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Seriously. Why Didn't You Read My Email?

By: *Melanie Brenneman*

It is January. A time in Texas when young girls are officially allowed to hunt. Dressed in Brownie and Girl Scout uniforms, they staff the entrances of grocery stores, pharmacies and other high-volume establishments. The first eight times you leave a retail metroplex, more than likely you fold and buy a box of succulent Thin Mints, Samoas or Trefoils. After all – you only get them once a year and it is for a good cause.

But that ninth time, when that troop has the exit roped over and covered more heavily than a faceless band of villains wearing bandanas and preparing for battle against a 1980s action hero – that is the time when you might say, “Enough.” And you then engage in Olympian efforts a la Indiana Jones to exit without a flurry of green berets and colorful boxes popping you upside the noggin. Duck behind another shopper. Roll under a cart. Force the emergency door open.

Sometimes, in marketing, reaching our ideal audience can feel like trying to target the shopper who has had just enough of those cookies. There are only so many general counsel, partners, corporate counsel and lawyers in this world. And there are a lot of technology companies trying to catch their attention.

With the multitude of marketing tools available to companies these days, email is still a solid contender for businesses trying to engage – and grow sales opportunities – with legal professionals. But that first step to success is often the hardest to broach – getting the email opened on the receiving end.

There have been multiple [studies into open rates](#), looking at topics such as best content, best length and best symbols to avoid. Here are three reasons why your open rates might not be ideal.

Wrong audience

Say you have a list of 2,000 contacts. They may all be members of legal organizations. But are they lawyers? IT staff? Legal administrators? Is the firm an AmLaw 200 or a solo shop? Where are they located? Do they have a say in the organization's purchasing? The point is – if you blast out the same message to your entire database, you are probably going to get a lukewarm response at best.

Make sure that your email hits the right people with the right message. Tailor content so that it is relevant to each qualified recipient. This means know your recipients, their placement in your sales funnel, their pain points and how you can address them. That way, when you release the arrow, you are aiming in the right direction.

Wrong subject line

Subject lines are often the trickiest part of the email. Each one has to be interesting enough to be relevant and entice people to read further. Remember even when you are hitting the right audience, that does not mean they will notice you have knocked on their door. They probably get hundreds of emails each day; some they open and some get sent straight to the trash.



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Stay out of the trash.

[According to studies](#), the most compelling subject lines are short (fewer than 60 characters), contain personalization or a sense of urgency and focus on positive solicitation. Brainstorm multiple subject lines that conform to these best practices and run through some A/B testing. You will notice a difference in performance.

Wrong content

Yes, even before an individual receives your email the wrong content can keep it out of his/her inbox. Content can form the basis for an entire series of articles, but here we want to look at one particular facet: What content – even unread – can send your email into the digital wastelands?

Spam filters are constantly scanning incoming content for popular spam terms such as dollar signs, words in all caps, anything with “free” in it or solicitations such as “dear friend.” (Want to see some lists? [Here is one.](#)) Know the list and know what to avoid in order to ensure delivery to an inbox instead of a junk folder.

Spam filters will also ban emails based on mail server IP addresses that have been blacklisted. Check to confirm your IP address – or the one being used by your email service provider – is not blacklisted prior to sending out emails. Do you have a dedicated IP or a shared IP address? If it is shared, activities by other emailers could affect your receiving status.

A high open rate for your emails is just the first step – and one of many – in email marketing. When combined with your overall marketing efforts, it can make a fundamental difference where it matters.

About the Author

An avid marketer, Melanie Brenneman has more than 14 years of experience meeting the communication needs of small businesses and Fortune 500 corporations alike. In her spare time, she volunteers as president for the Austin chapter of the American Marketing Association and tries to limit her Girl Scout cookie purchases to 45 boxes a year.



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