

The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution

Part 3

In the [second part](#) of the this four-article series I discussed some opportunities around the convergence of email with social and mobile, with insights and basic practical tips on how to integrate and manage your cross-channel voice. In this part I drill deeper into best practices for mobile-email optimisation, since this is a critical aspect of message consistency from the desktop to the handheld environment and something that can't be ignored in a solid multi-channel strategy.



By Wikus Engelbrecht 27 Jun 2012

Mobile is the technology with the highest audience penetration rate globally, and with smartphone ownership on the rise mobile email marketing is becoming increasingly important.

The mobile email campaign

With that said, the term "mobile email campaign" is a misnomer. The first and foremost concept email marketers need to embrace is that there is really no such thing as a mobile email campaign in the strictest sense. Emails are sent to an email address and it is the recipient alone who decides whether to read that email on their mobile phone or on their desktop computer.

Consumers' preferences can and will change based on what they are doing and what technologies they have at their disposal at any given moment. So people are reading emails on mobile devices, right now, even if the marketer doesn't know about it or plan for it.

In fact, it's very likely that a high percentage of email marketers have no idea whether their emails are being read on mobile devices and, as a result, are missing the unique opportunity to communicate with their customers through emails that are both content- and design-appropriate for today's on-the-go consumers.

Marketers can safely assume that a significant portion of their emails are being read on mobile phones. So therefore optimizing emails for cross-platform performance is a large but necessary labor.

Design sensitivities for mobile email readers

Designing for the mobile web is nothing particularly new. Although it seems that mobile style-sheets haven't proven to be quite as popular in email, despite the advantages they provide to device-based viewing.

Keep in mind that some devices are better at handling HTML email. Apple and Android devices generally display HTML emails intact, making the optimisation requirements minimal.

Overall though, viewing HTML email on a mobile device can be fiddly and even on the iPhone it's possible to have text automatically rescaled to a size that's nearly unreadable or in a way that can break your design. The point is that regardless of device-use, optimising your emails for the mobile environment is essential.

A mobile screen is small - at first glance no one's going to see much of your content, especially if it's designed to fit a PC screen instead. Also, each and every mobile device has its own unique standard settings to take into account. BlackBerry devices, for example, don't display images by default, whereas iPhones and Android devices normally do.

But how can you optimise for all these technical requirements and cater for device-use across the board in one sweep?

Start by following a few straightforward, universal rules.

Here are key optimisation practices that will help you produce mobile-friendly emails for most devices

1. Keep it simple

A key element of mobile email design is simplicity. Most of your audience is in a hurry and need to find relevant information to take actions on quickly. Make use of single column layouts, tighter subject lines, larger font sizes, bigger buttons for links and an overall narrower message width. Wide emails often require horizontal scrolling, especially when there are large images involved. Keep it top-down, not left-right.

While iOS devices zoom to fit your email the width of the screen, most other mobile operating systems don't - leaving users to resize the email or scroll left and right to view your message. Consider trimming your emails to between 320 and 550 pixels wide.

Also keep the HTML code of your email elementary - the simpler it is, the more likely it is to be interpreted correctly and rendered well on a mobile screen. Remember that good design is always backed by responsible coding and a platform appropriate layout.

2. Use images smartly

Using images in the right way is one of the biggest issues when designing an email for mobile readers. It is essential to keep your images as lean as possible: just think about download of data/charges to the user - you have to make sure that images are light-weight to allow speedy and comfortable viewing.

Prepare for the probability of image blocking by inserting ALT text into your emails and remember to create a layout that makes your call to action clearly visible. Write a short, but appealing description of the picture that will encourage recipients to click the "display images below" button to view the email properly.

Be obvious. Users aren't mind readers, and because mobile devices usually don't support hover states, you'll need to find creative ways to visually indicate that links and buttons are clickable. Try adding outlines, shadows and other effects, for example.

3. Not too much depth - cut to the chase

A mobile internet user is typically not sitting at a desk with a lot of bandwidth at his or her command; they are on the move, in a hurry and determined to find the right information right now.

Because of this you need to make your message clear immediately. You can always deliver deeper content on subsequent landing pages for those who wish to investigate further.

Evaluate the content in your email and prune less useful or less relevant links, copy and images. Be short, concise and to the point, making sure the copy you use is direct without being pushy.

The most crucial part of any effective email design is a strong and prominent call to action. So put the call to action front and center, and don't be afraid to make the button big. It should be obvious and 'tappable', with a minimum size of 44x44 pixels.

Remember: Less is more. Real estate on a mobile screen is limited and valuable, so consider simplifying complex pre-headers, navigation elements, social sharing, and calls to action to keep your design uncluttered.

Once you are more progressed with rolling out mobile-optimized email campaigns, think about surveying your subscribers to find out which of them would prefer to be provided with a mobile-only version and segment your lists for any exclusively

mobile campaigns.

In a world where data is king, it has never been more important to use it cleverly to support cross-channel marketing activities that drive sales. In the final part of this series I discuss some methods of gathering email subscribers' social profile data while highlighting the main privacy and legal concerns to keep in mind. I will also take a quick look at what the future holds for the multi-channel marketing evolution.

See:

- [The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution: Part 1](#)
 - [The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution: Part 2](#)
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ABOUT WIKUS ENGELBRECHT

Wikus Engelbrecht is a marketing writer, journalist and media liaison at GraphicMail (www.graphicmail.co.za; @GraphicMail), an international email and mobile marketing service provider. Since 2003, his professional career in language and media has spanned the film, print advertising, magazine publishing, web development and online content industries. Contact Wikus wikus@graphicmail.com and follow @WKS_Engelbrecht on Twitter. View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>