

A Whitepaper of Email Marketing Questions and Answers

Using Split Tests to Improve Email Results – Case Studies



Introduction

This document summarizes the questions that were asked during the session and offline in the recent Pinpointe webinar: "Email Marketing: Use Split Testing to Improve Email Response Rates – Case Studies". For this webinar, we analyzed several hundred million email responses and several thousand email campaigns. We then used this information to prepare several simplified, case study examples that easily demonstrate the results observed in our broader analysis. The resulting webinar includes a handful of easy to understand split tests and resulting 'Best Practice' recommendations that email marketers can use effectively to improve email response rates.

Q: WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CAN-SPAM ACT?

You can check the FTC website at: www.ftc.gov/spam

Or call toll-free: 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357)

Q: YOU USED THE TERMS B2B AND B2C - WHAT DO THESE MEAN?

"B2B" means 'Business to Business' - as in businesses communicating with other businesses, whereas "B2C" means 'Business to Consumer'.

Q: IN THE VARIOUS CASE STUDIES / EXAMPLES PRESENTED, HOW BIG ARE THE SAMPLE SIZES PRESENTED?

A: The sample sizes differed between case studies; however the number of emails included in each sample set ranged between 10,000 and 40,000 emails each. Overall, the results presented are consistent with aggregate results we have seen across several hundred million emails. Any 'surprises' were noted in our presentation.

Q: WHAT IS MULTI-PART VS. HTML-ONLY?

A: Multi-Part means that, when your email is sent, it is 'packaged' with both an HTML version - for email clients who prefer to open HTML emails, and a Text version, which will be opened on many PDAs, handhelds and where people have set their preferences to only read 'text' versions of email. Most emails are sent in Multi-Part format. Spammers on the other hand rarely take the time to create Multi-part versions and more often will send only HTML versions.

Q: HOW DO PEOPLE RESPOND TO ATTACHMENTS - HOW DO OPEN RATES WITH EMAILS USING ATTACHMENTS COMPARE WITH EMAILS NOT USING ATTACHMENTS?

A: We did not run this test. However, most spam systems will perform a virus scan on attachments, and many spam firewalls are set by default to quarantine attachments. You are usually better off to include a link to the document vs. an attachment. If you do opt for an attachment, stay away from large attachments; PDF documents seem to get through ok.

Q: WHAT ARE THE BEST DAYS TO SEND EMAILS?

A: Based on our data we consistently find the following:

- Business to Business (B2B) –Scheduling for delivery on Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday early morning are best. Peak open times are between 5 and 7am local time.
- For B2C recipients (specifically, when sending to a contact list with a high concentration of consumer addresses such as @yahoo.com, @aol.com etc), we find that peak open times are commonly Saturday morning, Saturday evening and Sunday evening.

However, as more and more companies focus on these times, you may find that you get very good responses by sending at different times - when overall email traffic is lower. The best bet is to test your campaign timing with *your* audience.

Q: WHAT CAUSES EMAILS TO BE REGISTERED AS HAVING BEEN OPENED MULTIPLE TIMES?

A: Some email clients will pre-fetch and preview an email. If image display is enabled, this can register as an open. When the user later clicks specifically on the email, this can register as a second open. The specific operation varies from Email client to client and the specific behaviour can be set through client-side options. Good emails can also register multiple opens from the same recipient if they are forwarded on to colleagues and then re-opened. For example, we have included references to funny YouTube videos in some emails and seen an average of up to 2 opens per email (ie total opens = 2x unique opens).

Q: IF AN EMAIL IS FORWARDED, CAN YOU STILL COLLECT OPEN AND LINK CLICK RESULTS?

A: If an email is simply forwarded, and the recipient opens and/or clicks on links, the open and click will be registered. There is presently not a method to track email opens for text emails; however Pinpointe *can* track link clicks even if the content is 100% text.

Q: HOW MANY LINES LONG SHOULD AN EMAIL BE LIMITED TO?

There is no set length, and it depends on the objective of the email. For example, a monthly update / newsletter format might be 1-2 pages. Be sure to put a list of topics at the beginning of the newsletter, so it is easy for the recipient to 'jump' to specific sections that may be of interest. A brief update, that is extending an offer to download a whitepaper or join an event, usually performs best if the email is short, to the point, and includes links to landing pages with additional information. Another common style is the 'educational, email blog's style. If you subscribe to 'The Motley Fool' for example, you've seen this. The writing style is personalized, 1 on 1 communication that typically covers a topic or two, and explains the topic in detail. This might be 2-4 pages long, and can include links to landing pages and external documents with additional supporting materials.

Q: DO YOU RECOMMEND COLLECTING SUBSCRIBERS' FIRST AND LAST NAMES DURING REGISTRATION, AND USING THEM?

A: Asking for a first and last name during a subscription process (when you are collecting names from a website subscription form, for example) may cause a nominal drop off in conversions. However, using the first and last names to personalize email correspondence will usually improve email response rates - easily offsetting the nominal drop-off in registration conversion.

Q: WHEN SENDING AN EMAIL IS IT BETTER TO USE A 'SEND FROM / REPLY TO' ADDRESS SUCH AS 'SALES@MYCOMPANY.COM' OR 'MY [NAME@MYCOMPANY.COM](#)'?

A: In most cases, for B2B companies, you will see better results by using a specific contact person (yourself for example) vs. a general address like 'support@' or 'sales@'. Keep in mind that your recipients take only a second or two to decide whether or not to open your email. If they do not recognize your company, they are likely to skip over the email. Also, general addresses are less personal, which reduces open rates.

Actual results. Based on analysis of campaigns across our system we have seen that using a specific personal name vs. a general email address can improve the net open rate by 15% - 35% (or more).

Q: WHAT QUALIFIES AS A CALL TO ACTION (CONTACT US, DOWNLOAD, ATTEND...) ?

A: A 'Call to Action' is your offer. For example, an offer a link to download a whitepaper, or registration to attend a Webinar, that is a call to action. A call to action might also be: " please call me at..." or "please email me at: ..." However we generally recommend using links within an email when possible because responses can then be directly and automatically tracked by Pinpointe.

Q: WHAT'S A "GOOD" OPEN RATE, AND A "GOOD" CLICK-THROUGH RATE?

A: There are so many factors that impact open rates that it is difficult to predict a 'good' vs. 'bad' open rate. It is more useful to look at your own open rates relative to other campaigns you are running to determine if one campaign is generally doing better / worse than others, based on net open rates and / or click through rates.

That said, assuming that you are following 'best practices' for the title, offer, content, send times, send frequency, list management etc, you might expect to see the following *unique* open rates:

Opt-in / managed list: 18% - 28% open rates are the current rates we see among Pinpointe's B2B customers. Customers who perform regular, rigorous testing and follow best practices will generally be at the upper end of the noted range. Some industries – including financial services, home mortgages, work-at-home business and some security products/services are on the lower range because ISPs see heavily amounts of spam traffic on these topics. Companies who do not follow 'best practices' and who may be less strict with their list management practices may see 10% - 12% unique open rates.

Q: HOW OFTEN SHOULD I SEND EMAIL CAMPAIGNS TO OUR CONTACTS, AND HOW DOES THIS VARY FROM B2B VS. B2C CONTACTS?

A: As a starting point, the best rule of thumb is to communicate with your database when you have something interesting, useful and relevant to say, so the frequency will depend on your audience and your business. From analyzing our customer data, here are some specific guidelines to consider:

- Our 'typical' B2B customers send to their database on average, 1-3 times per month.
- Our B2C customers tend to send more frequently: 2 – 8 times a month is the typical send frequency.
- Based on analysis of several hundred million emails and tens of thousands of email campaigns, we have seen that – if you stick to best practices and send targeted, useful information, the net response rate or 'engagement' rate improves overall if you send more frequently. Customers who send less frequently (less than 1x per month for example), see higher bounce rates, and experience *declining* open and click rates in subsequent campaigns.

Q: WHEN YOU USED PINPOINTE'S BEHAVIORAL TARGETING TO RE-SEND A NEWSLETTER THE FOLLOWING WEEK TO RECIPIENTS WHO HAD NOT OPENED THE EMAIL THE FIRST TIME, DID YOU CHANGE THE SUBJECT LINE?

A: For our test – to simplify the case study – no. However if you are re-sending to an audience, in practice it would be best to modify the subject and/or intro (perhaps with 'Reminder...' or similar).

Q: WHEN USING BEHAVIORAL TARGETING TO RE-SEND EMAIL CAMPAIGNS, DO YOU SEE AN INCREASE IN PEOPLE WHO UNSUBSCRIBE WHEN YOU RESEND?

There are two ways to answer this. First, when a campaign is resent and new, incremental people open (and read) the email, you will also see additional people unsubscribe.

However when you compare the % of people who opened and unsubscribed for the first send, vs. the % of people who opened and unsubscribed the second time, the unsubscribe rate is generally the same to very slightly higher.

Q: HOW MANY LINKS CAN I USE IN MY EMAIL? WILL TOO MANY LINKS REDUCE MY RESPONSE RATES?

A: Based on analysis of our B2B customer data, adding more links will almost always improve response rates. Key points to consider:

- Try to include a link within your initial opening paragraph (Read More.. for example). This can increase overall click rates by 12-15% and is virtually always the top-clicked link of a campaign.
- Do you know where the second best performing link is? In the 'P.S. or Footer section! Don't be afraid to 'advertise' or promote below your signature.
- Work more links into your campaigns. Our analysis shows that campaigns with more links produced higher total click response rates while *not* increasing the unsubscribe rate. 15-20 links in a campaign is not unreasonable.

Q: WHEN DOING A SPLIT TEST, HOW MANY EMAILS SHOULD I HAVE FOR EACH VARIATION IN ORDER TO HAVE MEANINGFUL DATA?

A: Shoot for the *greater* of the following:

- A test that will result in at least 100 data points per variation. For example if you typically see a 2% click rate and are comparing click rates, then each variation should be sent to at least $100 / 2\% = 5,000$. If you have 4 variations, then you should send to at least 20,000 total contacts for meaningful results.
- Or, if you have a large list and are following best practices and varying only one item per variation, your total sample size should be 10% - 15% of the total contacts in the list.

Q: I HAVE AN EMAIL CAMPAIGN AND I WANT TO TEST TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHANGES. HOW MANY CHANGES CAN I INCLUDE IN EACH VARIATION?

A: For basic split testing you should limit each variation to a single change. Otherwise, if you make multiple changes between variations, you will not be able to determine *which change* caused the different in response rates.

Pinpointe Questions

Q: WHEN USING PINPOINTE'S ON-DEMAND EMAIL MARKETING SERVICE, CAN WE ATTACH A .PDF FILE TO THE OUTBOUND EMAILS DURING THE CAMPAIGN?

A: Yes. However, we recommend that you host the .pdf and link to it in the body of your email. Most spam filters will automatically quarantine any attachments, including .pdfs. Therefore your pdf will not reach your recipients. Pinpointe includes unlimited storage for document and image hosting.

Q: ARE ANALYTICS AND E-MAIL DEPLOYMENT HELP, REPORTS AND E-MAIL EFFECTIVENESS METRICS INCLUDED IN THE MONTHLY PRICING PACKAGES FOR PINPOINTE'S EMAIL SERVICES?

A: yes, advanced reporting, help and effectiveness metrics are all standard features. If you would like to learn more, or to schedule a live 1 on 1 demonstration of Pinpointe, please contact us at: 408-834-7577, Option #2 (Sales); sales@pinpointe.com or cstouffer@pinpointe.com.

Q: WHAT SETS PINPOINTE APART FROM LOW END SOLUTIONS LIKE CONSTANT CONTACT?

A: Pinpointe offers the following advanced features and services:

- Pinpointe services B2B customers, so we are one of the only email vendors that permits the use of purchased lists from qualified database vendors like NetProspex. Constant Contact and others have Terms of Use policies that forbid using purchased lists, and standard policy is to disable your account without refund.
- **Pinpointe Professional** edition is a powerful full-featured email system with WYSIWYG editor, spam checker, email previewer and more.
- **Pinpointe Enterprise** edition is for larger enterprises who need 5 ~ 250 users (seats) and send 300,000 emails – 10M+ emails /month.
- Pinpointe transparently integrates with Google Analytics, so all of your campaigns can be tracked, monitored and analyzed within Google analytics.

Q: WHAT IS PINPOINTE'S PRICING?

Pinpointe's pricing is based on the number of emails sent per month. We offer some of the industry's most competitive pricing. There are no contracts, up front fees or long term commitments.

For the latest pricing please check www.pinpointe.com/get-started.

About Pinpointe

Pinpointe is a leading provider of on-demand email marketing automation software based in the heart of Silicon Valley, California. As former High Tech B2B marketers, we've been in your shoes. Our team has a passion for helping B2B marketing professionals communicate with existing customers, and target new prospects through behavioral targeting, improved segmentation and message personalization.

Other Resources

If you're a Business to Business marketer and are want to stay on top of the latest marketing trends, tips and best practices, then please sign up for our twice-a-month Tips 'n Tricks notes. Once or twice a month we'll send you a briefing with tips and tricks. We'll also include a link so you can op-out or update your preferences, any time.

Pinpointe Site: www.pinpointe.com

Pinpointe support Blog: www.pinpointe.com/blog

Contacting Pinpointe

Pinpointe sales and support are available from 8am to 8pm PST, M-F. We can be reached at:

(800) 557-6584 or (408) 834-7577, Option #2

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Sales: sales@pinpointe.com

Twitter (Daily Tips): @Pinpointe (www.twitter.com/pinpointe)

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