



2770 Arapahoe Road | Suite 132, PMB 233 | Lafayette, CO 80026
www.directhitmarketing.com | (303) 747-2603

Tradeshow A/B E-mail Testing

Improve E-mail Conversion Rates and Grow Attendance

By Rob Lagergren and Steve Juedes

Within the association and tradeshow marketing space, show attendees give e-mail campaigns 32% to 38% credit as the marketing influencer that most nurtured their registration journey. (Self-reported data compiled by Direct Hit Marketing for 2022 tradeshow.) E-mail is a very strong marketing channel for almost every marketing vertical to speak with your subscriber or attendee base about new events, as well as educate them on the benefits of membership. So, determining what e-mail response factors engage them the best is critical for retention and new growth.

This is where A/B testing comes in to make sure every aspect of your campaigns, from your subject line, from line, to the color of the buttons, are completely optimized for reader engagement that leads to higher conversion rates.

We have seen some subject line and landing pages have a 20% higher conversion rate in an A/B testing environment. Yes, we highly recommend testing landing page design and copy as well.

What Is A/B Testing?

A/B testing – sometimes called A/B split testing – is the practice of comparing two or more versions of individual components within your e-mail marketing campaigns, and measuring the impact each of these has on campaign performance.

The results from A/B tests give you a quantifiable way to understand which design elements, writing styles, subject lines and other e-mail characteristics work best for your audience.

Split testing within an e-mail campaign does take more effort but is not that difficult with most e-mail deployment systems or marketing automation platforms.

Current A/B Testing Metrics for E-mail Campaigns

My real world experience within the association and educational marketing places has revealed that less than 20% of the organizations that Direct Hit Marketing works with actively run e-mail A/B testing.

We often hear that the e-mail deployments schedule is too “rushed” to set up testing or that the e-mail deployment platform is not user friendly for e-mail testing. However independent facts stated below indicate that successful organizations have found a way to work split testing



2770 Arapahoe Road | Suite 132, PMB 233 | Lafayette, CO 80026
www.directhitmarketing.com | (303) 747-2603

into their e-mail campaign strategy. See some excerpts from True Lists, “E-mail Statistics 2023,” blog below:

With 60% of companies already using it and another 34% planning to use it, A/B testing is the number one method used by marketers to optimize conversion rates, according to recent reports. Copy optimization is employed by 59% of marketers in their daily work, while another 29% plan to adopt it (Smart Insights).

Although there are numerous factors that can affect conversions, recent A/B testing statistics show most businesses believe it is one of the best ways to improve it. **Almost two-thirds (63%) don't find A/B testing hard to implement. Just 7% disagree, admitting that the implementation of A/B testing is a daunting task (InvespCRO).**

When successful, A/B testing can pay off massively. Ecommerce websites generate an average revenue of \$3 per unique visitor. With properly conducted A/B testing, this revenue climbs even higher. **A/B testing trends reveal one-third of A/B testers' first start evaluating elements such as the call-to-action button, 20% test headlines, 10% test layouts, and 8% website copies (VWO).**

How Do A/B E-mail Marketing Tests Work?

Many e-mail marketing platforms offer the ability to split test components of your campaign. This is generally limited to basics like subject line and content. But there are plenty of other tests you can run.

By testing different versions of your content or subject line, you are able to see which ones perform the best by seeing which version had the highest open rate, click-through rate, conversions, etc.

Most ESPs offer the ability to run an A/B test by sending a small segment of your list the various versions of your campaign. For example, 10% will receive version one, and 10% will receive version two. After a period of time, the winning version is sent to the remaining 80%.

As you can imagine, this often results in substantially better performance than if you hadn't run the test.

As a general rule of thumb, A/B testing should only be run on one variable at a time. If you change more than one thing at a time it can be difficult to know which variable is responsible for the results. This is in contrast to multivariate testing, which is used to test multiple combinations of variables. Multivariate testing is much more complex and requires a very



2770 Arapahoe Road | Suite 132, PMB 233 | Lafayette, CO 80026
www.directhitmarketing.com | (303) 747-2603

substantial list size to make it successful. Maintaining statistical validity is a must and must be monitored closely in multivariate testing.

Below I have included ideas for 14 different e-mail marketing tests you can run to optimize your e-mail campaigns. Get creative with these, and your results are very likely to improve.

1. Subject Line

Try split testing the length of your subject lines, the capitalization style, the tone, whether emojis improve open rate, the use of certain keywords, punctuation style, and emotive words. There's a lot to test here!

Your subject line is also a perfect variable for measuring the impact of personalization on your e-mail campaigns. Using the subscribers' first name has been shown to increase open rates by up to 20%.

Also try experimenting with using second person pronouns such as "you" instead of "them" to see how your audience responds to a more conversational tone.

2. Preview Text

The preview text is the short teaser text that you see alongside or below your subject line in the inbox. This can be every bit as influential as the subject line on your campaign's open rates as it's visible *before* the subscriber even opens your message.

Use this text snippet to write persuasive copy that entices users to click to read more.

You can experiment with the length of preview text, the keywords used, punctuation and emojis. You can think of the preview text as a way to pre-sell your content and qualify your readers. It's a sub-header; a second chance at grabbing attention; so make the most of it.

3. Sender Name

The sender name is important but something you probably don't want to change too often. It's as much a part of your branding as it is another variable, so try to decide early on how you would like to be perceived.

Having said that, you can use this variable to experiment with a sender name that is easily recognized and promotes trust.

For example, your regular campaigns may have the sender name "ABC" but your monthly deals campaigns may perform best if they're sent from the name "ABC Deals" (because



2770 Arapahoe Road | Suite 132, PMB 233 | Lafayette, CO 80026
www.directhitmarketing.com | (303) 747-2603

subscribers would know what content to expect before opening, perhaps resulting in lower unsubscribe rates).

As another example, you may want to try sending your re-engagement campaigns from the name of your CEO, rather than your brand name, and craft the e-mail as a personal message to the subscriber, rather than a generic e-mail blast. This may result in more people staying engaged with your list over the long run. These are all tests worth running.

4. Send Times

Day parting and scheduling can have a profound impact on your open rates. It's good practice to analyze where your users are from and then test accordingly – do they prefer to receive your e-mails at the weekend? In the morning, or in the evening? Are conversions higher on a Monday compared to a Friday? Test this with your audience. We and many of our clients have had the best success on Thursdays. We recommend avoiding the Tuesday AM deployment after a three-day holiday weekend.

Many e-mail service providers (ESPs) will allow you to send campaigns in the user's specific time zone, but if this is not possible you may want to consider segmenting your users along these lines.

Optimal send times are an essential e-mail marketing test worth revisiting even if you have previously tested this part of your e-mail marketing strategy, as there has been a recent trend shift in open rates across many markets with more people now working from home.

5. Delay Periods

You can also experiment with different delay periods between automated sequences to figure out if a longer delay leads to higher open rates and vice versa.

You may receive more sales if your auto responder sequence is sent out daily or weekly, rather than every other day. Or maybe you consistently see highest performance on a Saturday; so all of your important sales-based auto responders should therefore be sent on a Saturday.

6. Copy

The words you use in your campaigns can change the way people engage with your content and can make or break your click-through rate. Your copy should flow naturally from one line to the next and persuade the reader to take action.



2770 Arapahoe Road | Suite 132, PMB 233 | Lafayette, CO 80026
www.directhitmarketing.com | (303) 747-2603

Experiment with short vs. long copy, tone of voice, and the soft vs. hard sell approach. Try to apply different copy writing formulas to see what effect each one has on your conversion rate. Remember, each audience is different, and will respond to different copy writing styles.

7. Content Type

The type of content you send is also worth testing. Does featuring a single product lead to higher conversions than a list of ten products? Do your subscribers react better to promotional material, or material aimed at entertaining/educating them?

8. Headlines

While testing the subject line aims to increase your open rate, striking the right balance for the headline displayed at the top of your e-mail template is just as important. Test different variations of attention-grabbing headlines and try out personalization, along with bold statements, fonts and colors.

9. Primarily Text vs. Primarily Image

Test using text-centric vs image-centric content to give varying degrees of weight to your content; this can influence the conversion and engagement rates for your campaign.

Experiment with images and GIFs, as well as above-the-fold and below-the-fold placements for your graphical content. You can also test UX design elements in your nav bar, header and footer and monitor the results in your stats.

10. Resend the Same vs Resend a Different Message

The type of content you use also comes into play when deciding whether to resend the same message or send a different message to your subscriber file.

Many ESPs offer the ability to resend the same message to subscribers who didn't open it the first time around. In some cases, this will work well. In other cases, it might be best to craft a different message entirely – perhaps offer a better deal, or a different deal, rather than regurgitating the first deal that didn't strike a chord last time.

11. HTML E-mail vs Plain Text

One of the most overlooked e-mail marketing tests is HTML e-mail vs plain text, and the results can be surprising. While plain text e-mails are not as visually engaging as HTML, they are also less distracting, giving your content greater focus in the e-mail.

A popular choice for marketers is the hybrid e-mail approach. This format mimics plain



2770 Arapahoe Road | Suite 132, PMB 233 | Lafayette, CO 80026
www.directhitmarketing.com | (303) 747-2603

text but allows for more advanced tracking and analytics and gives you more control over the formatting.

Plain text e-mails may also result in better engagement in reactivation campaigns as they come across as more personal and less a piece of marketing.

If your HTML template isn't coded effectively, plain text e-mails may also result in higher e-mail deliverability rates, which could drastically improve campaign performance.

12. Segmentation

Segmentation offers a golden opportunity to send relevant and targeted content to your subscriber file. Testing how different segments of your list react to different campaigns can help you to make informed decisions about which content leads to the highest engagement.

We recommend coding your e-mail deployment file by logical segments so that each valid segment's performance may be measured. This will gauge how your offer resonates with each segment and help you improve your relevant messaging to each.

So, what are important segments to consider? Start with recency. This could be your 2022 attendees to your event, new members, new subscribers, last 90-day webinar attendees, or last 30-day buyers. Breaking out your e-mail deployment list by recency, buyer type, subscriber type or membership type is a great first step in understanding what segments drove clicks and your conversion rate.

13. Offers

Testing different offers helps to keep your message fresh in the minds of your readers and can boost your conversion rate. Testing special discounts and other incentives to convert is always worthwhile.

You can also try out different strategies such as urgency tactics and countdown timers and monitor the results on your engagement stats to see which ideas lead to the highest conversion rates.

14. CTAs (Call to Actions)

All other things being equal, your CTA can have a huge impact on clicks. Try using different styles of buttons, text, copy, size, and colors, along with first and second person.



2770 Arapahoe Road | Suite 132, PMB 233 | Lafayette, CO 80026
www.directhitmarketing.com | (303) 747-2603

Landing Pages

Yes, this is not an e-mail A/B test, but it is a worthy test. A/B test two different landing pages. Test landing page design, copy, and offers. It is important that the landing page reflect the same creative and writing style as the e-mail. It should be a seamless experience for the reader to move from the e-mail to the landing page. The same e-mail may see a 10% to 20% conversion lift on the winning landing page.

Originally Written by Rob Lagergren of Campaign Spike and now with Campaign Sidekick, along with some added advice and tradeshow specifics from Steve Juedes of Direct Hit Marketing.

Rob Lagergren is the Vice President of Marketing for Campaign Sidekick. He may be reached at rlagergren@campaignsidekick.com.

Steve Juedes is the President and Founder of Direct Hit Marketing. He may be reached at 303-747-2603 or e-mailed at stevej@directhitmarketing.com.

Check out our Tradeshow Data Analysis Services: directhitmarketing.com/data-analytics-solutions.

Just want to learn more about Direct Hit Marketing? See our website: directhitmarketing.com.