

Best Practices in Email Marketing

# The Right-Time Email Marketing Playbook

Evolve Your Programs to Boost Subscriber Engagement and Customer Retention

PUBLISHED BY

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## INTRODUCTION

According to an April 2011 Gartner report, event-triggered marketing will enable businesses to generate response rates that are 600 percent higher than traditional outbound campaigns<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Forrester Research found that highly segmented email marketing programs generate between 2 and 5X the performance of non-segmented programs<sup>2</sup>.

While you might be tempted to discount these findings as overly optimistic, the data is consistent with program improvements that many StrongMail clients have achieved by implementing right-time email marketing. For example, Travelocity's automatically triggered Low Fare Alert generates click-through rates that are 300 percent higher than their average outbound programs.

There is no question that delivering a relevant message or offer at exactly the right time will boost conversions. However, many email marketers still consider the concept of right-time messaging unattainable. Like the much sought after "360-degree view of the customer," it's easy to think of right-time email marketing as more of a pipe dream than a near-term strategy. Fortunately, with the right strategy and technology, email marketers are now taking advantage of triggered and transactional emails to make right-time email marketing a reality and, as this whitepaper will demonstrate, seeing huge returns.

*"Event-triggered marketing techniques that make right-time messaging possible will enable businesses to generate response rates that are 6X higher than traditional outbound campaigns."*

**Gartner**, "Top Seven CRM Marketing Processes for 2011," April 2011

## OVERCOMING ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES WITH RIGHT-TIME EMAIL MARKETING

Recent changes in the email marketing industry make it more important than ever that brands consider a right-time email marketing strategy. As consumers discover new and exciting ways to engage with brands online, it has become increasingly difficult for email marketers to sustain high levels of subscriber engagement. "Engagement" in the email channel can be described in a number of ways, but an engaged subscriber is most commonly defined as "an email recipient who has opened, clicked, or otherwise engaged with an email within the past six months." When this definition is applied against industry benchmarks, even marketers with the most effective email programs will find approximately 70% of their list disengaged at any given time, and these numbers are projected to start eroding even further over the next several years.

As the email marketing industry continues to evolve, it is becoming more and more clear that untargeted promotional email is simply not capable of sustaining the conversion and revenue numbers email marketers have come to rely on to drive revenue and customer engagement. Following are several reasons why:

<sup>1</sup> Gartner, "Top Seven CRM Marketing Processes for 2011," April 2011

<sup>2</sup> Forrester Research, ROI of Relevance, September 2009

*Brands should begin to move away from defined marketing calendars and campaign schedules and create a mix of communications that are behavioral in nature.*

**Engagement Filtering** – Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo and AOL have all begun to look at engagement metrics to determine how to categorize incoming email. For example, Gmail's Priority Inbox automatically sorts and prioritizes email messages based on the subscriber's previous interactions with messages sent from a particular domain. Sending relevant messages that prompt recipients to open, click, reply or forward are now critical for maintaining critical inbox real estate.

**Rise of Flash Sale and Daily Deal Sites** – Companies like Groupon, Living Social and HauteLook have set a new bar for offers delivered via the email channel. Consumers can now subscribe to one or more of these daily deal sites to receive highly discounted offers in everything from restaurants to blue jeans. The result is that consumers are much less influenced by free shipping or more traditional tactics. The stakes have been raised on everything from offers to subject lines, and this makes engagement even more of a problem.

**Eroding Trust** – The April 2011 Epsilon data breach was the largest of its kind, as it provided malicious hackers with email address and names of consumers on email lists from brands like Disney, Target and Marriott. The result of this data loss extends far beyond Epsilon and its clients. Email marketers in general are now faced with a loss of trust in the channel itself. It's inevitable that consumers will begin looking at communications with an increased suspicion and think twice before clicking on links within messages.

**Growth of Email Alternatives** – Perhaps the biggest single factor driving the need for increased automation in the email channel is the social web. With Facebook, Twitter, online corporate communities and the general blogosphere, consumers now have many alternatives to engage with a brand and build relationships. Add to this the growth in mobile applications, and email subscribers will only remain engaged in email if it is relevant and timely.

## **The Shift to Right-Time Email Marketing**

Email marketers need to respond to these trends by shifting the emphasis of their email marketing efforts from outbound, batch-and-blast email campaigns to triggered, right-time email marketing. This means more than delivering relevant content quickly – it is about delivering relevant content at a cadence that is driven by the subscriber, your brand community or environment.

Right-time email communications are driven by online activity, purchases, in-store behavior or environmental situations that are important to the brand and its subscribers. To put it simply, brands should begin to move away from defined marketing calendars and campaign schedules and create a mix of communications that are behavioral in nature. By embracing this mix of relevance and timing, marketers can make their email programs stand out within the inbox.

Right-time email marketing does require initial integration between email marketing and business systems, but once accomplished, marketers are empowered to be more efficient and effective with less effort. By connecting the email channel to eCRM, ecommerce, data warehouses, customer service infrastructure and other systems, marketers can set up powerful programs that are driven by real-time lifecycle events.

## RIGHT TIME VS. REAL TIME

Many marketers use "right time" and "real time" interchangeably. In reality, real-time messaging is a component of right-time messaging, and marketers should look at it this way. Simply delivering a message in real time (immediately following an action online or an event in the customer database) does not necessarily make it the "right time."

There are many applications in which real-time messaging is business critical. In the Travelocity Low Fare Alert mentioned earlier and shown below, being able to deliver airfare reduction notices immediately can mean the difference between booking a fare and losing a customer to a competitor.

Because an airline's airfare reductions are typically made available to online travel sites at roughly the same time, the ability for the site to immediately notify a customer when a route that they recently browsed has been reduced is paramount. Consumers typically sign up with multiple online travel sites to find the best fare, with little brand loyalty for the site that delivers it. As a result, the first company to deliver the lowered fare has the best chance to sell the fare. Any delay, and the consumer could wind up booking with a competing service.

*Many marketers use "right time" and "real time" interchangeably. In reality, real-time messaging is a component of right-time messaging, and marketers should look at it this way*

**travelocity** | LOW FARE ALERT

Georgann, still shopping for your flight? Hurry, because right now fares from Boise to Phoenix are 40%\* lower than the average round-trip ticket sold on Travelocity during the last 30 days.\*

**Boise (B0I) to Phoenix \$129+** [Book now >>](#)

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| Save up to 40%* on this flight!     |                          | <b>\$323+</b> ★★★★★                                  |
|                                     |                          | Book your <b>flight + hotel</b> together and save*** |
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[Add this to your FareWatcher Plus for price change updates >>](#)

*Delivering Travelocity's low fare alerts in real time is critical to program success.*

In contrast, many marketers consider right-time email marketing to be anything but immediate. As an example, Zappos relies on a number of right-time programs to drive their business and add value to the consumer experience. One good example of this approach is Zappos' cart abandonment email, which is shown below.

Using StrongMail's Transactional Email Platform, Zappos' program is triggered by a consumer filling a shopping cart but abandoning the cart or site prior to purchase. Zappos captures this data at a consumer level and schedules an abandonment email to be delivered at a set time in the future.

Zappos' program purposely puts in this time delay to allow the consumer to return and complete the transaction before a reminder notice is sent. In this case, Zappos considers right time to occur not at abandonment but after the cart has been abandoned for a pre-determined number of days of inactivity within the cart.

The Zappos program performance shows that the more thought put into defining the right time, the larger the payoff for the marketer. The Zappos abandonment email delivers a conversion rate that is 5X higher than any of their other promotional programs.

In the end, right-time marketing can mean different things to different brands or different communications, and it is critical that an organization's email platform is able to deliver the email at exactly the right time, whenever that might be.

*The Zappos cart abandonment email delivers a conversion rate that is 5X higher than any of their other promotional programs.*

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### Come See What Your Shopping Cart Has Been Up To!

Hello Ashley!

Have you met Dash the Dog? He keeps the Zappos.com site running smoothly so our customers can shop with ease! Dash has been looking after the Item you left in your shopping cart. While Dash doesn't mind watching your order, he wants you to know that your Item have been asking for you and would like for you to return.

If you'd like, you can [buy your Item now](#) and pay using PayPal, Visa, MasterCard, American Express, or Discover. Plus, we always have fast and free shipping, so you don't have to wait long for your order to arrive!

Since Dash has been known to chew on shoes and other items left unattended for too long, we suggest you come back and purchase your Item soon!

**Buy Now At Zappos.com!**

**Items In Your Zappos.com Shopping Cart:**

|   |   |                 |
|---|---|-----------------|
|  | <b>Joe's Jeans: Petite Provocateur in Brandy</b><br>SKU# 7637831<br>Size: 25<br>Color: Brandy<br>Width: Apparel | <b>\$167.00</b> |
|---|---|-----------------|

*The right time for Zappos' cart abandonment message isn't immediately after the triggered activity, but a set number of days afterward.*

## 4 STEPS TO RIGHT-TIME EMAIL MARKETING

While most marketers know that there is exceptional upside to implementing a right-time email marketing program, many put off implementing one because it can seem like a daunting project. For those ready to take the initiative and wield a competitive advantage, here are four key steps that will help you optimize and expedite the process.

### Step 1: Lay the Foundation for Automated Processes

Before you can engage in right-time email marketing, you first need to lay the foundation for enabling automated processes, and that begins with forming a cross-functional team led by Marketing and IT. Involving your IT department is essential in this first step of the process, as right-time email marketing is dependent on having real-time access to customer data – and that requires integration.

As data becomes the currency of relevance and customers demand real-time interaction with the brands they do business with, reliable systems and integration must be put in place to drive efficiency for the business and value for the customer. In addition to Marketing and IT, this cross-functional project team should include representatives from Customer Service, Data/Analytics and CRM. Ideally, the team should be co-chaired by the CMO and CIO.

Customers are interacting with your business daily, and an email marketer's ability to know and react to those interactions is fundamental to right-time marketing. If separate systems/teams/divisions within a company can trigger email communications to the same customers unknowingly, your business runs the risk of driving customers towards the spam button. In a less fatalistic sense, you certainly miss out on the opportunity to consolidate content and streamline the customer experience. Sit down with the project team and discuss opportunities to centralize customer data sources within your business. In most cases the data is already there; you just need access to it.

The Zappos program featured on the next page highlights the value of accessing data from multiple systems and thinking in a right-time mindset. Zappos does not place back-orders; if an item is not available for purchase, the consumer is given the opportunity to request an in-stock notification email. Essentially, the consumer opts in for a new email communication from the brand, and that email is triggered by internal systems once that item is in-stock. This requires a level of integration between email, subscription management and inventory management technologies. The effort put into this right-time communication is well worth it. Not only is this program 100% dynamic, the program is the highest performing email for Zappos, outperforming any other promotional or transactional email by a factor of 15.

*Zappos' triggered in-stock notification email is outperforming other promotional and transactional email by a factor of 15.*

StrongMail personalizes and delivers the email in real-time.

Stock item is pulled from Zappos' inventory management system.

Brand preferences are stored in Zappos' subscription management system.

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Shoes | Clothing | Bags And Handbags | New Arrivals | Clearance | Brands | More Departments

### You Wanted It...Now Zappos.com Has It!

Hello Ashley!

Guess what?! The item you requested is back in the warehouse, so get it while the getting's good! PS - This is a one-time notification that you requested from Zappos.com! We'll only send you emails when you ask for them! We're cool like that!



**Nine West: Getby**  
SKU# 7604067  
Size: 6.5  
Color: Black Leather  
Width: M

**Interested? Click Here to Buy!**

Here's the deal:

1. A lot of people get these emails.
2. Maple syrup should be its own food group.
3. If the product sells out before you buy it,
4. then you can sign up to be notified again.
5. Music is a nice way to end the day.

[View Entire Collection](#)

Thanks for visiting us!

With Love,  
Your Customer Loyalty Team at Zappos.com

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**Contact Our Zappos.com Customer Loyalty Team:**  
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Safe Shopping Guarantee - Shop With Confidence  
Secure Shopping - Protecting Your Personal Information  
Our Privacy Policy

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Zappos has completely automated its in-stock notification email, resulting in conversion rates that are 15X higher than any other program.

*As brands move away from batch campaigns, marketing will need to make up for these customer touch points via right-time messaging in other email communications.*

Getting IT involved at the onset of the move to right-time marketing is also critical because successful programs require centralized control of ALL outbound email communications. Regardless of the originating system, marketing needs to own the experience. As brands move away from batch campaigns, marketing will need to make up for these customer touch points via right-time messaging in other email communications. To date, marketing has done a great job at owning "campaign-centric" communication; however, they have not extended their influence into the operational messaging that exists in the call center, e-commerce or other areas of the business. This is because these communication streams tend to fall to operations and the CIO.

By ensuring commitment and collaboration between Marketing and IT, you can create the initial integrations that need to happen. And once they are created, it's a largely a set-it and forget-it type scenario. An effective email marketing system leveraging these integrations will then give marketers control and freedom to be creative and autonomous. Email marketing systems with a drag-and-drop UI are essential to achieving this autonomy, as they enable marketers to design and automate right-time email marketing programs that are triggered off any number of consumer actions or attributes.

### Right-Time Email Marketing System and Integration Checklist

Here are the five steps that marketing and IT need to collaborate on at the outset of a right-time email marketing program.

**Identify** – In concert with IT, marketing users should identify where the data they need comes from. Are you currently accessing it from the source system, or are you accessing a copy of the data from the source system? If the latter, is there any difference in the data between the source and the copy? This step will not only help you locate and identify the data you use today, but it will also help you find new data and target the silos that need to be broken down later in the process. This information is also critical for steps later in the right-time process.

**Audit** – Now that you know where your data lives, you need to determine two things: the accuracy of the data and if the same data lives in multiple places. The first step is crucial, as the success of personalization, dynamic content, and relevancy of your program is a direct result of the accuracy of your data. The second step is closely related to the first in that if data resides in more than one location in your organization, there is a good chance that you will have the additional task of determining if it matches up exactly, and, if not, what data represents the real version of the truth. Again, marketing with bad data is risky, but automating programs leveraging bad data is even worse.

**Centralize** – Now that you know where your data resides, and that it is accurate and marketable, you need to make it actionable. While centralizing all data in the organization is optimal, it can often times be expensive and time consuming. An alternative is to work with your IT organization to get all of the data that you need from all of the disparate data sources that you have identified and have it placed into a central marketing database. This can be accomplished through any number of ETL (Extract, Transform, and Load) applications.

*Once IT has been engaged to create the technology backbone for enabling right-time messaging, email marketers should move onto a three-step strategy for defining engagement at a brand level and building a strategy that is inclusive of all critical customer touch points.*

**Validate** – Now that you have accurate, marketable and actionable data, you might think you are ready to send those emails. Not quite yet. As a last sanity check, it is always a good idea to validate the data that you will be marketing with against the source systems to ensure accuracy. If you previously ran marketing campaigns using data from other sources and you are now using the new data source, it is advisable to run the existing programs in parallel to ensure that the count of eligible recipients matches that of your old data sources. If the counts are off significantly, you will want to investigate. If the counts and data match, you are ready to go.

**Integrate** – The final step in the process is integration. If you have an existing CRM or multi-channel campaign management system, you will want to ensure that it has access to this new data source, as it will be driving the majority of your automated messaging. Alternatively, if you leverage your ESP for campaign management, you will need to work with them to determine the integration required to move this data in a programmatic fashion so that it is available for your automated messaging programs. Integrating with APIs, automated file transfers, and security evaluations on the integration will be something that your IT group will want to be involved with in your collaborative efforts.

## **Step 2: Define the Customer Lifecycle Across Media and Understand Engagement**

Once IT has been engaged to create the technology backbone for enabling right-time messaging, email marketers should move onto a three-step strategy for defining engagement at a brand level and building a strategy that is inclusive of all critical customer touch points. First, engagement must be defined in the context of a brand's unique customer experience by identifying and mapping customer touch points during the customer lifecycle. Second, a contact strategy needs to be developed to maximize the value of each touch point. Third, marketers should be prepared to leverage their centralized view of customer data in a right-time manner. These three steps are outlined in more detail in the sections that follow.

### **Defining Engagement**

For many brands, engagement is defined as anyone who opened or interacted with an email in the past six months. This view is too channel-centric, as consumers do not see brand experiences this way. Engagement must be defined based on in-store activity, browser-based behaviors, online shopping, community involvement, social posts, loyalty program participation, and/or any combination of these metrics that makes sense for your business. A consumer takes every interaction, across channel, into account when mentally building loyalty with a brand. Marketers must adhere to this same measure of engagement.

To define engagement, email marketers should create a detailed list of cross-channel opportunities for a consumer to engage with a brand. Once the list of touch points is created, they should be "mapped" to relevant communications.

Marketers need to identify the following types of touch points:

1. Touch points initiated by the consumer that result in a communication or conversation
2. Touch points initiated by the brand that result in a communication or conversation
3. Touch points initiated by the consumer that trigger no communication or conversation
4. Touch points initiated by the industry
5. Touch points initiated by the community

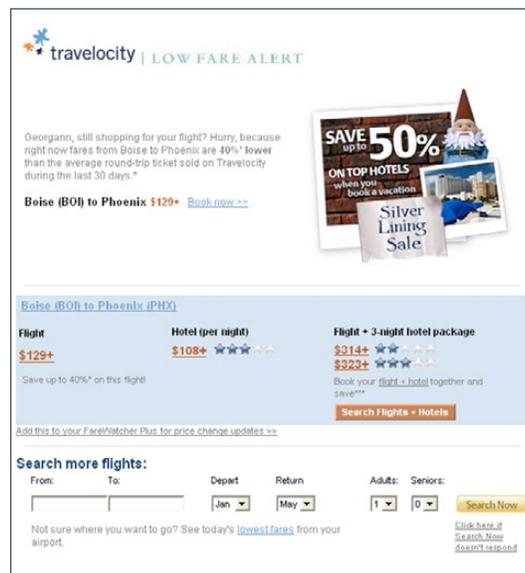
These critical touch points are further explained in the following sections.

### Consumer-Initiated Touch Points

A great example of a consumer-initiated communication is the Travelocity Low Fare Alert email program mentioned earlier and shown below. The brand leverages web analytics technology to capture flight searches from consumers on the web. Leveraging cookies and other capabilities, Travelocity is able to identify when an email subscriber is shopping for a specific fare. For example, from Boise to Phoenix. Travelocity keeps track of the customer specific searches and automatically monitors fares for this origin and destination fare for a material decrease. They can also configure what level of fare reduction triggers the low fare alert (20%, 30%, etc.) Once that discount threshold is reached, an email is triggered alerting the consumer of the decrease in price and providing links to book the travel.

While this program represents only a fraction of Travelocity's overall volume, it is responsible for a large number of conversions in the email channel – outperforming other conversion-goaled programs by three to four times.

*Travelocity's automatically triggered Low Fare Alert generates conversions that are 3 to 4X higher than other conversion-goaled programs.*



*While Travelocity's Low Fare Alert represents a fraction of overall revenue, it is responsible for a large number of conversions.*

*Perhaps the greatest opportunity for right-time email marketing is in response to trends and topics within the consumer community.*

### Brand-Initiated Touch Points

Touch points initiated by a brand are the most obvious and familiar to email marketers. These communications consist of traditional promotional and batch-and-blast email marketing campaigns. While consumers typically provide some level of data for informing brands of the kind of messages they want to receive, brand-initiated communications are still being delivered via a communication schedule set by the company.

### Industry-Initiated Touch Points

Most brands are experts in the industry in which they operate. From Financial Services to Retail, brands likely have unique insights into their markets and products. This insight can be very valuable to consumers and subscribers alike and can introduce right-time communication opportunities.

Consider a retailer that specializes in sporting goods. It is likely that the retailer maintains relationships with experts in football, tennis, golf, etc. These experts have knowledge that subscribers can benefit from. They understand how changes in the games that they manufacture equipment for will impact play and eventually the products that consumers purchase. Brands must find ways to tap into this knowledge base and share it with consumers in real time. The result is increased trust in the brand and increased engagement with the email program.

The same holds true for almost any industry. Financial Services, Consumer Packaged Goods, etc. – all have the ability to facilitate a conversation and share information that few subscribers would have access to on their own. Consider these content sources and how they fit into a customer lifecycle to add content and communication opportunities to right-time email programs. The challenge with industry initiated right-time communications is identifying content providers and giving them an incentive to participate in your initiatives. Remember, these experts live within your company and its partners; offer them an outlet and recognition for their insight, and they might just jump at the chance to participate.

### Community-Initiated Touch Points

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for right-time email marketing is in response to trends and topics within the consumer community. The social web has introduced an almost endless source of information from an equally endless number of content creators. From traditional news outlets and amateur bloggers to individuals with large Facebook and Twitter networks, information flows fast and free across the social web and around the world. Right-time marketing requires that a brand track topics and trends in real time and that it be the first to inform and engage audiences around topics as they build groundswell within the community.

One interesting Travel & Hospitality example comes from popular marketing strategist David Meerman Scott<sup>3</sup>. The Wynn Resort in Las Vegas picked up on news that Paris Hilton had been arrested for cocaine possession. In response to this real-time event, which was being followed closely by the community of guests that the Wynn caters to, the resort announced that they would ban Ms. Hilton from the hotel. The result was coverage in over 5,000 articles. Imagine an email campaign that leverages this air cover. The brand can explain to their subscribers why they banned Ms. Hilton and in the same message offer available inventory and tips on how to enjoy the Wynn just like the 'jet set' does, only legally. Open rates and corresponding engagement would increase significantly and booking would no doubt follow.

The challenge with community-initiated engagement is two-fold. First, your brand needs the tools that will allow it to listen to the social web and identify topics and trends as they emerge within your community. All brands have subscribers with common interests and passions; use social listening technologies and data analytics tools to identify that passion. Second, once trends are identified, marketers need tools that quickly allow them to be part of the conversation. Look for tools that enable the creation, execution and tracking of social and email programs in tandem.

Regardless of how it is initiated – from the subscriber, from the industry or from within the community – brands must understand the triggers for right-time email marketing and begin to transition from traditional batch-and-blast strategies immediately. Waiting will result in lost subscribers, revenue and overall brand equity.

### **Step 3: Develop Right Time Contact Strategy – Migration First, New Programs Second**

Once a cross-functional team is defined, the systems backbone is developed and an engagement inventory has been created, the marketer can focus on opportunities to make current communications more “right time” (by moving onto the “backbone”) or to create new communications altogether.

Start by completing an Email Stream Analysis. It's no surprise that the most successful email marketers have a firm grasp on how their business uses email across the customer experience. The stream analysis is simple to complete. Completing the following five tasks below is more than enough to uncover some exciting right-time opportunities.

#### **5-Point Email Stream Analysis**

1. Identify all communication streams delivered to consumers or clients via email. This means everything from a purchase confirmation to customer service announcement.
2. Determine the data source for each stream of email, and more importantly, who owns it.
3. Determine the trigger of each communication, and classify the current state as automated or manual.
4. Determine the purpose of each communication. Is the message focused on customer support, brand marketing, ecommerce, etc.?
5. Determine the opportunity to enhance the customer experience in each stream. What elements of the program can be tweaked to optimize results?

*Regardless of how it is initiated, brands must understand the triggers for right-time email marketing and begin to transition from traditional batch-and-blast strategies immediately.*

<sup>3</sup>David Meerman Scott, MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Summit, January 2011

## Email Stream Analysis Case Studies

Now that you know what email your organization is sending, it's time to consider what email you're not. Consider the following example where StrongMail's Strategic Services team walked a client through their unique engagement inventory across channels. We started by looking at the recipients of promotional messages and then moved on to all other email messages ranging from visitors of the brand's online story and community all the way to the entire shopping cart process.

As a result of the analysis, we identified opportunities for communication that were not currently being leveraged that were right-time in nature, meaning that they were immediately relevant to the consumer's engagement. We then added these programs to the email stream analysis.

At InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), StrongMail helped the brand create a "Hurdle" program. IHG had determined there was an opportunity to create a right-time communication based on a guest's loyalty status and the loyalty point "hurdle" they needed to reach before achieving the next status level. The resultant program we helped them create is triggered by queries within the loyalty database that identify guests who are approaching the next level of status. Once the guests are identified, a message is deployed offering a point bonus for nights stayed.

*InterContinental Hotels Group is generating click-through rates of 37% on their triggered, right-time email campaigns.*

*InterContinental Hotels Group automatically sends members of its loyalty program bonus point offers when the extra points would result in the recipient achieving the next level of status.*

While a point bonus offer might on its own motivate a guest to purchase, this automated right-time offer is made much more effective by delivering it when the extra bonus points would actually cause an increase in status level. With the largest loyalty program in the world, IHG understands the nuances of right-time email marketing and practices it frequently. As a result, the click-through rates on their triggered email are 37%, compared to 19% for their batch campaigns.

| Response Rates for IHG US Brand Batch Email Newsletters |                  |                        |          |
|---|------------------|------------------------|----------|
| Inbox Delivery Rate                                     | Unique Open Rate | Unique Click-Thru Rate | CTO Rate |
| 95.8%   | 15.9%            | 3.1%                   | 19.1%    |

| Response Rates for IHG Dynamic Triggered Global Pre-Stay Emails |                  |                        |          |
|---|------------------|------------------------|----------|
| Inbox Delivery Rate   | Unique Open Rate | Unique Click-Thru Rate | CTO Rate |
| 95.6%   | 59.6%            | 22.3%                  | 37.3%    |

### Ranking Email Streams for Automation

Once a comprehensive view of current and potential email programs is available, marketers should “stack rank” each stream based on its automation opportunity, engagement impact and overall potential value to the consumer and brand. Start by placing the highest priority for current automated programs, followed by programs with high automation potential. Those with low automation potential are assigned the lowest priority. Next, review the list for those programs with the highest engagement potential and rank them higher based on the anticipated ROI and ease of implementation.

Ranking email streams by high or low automation potential isn't a difficult endeavor. In fact, it's as simple as reviewing your already completed email stream analysis. Start by looking at the third analysis point mentioned earlier where you identified the “triggering event for each stream.” Wherever the trigger event sits within or is tracked by an application (e-commerce, web analytics, CRM, data warehouse, etc.), the automation potential is HIGH. Whenever the triggering event sits outside a system and is controlled by a manual process (submission of newsletter content from authors, development of “one-off” email creative), the automation potential will be low.

While some of the more successful programs may take more effort, don't forget to also focus on the low hanging fruit, which are essentially those programs that are already automated but not necessarily optimized. Consider Benchmark Brands' purchase confirmation for its FootSmart brand. The message was already triggered, but the communication offered little value to the consumer or brand beyond confirmation of purchase. FootSmart used StrongMail to integrate email, web analytics and product recommendation into this email, and as a result, the brand was able to generate \$750,000 of annual, incremental revenue. This example showcases what's possible by optimizing just one, already triggered email stream. Imagine what's possible if an entire email strategy was built around right-time messaging.



FootSmart was able to generate \$750,000 in incremental revenue by implementing right-time messaging on just one email stream.

#### Step 4: Test and Optimize – 7 Tips for Implementing a Testing Program

The email marketer's job does not end after programs are in place. Even automated, right-time programs require ongoing management and optimization. Develop a test matrix for each program and then strictly adhere to a regular testing schedule. The methodology outlined below will help you create an effective testing program for your right-time messaging streams.

*Develop a test matrix for each right-time email marketing program and then strictly adhere to a regular testing schedule.*

1. **Ask a Question:** If I introduced an upsell call-to-action in a confirmation email, would it drive conversions?
2. **Form a Theory:** Based on industry experts, I theorize that we would see high click-through rates and conversions on such an offer.
3. **Determine KPI's and Establish a Baseline:** With current open and click-through rates on promotional email being 12 and 3 percent respectively, I expect a 2 to 3X increase.
4. **Create the Test:** Insert cross-sell offers to a defined segment of the email file. Create a statistically similar control group.
5. **Segment the List:** Identify active email subscribers and test to that segment only for both control and test segments. Testing innovative strategies on unengaged list members is counterproductive at the start of new initiatives.
6. **Measure & Analyze the Results:** Carefully review the results of the control and test segments to determine any significant uplift and the factors that drove it.
7. **Make Changes:** Use the results data to implement changes that can improve performance or mitigate unforeseen consequences.

Many brands already have extensive testing plans in place for promotional mailing, so the testing and optimizing phase of right-time messaging just extends this critical process to include all email communications.

#### CONCLUSION

New technologies and communication channels will continue to alter the email marketing landscape, which makes it incumbent on brands to respond with innovative email marketing strategies that preserve the high ROI that has become indicative of this valuable channel. While trends will come and go, one thing is clear: relevance is now table stakes and brands need to create communication strategies that are based on more than one-dimensional data attributes. Right-time messaging enables marketers to effectively leverage the customer data that they are already collecting throughout the organization and apply it a strategic way that significantly boost results.

By doing some initial work up front to provide marketers with access to this data, and the tools to effectively leverage it, brands can effectively transition into a real-time marketing organization. By following the guidance in this whitepaper, you can make the investment now that will pay significant dividends once your right-time programs are implemented. Broken down into steps, the process doesn't have to be overwhelming. And once it is set up, marketing is empowered to optimize the programs moving forward without IT involvement.

StrongMail has worked with brands mentioned in this whitepaper and others around the world to create sophisticated, right-time programs. We look forward to helping you make right-time messaging a reality for your organization.

## **ABOUT STRONGMAIL SYSTEMS, INC.**

StrongMail enables marketers to forge meaningful, profitable and long-lasting connections with their customers through email marketing and social media. Offering a comprehensive suite of technology and services, StrongMail takes a fundamentally different approach to traditional email service providers that offers many unique advantages to brands. StrongMail's dedicated online marketing solutions offer the lowest total cost of ownership of any enterprise email marketing solution and easily integrate with customer data sources to help marketers improve the performance of their email marketing campaigns. StrongMail's email and social CRM agency provides industry-leading strategic and creative services to help marketers listen, learn, engage and influence best customers. It's these differences that have led Fortune 2000 brands to switch to StrongMail.

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