



E-mail Strategies for Corporate Governance

How to manage your e-mail programs across your company

Is e-mail communication so successful for your company that everyone wants to get in on the act? In many organizations, the marketing, sales, public relations, product marketing and market research departments all want to develop outbound e-mail communications. Many of these business units are likely to be unversed in e-mail best practices and legal issues. The end result can be a free-for-all that can damage your brand, annoy

your customers and create serious liabilities for your company.

The first step you should take is to centralize the governance of your e-mail programs. Groups within your company can use e-mail, but you should establish rules and standards. Even if your company's use of e-mail is limited, it still is advisable to develop a strategy for oversight of the e-mail channel. Here are some thoughts for an integrated approach.

Create a Road Map

Develop a grid that outlines every group that uses e-mail and the primary purpose of its communications. It might look something like this (see chart below) in a typical company.

The goal is to map out all the major e-mail touchpoints. Once you've done this, identify a contact in each group who has primary responsibility for e-mail efforts. This is the beginning of your governance committee.

Name one person or department in your organization to be responsible for the overall administration of your company's various e-mail efforts. This individual or business unit should have a keen understanding of the e-mail landscape, keep abreast of industry issues and trends, and have the power to make policy and decisions on the company's use of e-mail.

Educate Groups on Can Spam and Permission Practices

You must establish standards for legal compliance with the Can Spam Act and any other laws (many of which are industry-specific) that may affect your e-mail programs. Establish levels of permission for the major types of e-mail you send and consider implementing a companywide opt-out policy.

(continued on page 28)

Corporate E-mail Road Map

Type	Who	Audience	Why	Frequency
Newsletter	Marketing Prospects	Customers, Retention	Sales	Weekly
Surveys	Market Research	Customers, Prospects	Trends, Feedback, Data Collection	Quarterly
Press Releases	Public Relations	Journalists, Advocates	Inform	As Needed
Third-party Marketing	Advertising	Customers, Prospects	Revenue Generation	Weekly
Product Updates	Product Marketing	Customers, Prospects	Lead Development, Sales, Satisfaction	As Needed
Customer Service	Customer Service	Customers	Sales, Satisfaction	As Needed
Product Promotions	Sales	Prospects, Customers	Sales	As Needed
Acquisition	Marketing	Prospects	Sales	Monthly
Trade Show Announcements	Marketing	Customers, Prospects	Visibility	As Needed

(continued from page 27)

Most of your messages fall under the Can Spam definition of "commercial messages," and require elements such as your company's postal address and a way for recipients to opt out of future e-mails. Is your sales department aware of this? It should be, since individual salespersons act as agents of the company and are subject to compliance with the law. Do your third-party advertising e-mail procedures include suppression of previous opt-outs from advertisers? The law defines the advertiser as the sender because the content is about its product or service; and a main requirement of Can Spam is that prior opt-out requests must be honored. It is likely that some individuals on your list previously have opted out from the advertiser.

Some of your e-mails are likely to fall outside of Can Spam requirements because they are "transactional messages," such as customer service replies to customers or order confirmations. However, there are best practices for

the content of these messages.

You should document legal requirements and permission standards for your company. It is a good idea to hold educational briefings so that all departments are aware of the law and the penalties for noncompliance.

Set Brand Standards

Your company's e-mails should promote your brand consistently. This starts with creating standards for fonts, logo use, terminology and legal language. It also includes establishing rules for departments. Can they create their own e-mails or must they only use preapproved templates? For example, some organizations empower their salespeople to select e-mail content from a series of preset messages. This controls the messaging and presentation, but allows sales to make dynamic use of the e-mail channel.

It's also important to make sure your templates and messaging are in alignment with your Web site, direct mail programs, print advertising and other communications.

Centralize Deployment for Most Touches

Ideally, you should use the same e-mail deployment system for most of your messaging. (Groups such as customer service and public relations may require different facilities.) A centralized system allows you to provide consistent access to a selection of e-mail lists or subsets of e-mail lists, and also ensures that opt-out activity is managed properly. A good system also provides companies with the ability to control who has access to the system and what they can do within it.

The primary company administrator might be responsible for creating lists for various departments. For example, the product management department might only have access to a list of registered users of a specific product, and the sales team might only have access to a segment of prospects or customers added to a list within a given time frame.

In addition, don't allow individual users to have full access to all e-mail

addresses in the system because it certainly will result in misuse or overuse of names. And you probably do not want to give these users the right to modify records within the system.

Establish Frequency Rules

It is natural that individual groups in your company suffer from tunnel vision. Their e-mail program has a particular mission and goal, and they may not be aware of all the other e-mail activity taking place throughout the company. Without governance, you could be inundating a customer or prospect with multiple e-mails on any given day.

You should establish general frequency rules for e-mail contacts. If your newsletters are sent on Tuesdays and Thursdays, you may only want to send third-party advertising e-mails on Mondays and Wednesdays. Yes, there may be extenuating circumstances, but if all groups know the guidelines in advance, you'll have stronger lists and suffer less churn. Your administrator should be the final arbiter.

Ongoing Oversight and Monitoring

Your e-mail administrator also must be responsible for ongoing oversight of your programs. Monitor actual frequency, opt-outs by list type, spam complaints and other general performance metrics. If there are problems caused by particular programs, they must be addressed.

E-mail corporate governance is not easy. Companies that take a centralized approach and the time to develop guidelines and standards will be poised to use the channel effectively and reap rewards. You'll maximize your e-mail communications and have a healthy list that will continue to deliver ROI. ■

Regina Brady is president of Reggie Brady Marketing Solutions, a direct and e-mail marketing consultancy. She can be reached at (203) 838-8138 or reginabrad@compuserve.com.