



Wake Them Up!

How to re-engage inactives on your e-mail list

Does it surprise you that a substantial portion of your e-mail list is inactive? If you're like most marketers, you'll find between 25 percent and 40 percent of your list is not opening or clicking through on your messages. This group drags down the overall performance of your program, so it's important to identify your inactives and create strategies that will re-engage them.

Define Inactives

Someone who has not opened or clicked on your messages in the past six months certainly is not avidly involved with your programs. Use this time frame to conduct benchmark analysis. If you don't send e-mail on at least a monthly basis, you may want to use a longer period, such as nine months. To analyze your list, start by selecting list members who subscribed more than six months ago. From this group, identify those recipients who have not clicked-through or opened your messages. Now you've isolated your least-productive contacts. You can calculate your inactive rate by dividing this group by the through or opened your messages. Now you've isolated your least-productive contacts. You can calculate your inactive rate by dividing this group by the total number of names that met the first criteria.

Further Analysis

Now that you have isolated your inactives, do some additional analysis. Look at the source of the names. Are they co-registration names, individuals who participated in a contest and opted to also receive your e-mails, or are these appended names? These names may not be as qualified as other names on

your house list. Also, examine the list by domain. Do you have a good deal of names at free e-mail accounts? If so, you probably do not have the primary e-mail address of these members. Also, if you see a substantial percentage of these addresses come from a particular domain, this may indicate your e-mail either is blocked or delivered to a bulk folder. Some ISPs flag accounts that have been closed for a substantial period of time and use them as spam traps. Continuing to mail to these names may jeopardize your overall mailings and result in delivery of all your mail to a bulk folder.

Can you determine other data attributes that are consistent across your inactives? Is there a particular demographic characteristic that stands out? This may indicate that your content or offers are not resonating with the group. Are some of these names buyers? If you have postal address information, consider doing a matchback against online and offline orders. While these buyers may not respond to your e-mails, these messages may be influencing a sale, so you'll want to put these names in a separate category and continue to mail them. If you see particular trends based on any of these circumstances, this information can help drive your communication strategy.

Seven Ways to Re-engage Inactives

There is no "magic bullet" that will re-engage inactives. However, you may want to consider implementing a few

of the following ideas.

- **Mix it up.** Try sending text messages to this group in lieu of HTMLs. Text messages have a better chance of being delivered. If the images in your e-mails have been blocked or improperly rendered, your recipients may have experienced problems in accessing or understanding your content.

- **Reconfirm their permission.** Use this strategy particularly if you've found a sizeable portion of the names come from secondary vehicles such as co-registration programs or contest entries. Ask inactive members to re-opt in to your program. Yes, you'll lose the ability to contact these names going forward; but your overall program performance will improve.

For example, I recently received a reconfirmation e-mail from Dell. I'd been on its list for quite some time, but I hadn't been reading the messages. The subject line: "Dell sends its apologies. There's still time to save on \$599 desktop savings." In the e-mail, the first sentence was very clear: "If you no longer wish to receive these communications, unsubscribe by clicking here." The second paragraph asked if I'd prefer to receive e-mails on a less frequent basis. And, the third paragraph suggested I add Dell to my address book. Dell attempted to overcome several obstacles with this one communication.

- **Obtain better e-mail addresses.** This makes sense for those names registered with free e-mail accounts.

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It's likely you don't have the primary e-mail address for these individuals. Flag these names in your call center workstation, and if these individuals call in, have your reps ask for, or reconfirm, their e-mail address. If the economics work, you also may consider either an outbound call program or a mail campaign sent to these names to acquire a better address.

- **Ask them to update their profiles.** This is a variation on getting a better e-mail address. For instance, I received an e-mail from Classmates.com with the subject line "Important - Classmates membership verification." The body of the e-mail explained it was sending me the message to confirm that my account and profile information were correct. Key elements of my personal information were clearly

presented, and I could click on "edit" to update my account.

- **Try a "We want you back" tactic.** There are many ways to do this. Many marketers provide a special offer to the recipient and use this opportunity to restate the benefits of its program. Drugstore.com sent me an e-mail with the headline, "We want you back. And to prove it, we're giving you \$5 off any purchase of \$30 or more." One of my favorite examples is a "tongue-in-cheek" message from BMW for its MINI e-mail recipients. The headline in the message is, "Are We Boring You?" The accompanying graphic is of a man sleeping in the driver's seat of the car. BMW checked in with its readers and explained that if the reader was enjoying the program, that was great. If not, it suggested the individual could modify his or her profile and opt out. It said, "It's OK. Technically speaking, we're adults. We won't be offended."

- **Change frequency.** Put these individuals on a different communication cycle. If you have a weekly program, consider mailing this group only on a monthly basis until its activity patterns change.

- **Survey them.** Different types of communication often can restimulate activity. People like to share their opinions. Send your dormant names a survey with the goal of understanding more about their preferences and capturing additional profile information. Or, include a polling question in your e-mail. You can use this information to customize and personalize ongoing e-mails.

These are just a few ideas to help to customize and personalize ongoing e-mails.

These are just a few ideas to help you deal with waking up your inactives. Once you do the analysis to determine the extent of the problem, you can employ several strategies and tactics. After all, you want to wake them up! **||**

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