

Winning the war for inbox attention: Simple strategies to land your Black Friday emails

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Taking inspiration from the peppered moth, here's how to stand out in the proverbial internet crowd...



Image source: Keila Hötzel on Unsplash

With leaders and marketing teams starting to prepare for the annual Black Friday and Cyber Monday online shopping bonanza, now is the time to consider how you will differentiate your messaging amidst the inevitable barrage of email marketing traffic. When it comes to standing out, consider the peppered moth for a moment (an indulgence, but stay tuned!): during the Industrial Revolution, as the trees and environment turned a darker hue as a result of the soot in the air, the peppered moth underwent a remarkable evolutionary colour mutation. To survive, the species took on a darker hue so that it became more inconspicuous and was harder to be seen and picked out by birds amongst the darkened, sooty trees. In the business context, a similar mutation or evolution of email communication needs to be pursued when Black Friday rolls around – but instead of blending in, this evolution must ensure that your emails ‘pop out’ in inboxes and get your business noticed.

Given the increasing amount of email and internet traffic over the Black Friday period, devising a successful strategy to get noticed has become vital. In 2020, for instance, in the week running up to Black Friday, Everlytic’s email servers processed an average of 1.7 terabytes of data per day (the equivalent to 10,000 hours of HD video streaming!). Moreover, data volumes peaked on Black Friday and the day before at 3.2 terabytes and 3.1 terabytes respectively (and let’s keep in mind that a terabyte is a million megabytes!).

With this gargantuan amount of information and messaging flowing through cyberspace, the primary challenge is to employ simple but actional strategies that line up consumers’ attention curves with their messaging loads. These strategies have to be able to focus his or her attention on the particular, rather than the general – using a combination of savvy timing, personalisation and the right technology.

Let's take a closer look...

Inbox 101: Timing is everything

As with evolution and savvy moths, getting your emails noticed requires adapting to the current environment and, in our case, email engagement rates. Now, when comparing November 2019 and November 2020, it is clear that last year saw a change in pattern. Whilst 2019 was flat both in terms of the work weeks of the month, it was also flat in terms of the pattern of sending across the work week. However, 2020 saw dramatic sending peaks on the three Thursdays in the run-up to Black Friday.

With these patterns in mind, we must consider that there is a theoretical attention curve that represents key factors: the frequency by which a consumer pays attention to their inboxes and what the level of competition is for a message in the inbox at the time. Finally, there is a practical message load on a consumer, which consists of all messages sent at any time.

Having analysed engagement rates, we know that whilst work email is read more during the week, messages to personal mailboxes are still consumed over the weekend. Engagement rates support this because people receive 70% fewer emails on these weekend days than during the week, the probability of your message being seen during the weekend is relatively higher than having someone pay attention to the mails during the week (even considering that people interact with email less over the weekend).

In addition, consider the inbox order for Monday morning workers. Do people read from the bottom or the top? If you believe they read from the bottom up, you need to ensure your messages reach the recipient after they have read the last message on the Friday, so it waits patiently at the bottom of the unread stack for Monday morning.

The next peppered moth strategy to consider is the user's actual email address. Learn to differentiate between personal email addresses and working ones (tip: @gmail, etc. are generally personal). Then, for instance, send that last late creeper workweek message to the work addresses (the law allows direct marketing between 8am and 8pm on weekdays), while sending to personal addresses on weekends (keeping in mind that the Consumer Protection Act stipulates that you can only send direct marketing communication on Saturdays between 9am and 1pm).

Remember, this is all about boosting your relative share of attention. So, to recap: Sending more tactically to personal addresses over weekends might allow you to match your message load to the theoretical attention curve of the consumer/reader.

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Provide value and make it personal

Now, once your email has arrived at the right inbox, at the right time – will it actually get opened?

Again, there are various peppered moth approaches that will boost the odds of your email actually being read, and these include:

- **The sender's name:** Do they know you or expect messages from you? Use brand recall and equity, or personalise the email using the name of an account manager.
- **The sender's address:** Make sure it is legitimate and trustworthy.
- **Subject line:** Emojis work well; and also inserting a person's name in the subject line text draws attention.

- **Call to action:** Are you informing; offering a discount; providing a personalised offer? Make sure there is a distinct and value-adding reason for sending your mail.

Finally, we also think there is value in harnessing Gmail's promotional metadata tool. This function allows you to present your logo, discount details, end dates, and promotional images with your email – and is a fantastic way of standing out in the inbox (go peppered moth!), while also avoiding the junk folder in Gmail.

As with our highly intelligent peppered moth, getting noticed and ultimately ensuring success over Black Friday and Cyber Monday will require that you continually monitor your environment (i.e. reader engagement rates and responses) and tweak and change your strategy when required. Complacency is never an evolutionary option...

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