Spotlight on:
Getting ready for the holiday season
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While it may be difficult to turn our attention away from summer vacations, now is the perfect time to start planning for the holiday season. Looking at last year’s holiday successes and current marketing trends, we have identified five key strategies to incorporate into your holiday programs.

Subscriber acquisition – Point-of-Sale (POS)

According to Experian Data Quality, the three most common channels to collect customer data are email, websites and point-of-sale. While data quality is important in all channels, the increase in in-store traffic makes POS processes particularly critical during the holiday season. Subscribers obtained at POS are likely to be highly engaged with your brand. Welcome mailings to POS subscribers had 32 percent higher click-to-open rates than those to subscribers from other sources (23.2 percent for POS compared to 17.5 percent for other welcomes). Email transaction rates were lower for POS welcome mailings, however, possibly indicating an in-store preference for these subscribers (transaction rate of 0.07 percent for POS and 0.13 percent for other welcomes).

According to a 2016 joint study with Experian Data Quality and Boston Retail Partners, 86 percent of brands use email addresses to identify their customers. This makes accuracy at POS even more important. POS email collection problems are most often caused by human error, and include incomplete or missing data, duplicate data and outdated information. Fortunately, there are many ways to improve the accuracy of email information collected at POS.

• **Invest in a real-time email validation solution.** Correcting invalid or partially entered emails and eliminating duplicates can greatly reduce bounce rates and add a significant number of valid emails to your list.

• **Train store associates in proper data collection.** Instilling a sense of accountability for good data collection practices can be hard in a fast-paced retail environment. Make sure staff understands how to use the POS technology, how the validation software will integrate into the POS system and the critical importance of good data to the overall business.

• **Have customers themselves verify their email addresses.** If your email validation tool has flagged an inaccurate email address, ask the customer to correct it while they are still engaged at the register.
Social media

Not that long ago, a ‘social media/email strategy’ meant sending emails to ask subscribers to like you on Facebook. Now brands are expected to have a presence on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Twitter and any other trending social media platform.

Targeting subscribers based on their interest in social media can lead to high email engagement. While performances can vary, some emails featuring Instagram favorites had more than double the click-to-open rates of other promotional mailings.

Emails with Facebook or Pinterest in the subject line had higher open and click rates than the all industry average.

A good social media/email strategy includes the opportunity to sign up for emails on social. Welcome emails sent to segments that subscribed via Facebook had 11 percent higher click-to-open rates than other welcome mailings from the same brands (22 percent for Facebook welcomes compared to 19.9 percent for other welcome mailings), highlighting again the high engagement of subscribers who interact with brands across multiple channels.

Source: Experian Marketing Services
Fresh creative ideas that add a sense of urgency are an important strategy for holiday campaigns. One highly successful creative strategy that we saw in the 2015 holiday season was the use of countdowns. Whether it was 12 days until Christmas or 5 days until Black Friday, sending an email each day of the countdown increased transactions and sales.

Countdowns were great promotions, encouraging customers to purchase.

While day-by-day countdown mailings appeared more frequently, the use of dynamic countdown clocks provided greater overall boosts in performance. Campaigns including dynamic clocks had 41 percent higher click-to-open rates and more than double the transaction rates of other holiday mailings for the same brands.

Countdowns are not limited to emails. Mobile messaging provides a highly effective channel for day-by-day messages for events, holidays and sales. Coordinating these types of campaigns across email, mobile and social channels can increase customer anticipation and engagement.
Make it personal

Including a subscriber’s name in the subject line is a great way to boost the performance of promotional mailings. Based on mailings from April 2015 to March 2016, personalized subject lines provided significant increases in unique open rates for brands across many industries.

Personalized subject lines in promotional mailings provided a lift in unique open rates

![](image)

Source: Experian Marketing Services

In addition to higher open rates, personalized subject lines had a 27 percent higher unique click rate, an 11 percent higher click-to-open rate and more than double the transaction rates of other promotional mailings from the same brands.

Including subscriber’s names is not the only way to make your email communication personal. A few personalization tactics that have been proven successful include:

- **Dynamically populating product choices** based on the past purchases of the subscriber or any subscriber preferences you may have in your data. Some examples are petite or extra-large sizes, specific styles of clothing, or complimentary products.

- **Triggering emails based on Instagram or Pinterest selections**, connecting social media choices to email opportunities.

- **Customizing subject lines based on browse behavior**, such as “Bedding,” “Lighting,” “Sleepwear” or “Shoes” are great example lead phrases for a “_____ on Sale Now” subject line.
Retention

While acquisition and sales typically increase during the holiday season, it is also essential to have a strategy to retain these customers throughout the year.

• **Say “Thank you.”** “Thank you for your purchase” mailings (sent in addition to any order confirmations) had twice the open and click rates and 5 times the transaction rate of promotional mailings (0.22 percent transaction rate for thank-you for purchase compared to 0.04 percent for all promotional mailings). Just including the word “thanks” in a subject line may boost response. Promotional campaigns such as “Our way of saying thanks,” also had 2.5 times the transaction rate of other promotional mailings.

• **Know your customers.** Identify your best customers as well as those that are inactive. Whether through structured loyalty programs or segmentation that acknowledges frequent buyers, offering VIP or exclusive experiences to your best buyers is a necessary part of an overall email retention strategy. Equally important is implementing a strategy to reactivate those subscribers who are no longer opening or clicking on emails. Reactivation mailings, such as a series of “We miss you” emails, generated an average transaction rate equal to that of all promotional mailings. In addition to your own response data, you may want to consider investing in third party customer data. Through such programs as Experian Email Insights, you can see which of your subscribers are active with your competitors and thus may be open to reactivation mailings from you.
Summary

Our top five strategies to help you prepare for the holiday season and beyond are:

1. Take steps to ensure the quality of subscriber data obtained at the POS.

2. Coordinate your social media programs with your email and mobile campaigns to optimize engagement across all channels.

3. Freshen your creative and consider a countdown as part of your holiday promotions.

4. Include personalized subject lines and content to connect with your customers throughout the season.

5. Look beyond holiday sales with retention plans to keep your customers engaged throughout the year.

If you would like more information on how Experian Marketing Services can help you optimize your holiday marketing strategy, please call 1 844 747 1667 or visit www.experian.com/marketingservices.