

Marketing 2012: how to make it your best marketing year yet

It requires a little preplanning, a few simple fixes to last year's campaigns — and very little heavy lifting



As 2011 draws to a close, it's time to look toward the year ahead and determine where to devote your marketing resources. Whether you have all your plans finalized or you haven't even started, there are several steps you can take to make sure that 2012 is your best marketing year yet.

Making significant changes to your program during the year can be difficult and chaotic, so we are offering some preplanning marketing tips for you to leverage in the upcoming year. Best of all, you can implement them now without any major heavy lifting.

It's important to take a step back and focus on two components when thinking about the upcoming year:

1. What marketing programs from last year worked or didn't work?

For this step, compare your intended communications plan from last year with what was actually mailed or emailed and ask yourself:

- **What were the successes and failures, and when did they happen?**

Leverage this insight to determine which promotions are “must haves” for this year's success based on the previous year's data and which programs should be dropped.

- **Where did we go off plan and why?** Were there underperforming emails that required you to increase frequency to meet revenue projections? Were there unexpected shifts from competitors that forced you to become more reactive? Expect that there will be last-minute campaigns you'll need to develop no matter how rock-solid your communications plan appears to be. Be flexible based on trends from your competitors. Focus on encouraging your team to bring out their best ideas.

2. What have we tried since?

It would be shortsighted to use only last year's performance data as a guide for the upcoming year. Spend some time reviewing how your program has evolved over the year, and determine if there are successes that could translate into a strong new year. A few areas to focus on are:

- **Creative testing** — Have new creative components been tested and implemented? Which navigation layouts worked best? Did you test animation? Was it effective? Have you seen any lift in engagement when images and copy were balanced in a certain way?
- **Communications planning** — Are there any day-of-week or time-of-day trends that you've seen since last year? Frequency will increase over busy and seasonal times, but knowing your strongest deployment times could help you better understand key times to launch your strongest promotions.
- **Headlines** — Which subject lines, tag lines and marketing content have been strong performers? Review tone (promotional, playful, conversational, etc.) to see if your subscribers react differently to various subject line approaches. Perhaps purchasers open more frequently to playful subject lines and nonpurchasers want the heavy sales pitch to convince them to open. Review short versus long subject lines, too. Many marketers tend to take the “kitchen sink” approach by including every detail about the promotion in the subject line when a shorter subject line might set you apart in the inbox.
- **Featured products** — Have you tested the number of products, price points and/or product categories that are featured in your email/direct mail over the past year? Review the data to determine if there are patterns pointing to the optimal mix.
- **Segmentation** — Have you changed your segmentation strategy in the past year? As you increase mailing frequency, it's important to review what has been working and what potentially could be consolidated or dropped to streamline your production process and gain some flexibility for those last-minute mailings.

Looking ahead

Remember, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. With just a few tweaks of your 2011 campaigns, you can fix anything that didn't work and do more of what produced results. Along the way, you'll find better response rates, better returns — and new ways to grow your business.

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