

dotmailer

IMAGINATION...DELIVERED

The Annual Marketing Benchmark Report

Hitting the Mark

2015-16



Online



Social



Direct



Email

Key takeaways from the 2015-16 edition:

- Find out which retailers are leading from the front in email marketing and ecommerce
- Gain a detailed understanding of current marketing trends within the retail industry
- Learn how retailers are using multichannel to adapt to the needs of the customer
- Glean inspiration for your marketing via best practice examples
- Pick up a complete toolkit for maximizing ROI from email and ecommerce

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Executive summary

Hitting
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2015-16



Reading dotmailer's "Hitting The Mark 2015-16"

In our 7th annual Hitting the Mark study we placed orders with and monitored campaigns from almost 60 of the top US and UK retail brands over the quarter from April to June 2015. This created a comprehensive view comprising over 1,400 emails.

A range of 24 attributes were used to score retailers representing impact, offer, appearance/rendering, integration with mobile & social and legal compliance.

Analysis of the retail environment

In order to create a realistic context for evaluation, we analyzed the retail environment in a broad sense. Given the constantly shifting nature of retail – the development of multichannel, the pressure of continued economic environment to name but two examples – we found a sector that was largely very healthy.

Transactional email processes were consistently impactful and efficient; many brands were achieving relevance and personalization in varied and sometimes novel ways; some savvy brands were using new technology and techniques to transform their emails from static to dynamic; a number of brands' communications successfully spanned several channels.

Email best practice

Although we found significant differences between the US and the UK in volume/frequency of emails, in the use of addressing personalization and in the use of email sharing, both regions adhered to email marketing best practice.



Tweet This!

Reading dotmailer's
"Hitting The Mark 2015-
16"
#multichannelmarketing
#marketing



We recognized a top 10 of retailers that showed the most rounded approach across all categories. We see these as exemplary in reflecting many of the attributes of an effective marketing campaign.

But where did these retailers fall short?

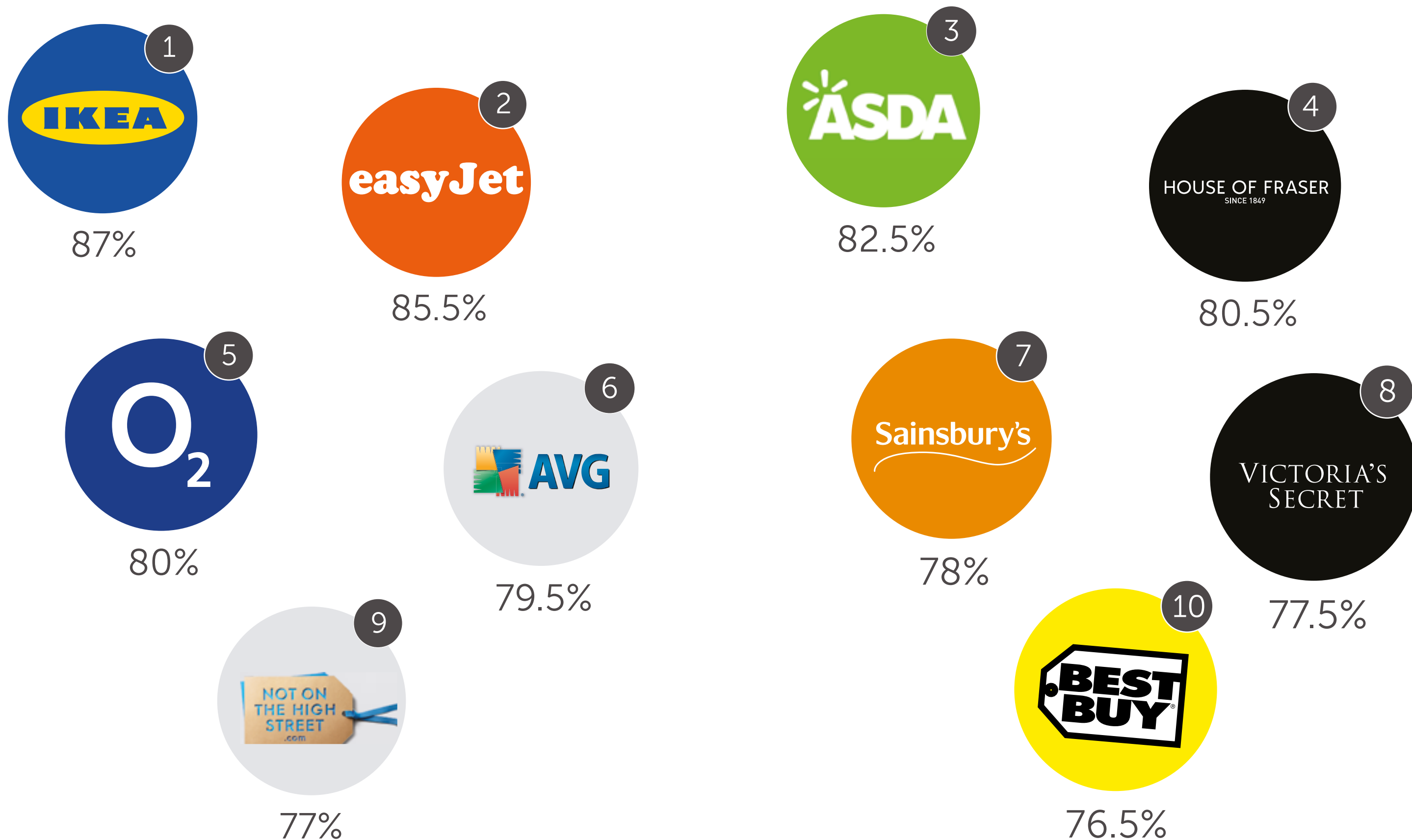
We were surprised by the low use of personalized addressing and found many retailers failed to take the relationship with customers into account e.g. the nature of an original order. What's more, we found brands took a pedestrian approach not only in their attempts to convince customers to engage with them on social but also in their marketing of special occasions e.g. customer birthdays.

Top 10 retailers

We recognized a top 10 of retailers that showed the most rounded approach across all categories. We see these as exemplary in reflecting many of the attributes of an effective marketing campaign.



Our top 10 roll call is



Introduction

Hitting The Mark

2015-16



Reading dotmailer's "Hitting The Mark 2015-16"

This is our 7th year of running Hitting the Mark and the challenges for retail marketers have never been tougher. We've always aimed to make this study both enlightening and practical – a document that is useful to have to hand when planning and evaluating your own strategy and program.

This year is no different but we have taken a broader perspective this time around by looking not only at the programs of leading retailers but also at some of the key drivers impacting the sector. By taking this approach, we aim to see the programs in the wider context of the challenges being faced by marketers and we hope that, as such, it will better resonate with – and help – you in your daily work. We hope that you will recognize even more relevance in the findings and comparisons of brands, sectors and countries.



Tweet This!

dotmailer's
"Hitting The Mark, is
useful when planning
and evaluating your
marketing program"

A thriving retail environment

The US is widely acknowledged as the most advanced retail environment in the world whilst, with 88% of UK internet users shopping online, the UK is one of the most advanced in Europe across all channels. The activities of the leading players in both markets therefore represent an ideal benchmarking focus. The business environments in both markets also represent many of the key challenges posed by savvy and demanding shoppers in economically difficult times.

Since our study is focused on emails which primarily drive readers to online stores, it's important to put this into perspective. Although online sales account for just 7% of all retail, digital channels are disproportionately important because:

1 Online is growing

Web sales in the US grew on average by almost 30% in the last quarter of 2014 versus the same period in 2013² (several of our target companies exemplified this growth including HSN, Gap, Grainger and Netflix). A notable headline is Walmart where almost a quarter of all its US sales come from online. Often this is the only area of growth in the sector and so compensates for flatlining or even declining sales elsewhere. Retail marketers therefore have a keen focus on the ecommerce channel – and the marketing comms that drive it.



"Online is growing - web sales in the US grew on average by almost 30% in the last quarter of 2014 versus the same period in 2013¹"

Deloitte 2015 – Navigating The New Digital Divide

2 Online sales are integral

Online is now an integral part of all sales – the divide between the channels is eroding because shoppers now browse, research, compare, buy and collect using different channels all in the same transaction. Retail marketers therefore can no longer see their email campaigns being solely to push readers to a conversion site; they have to support ever more subtle roles in the buying process whilst still hitting the all-important bottom line numbers.

¹ Deloitte 2015 – Navigating The New Digital Divide

² Internet Retailer 2015

Customers are becoming less loyal

To compound all of this, customers are increasingly more demanding, less tolerant of shortcomings and therefore overall less loyal. 71% of UK shoppers say that they’re likely to switch retailers after a bad experience³ and 40% say that their loyalty to a brand is directly affected by the convenience of the brand’s multichannel offering⁴. Clearly, if retailers want loyal customers they have to do so much more than provide the right products and prices. Delivery, advice and service are making a comeback but not instead of a focus on price. As a consequence, the marketer’s role becomes ever more integrated with those of merchandising, customer service and revenue management. Even traditional RFM based CRM needs to be tempered with the realization that what made someone loyal yesterday can be easily cast aside tomorrow. In this environment an over reliance on price-based offers may well be dangerous - from a comms perspective, it can’t be about just continually pushing deals. Our study casts a natural spotlight on this.

“71% of UK shoppers say that they’re likely to switch retailers after a bad experience³ and 40% say that their loyalty to a brand is directly affected by the convenience of the brand’s multichannel offering⁴.”

Source: JDA/Centro Customer Pulse 2015

How good ideas delivered nimbly can grow

There is also a shift in power base. In the US for instance, over the last five years the top 25 retailers have lost nearly 2% of their combined share – and it’s been to smaller retailers growing rather than trading share with other giants⁵. The presence of players like ‘Not on the High Street’ (just 9 years old), Newegg (14 years old) and Etsy (10 years old) in the top rankings is testament to how good ideas delivered nimbly can grow. Who will be the next newcomer to sit at the top table? One thing is for sure, marketing will be one of the attributes that defines these players.

“In the US for instance, over the last five years the top 25 retailers have lost nearly 2% of their combined share – and it’s been to smaller retailers growing rather than trading share with other giants⁵.”

Source: Deloitte 2015 – Navigating The New Digital Divide

Email – the preferred channel for shoppers

Email is overwhelmingly the preferred channel for shoppers to interact with retailers. In the US in excess of 80% of all shoppers see it that way⁶ – and this is regardless of age. Retailers know this and the level of activity reflects it - retail is the largest volume sector and a third of retailers send more than 500,000 mails per month⁷.

The email channel is not without its problems however. In the race to communicate the message and deal, engagement can suffer as illustrated by the fact that just 35% of US shoppers consider communications to be usually relevant⁸ – that’s a big miss rate. Relevance is of course (as ever) the hottest topic when it comes to defining effectiveness and, in today’s world of advanced optimization technology, the debate rages about just how far the brand can go to address this miss rate.

Recent public statements by brand giants including Walmart and Macy’s suggest that they’re well aware of the line to be crossed between relevance and intrusiveness (The Gap puts it neatly – their ambition is to be ‘cool not creepy’). Consumers of course are increasingly knowledgeable about the give and take necessary to achieve such relevance.

For retailers in European markets facing imminent major changes to data protection regulation around consent, it’s therefore alarming that just 6% of UK shoppers would be in favour of renewing marketing consent to all of the brands (retail and other) to which they have currently given it⁹. This is a highly resonant theme for the immediate future of a channel and sector where access and relevance are so crucial.

“6% of UK shoppers would be in favour of renewing marketing consent to all of the brands (retail and other) to which they have currently given it⁹.”

Source: Fast Maps consent research 2015



Tweet This!
dotmailer says -
“email is the preferred channel for shoppers”
#multichannelmarketing
#email

3 JDA/Centro Customer Pulse 2015
4 Oracle Retail 2015
5 Deloitte 2015 – Navigating The New Digital Divide
6 Merkle – Shopper Survey 2015

7 eConsultancy – 2015 eMail Census
8 IBM/eConsultancy – The Consumer Conversation 2015
9 Fast Maps consent research 2015

Methodology

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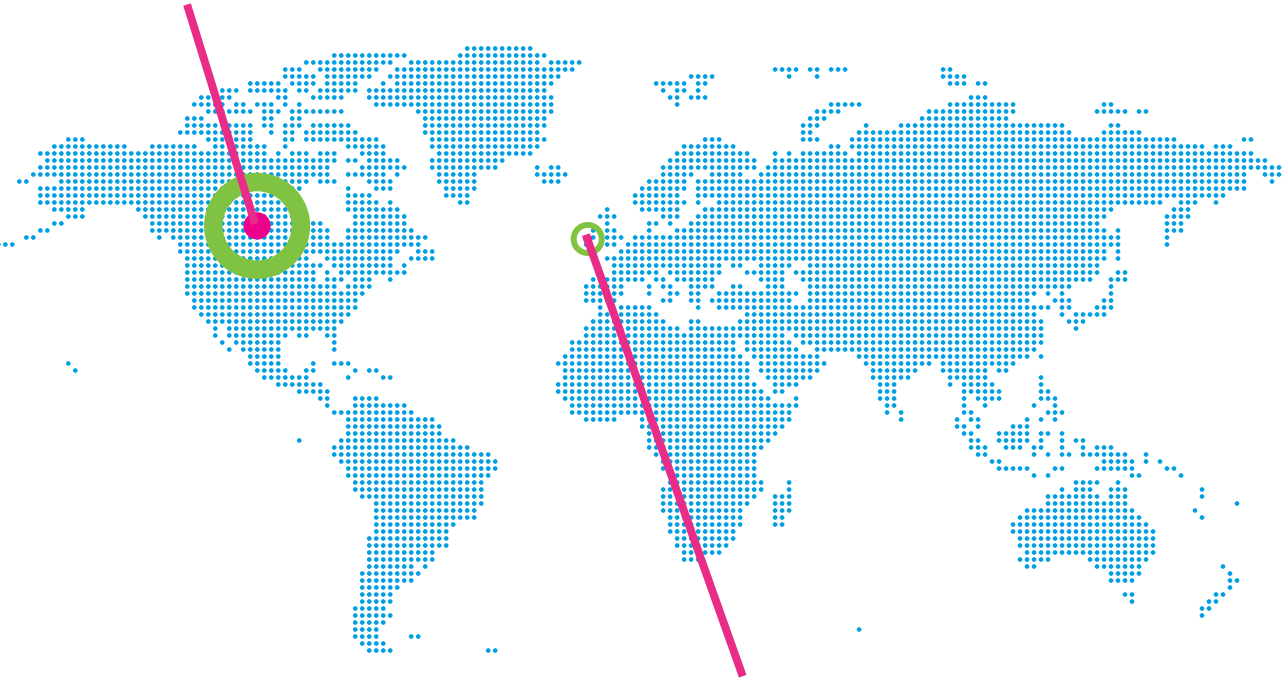
Reading dotmailer's "Hitting The Mark 2015-16"

We monitored and scored the resulting marketing emails over a period of three months by a range of criteria including personalization, relevance, CTA, mobile performance, social sharing and unsubscribe functions.

The companies tracked were identified by two leading ranking sources:

1 US

In the US, Internet Retailer's Top500Guide from which, we took the top 30



2 UK

In the UK, IMRG and Comscore's Top online retailers from which, again we took the top 30

Companies by sector (%)

General/Dept Store	31
Technology	15
Clothing/Apparel	12
Entertainment	8
Office Stnry & Equipment	5
Supermarkets	5
Travel	5
B2B	3
DIY	3
Telecoms	3
Homeware	2
Books	2
Chemist\Health & Beauty	2
Sport	2
Furniture	2



The ranking

Hitting The Mark

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In assessing the brands it's important to say two things:

1 Subjectivity

Some subjectivity is inevitable in a process of this sort however, we've done our best to be as objective as possible and to be transparent on the basis of our scoring as shown on page 17.

2 Quality

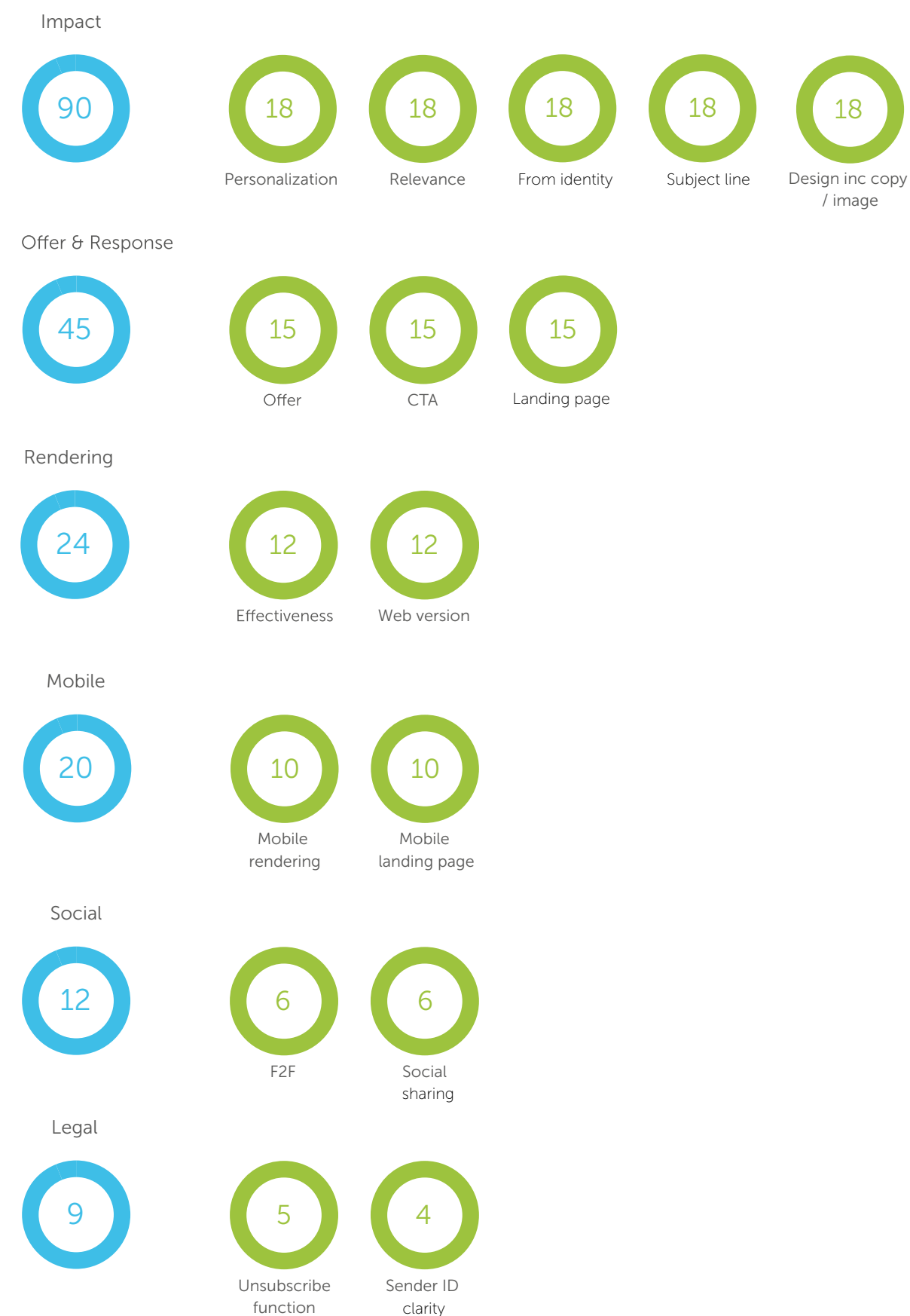
The quality of the brands' activity was high throughout. Whilst our top ranked brand scored 87% of the total available points, our bottom ranked brand still scored 60% of the available points which makes it, in anyone's eyes, a strong program. This is to be expected because these are all top retailers. We think therefore that the real areas of interest are in the – sometimes quite subtle – differences and, particularly, in the themes used here to focus on specifics.



Tweet This!

dotmailer
"has ranked the
top brands by their
marketing emails"
#multichannelmarketing
#email

Our ranking of brands' marketing emails is based on their score from our 200 maximum point scorecard as follows:



Outcomes

Hitting The Mark

2015-16



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"40% of US shoppers say that they receive 'way too much' email from retailers and around half indicate that they receive 'occasional value' only¹¹."

Merkle – 'Survey of US shoppers', 2015

1 An ocean apart

One of the key outcomes of our study was in identifying marked differences between the UK and the US. We think that these are worth noting as well as some consideration of the reasons because they likely touch many cultural and environmental differences – but they may too share many similarities from which we can all learn.

Volume and frequency

The biggest difference that our study illustrates is in the frequency of emails and therefore the volume received over time. This is illustrated by the table on page 20/21. We took the number of emails received and the number of days over which they were received. From this we created a ratio that shows the number of times in a day that a recipient could expect to receive an email.

At the top of the table (see table on page 20/21) you can see that a Victoria's Secret customer could expect to receive an email every 0.8 of a day (or every 19 hours) whereas at the bottom, a National Rail customer could expect to receive one every 84 days. These are extremes of course but it's striking that, of those brands that send an email every 1.5 days or more, 77% are US or US parented international companies. At the other end of the spectrum, of those brands that sent an email every 10 days or less none were US companies and only 18% were US parented international companies.

We might hypothesize that one of the reasons for the difference in volumes is cultural attitude – Brits are just less comfortable with what can sometimes feel like an 'in your face' approach.

This cultural view (stereotypical though it may be) may well also be behind the difference that we saw in personalization. Use of the recipient's name in the salutation or subject line is far less common in the US than the UK - less than 15% of US marketers use it versus just under 50% of their UK counterparts.

The effectiveness of email frequency is a matter of debate. Traditionalists who believe that high frequency and volume is always negative have been challenged by empirical evidence suggesting that, for instance, engaged users will tolerate up to 5 emails per week¹⁰ and that emailing much lower volumes therefore simply leaves potential money on the table.

¹⁰ Return Path - 'Frequency Matters', 2015

There is however no absolute rule and the ultimate measurement of 'how much is too much' (beyond the ISP's view on deliverability of course) comes from two points of view:

- **Yours** - the ROI measurement of your program over time is the bottom line impact to your business.
- **Your customer's** - their potential engagement or irritation is what defines their likelihood to value and respond to your email and to stay with your brand.

A study like this cannot know either of these things and so it would be wrong to judge what is good and bad based solely on the findings. This is why we have not included frequency in our scoring. Its absence however should not imply that it is unimportant.

In a world of ever more crowded inboxes it is anything but. Indeed, 40% of US shoppers say that they receive 'way too much' email from retailers and around half indicate that they receive 'occasional value' only¹¹. We know the prominence of this when looking at factors in unsubscribe decisions. For all of these reasons, a focus on defining the optimum frequency is likely to be high on most retail email marketer's testing agenda. Given that we're looking at the top brands it might be reasonable to assume that such work is likely behind what we see.

Personalization

Of course the big personalization push in digital today tends to be around using previous browsing and purchase history to present relevant content (including recommendations). 33% of UK retailers place the highest emphasis in improving customer experience on 'making our experience as personalized and relevant as possible'¹². In many areas this doesn't need the name of the target consumer – in display for instance it can't have it – but we wonder whether data science and algorithmically based approaches might be forgetting the rather more prosaic advantage that email offers as a channel – to address a known recipient by their name.

It's always possible of course that problems with accessing data or concerns about its quality may be dissuading brands from using it in basic level personalization. If that were the case with these best of breed retailers however, it would be a real concern.

¹¹ Merkle – 'Survey of US shoppers', 2015

¹² eConsultancy – The Digital Retailers: Trends, Opportunities & Challenges, 2015

Volume and frequency: at the top of the table (INT) you can see that a Victoria's Secret customer could expect to receive an email every 0.8 of a day (or every 19 hours) whereas at the bottom, a National Rail (UK) customer could expect to receive one every 84 days.

UK

		Ratio
UK	Sports Direct	1.1
UK	House of Fraser	1.5
UK	Not On The High St	1.6
UK	ASOS	2.2
UK	Screwfix	2.5
UK	Very	3.0
UK	M&S	3.0
UK	Next	3.8
UK	Debenhams	3.8
UK	Easyjet	4.8
UK	Sainsbury's	5.1
UK	Asda	5.3
UK	Argos	6.0
UK	Ticketmaster	10.4
UK	John Lewis	10.5
UK	Carphone Warehouse	11.7
UK	B&Q	20.5
UK	The Trainline	21.0
UK	O2	27.3
UK	National Rail	84.0

US

		Ratio
US	HSN	0.9
US	Systemax (Tigerdirect)	1.1
US	Target	1.2
US	Newegg	1.3
US	KOHLS	1.6
US	Walmart	1.7
US	Nordstrom	2.9
US	Best Buy	2.9
US	Macy's	3.3
US	Home Depot	4.2

International (INT)

		Ratio
Int	L Brands (Victoria's Secret)	0.8
Int	Etsy	1.0
Int	Gap	1.2
Int	Costco	2.3
Int	Viking Direct (representing Office Depot/ Office Max)	3.6
Int	QVC (Liberty)	9.9
Int	Sony	14.7
Int	Netflix	16.6
Int	Ikea	20.5

2 Across the channels

There are few areas of retail more challenging than support of the multichannel environment. With shoppers increasingly using online, mobile, social and in-store as elements of their purchase, email has to find its place.

The success of an email is therefore no longer as straightforward to measure or as linear to track. Today, email may just as likely be a contributor to a sale as a direct source (in 2014 ecommerce sales amounted to only some 6.5% of total retail sales but digitally influenced sales were five times higher equalling some \$1.7tr in the US alone)¹³.




This focus on serving the multichannel environment is very visible in emails reviewed in the study. Whereas just a few years ago most retailers would be using emails to emphasize the advantages of shopping online, we now see them equally singing the praises of the physical shopping experience that supports it.

One of the best examples is Click & Collect (hugely popular with shoppers – 60% of UK consumers consider it extremely important¹⁴) which is now prominently featured in the headers or hero images of brands such as Screwfix and Sports Direct.

The below examples illustrate the fact that email marketing for retailers is about persuading readers of **all** of the attributes of buying from them – whether the transaction happens online or offline.

Sports Direct and Screwfix

Click & Collect features prominently in the website headers of both Sports Direct and Screwfix respectively.




¹³ Deloitte – ‘Navigating The New Digital Divide’, 2015
¹⁴ Oracle Retail Study, 2015

Savvy retailers know that even if consumers interact with emails and buy online, they don’t always want to be talked to that way. Sometimes more ‘old school’ and tactile physical channels such as direct mail can have a real impact. 57% of UK consumers say that receiving physical mail makes them feel more valued¹⁵. As our email inbox becomes ever more crowded too it’s likely that good old direct mail has an increasingly greater impact as it has to vie for attention rather less on our doormat. Our study illustrated several examples (see below). Brands such as Staples and Viking use direct mail to offer

discounts on online, phone and physical sales whereas QVC welcome new customers with a high quality physical welcome pack and personalized membership card. Here QVC may well be aiming to find a physical way to bring home the range of its service and access; it may also be capitalizing on that impact effect - 38% of UK consumers say that the physical properties of the communications affect the way that they feel about the sender brand¹⁶.

Staples & Viking

Staples and Viking send Incentivized offers via direct mail. Customers can take advantage of these offers online, via phone or physically.



QVC

QVC sends a welcome pack to customers via direct mail.

¹⁵ Royal Mail MarketReach – ‘The Private Life of Mail’, 2015
¹⁶ Royal Mail MarketReach – ‘The Private Life of Mail’, 2015

3 This time it's personal (or not)

In its early days of development, email marketing clearly adopted many of the proven best practices of direct mail. Ranked high amongst these was the use of identity information at the most basic level in the salutation.

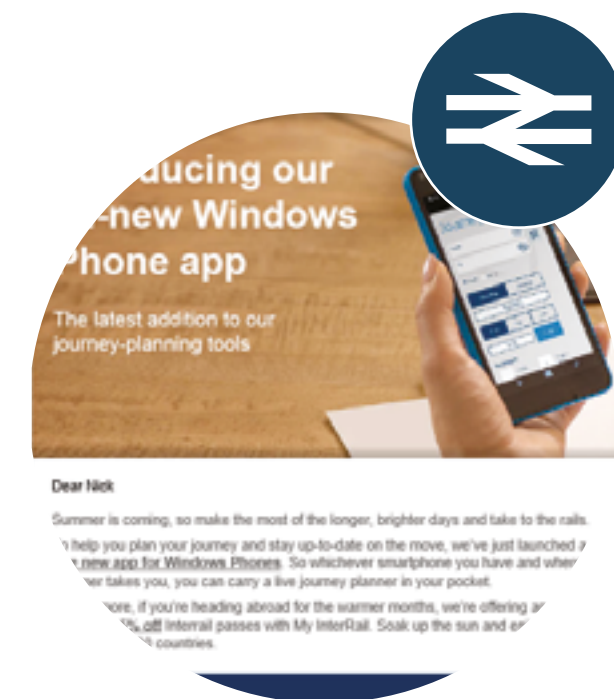
The recognized principle was that a good email isn't just a poster or display ad delivered to an inbox – it's crafted as a personal message. Our study showed that this is no longer universally accepted with only around a third of emails overall featuring a salutation or subject line that reflected the recipient's name.

Transactional emails (order confirmation and shipping advice which are largely driven by automated back office processes) were mostly personally addressed but that personal tone was then dropped once the sales and marketing emails commenced.

This seems oddly the wrong way around. Given its rarity these days however, a personalized salutation is arguably even more impactful when used.

Those brands that did use the technique applied it in a number of different ways.

B&Q and National Rail used the formal 'Dear' salutation in a familiarly structured letter format:

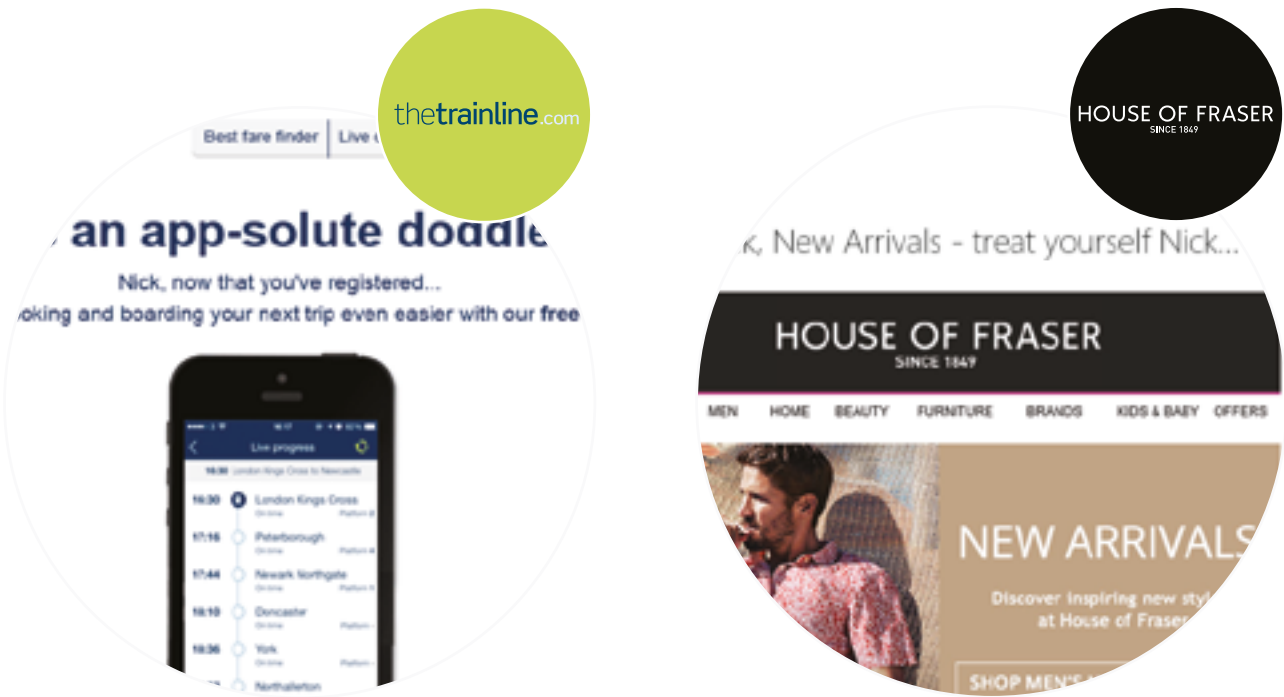


Ikea, O2, Sainsbury's and AVG used the more informal 'Hi' salutation in a generally less formatted approach:



Outcomes

The Trainline and House of Fraser used just the forename either in the body or the subject line:



Tweet This!

dotmailer says -
"salutation is ranked
high amongst
personalization in email
marketing" #marketing
#personalization

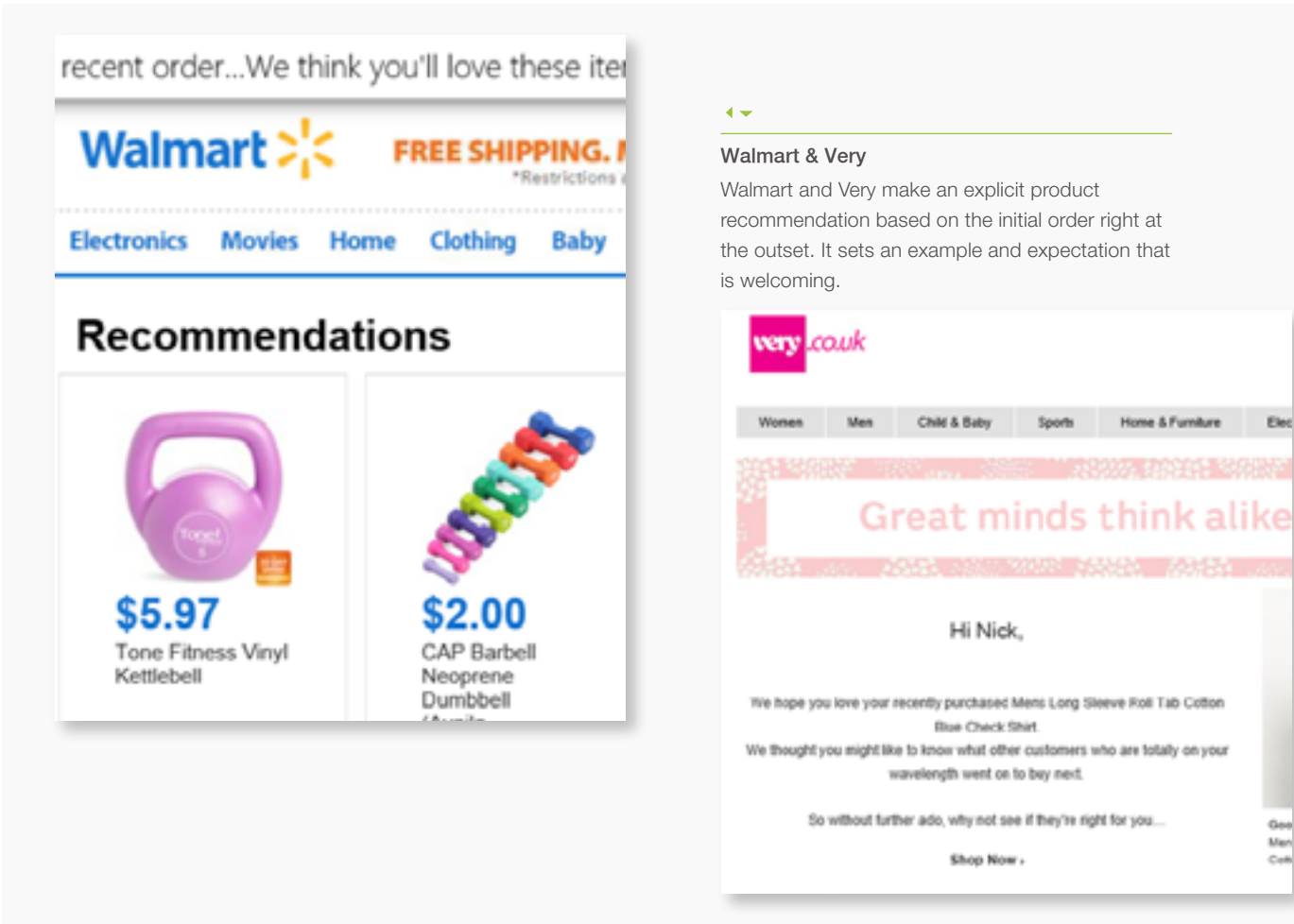
Outcomes

4 Especially for you

Relevance is always the key driver of effectiveness. In a CRM environment - where data is available on customer transactions, preferences and engagement – it's both a realistic ambition and a very real challenge.

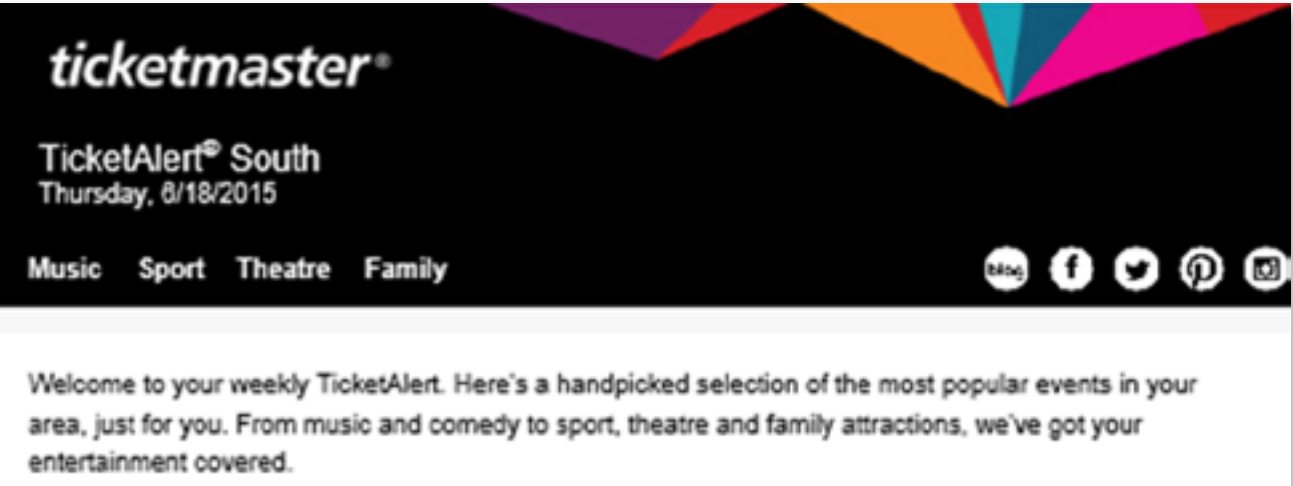
Of our US giants, the vast majority have in place enterprise CRM, ratings & review, personalization and web analytics solutions from the likes of Oracle, SAS, Bazaarvoice, Rich Relevance and Adobe plus of course very considerable in-house skills and resources. However, as our study illustrates, it's still very difficult to deliver highly relevant emails. Indeed many brands' sales and marketing emails often appear to be largely generic and to feature a range of products that don't relate to the order recently placed.

Moreover, when the emails are frequent this fact is exacerbated so that the customers can often receive a stream of messages on a daily basis with little obvious relevance. Some notable brands do however look to make the message fit the reader in a number of ways:



easyJet

EasyJet explicitly references the customer's last booking destination and times the email to hit shortly after returning. The copy talks about planning the next trip – probably a sound call when most of us are facing that ‘back home again’ blues feeling. Importantly, the CTA takes the reader to a tool that selects destinations based on budget and type.

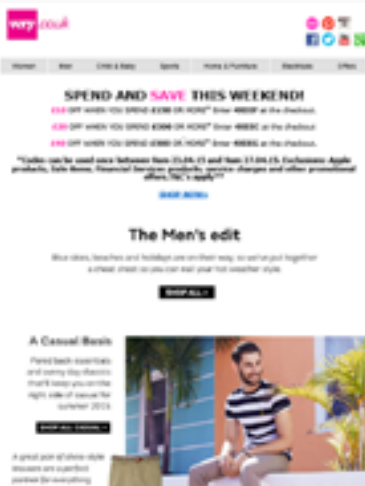


Ticketmaster

Ticketmaster takes an implicit approach by including forthcoming events related to the genre of the original booking but alongside an array of more general events. It's probably less impactful but understandable given that the company has just a single booking on which to base decisions. Importantly it does reflect some understanding of the customer's interest which is important in a sector in which the chance of presenting irrelevant content is very high.

Very

Very references the broad range and style of the customer's first order and backs it up with time limited and spend related discounts.



Brands that ensure the message fits the reader:

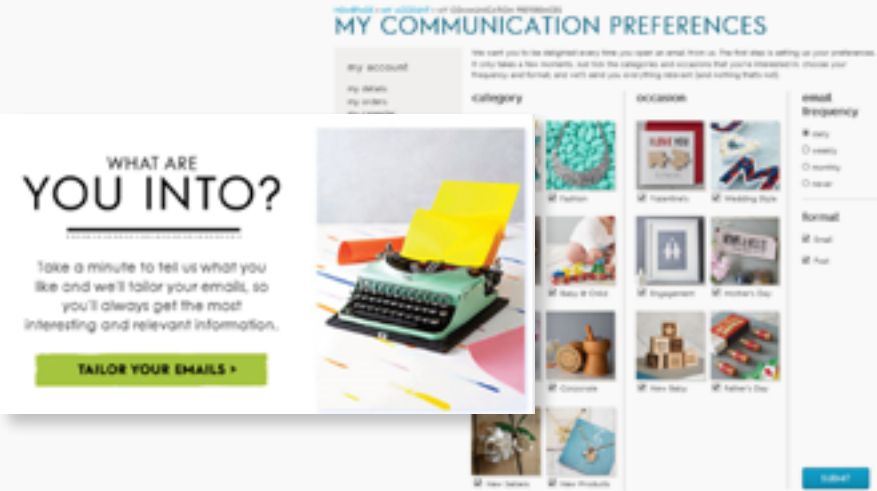
Argos

Argos incentivizes users to complete their profile with a gift voucher prize draw.



QVC

QVC sends a welcome pack to customers via direct mail.



Netflix

Netflix emphasizes that its whole service is ‘built around you’ and so offers the reader the chance to score a number of films which will give the company its view of genre likes and dislikes. It's entertaining, useful and easy.



Outcomes

Looking at recent activity is a must


Retailers have put this information to use in a variety of ways:

The most enlightened brands are now going further and looking at engagement modelling to reflect readers’ activity with email (their open, click and browse history) as well as their order history. See examples below:




Next reminds the customer of the brand and its product as an attempt to re-engage.


Just landed! See our handpicked New Arrivals Nick...



House of Fraser prompts customers with new products similar to those originally ordered. They emphasize this approach by using personalization in the subject line to announce ‘handpicked’ new arrivals.



Asda goes beyond relevant product recommendations with incentivization. Asda explicitly references the fact that the customer hasn’t ordered lately and, over a number of touchpoints, both reminds the reader of its service in comparison to competitors and then incentivizes with free delivery.




Walmart recommends products similar to those originally ordered. They take a straightforward, factual approach.

Cookie-based retargeting in display is now very well established and some brands are also exploring the same principles in linking email open activity to display retargeting. In many ways this makes sense – a reader who has recently browsed a site for a specific product after clicking through from an email will likely be interested in further exposure to that product or others like it. The question is more around how and how often. Our study showed several examples of how this is working today (see below).

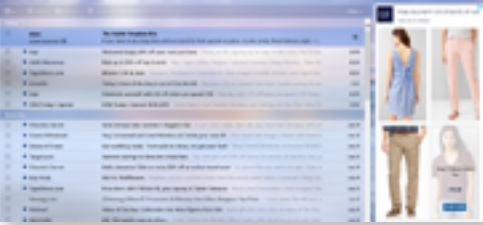
Some brands are showing previously viewed content from an email click through as display ads. These can be both at the login stage and in the frame around the email view post login the next time that the user views their webmail account.

Others are using the same technique to present display ads of content in the frame within the same session so that the user is in effect re-presented with something that they previously viewed.

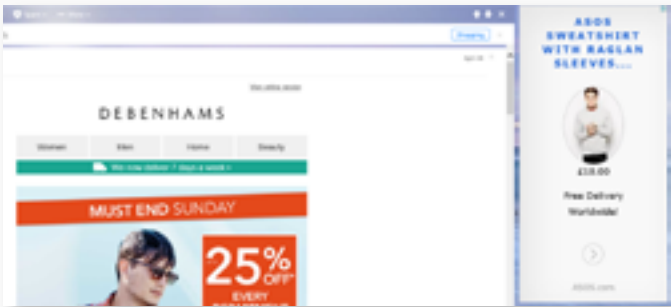
This can be smart in that it’s revisiting something of known interest. It also however runs the risk of both alarming users (potentially crossing the so-called ‘creepy line’ at which the ability to track risks becoming the ability to stalk) and creating an annoying distraction of focus. It’s a fine balance. The difficulty of achieving such a balance is likely to be greatly exacerbated for European marketers with the forthcoming changes in Data Protection legislation which promise to change the status of cookies to ‘Personally Identifiable Information’ with all that that entails in terms of consent – a red flag that brands will need to address.



Next use cookie-based retargeting to keep the brand front of mind.



ASOS show display ads within the same browsing session so that the user is in effect reminded of something which they’ve previously viewed.



5 Standing out from the crowd

Effective personalization and relevance is clearly neither simple nor the norm. Even those brands that have it will still find it tough to stand out above the noise in a crowded inbox.

All email marketers know the importance of subject lines. Like the message on an outer envelope in direct mail, failure here means that no one will even read - let alone respond to - your message. Today, in addition to their own testing, email marketers have access to third party analysis that can produce guidance on the most effective approaches. These suggest that action and urgency-based words work better than discount & news-based words and that there is little correlation between length and success rate¹⁷.

What our study showed is that most brands use a varied approach that seeks a balance between attention-grabbing, factual communication, personalization and response encouragement; they break things up by employing these approaches over time. Some brands however have created a far more uniform approach which caters very much for their specific audience. Newegg is a good example – its emails always feature a price and tech headline format that is consistent and identifiable; it won’t be to everyone’s taste but it clearly resonates with Newegg’s customer base and that’s what matters.

Subject line consistency from Newegg:

“24Hr \$199.99 ASUS AC2400 Dual-Band Router, 48Hr \$234.99 Dell 24” IPS Monitor & MORE”

“May Clearance: \$179.99 500GB SSD+BONUS 128GB Flash Drive, \$299.99 i3 4GB Desktop PC”

“Get Tech’d Out: \$189.99 GeForce GTX 960 2GB Video Card, Savings on Intel Core i7 Combo”

“Power Into May: \$69.99 Win 7 Home, \$299.99 3x WD 120GB SSD + 1TB HDD Dual Drive”

17 Return Path study February 2015

We also saw a number of examples of brands using newer or less familiar technology and techniques to really make a splash and jump out from the crowd. We think that these are great illustrations of how email as a channel is becoming far less static and more dynamic. Below are the best examples:



Viking
Viking use alternating hero images with varying colors to illustrate its product range. This really grabs the eye.



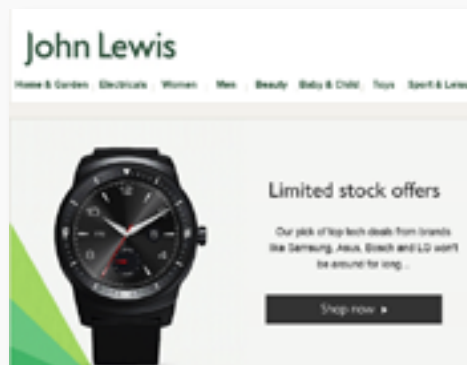
Trainline
Trainline use a similar alternating image technique to illustrate the actual product - its mobile app. Again, this brings alive both the image and the product itself and is far more effective than a dry listing of its features.



Gap
Gap alternate hero images of men’s and women’s ranges.



Home Depot
Home Depot display alternating teaser images of it’s Mother’s Day video in order to entice the reader to click and play. Again, this makes sense in that the creation of an event specific video is an overhead – the last thing that a brand wants is to risk the reader missing such valuable content. These revolving teaser images will greatly reduce that risk and at the same time bring the whole email to life.

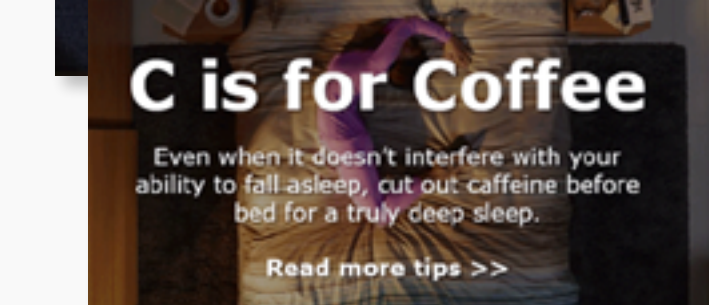


John Lewis

John Lewis uses alternating hero images to illustrate the range of products in a specific category. Again, this approach is far more impactful than attempting to make the point in copy and more practical than using multiple images in limited space.

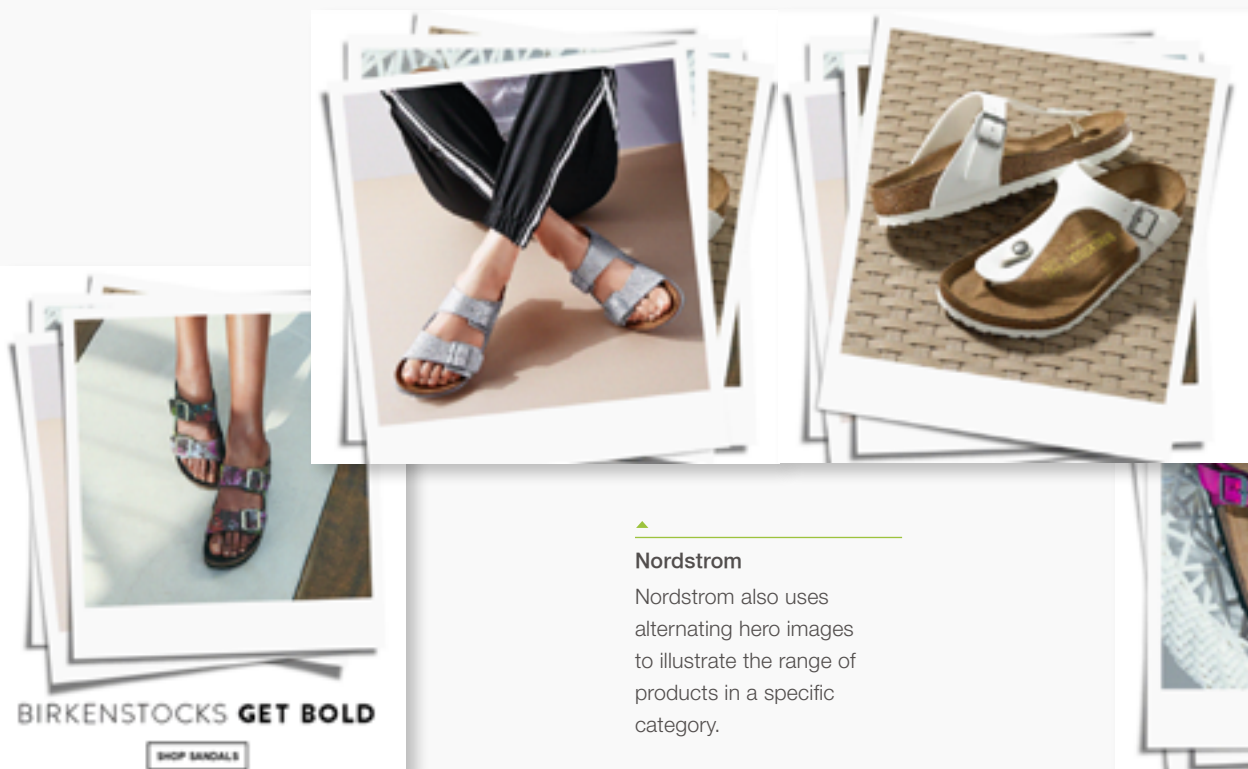


Email as a channel is becoming far less static and more dynamic...



Ikea

Ikea alternates images and copy that link back to a central and wider campaign theme beyond the email. Ikea's advisory approach to buying beds is brought alive by the eye-catching alternating technology linking to its helpful resource for bed selection. It's intriguing, enticing and useful.



Nordstrom

Nordstrom also uses alternating hero images to illustrate the range of products in a specific category.



Very

Very choose to alternate images presented within a product. This beautifully illustrates the point that the shopper has a range of choices and that they can be made from the very product – in this case a tablet – that is being displayed in the message.



Outcomes

“It’s estimated that brands such as Nordstrom and Macy’s achieved open rates of 42%-50% on 2015 Mother’s Day campaigns so there’s certainly a case for suggesting that special occasions can generate special returns.”¹⁹

eDataSource, 2015

Themed emails

With ever more crowded inboxes, all brands are seeking ways to rise above the noise. It used to be that specially themed emails – e.g. Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Father’s Day - offered an opportunity for this. However universal usage has made them often look like a cliché (those of us who have worked with designers’ violent reactions when asked to put snowflakes into their December newsletters will know what we mean)!

The fact remains however that these occasions and events do present real merchandising and sales opportunities and that many are now vitally important in the retail calendar. Take Black Friday and Cyber Monday – traditionally these were solely US-based events but they’re increasingly now international and most certainly are important in the UK both in physical and ecommerce sales (online traffic was estimated to have risen by 60% and overall sales to have been £810m on Black Friday alone in 2014¹⁸). It’s also true that these occasion emails can still stand out in performance – it’s estimated that brands such as Nordstrom and Macy’s achieved open rates of 42%-50% on 2015 Mother’s Day campaigns¹⁹ so there’s certainly a case for suggesting that special occasions can generate special returns.

Our study period included four UK bank holidays (Good Friday, Easter Monday, early and late May Days), one US federal holidays (Memorial Day), Mother’s Day in the US and Father’s Day in both countries. As such we had the opportunity to see what brands are doing.

Many brands went with a straightforward ‘special day discount’ approach. Clearly this always has potential resonance especially with those who have time on their hands that day and it may prompt a purchase that they’ve been considering anyway. Examples of this can be seen on page 37.



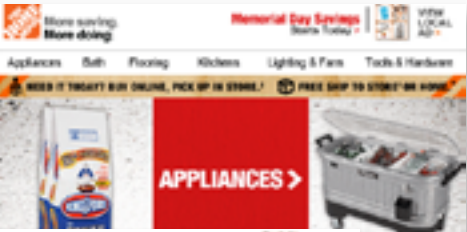
Tweet This!

dotmailer’s
“Black Friday and Cyber Monday are now increasingly important in the UK”
#multichannelmarketing

¹⁸ Experian/IMRG
¹⁹ eDataSource, 2015



Best Buy & Home Depot
Best Buy and Home Depot went with a straightforward ‘special day discount’ approach.



Tiger Direct
Other brands took a sometimes rather creative approach. In the case of TigerDirect this included defining their own special occasion of a recurring Black Friday and positioning a PC upgrade as the ideal Mother’s Day gift.

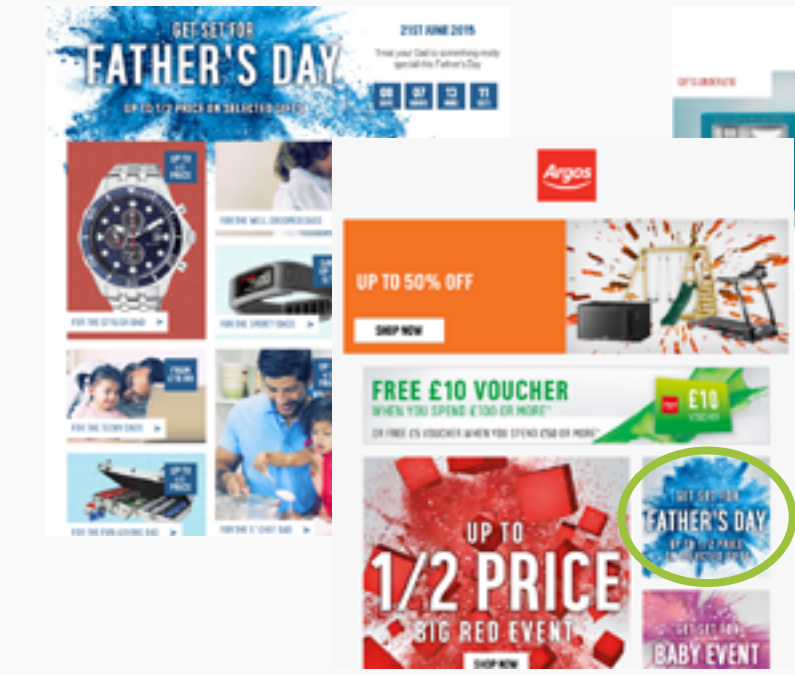
Newegg
Newegg took a general approach to positioning products or gift cards for the appropriate day. Examples of this include the Home Depot gift card for Mums and the Newegg tech savings for Dads and their graduate sons.



Outcomes

The emails we think stood out

In our opinion, the emails that stood out were those that went a step beyond simply positioning a product against the day; they offered help in finding the ideal item. This type of help and support often entails some sort of ‘inspire me’ or ‘gift finder’ approach which is very likely to resonate more for these lesser events (i.e. we may all find it easier to buy Christmas and Birthday presents than Father’s Day equivalents). We saw some nice examples of these. Lastly, all holidays are of course subject to the vagaries of the weather (especially for those of us in Britain). Reacting to this is notoriously difficult but some of the best brands do exactly that in positioning content alongside forecasts.



Argos

Argos' ideas approach based on 'Dad type' (e.g. Techy dad, Sporting Dad and DIY & Garden Dad) carried through into a strong landing page proposition.



Kohl's

Kohl's used a time-limited, spend-based discount approach (always popular especially in the US) for Father's Day in addition to other such discount incentives.

Very

Very's 'shop by price range' approach was supported by a 50% discount message.

Landing page



Debenhams

Debenhams use an email split by product range. This is continued through to the dedicated landing page.

Asda

Asda's campaign for the late May bank holiday in the UK showed good use of weather. It showcased the multiple retailer's broad range from food to play equipment and clothes right through to offers on days out.

House of Fraser

Much thought is given to the 'value exchange' when asking consumers to opt in to email programs but it's far more rare for brands to remind readers of that once they're in the program. When a brand makes a virtue of the exclusivity of an offer, it can stand out. House of Fraser's email gifting subscribers early access to its sales range is a good example.

Outcomes


The bigger picture. Thinking about the end-to-end experience

This shift from a focus on convenience of ordering ('we never close') to the end-to-end experience means that the offline elements of a purchase become increasingly important – from customer service and returns to delivery. Indeed delivery has always been amongst the most important service features for customers but of late this has increased both as a consumer demand and as a retailer offering. 64% of internet users say that delivery is important but only 15% of retailers worldwide offer same day services despite the fact that a quarter of shoppers would be prepared to pay \$10 for it (some much)²⁰.

This focus by consumers – exemplified by the fact that shock at the impact of delivery price is known to be one of the major reasons for abandoned carts – is behind brands openness about the subject. It's rare now to find such information in the small print. For those retailers that do offer advantageous deals - either in price, speed or both - it makes sense that they shout about it. This is precisely what we see in different examples:

M&S

M&S makes a virtue of its 'order by 10PM for next day delivery' by featuring it prominently in the pre-header text of its emails.



Order by 10pm for next day home delivery

M&S

EST. 1884

SHOP ONLINE →

WOMEN | LINGERIE | MEN | KIDS | HOME | OFFERS

UPDATE YOUR INTERIORS IN STYLE

HOME EVENT

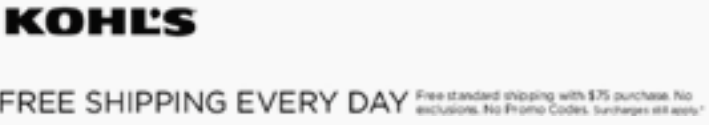
20% OFF HOMEWARE

From sofas to colourful picnicware and stylish bedding – save up to 20% on Home lines until Sunday 7 June*

SHOP HOME →

Kohl's

Kohl's spend related everyday free shipping is featured prominently in its email header.



KOHL'S

FREE SHIPPING EVERY DAY Free standard shipping with \$75 purchase. No exclusions. No Promo Codes. Surcharges still apply.*

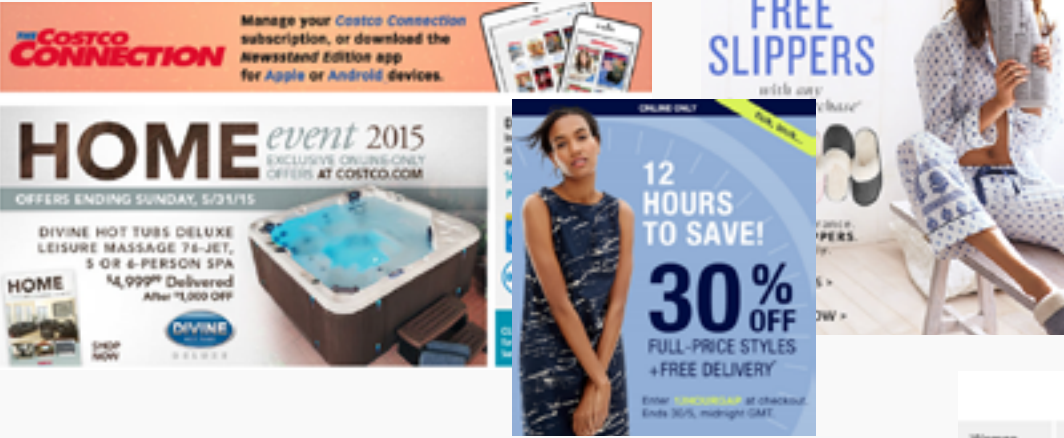
20 Accenture study November 2014

Outcomes

A sense of urgency

Everyone wants to create a compelling argument to respond and to do it now. Time limited or restricted availability offers are two of the most frequently used calls to action. The real challenge is how to make those messages fly. For this brands use an array of tactics in counting down (by days or hours) via clocks in the email and/or on the landing page, using limited coupons and stressing the message in intriguing subject lines as well as bold images. We saw an array of good and varying examples in our study.

Shop Offers Ending Sunday - Save on Spas, Computers, Window Treatments and More!



Manage your Costco Connection subscription, or download the Newsstand Edition app for Apple or Android devices.

HOME event 2015 EXCLUSIVE ONLINE-ONLY OFFERS AT COSTCO.COM

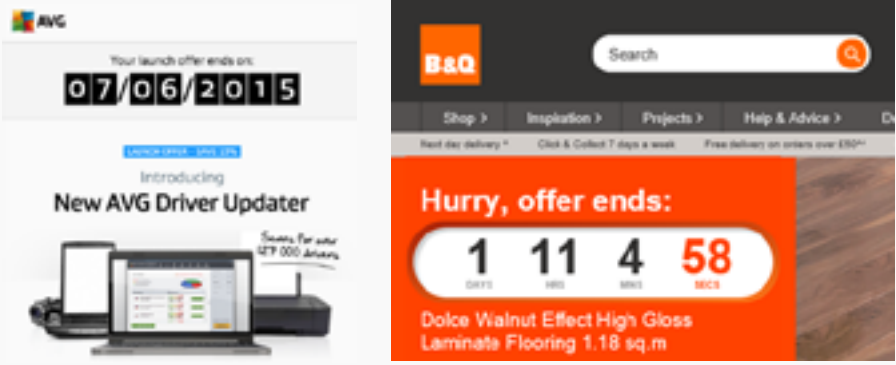
OFFERS ENDING SUNDAY, 5/31/15

DIVINE HOT TUBS DELUXE LEISURE MASSAGE 78-JET, 5 OR 6-PERSON SPA \$4,999* Delivered After \$1,000 OFF

12 HOURS TO SAVE! 30% OFF FULL-PRICE STYLES +FREE DELIVERY*

final hours! **FREE SLIPPERS** with any \$49.99+ purchase

Ends 07/06/2015 | Save 15% | Easily fix common PC, printer & scanner problems



AVG

Your launch offer ends on: **07/06/2015**

Introducing **New AVG Driver Updater**

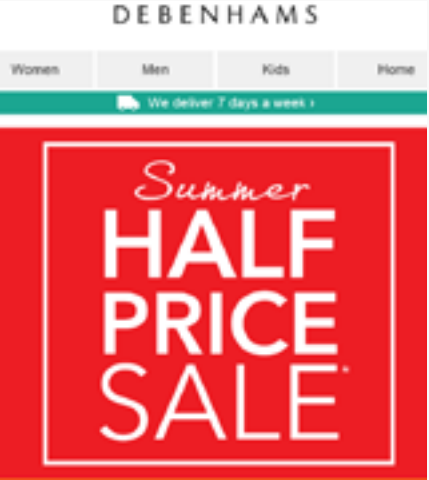
Hurry, offer ends:

1 11 4 58 DAYS HRS MINS SECS

Dolce Walnut Effect High Gloss Laminate Flooring 1.18 sq.m

Debenhams

Debenhams made an announcement of an imminent early morning sale start in order for customers to be prepared. In effect this gave readers a chance to join the virtual queue.



DEBENHAMS

Women Men Kids Home

We deliver 7 days a week

Summer HALF PRICE SALE

6 Hard sell v soft sell

Retail is a tough business. With challenging weekly and daily targets, fierce competition and a challenging economy restricting consumers' appetite for spending, many brands face the dilemma of going all out for short term returns versus holding out for that longer lifetime value.

In the midst of this is the issue of brand – email comms need to reflect what a brand stands for. The tone of message is a key part of that. Email comms too have to represent a balance between the brand sender's objectives and the recipient's expectations (largely driven by what they signed up to). Often there is a real tension between the two.

This is commonly illustrated in discussions around focus, frequency, tone and balance (e.g. offers v news v support). When handling day-to-day pressures, this is no academic discussion but a real driver of hard decisions for marketers. Do we go for sell/sell/sell or a more relationship approach?

Our study showed a range of examples of how brands navigate this. All retailers are of course focused on selling but our examples show the different approaches that can be taken. Several brands take a ‘softly softly’ approach at the outset by ensuring that initial emails are about welcoming and orientating the reader to the brand and its offering before the ‘sale’ stream kicks in.

Key examples include:

Although these two brands are vastly different (one consumer and one largely B2B) their approach is common and these initial emails precede a more offer-based program that generates an email every 5 days (in the case of Asda) and 7 days (in the case of Grainger).

These email programs have their fair share of price and offer related content but they're also balanced with softer advisory messages and subject lines (Grainger examples include '10 Dumb Things Smart People Do When Testing Electricity' and Asda's include 'Make Your Next Shop A Breeze'). They're in very sharp contrast with a lot of the other programs that we saw which start as they mean to go on with price-led offers pretty much from day one.

ASDA Groceries

Start Shopping | My Account | Favourites and Lists | Browse Offers | Recipes

Thanks for placing your first order

Hello Nick

Thanks for placing your first Click & Collect shop with Asda – we hope you found it an easy and enjoyable experience.

You'll find lots of clever ways to make your second online shop with us a breeze with our online tools.

And remember, you can book your collection slot up to three weeks in advance, so you can plan ahead.

Looking forward to seeing you soon.

The Asda.com team

[Book a collection slot now](#)

Did you know?

Your details are securely stored, with just a simple payment verification when you shop.

ASDA Groceries

Start Shopping | My Account | Favourites

So many ways to save

Hello Nick

The good thing about shopping online at Asda.com is you'll find the same money saving offers and value as you do in-store.

Look out for Price Lock where prices on the essentials you buy regularly go down and stay down.

Or try our Rollbacks & Multisaves – it's our way of helping you save money, everyday.

The Asda.com team

[Start saving now](#)

Asda

Asda in the UK emphasizes the way that the service works.

ASDA Groceries

Start Shopping | My Account | Favourites and Lists | Browse Offers | Recipes

With Asda, you're always in control

Hello Nick

You may have noticed some items in your order were different to what you expected.

These 'substitutions' happen when a product you've ordered is out of stock – we replace it with a similar or higher value product, for the same price.

Remember, you always have full control of how you manage your substitutions using your online preferences. And you don't have to accept any substitution either; just tell the driver or store member, and we'll organise a refund.

The Asda.com team

[Shop now](#)

Rollback

any **2 for £4**

GRAINGER

Electrical | Hand Tools | Safety | Cleaning

Search

The Right Product. At the Right Time.

Not only do we have the right product to get the job done. We can get it to you when you need it.

Grainger.com's **Real Time Availability** allows you to find out instantly what's in-stock and when you can get it!

[Shop Now](#)

[Pick Up at a Branch Near You](#)

GRAINGER

Electrical | Hand Tools | Safety | Cleaning

Search

Take Costs Out of Managing Your Business

When you choose Grainger you get a partner who knows you don't have time or money to waste.

From purchasing and managing inventory to running your business safely and more sustainably, we can help you take costs out and gain the time you need to manage your business.

We offer a variety of services to help you maximize your business operations, by taking costs out!

[Learn More Today](#)

GRAINGER

Electrical | Hand Tools | Safety | Cleaning

Search

The Products You Need to Get the Job Done.

Grainger is a leading provider of top-quality industrial supplies worldwide. We carry the brands you trust, along with money-saving alternatives to suit any budget.

With more than 3,500 suppliers, Grainger provides access to more than 500,000 products. We add [new products](#) nearly every day to make sure we offer the latest, high-quality products.

[Start Shopping Today](#)

Outcomes

It’s time to learn more about your customer

Some brands take the opportunity right at the outset to not only orientate the customer to the experience but also to learn more about them so that the subsequent emails can be made as relevant as possible (a similar approach to those we highlighted above in ‘Especially For You’).

Not on the High Street is a good example of this not just in what it does but why it does it. Like Etsy in the US, the brand in effect represents a multitude of smaller and diverse suppliers such that its product offering is extraordinarily broad. Ensuring that new customers understand its relationship with the end suppliers, how it works and most important the customer’s ability to choose their content is key.

The initial email therefore leads on exploring the site, tailoring emails and setting a calendar of reminders such as birthdays (see images below). Like flash sale operators, the breadth of product range will generate an open-ended number of communication opportunities; those customers who stick with the default preferences of all products and daily emails (as we did for the purpose of the study) will see a dizzying range of options from which to choose. It’s important therefore to establish an understanding and expectation right at the outset.



Outcomes

Branding vs. sales issue

Representing the brand image and essence within an email program is essential. Sometimes though it’s a challenge in the face of the need to push for sales. We see this all the time and we see many different responses by marketers. We think the following campaigns are great examples of brands going for the sale with a subtle and supportive approach:

Ikea

Ikea is an iconic brand that consistently creates arresting campaigns across all channels so it’s not surprising to see it expertly address the branding versus sales issue in email marketing. Rather than just pushing a ‘sell’ message for its beds, the Swedish brand introduces its ‘A to Zzz of Sleep’ – 26 facts that we should know about sleep. This is a neat introduction to its ‘mattress finder service’ which is a key element of its in-store experience – here recreated in an email. The email is very clearly pushing the reader towards buying mattresses, pillows and duvets but is doing so in a way that’s consistent with the in-store service, site content, creative theme, approach to service and overall brand.



Carphone Warehouse

Carphone Warehouse is a brand with strength in knowledge and impartial advice across the wide range of mobile networks and devices. In this sector, the launch of a new device is always big news and can be pushed on the basis of merely ‘get it here first’. However the brand took a different and softer approach with the launch of new LG and Sony Experia devices. The newsletter approach was cleanly and stylishly designed and very much positioned as a news-based event even though the CTA and subsequent landing page were very focused on converting a sale.



Outcomes

Building bridges

Whilst many brands dive straight into the sales and offer messages from day one – in stark contrast to the ‘softly softly’ examples on the previous page – others take a middle ground where a price and offer-related approach is used but it’s linked to a ‘thank you’ for the initial order. Here there’s still a very clear objective to create a second order and a clear incentivized CTA to encourage it but the message received by the reader is one of appreciation.

Staples

Staples provides a good example of this with a time limited 30% discount on the recipient’s next order. The brand also uses physical direct mail in this approach in the period shortly after the initial order. The rationale for many of these ‘softer’ approaches of course is to build a relationship rather than to merely close a sale – such that the relationship creates many more sales.



Very

Of all of the examples of this that we saw in our study, the most ambitious was the use of Very’s ‘Big Catwalk’. In Liverpool on 4th July, the UK ecommerce giant attempted (successfully) to beat the world record for the most models on a catwalk. Clearly a massive undertaking and a very significant branding and publicity initiative, this was used by Very to involve its customers. Email recipients were invited to take part, to join the after-event party and to get involved on social media.

The message itself bookended more conventional product CTAs but no reader could’ve missed the ambition of the brand’s statement; certainly this campaign stood out from the crowd. It wasn’t **just** about selling but it sold.



Outcomes

Adapting the approach

In many ways the ideal program reflects and respects the stage that the customer is at in the relationship. That’s where the decisions between a softer and harder approach must be made. It may not be appropriate to start a hard sell program of constant messaging right at the outset; on the other hand if the brand is offering daily deals it may well be exactly right to take that approach.

One of the best examples in our opinion of a brand structuring a program around its customer’s purchase cycle is by easyJet. It could be argued that flights are hardly comparable to groceries for instance or even that an airline is a retailer at all. We think however that much of the logic behind its program resonates in a far more general sense. In summary this is how it looks –

- In the 59 days between booking and flight, we received 10 emails of which 7 were directly or indirectly related to the flight itself (they included destination hotel, airport hotel, airport parking, seat pre-booking, pre-paid currency card, destination car hire and destination hotel).

N.B. there were additionally two service emails relating to roadworks that would definitely have affected our ability to make the check in – these were very useful and we consider them above and beyond; a great customer service experience.

- In the 20 days since the flight, we received 7 emails of which 6 were general offers and sales (the other one was a post flight satisfaction survey). This illustrates to us that the general marketing emails were held in check during the pre-flight period where the focus was on upsells and cross-sells related to the initial booking. Whilst this may seem obvious (and is very clearly sound marketing) it’s not by any means the norm. Indeed, many consumers are often left with the impression that marketing emails happen almost entirely independent of any recognition of recent or current sales relationships. easyJet’s achievement is therefore notable especially approach was cleanly and stylishly designed and very much positioned as a news-based event even though the CTA and subsequent landing page were very focused on converting a sale.

7 Taking care of business

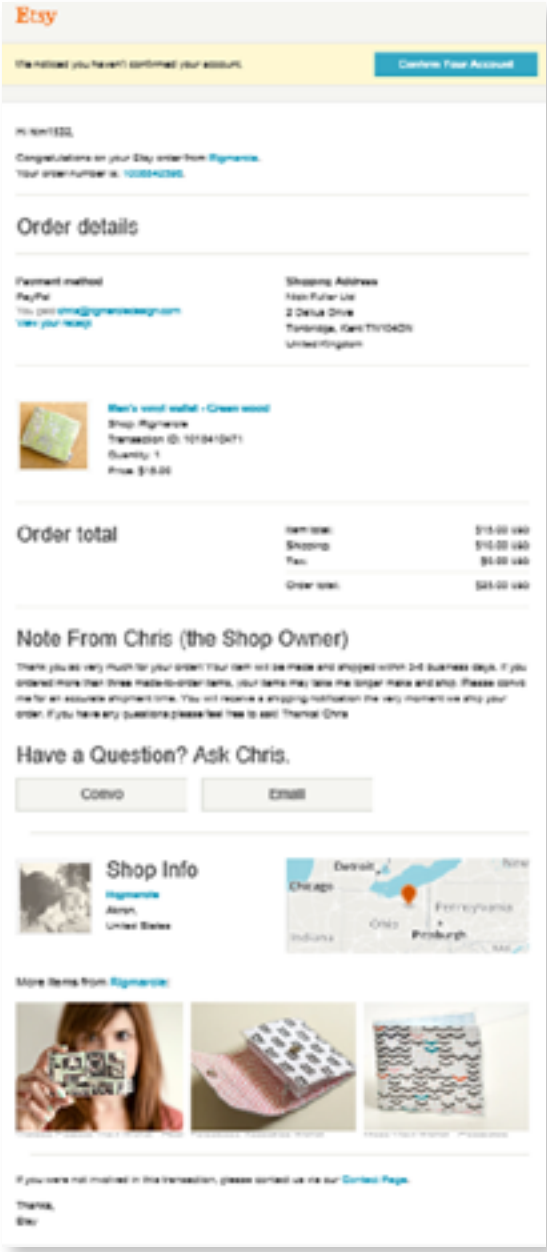
As you would expect from the largest and most successful retailers, most brands were very strong in the operational areas that most impact on the successful completion of a sale.

Almost all brands’ order confirmations and shipping advice comms were very effective. We scored them primarily on timeliness and clarity. There were exceptions however – in one case both went to Junk folder and in another the delivery advice became very confused between the brand and its courier. These exceptions however rather proved the rule that, in general, the order process is slick. Consumers generally expect a near instant confirmation of the order, regular updates on delivery expectations and clarity on who to contact in the event of a problem or question. Overwhelmingly that’s what the retailers provide.

Some too are going further in making that initial transactional contact into both an intro to the brand and an initial example of relevance by recommending products similar to the initial purchase. Etsy is a great example of making this approach to making transactional emails both meet their objective but also go further (see image on the right).

Specific shop owner comms

Related product suggestions



8 Marketing on the move

The rise in mobile usage has long impacted email marketing. Our study shows that, not only have brands largely conquered the objective of ensuring that their emails appear correctly on mobile devices (with their smaller and varied screen sizes) but they’ve gone a step further in optimizing the mobile landing page and site experience for readers who click through. The chances of now buying during the visit are greatly increased.

There’s very good reason to focus on this – in 2014 almost 70% of Walmart’s US traffic and 60% of Amazon’s overall traffic came from mobile²¹ and this reflects a general trend. The performance here should not be underestimated – it was not long ago that mobile presented a real headache to many brands. The sector has since come a very long way. This is especially so because the channel has shifted from threat to opportunity.

US consumers are 30% less likely to use their mobile for showrooming and price comparison than they were a year ago²² and there’s increasing evidence of people doing the opposite – 70% of digital shoppers have browsed online from their mobile whilst in a shop and then bought from that physical shop²³. No doubt there are elements that remain (or will become) a threat but our study suggests that the top retailers are equal to it. Several examples illustrate the point on page 50.



Tweet This!

dotmailer says -
“the dramatic rise in mobile usage has long impacted email marketing”
#multichannelmarketing

21. Internet Retailer US Q4 2014 Analysis
22. Deloitte – ‘Navigating The New Digital Divide’, 2015
23. PwC – ‘Retailers & The Age of Disruption’, 2015

Not On High Street

Not On The High Street's mobile landing page is not only optimized for mobile but also fully supports transactions. The countdown timer used on its Father's Day landing page encourages immediate action and so it's important that a mobile visitor can act upon that urgency. The user experience from email reading, to landing page, to browse, to checkout is as good as the desktop version.



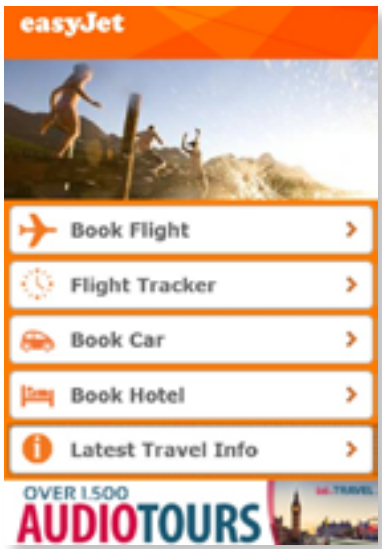
Screwfix

Screwfix understands the importance of time and location to its customers – they're busy, on the move and could be in need of supplies at any time. It has successfully designed its emails for mobile optimization but gone further. With the user's permission to track location, the mobile site enables any searched item to be automatically checked for local availability pre-checkout – an ideal facility for users accessing the site on a mobile device (we also found its Click and Collect service to be amongst the best we tested).



easyJet

easyJet's emails, again, not only read well on mobile but its mobile site is one of the best for supporting the whole buying and service cycle. Airlines of course have a real challenge here because their sites need to support everything from searching and browsing through booking flights, buying add-ons, checking flight and travel details to checking in. We think that easyJet's mobile experience is excellent.

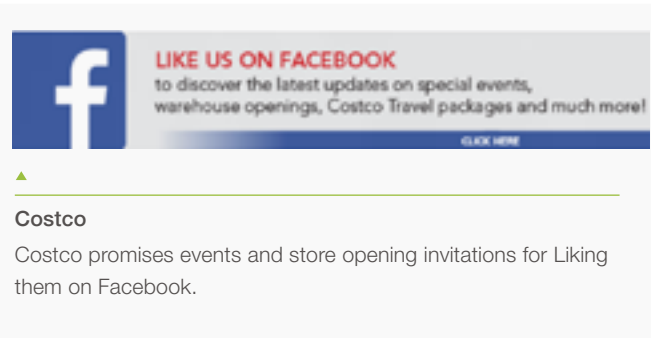


9 Social society

The relationship between social media and ecommerce is very clear. The bottom line impact of generating traffic and sales is accepted - the top retailers ranked in Internet Retailer's Social Media 500 sold an estimated \$2.7bn in 2013 to shoppers arriving directly from social networks after clicking on an item.

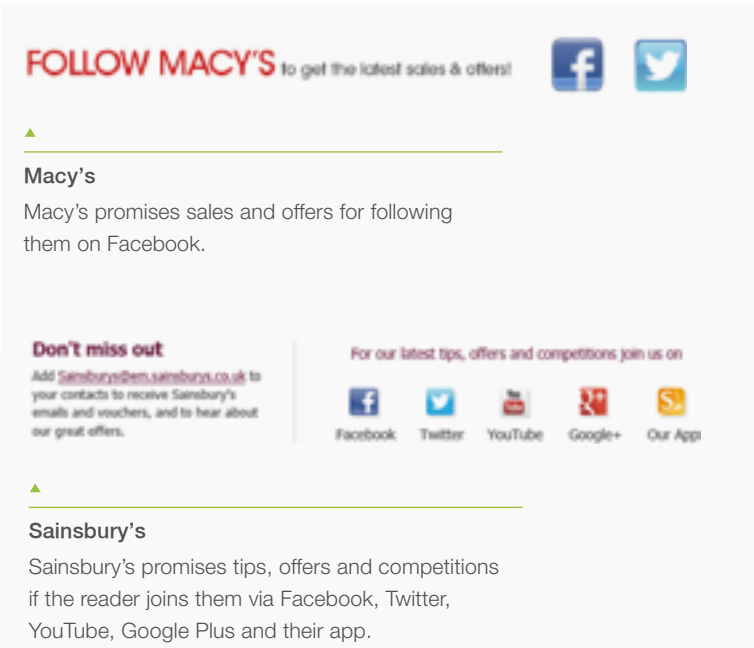
The relationship between email and social media is far less clear and has been a source of discussion and debate for some time. In some senses, email and social are natural bedfellows but in others they are far from it – email is personal and recognized as a channel through which transactions happen whereas social is semi-open (it's rare that a message from a brand will go to an individual only based on their attributes) and a channel of chat/sharing rather than buying decisions and actions.

Social media has always been a good source of message amplification but many brands – both in retail and other sectors - have struggled to find the real motivation that would persuade consumers to use it. This is one of the reasons that our scoring process looks not just at the ability of readers to follow or 'Like' the brand on social but **why** they should do so. In the majority of cases, brands give no tangible reasons.



This seems to ignore the obvious 'What's in it for me?' question especially given that most of us view social networks as a place to meet friends not to advocate brands – so consumers may well need that reason. Indeed there are clear signposts – e.g. attractive deals, promos and sales are the biggest reasons for shoppers to visit brands on social (45% of shoppers cite them²⁴). No doubt brands rightly see the objective of their campaigns as driving readers to sites or stores to buy but it's also valid to see social as a means of both spreading the word and extending the relationship/engagement so that those who aren't ready to buy right now will keep the brand front of mind for when they are.

Those brands that go beyond a standard follow or 'Like' to offer a more tangible reason to consumers take a number of approaches which we saw in examples from our study:



Outcomes

The importance of being social

“62% of shoppers say that interacting with their favorite brands on social has, in some or most cases, driven them to buy more.”

Merkle – ‘Survey of US shoppers’, 2015



Social is indisputably an important element of the decision-making process in retail. 62% of shoppers say that interacting with their favorite brands on social has, in some or most cases, driven them to buy more²⁵. It therefore makes sense that retailers are grappling with the relationship between social and email. It makes even more sense that some stand-out brands are going beyond reasons to Like, Follow or Share by creating social engagement that, in itself, becomes a destination. Email can be a key source of traffic delivery here.

With the recent launch of Pinterest Buyable Pins, it’s likely that more retailers will start to develop these approaches; in the words of Ripen ecommerce Marketing Director David Rekuc, Pinterest is an environment of ‘socially curated glorified wishlists’ and may yet prove to be the better platform for social commerce than even Facebook. This is an incredibly fertile area for retailers and email will play a key role in it.

ASOS’ ‘As Seen On Me’ is a great example of making the customer into the model and encouraging users to share. Here’s a brand not only encouraging users to go to social by providing a compelling reason but also focusing on social as a direct link to ecommerce as an end result. They are tapping into a real retail trend – more than 30% of US and UK shoppers would be more likely to buy an item of clothing from a site that featured

real customers wearing them²⁶. The brand uses its email program as one means of driving traffic – this doesn’t detract from the email’s primary objective of selling because the social content is very focused on conversion with every user image featuring a click through to buy each item shown. It’s a long way from a pedestrian Facebook and Twitter logo in the footer.



Tweet This!

dotmailer says -
“social is indisputably
an important element
of the decision-making
process in retail”
#marketing

25 PwC – ‘Retailers & The Age of Disruption’, 2015

26 Polapic – ‘From Ripple to Wave – The Ascent of Authentic Visual Content’, 2015

Outcomes

Sharing is caring

We also looked at how brands were facilitating or encouraging social engagement from email. There is a lot of debate and development underway in this area and cracking it is seen as a big prize. We wonder however whether – once again – the more basic means of sharing email content hasn't been left behind in the rush.

Forwarding To A Friend (F2F) - in which the brand sends a copy of the email to a person identified by the reader - has long been a staple of the channel and yet our study found that it's now quite rare. Not a single US brand featured the facility whereas almost 20% of UK brands did.

We can hypothesize as to the reason for this generally low penetration:

- Maybe brands consider it easy enough for users to forward without any additional function.
- Maybe users would be uneasy with completing their friend's personal details.
- Maybe brands think that it has been usurped by the ability to share across social. This is possible but very few give readers the chance to do so; it's rare to see examples like Newegg and Sony Electronics (see images below).

What we can say is that those brands who still use it take it seriously by giving it prominence in the header and often giving the reader the chance to add personalized comments. Examples are Argos, Sports Direct and Ikea (see images on page 55).



10 The right side of the law

We know that all marketers value the consent of their customers to send them emails. As the ultimate permission marketing channel, email simply wouldn't exist without customer's consent. We see this business focus reflected in clients:

- Using (or developing) a direct measure of the value of consent that can be used at board level in driving business decisions for investment.
- Assessing the sales attribution impact of emails across other channels to create an indirect value of consent.
- Making considerable efforts to collect more consent and to work with compliance and legal colleagues in avoiding an onerous process whilst still adhering to regularly changing data protection legislation.

Most of all, in an age of increased focus on data security and privacy, we see an ever greater focus by consumers on if, when and how often they will volunteer their email address and give brands consent to use it.

The issue of how a brand 'values' their customer's consent and attention is also a key part of the debate around frequency and volume that we discussed earlier (see An Ocean Apart). If there's also value in gaining consent there's also a cost in losing it. Unsubscribes are a key metric in most client's reporting. We all know of course that consumers will leave so the focus must be on a) providing them with as good an experience as possible to minimize the number, and b) if we can't stop people leaving then trying to learn as much as possible from the event.

We think that this focus is reflected in the unsubscribe process that we tested at the end of our study when we removed our consent from all of the brands. Even relatively recently, we would've expected to have seen some clunky administration-based processes that did little to help the departing customer and nothing to gather their reasons. Not today. It was almost unanimously well managed across all of our brands.

The process itself was generally well signposted within the email itself and it was very rare that a user was required either to login or to go to a separate preference centre; most were straightforward and could be completed in a couple of clicks. It was quick too. Some brands set an expectation of how long it would take before taking effect (from a low of 3 days to a high of 28) but, in the event, the vast majority were near instant. Overnight a crowded inbox became markedly clearer.

A number of brands sought to dissuade us from leaving by offering the opportunity to reduce the frequency of emails. A good example of this was Viking Direct (see image of 57). This suggests that marketers know very well that frequency is a factor in the decision; it also made us wonder how the collected data was used in potentially making changes to policy.

Some brands also emphasized the other ways that we could stay in touch with them – primarily via social. These included John Lewis at the point that we were making the decision (see image below) and House of Fraser after we had signed off from email (see image below).

A number of brands explicitly asked why we were leaving. Frequency of emails was a common option offered which once again underlines the recognized sensitivity. Other options commonly included lack of relevance and the user no longer being interested. The example of Debenhams here illustrates the point (see image below).



Conclusion

Hitting
The
Mark

2015-16

 Reading dotmailer's "Hitting The Mark 2015-16"

Today's retail environment – and most certainly tomorrow's – is no longer about linear marketing in which the retailer pushes the message to the consumer. The balance of power is far more complex and the consumer far more powerful.

With a vast array of information and reference points (from ratings & reviews through social media to in-situ product comparison by smartphone), retailers must ensure that their communications reflect and support these; that their message strikes the right chord at each of the right points. Deloitte defines these as an array of 'Moments That Matter' which include 'Finding Inspiration', 'Selection & Validation' and 'Returns & Service.'

Today's retail email marketer must design programs that reflect this based on an acknowledgement that the KPI driving such programs may no longer always be a direct conversion (creating inspiration for instance may be both nebulous and time consuming but is essential).

All in all, retail probably represents the toughest sector in which email marketers operate and so it's a very appropriate area on which to focus and to celebrate those brands that are 'hitting the mark'.

Our top 10 companies that hit the mark



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complex and the
consumer far more
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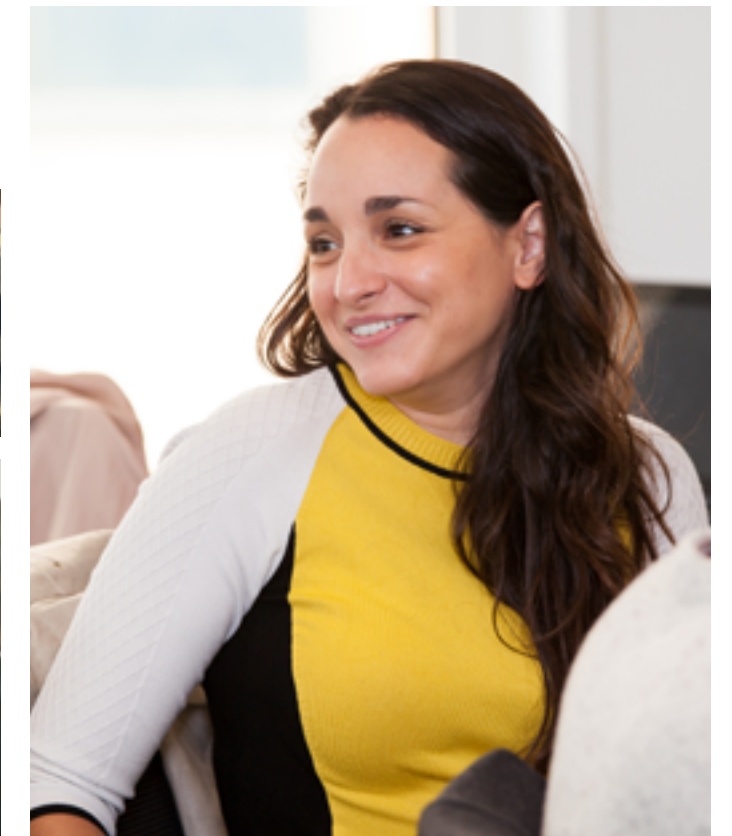
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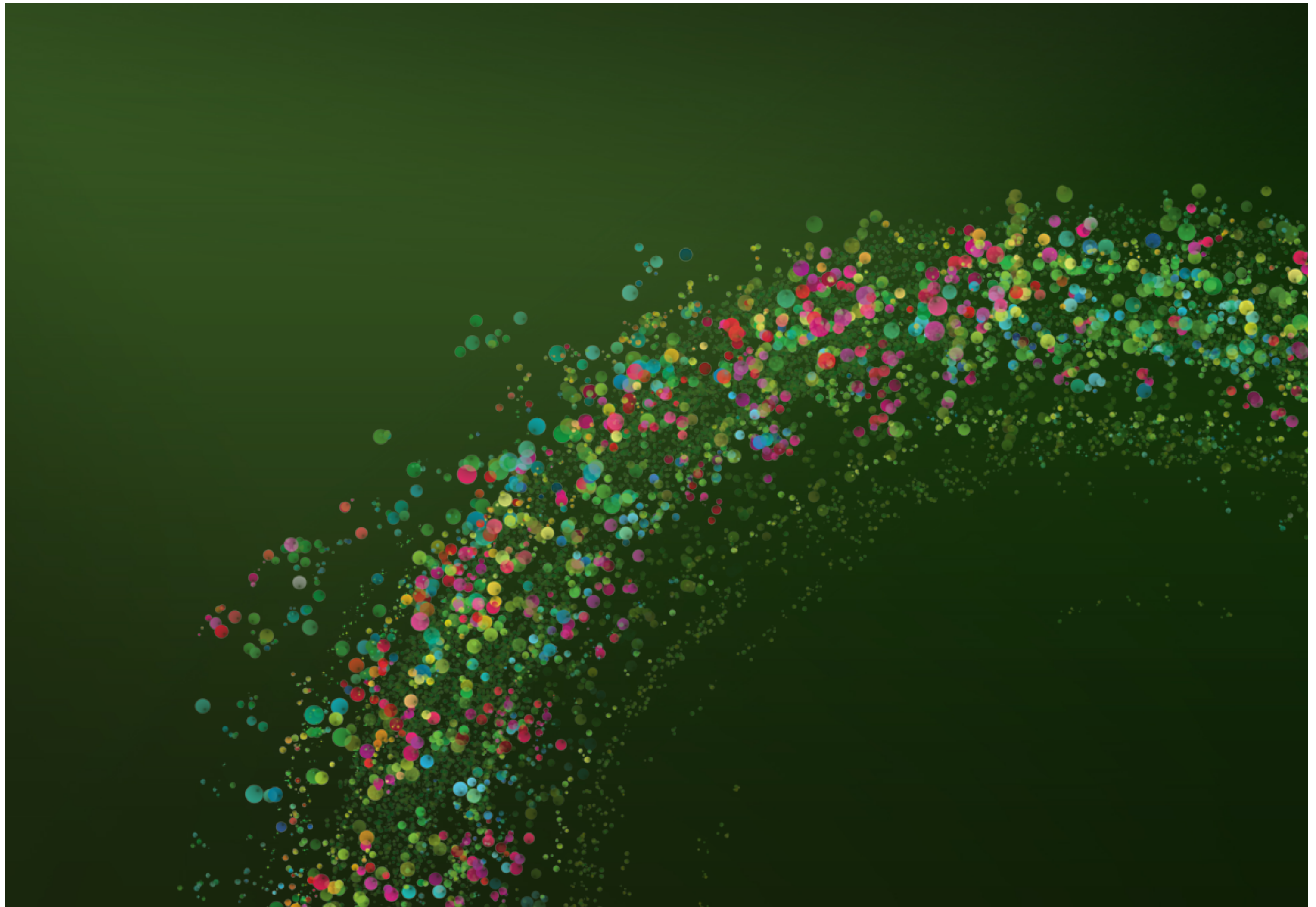
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