define the internal goals of every campaign.** Establish an internal goal and stay on track with your own metrics.
- **Make sure every campaign includes a solid value proposition.** What are you delivering that creates an opportunity or solves a problem for your subscriber?
- **Deliver value on a personal level.** In terms of what you offer to entice your subscribers, keep what's personally important to them in mind. For instance, a business-to-business (B2B) audience isn't typically spending its own money. So when you think about what to offer, think perks and relationship management. Consider VIP events, free upgrades, enhanced access and valuable content.
- **Create a content roadmap.** Manage a rolling content production schedule to maintain your momentum and your subscribers' brand experience. Plan out at least three months ahead and align your content production schedule with what's happening with other marketing programs such as upcoming events or product upgrades.

With strategies in place to ensure relevance, use these hands-on tactics to develop your content:

- **Mention key information first** in both your subject line and email copy. As the saying goes, you only have one opportunity to make a good first impression.
- **Make subject lines a priority.** You have 50 characters or less to prompt subscribers to both notice and open your

email. Then, you have less than two seconds to compel them to read the email. Some tips:

- **Keep your end goal, and the interest of your subscribers, in mind:** What is it that you want them to do after reading the email, and what would make them care enough to do that?
- **However, don't take this advice too literally:** In many cases it doesn't make sense to cram the offer and call-to-action into 50 characters. Instead, focus on the intent of the advice: mention something that makes your subscribers care. For example, a fashion retailer might tempt post-holiday shoppers with a subject line like, "Buy now, wear now with new-season star buys."
- **Most email preview panes allow for 50 characters' worth of space in the subject line area, and anything beyond that gets cut off.** So make sure the cut-off doesn't occur in a crucial word, such as a price or date. Always view how your subject lines render across a range of popular browsers.
- **Optimize for the priority inbox.** By more prominently featuring the most relevant emails and filtering out those that are less desired, most popular email providers now enable users to better manage and control their inboxes. If your subject lines aren't compelling, your emails will quickly be deleted.
- **Leverage pre-headers.** Depending on the length of your subject line, the first few words of your message may also be displayed – up to about 70 characters total. This means that your pre-header, also known as snippet text, is just as important as your subject line in getting your subscribers' attention. One way to improve open rates is to include a strong call-to-action in your pre-header, for example, "Click here for a 50% discount," which takes advantage of people's natural desire to save money.

### 3. Use subscriber information and behavioral data to drive relevancy.

A wealth of information and data is available to help marketers create a unique and detailed profile for every single subscriber. Demographics, preferences and behavioral characteristics – based both on what your subscribers tell you from quick registration questions or detailed preference centers and what their shopping behaviors show you through Web analytics – are at your disposal for improving the relevancy and results of email campaigns.

**Website behavior and analytics:** Use Web analytics reports from your email service provider or Web analytics program to drive content selection strategies and show you what information is most relevant or useful to your target audiences. For example, find out which newsletter articles draw the most clicks or forwards, which offers get downloaded most often and which brands or departments get the most traffic.

**Subscriber-reported data:** This is the type of data that you may typically collect in an opt-in form or preference center, or that you may ask for later in the relationship via a survey. Examples of standard subscriber-reported data include:

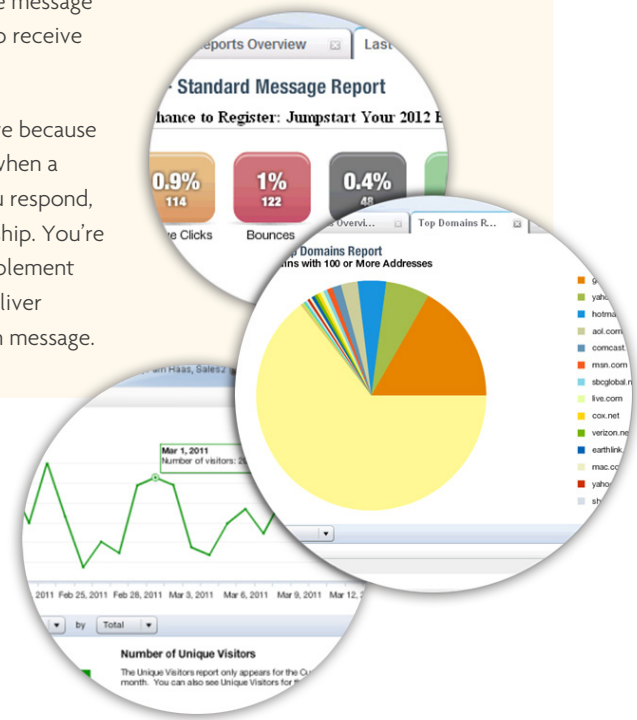
- Age
- City or location
- Interests
- Marital status
- Number of children
- Purchase cycle
- Other lists they're signed up for
- B2B contact data, if applicable

#### Behavior-based Trigger Campaigns

Today's most successful marketing campaigns use triggers to automatically send email based on subscriber behaviors. A trigger can be a subscriber action or response, an event like a date, a website update or a response to Web analytics or Web visit data. By establishing business rules and criteria around such behaviors, you can decide the right message, the right subscriber and the right timing, and use the combination for highly effective programs.

Welcome programs are an example of trigger campaigns, wherein new subscribers receive a welcome message immediately upon opting in to receive email communications.

Trigger campaigns are effective because they are subscriber-driven – when a subscriber signals you and you respond, you're nurturing that relationship. You're then in a good position to implement high-touch campaigns that deliver relevance and value with each message.





## 4. Personalize your messages directly to your audience.

Email marketing is based on trust. Making your email communications more personal, with a more familiar tone, gives the perception that a true relationship has been established with your subscribers and makes them more responsive to hearing from you.

From a financial perspective, adding personalization to an email message has been shown to boost the effectiveness of the message by as much as 25 - 30 percent. It also offers the additional benefit of differentiating legitimate email from that of spammers.

However, when personalization is overdone or done improperly, email marketing campaigns can come across as phony, contrived or downright creepy. Doing it right requires a good database, careful planning and reliable technology.

The level of personalization you use can vary and doesn't have to be too complex. At the very least, you can use these personalization techniques to introduce your emails:

- **Friendly from:** Account managers or sales reps will be known to subscribers, so leverage that relationship and use mail merges to change the "friendly from" name to that of their account manager.
- **Subject line:** The subject line must let subscribers know why your company is sending this communication. By making it clear what the email contains, they will be able to respond to it when it suits them. Annual reports might be a lower interest to your database than a support renewal contract, so empower the database to manage your communications.
- **Sender address:** Rather than using the default email address that was set up with your account, take the opportunity to personalize and brand your sending address so it is immediately recognizable to subscribers. This is not only very effective but will help to increase your deliverability rates.

Take personalization a bit farther by using these tactics:

- **Include first name personalization.** Make sure the tone of the greeting matches the rest of the conversation.
- **Reference past activity.** Include a reference to a specific product or service that the recipient has either purchased or has requested information about.
- **Try personalizing by location.** Personalizing an email on the recipient's location is a great way to help people feel a sense of belonging.
- **Test images and multimedia.** Add a product image that corresponds with an item they've already purchased or an image of a familiar skyline. Humanize messages with photos of executives, speakers or sales reps.
- **Reward subscribers.** Get personal by rewarding your most dedicated subscribers with a coupon or special offer, or incentivize the sharers.

A couple of caveats:

- Make sure your email database is free of missing or mixed-up fields. An error in your records can lead to your email showing how little you know about your subscribers, as opposed to how well.
- Be sensitive to your recipient's privacy concerns and don't overdo it. An email with too much personal information may seem like an abuse of privacy.



## 5. Implement segmentation tactics that drive results.

Segmenting for email relevance is the process of taking a larger email list and separating it into several “like” groups, then creating a series of highly-focused messages appropriate to each segment. This can be accomplished without having to re-enter data from your database for every send, and without requiring subscribers to sign up for several different mailing lists .

We talked earlier about using subscriber and website visitor analytics and behaviors to create relevant content. Targeting your audiences and segmenting your lists are ways of working intelligently with the data you have on hand to find answers to the fundamental questions that will help you optimize your relationship with subscribers and, of course, your return on investment:

- Who are your best customers?
- What appeals to them?
- What are their pain points in relation to what you offer?

These are some categories of data and information you can tap into to determine your target audiences:

- **Basic demographic information** like age, gender and geography is the absolute minimum marketers should target and one of the quickest, easiest ways to start.
- **Customer lifecycle** uses sales demographics to determine where your customers are in the purchase lifecycle so you can target them when they're ready to make their next buy.
- **Customer activity** utilizes email click data. Identifying which links subscribers click on will tell you their interests and how to target them next.
- **Website analytics** provides actionable data such as what product category or page the subscriber last abandoned or purchased from.

### The Value of Segmentation

If segmenting sounds like just an extra step to you, consider this: according to MarketingSherpa, companies with segmented campaigns produce at least **30 percent more opens and 50 percent higher click-through rates** than undifferentiated messaging.

Here are some other strategies to consider for grouping target audiences into meaningful segments, and why they're important:

- **Surveys:** Reviewing survey responses helps you learn the different interests of your subscribers so you can target your offers related to certain types of products or services.
- **Past purchase data:** Look at recency, frequency and monetary value: recent customers are most likely to respond to cross-sell messages; frequent purchasers tend to be responsive to upsell messages.
- **Average purchase price:** Enables you to focus on your core revenue generators and incent lower-level purchasers.
- **VIPs:** Knowing who they are enables you to acknowledge major customers with exclusive information, content and deals.
- **Audience origin** tells you how subscribers got on your email list in the first place. Each segment is likely to respond differently to your messages.

## 6. Test to hone your messages and offers.

Testing is one of those things that all marketers know they *should* be doing, but often feel they don't have the time or resources to do well. But the truth is, you can't afford to *not* incorporate testing into each and every email campaign. Your messages need to stand out each time, yet be familiar to the subscriber.

While it takes more time at the onset of each new campaign, testing ultimately pays for itself in better data, improved decision-making and, ultimately, better campaign results.

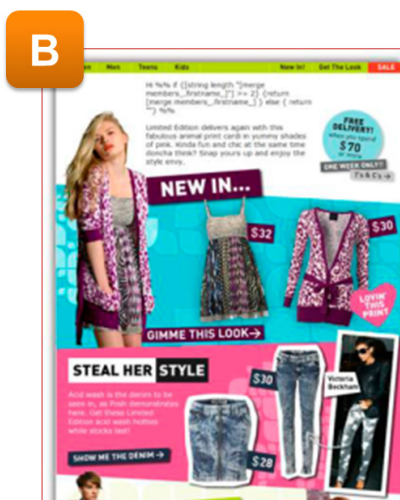
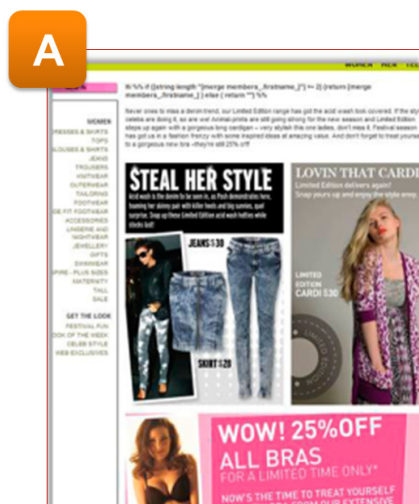
There are a number of tactics to enlist when testing. Some are fundamental, related to the execution of your email marketing, such as determining how your emails render on big and small screens. It's when you drill down to testing the elements of your campaigns that you find opportunities to improve the relevance and performance of your messaging.

Here are some recommended areas for testing that can make significant differences in campaign results:

- **Subject line testing:**

- Split your list randomly into "A" and "B" cells and try a different subject line for each. For example, test negative subject lines vs. positive ones: "We hate to see you go" vs. "Newsletter subscription offer."
- Use the metrics from each segment to determine which subject line(s) delivered the action you wanted – the most conversions, the highest average sale per order, the highest click-through rate and so on.
- Once you have a champion subject line, introduce a challenger and test again.
- **Challenger vs. Champion offers:** Put your best-performing campaign up against a new challenger to see which one performs the best.

- **Creative elements that spur the most action:** Change out creative elements like images, graphics, call-to-action buttons and links, even typography to see what gets the most desired reactions from subscribers.
- **Personalization vs. no personalization**
- **Mention of price savings vs. no mention of price or savings**





## 7. Apply social networking techniques that tap into real-world customer insights.

Social networking essentially uses technology to harness a fundamental human behavior: sharing our experiences with one another. This sharing of experiences includes your customers, your prospects and the rest of your email subscribers.

By taking the time to learn which social networks your subscribers frequent and finding out if there are discussions taking place, you can determine what topics are being discussed and what content is being shared. This information will help you tap into the motivating factors that are driving your base to share content, which will help you shape future content.

Tactics for success in social are very different from those in email. But email and social are alike in a very significant way: they are the only two permission-based channels. Marketers who are good at email head into social with a competitive advantage – they already understand the principles of audience acquisition, respect, empathy and relevance.

Here are some ideas for laying a social media foundation that drives email relevancy:

**Identify where your subscribers are on social networks** – Facebook? Twitter? It's critical to figure this out rather than making assumptions. There are several ways to do this:

- Third-party tools such as Compete and Hitwise are free tools that can provide insight about social site traffic by industry sector.
- Surveying your customers or customizing your email profile page provide ways to ask whether a subscriber is on Facebook, Twitter or another social site.
- Data providers like FlowTown and RapLeaf can append social data to your opt-in subscriber list to provide a snapshot of what social sites your subscribers are on.

### The Email + Social Equation

Connecting social networking and email marketing can yield big results for marketers. Social provides the ability to gain deeper customer insights sooner, for better engagement and messaging.

**Discover how your brand is being discussed** – Is there buzz around a certain product or promotion? Are there complaints that need to be resolved? Are there suggestions or comments to be addressed? It's easy to get information about what's being said about your brand and what content is being shared:

- **Monitor blog posts and social conversations for free:** Start by setting up a Google alert for blogs and news. Addictomatic, Samepoint and HootSuite provide content that is being published and shared in social networks.
- **Use more advanced monitoring solutions** like Radian6, SM2, Sysomos and Visible Technologies to not only provide you the posts, but score the content for tone, volume, share of voice and content tags. How does this support email? It informs you of relevant topics and trends that you can leverage to design and prioritize your email messaging.
- **Find the sticking point:** In addition to learning what your subscribers think about you, these tools can help measure the stickiness of your campaign: what draws your subscribers in, makes them stay and brings them back.
- **Identify motivators that make content shareable:** It could be that your fan base is mobilized by philanthropy, or maybe it's promotional offers. Understanding this will help you design email programs in the future that are relevant to this group.

## 8. Create content relevant on the small screens of mobile devices.

Faster networks and richer capabilities have catapulted the number of mobile users throughout the world to over the five billion mark. That’s why it’s so important for marketers to keep in mind when designing email campaigns that it’s highly likely that your subscribers are accessing your content on a mobile device. In fact, a 2011 Nielsen study reported that 45 percent of Web mobile use is spent checking email.

The unique characteristics of mobile marketing make it a notable channel where marketers are able to know just where their subscribers are and can engage with them at any given point in time. Mobile allows marketers to stay relevant by showing up in the right place, on the right platform, at the right time, with an immediate, relevant offer.

When it comes to how people are consuming content on their mobile devices, remember to use tactics to ensure that your messages are just as effective on smaller screens. Start by understanding the parameters around mobile devices – they are different than a traditional computer-based interface, and messages view differently on different devices. Build this consideration into each and every campaign. Here are some tips to follow:

- **Feature a link in your campaigns to view mobile versions of your email.** This is the simplest way to make sure your messages are consumable on mobile devices.
- **Offer a text option as an alternative to HTML.** And format the text for mobile, which show 20 - 40 characters in 12 - 15 lines per screen, a much smaller frame than email. Plus, ask your subscribers for their mobile preferences for viewing emails.
- **Be concise.** For the subject line, as little as 15 characters may be viewable, so make it as short as possible. For the content, keep your messages short and leverage the pyramid writing style with the most important information up top.
- **Leverage pre-headers.** The space at the top of your message is a great place for text links with a key offer or promotion.
- **Remove images.** Images can make a newsletter attractive, but viewing on a cell phone can cause longer loading time. Link to a mobile-friendly site or landing page.
- **Remember to test for every platform,** such as a variety of smartphones and tablet PCs. Send yourself a test email, and open it up in different devices to make sure it displays correctly.

### Location-based Marketing

Location-based marketing – the convergence of mobile and social – takes mobile marketing a step further, enabling marketers to micro-target subscribers based on where they are located. When marketers know where subscribers are at any given point in time, many

opportunities arise to market goods and services based on that location. And because subscribers alert their friends to their locations, they show their affinity for brands and essentially endorse those locations.



## Conclusion

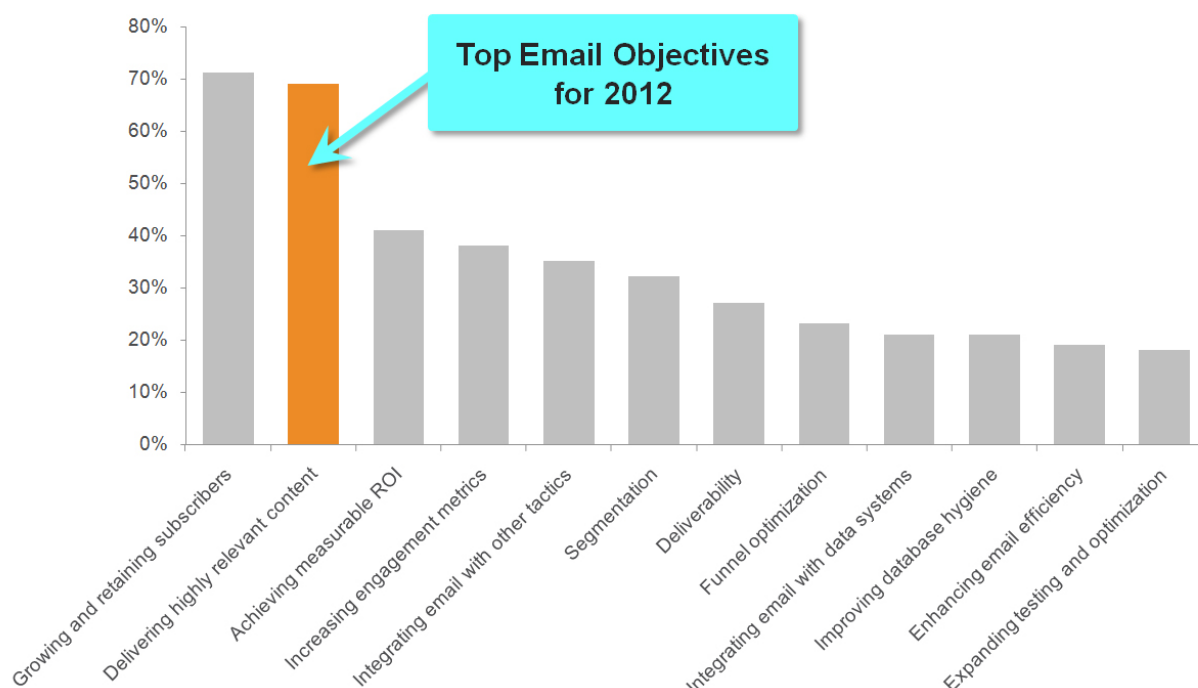
There is a great deal within your control that you can leverage to improve the relevancy and results of your email campaigns. Here are a few of the things we covered in this guide, in the form of next steps you can take to get better results:

**Understand and leverage subscriber and visitor behavior to improve relevance and results.** Look at the data you have today to tell you how to optimize. Use Web analytics data to get a better understanding of which pages are and are not working for your online visitors. Then use that learning to create highly-targeted content in your email messages or on your website.

**Establish key subscriber segments that make the most sense for your company.** Target content towards those segments by speaking to their needs and pain points, by using terminology that resonates with them, and by developing content and offers that matters to them.

**Test your way to success.** If you think it's the subject lines of your emails that are depressing results, test two different subject lines...or if you don't know which lists are getting you the best conversions, test the lists against one another with the same offer and content.

**Use social and mobile mediums wisely.** Leverage social media as a way to get a better "read" on your target audiences, and use what you learn to create more relevant email content. And design your emails for mobile users, creating email messages and Web pages that render well on mobile devices or that offer a mobile viewing option.



Source: MarketingSherpa 2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report, n=2,735



## About Lyris, Inc.

Lyris, Inc. is the global digital marketing expert, delivering the right blend of technology and industry knowledge to help businesses achieve value with their email marketing campaigns. Through its in-the-cloud integrated marketing suite, Lyris HQ, and reliable on-premises solutions, including Lyris ListManager (Lyris LM), Lyris provides customers the right tools to optimise their online and mobile marketing initiatives and deliver quantifiable ROI.

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