

EMAIL TESTING GUIDE

EFFECTIVE TESTS FOR
EVERY METRIC OF AN
EMAIL CAMPAIGN

GUIDE TO TESTING YOUR EMAIL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

The savvy email marketer knows that to maximize email marketing ROI, testing is a must. In the constant crusade for campaign improvement, testing is an effective catalyst between an email marketing goal and the tactics to reach that goal.

There are always several options for testing on each email metric. Not sure where to start? Use this guide to help identify problems and develop smart solutions. We'll walk you through the process and show you the best tests out there to strengthen those weak spots in your email campaigns.

WHAT'S MY PLAN?

SET YOUR GOALS

Before you begin testing, understand the types of emails you're sending and analyze your current campaign stats* as your starting point. There are many different types of emails that marketers send, and each has a different purpose, not to mention different analytics benchmarks for effectiveness. Knowing the current purpose, performance, and desired (expected) performance of your email campaigns will not only guide you toward realistic goals, it will set a starting point for testing efforts.

TYPICAL TYPES OF EMAILS:

- Simple transactional ("postcard" with one call-to-action)
- Simple informative (press releases, announcements)
- Newsletters
- Product / Catalog
- Triggered
- Drip / Nurture campaigns
- Integrated / complex campaigns

When zeroing in on the metric you want to test, identify a single goal for improvement. After analyzing the results of your test and determining the best clear course of action for adjustment, move on to another goal in your next round of testing.

**For detailed, industry-specific email benchmarking information, check out MarketingSherpa's Email Benchmark Guide.*

Now the question is: “What metric will reveal your success?” Possibilities include website traffic, response to an offer, sales, and click-throughs. Open rate, while still desirable, should not be a measure of success. It is a misleading metric that really just tells you that images in your email rendered correctly. Whatever you decide on, be confident that you can attribute an increase (or decrease) in the area you measure directly to the email you send.

TRUST YOUR LEFT BRAIN

It’s important to let analytics be your guide when developing a testing strategy.

- LOOK objectively at your current statistics
- IDENTIFY areas of improvement
- FOLLOW the test results as your guide for next steps.

This simple process will eliminate any question as to the best email marketing decisions for your organization. Make your decisions based on data, not knee-jerk reactions or gut feelings.

BUILDING THE TEST: WHICH TESTS WILL ACHIEVE MY GOALS?

It’s natural to want to improve everything at once. However, it’s best to start by testing one element at a time. Testing multiple elements right off the bat makes it very difficult to see what influenced the improvement. Included in this full report are 32 tests that can improve every aspect of your email marketing campaigns. Following our Email Testing Guide will give you a head start in finding the right tests to reach your goals, and what kind of improvement you can expect from each.

DELIVERY RATE:

Spam filters and bad reputation can seriously effect deliverability. Also, bounced emails are not always fully reported, which means a larger number of false positives.

- **Test #1:** White List. Ask recipients to white list your email address. Include “how-to” instructions to make it easy for them to add you to their safe sender list.
- **Test #2:** List Scrub. Perform careful list hygiene including list scrubbing. Eliminating expired or incorrect addresses will make sure a larger percentage of emails hit the inbox.
- **Test #3:** Complaints. Make sure you follow up on all spam complaints. Listening to subscriber concerns can open up some valuable insights to improve deliverability.

OPEN RATE:

Open rate stats are dependent on HTML images, but many email clients do not support HTML or they suppress it. This causes skewed open rates, making them appear lower, and it has even been recently argued that these problems actually render open rate an obsolete statistic.

- **Test #1:** Sender Recognition. Explore the use of company name vs. personal name in the “from” line.
- **Test #2:** Subject Lines. Your subject line is a powerful first impression of your email.
 - Subject line test A: Long vs. short. Try a subject line <60 characters vs. one >60 characters.
 - Subject line test B: Offer. Try leading with your main offer to pique interest.
 - Subject line test C: Calls-to-action. Be upfront with what you want the recipient to do by including the CTA in the subject line.
 - Subject line test D: Personalization. Use the recipient’s name, company name, interests and more to increase relevance.

CLICK-THROUGH RATE:

Take the number of unique clicks in an email and divide that by the total number of delivered emails. Links are tracked the same by default in email marketing platforms. An ESP converts the destination link into a “trackable link” where the URL is redirected through the ESP’s server and recorded.

- **Test #1:** Copy.
 - Copy Test A: Content. Try keeping your content simple, direct and targeted. Too many elements or offers can divert reader attention, lowering response.
 - Copy Test B: Long vs. Short. Is less really more? Create a shorter version of your current newsletter with teasers and links to your website. Or create two versions of a promotional email. Keep one very short and to the point and make the other a little longer by adding additional, useful information.
 - Copy Test C: Trust Factor. Use testimonials to increase trust and encourage action.
 - Copy Test D: Headlines. Like body copy, being either more concise or more detailed can effect how you hold recipients’ attention.
 - Copy Test E: Tone. Switch up the tone of your emails to better engage readers. Stay consistent or go with something more edgy depending on the message.
 - Copy Test F: Dynamic Data. Make the reader feel special and increase relevance. Reference their name, their company, industry, interests, or any other known data.

- **Test #2:** Offer. Focus on a main offer that is short and compelling.
 - Offer Test A: Percent vs. Dollars. Depending on the offer, presenting it at a percent off vs. a dollar amount off could make an impact on its effectiveness.
 - Offer Test B: Free vs. Reduced. Same idea. Try presenting a free offer vs. reduced offer to improve click-through and conversion.
 - Offer Test C: Perceived Value vs. Price. Again, it's not just your offer, but how it's presented that can make an impact. Try focusing on perceived value vs. price to pique recipient interest.
 - Offer Test D: Urgent. Putting a time limit or incentive to act now helps create a sense of urgency.

- **Test #3:** Calls to Action
 - CTA Test A: Type. What will work best? A button? A text link in the body copy or preheader? A linked image? Try a variety and see what works best with different segments and campaigns.
 - CTA Test B: Placement. Where is your CTA? Is it in the middle of the body copy? Upper right? Next to an image or testimonial? Test some different options and you might just be surprised by what performs best.
 - CTA Test C: Number of CTA's. Consider including a relevant secondary or tertiary call to action. Single calls to action can raise clicks by focusing attention on one thing, but multiple CTA's are a great chance to cross promote, cross sell, or test offers head to head.
 - CTA Test D: Copy. What is the copy for your CTA? Sometimes this is overlooked as you sort through options for body copy, but the CTA copy used on your button or link can make a big difference.

- **Test #4:** Segment. Analyze different segments' past behavior (purchase history, email click history, site visits, etc). Then, based on findings, tailor different offers and messaging to each group.

- **Test #5:** Trust Factor. Use risk-free offers like "money-back guarantee" or "free trial" to increase trust and incite conversion.

- **Test #6:** Graphics
 - Graphic Test A: Position. The position of the main graphic in your email, and how it works with the copy, can influence clicks.
 - Graphic Test B: Complexity of Design. Try different levels of design, everything from text only with light branding to detailed, high-level design.
 - Graphic Test C: Dynamic Imagery. Dynamic isn't just for data. Pull in different images for different segments.

UNSUBSCRIBE RATE:

Unsubscribe rates are a main indicator of list health and cleanliness. There's no point in sending a great campaign if nobody is on the receiving end. If your list is fresh, the unsubscribe rate can be an indicator of the relevancy of your content and/or offer. Look for patterns in unsubscribes to adjust campaigns based on behavior. Build relationships with customers and prospects, and put them in control.

- **Test #1:** Relevant Content. Try sending segment-specific content.
- **Test #2:** Frequency. Test frequency to learn which recipients prefer, or better yet let recipients choose their own frequency.
- **Test #3:** Trust Issue. Some on your list might become concerned that their address is being shared or sold. Being upfront and having a winning privacy policy could make a difference.
- **Test #4:** Remind Them. Many people forget they opted-in. To keep them from leaving, try using a double opt-in, or messaging that reminds subscribers why they are receiving emails from you.

CONVERSION RATE:

What happens after the click? (How can optimizing your emails to help campaign landing pages work better)? Besides have a call to action that's consistent from email to landing page, pre-populating data from email to web can make it easy for recipients to convert.

- **Test #1:** Pre-population. Take advantage of what you already know about the customer to make the conversion process as easy as possible. Try pre-populating forms with name, shipping address and other known information pulled right from your email database.

SAMPLE TESTING AND SEGMENTATION

Choose the list segment that will best meet the objectives of your test by asking yourself the following:

- Right list?
 - Is this the right list to show me if my test actually results in improvement.
When it comes to who you will send your test to, you have two options. You can either split your entire list in half and test one against the other or take a random sample and do a pre-test.
- Big enough?
 - Is my list only big enough for an A/B split?
 - Is my list big enough to break into a larger control and other smaller test segments?

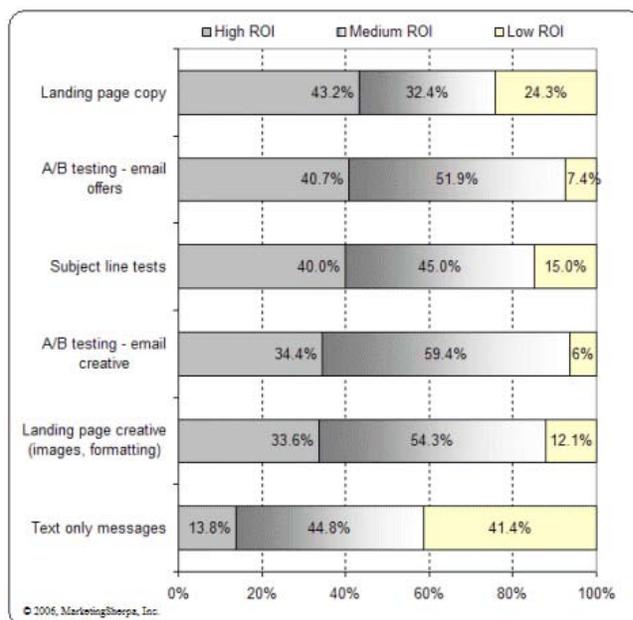
- Pre-Test?
 - Is my list big enough to sample a percentage of it to test?

Pre-testing can give you a preview of full campaign results before sending to your entire list. This protects you from wasting efforts with a poor performing email test to a large portion of your list, and gives you the knowledge to improve your overall response rate. Choose a random sampling of 10% of your master list, and then split that in half for the test.

RESULTS FOR ROI - THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

With email as your marketing medium, the beauty is the speed with which you can get results (usually in 24 to 48 hours). Measure and analyze results to gain insight and prove or disprove theory. Accurately compile stats. What does it all mean?

Refer to this handy chart from MarketingSherpa as a guideline for what ROI increases you can expect from certain tests:



It's important to remember that even small percentage differences can mean a big difference to your email marketing ROI.

- My opens changed ___%.
- My click-throughs changed ___%.
- My conversions changed ___%.
- Traffic to my website changed ___%.
- My click-throughs focused on specific area, topic, or action.
- My click-throughs were varied between different areas, topics, or actions.
- My inbound sales calls changed ___%.

OPTIMIZATION - TWEAKING THE TEST

Don't stop now, the fun is just beginning! Now that you've made your way through the first and most difficult test for your campaign, choose the next metric to improve and go on down the line to email campaign perfection, testing every single time. Commit to making at least one change in each campaign:

- From name
- Subject line
- Specific words
- Subject line format
- Add content
- Decrease content and simplify
- Increase clickable areas or clicks
- Highlight actionable items more
- Change copy
- Modify layout

CREATIVITY + CONSISTENCY = IMPROVEMENT

Even with all the numbers and ideas that fly around during the process, testing can be fun! Not just because it eliminates guesswork and settles arguments, but because of the surprises waiting around every corner. This bevy of information and direction is what proves the value of testing again and again.

Remember to be creative and go big when testing your emails. It's the best way to improve quickly.

Let your recipients and email analytics be your guide, and remember to test every time.