

Turning Email Clicks into Results

Executive Summary

We're finally getting to get to grips with email marketing. Deliverability and data hygiene issues are being resolved, open and click-through rates are creeping up and we're seeing a healthy return on our modest investment. But how much better could our *conversion rates* be? Are we looking beyond email tracking at what happens "on the other side"?

Introduction

As email marketing has become more sophisticated marketers have come to realise that not all clicks are created equal. Some are more valuable than others and, chances are, that you are not being judged on your skill in getting people to click-through on links, but on getting people to buy something or share information or move nearer to purchase along the sales funnel. As the upstream elements start to get optimised and we are trying harder to squeeze every click out of a campaign, you may need to focus on a different area – the landing zone.

A Landing Zone in the world of email marketing is defined as: "Specific page(s) forming an integral part of an email marketing campaign which are designed to achieve a marketing outcome".

A landing zone is intended to maximise conversion rates, it is the element of the campaign where the recipient responds to the call to action, whether that's a white paper/case study/brochure download, registration for an event or simply data capture/cleanse. Landing zones are sometimes known as a microsite, which is specifically set up for a campaign, typically with its own campaign URL.

Do the Maths

Whatever your call to action might be... conversion rate improvements mean you can do more for less money.

Let's say that you need to rent some data to generate 100 qualified leads. At £100 per thousand you will need to spend £5,000 if you get a 10% click-through rate and only 2% convert. But what if you could improve that conversion rate to 3%...you can actually get the same leads for only £3,333. And as we now need to mail less data, we can probably get a slightly higher average click-through rate.

Volume Mailed	CTR	Total Clicks	Conv %	Leads	CPT	Total Cost	CPL	Index
50,000	10%	5,000	2%	100	£100	£5,000	£50	0
33,333	10%	3,333	3%	100	£100	£3,333	£33	33%
27,778	12%	3,333	3%	100	£100	£2,778	£28	44%

As the table above shows, by moving our conversion rate from 2 to 3% we have generated the same number of leads for £2,200 less at a 44% lower cost per lead.

Therefore, the smart way to generate more leads for less is to work on your campaign conversion rate.

Define your “successful outcomes”

The key to email marketing is focussing on what you want people to do and getting them to do it and that outcome probably lies beyond the email. Here are some actions that you may want your audience to do:

- Register to attend a seminar
- Download a WhitePaper or Podcast
- Fill in a survey or update a database profile
- Forward a message to a friend or colleague
- Ring a branch to book an appointment or take a test drive
- Print the email out and take it in-store or to a trade show.

Now we have a clear idea of what we want people to do, we need to create a landing zone that maximises the chances of it happening.

Following the scent of information

On-line we try and follow a path towards what we want using the visual clues we see. Web usability experts call this information “scent” and we should make sure that there is an easy-to-follow link between the email, the landing zone and what is required of the recipient next. Sadly, all too often marketers don’t recognise the need for this trail of scent and the landing zone does not convert people as well as it could.

There may be a perfectly good page already on your website that appears to fulfil most of the needs of a landing zone for your successful outcome. In reality this is not the case. You may have a “Take a Test Drive” or “Whitepapers to download” page and you can link people straight through to that. Agreed, this is better than dropping them off at your home page, but we can do more to fill these landing zones with the scent of conversion! Make the sequence of information easy for the visitor to sniff out!

Beef up your Persuasion Architecture

Don’t assume that clickers are going to be committed to making their way through the process. They may need to pick the kids up from school in 5 minutes, or are about to dive into a meeting so we need to compel people to do what we want. Assemble everything you know that works from direct mail, telemarketing scripts and face to face sales calls. What is the best way to position your pitch? What benefits do people get from this action? What is the relevance to them? Why should they do it now? What will be the dire consequences if they didn’t act on it now?

Sometimes our landing zones are passive, even apologetic, checkpoints people have to guide themselves through and many people will need convincing or re-assuring all the way. Critically review every stage of the process and decide what can be made more compelling. Repeat the email’s message to reinforce the conversion goal - matching the look and feel of the email will reassure the customer that they have arrived at the right place. It may accentuate the positives or it could introduce fear uncertainty and doubt if they choose not to take the action. Either way, you’ll need to spell out why they need to act...or don’t be surprised when 98% of them don’t. A landing zone experience that fulfils the message promised in the email builds trust with the recipient; mismatched messages damage your brand and make your audience less likely to click-through or even open the next email communication from you.

It is often the company's reputation and ongoing customer care that attracts and retains customers. Relevant and timely email communications and landing zones are an excellent means of maintaining a company's brand and reputation. This retention element is not as easy to measure as immediate sales, but certainly is a highly effective conversion influencer.

Segment your landing zones

Let's say we're selling marketing software to medium-sized businesses. We may have to win the hearts and minds of several types of decision-maker:

- Marketing professionals – is the software easy to use?
- IT professionals – is it easy to install and maintain?
- Board Members – are you a credible company?

If the desired response to these concerns is the chance to download a whitepaper or listen to an audio discussion about the issues then we could just point them all at a "Knowledge Section" page and let them find what they need. Or, for a more targeted (and successful) approach we could build 3 landing zones tuned to the motivations of each segment. We can now send the marketers to a dedicated page filled with lots of benefits and positive information/sales points that meet their specific demands, and do the same for the 2 other segments.

We could even make the landing zones more relevant based on anything known about the clicker:

- Copy and/or images relating to their industry sector
- Information about existing clients in their geographic region

The presence of little touches will re-assure the clicker that they have come to the right place and that all their needs are being addressed. Pages will hold more of the right scent of information and be more likely to convert, but there's even more we can do...

Personalised landing zones – reduce the number of clicks to achieve a successful outcome

It's likely that you will have some contact information beyond simply an email address – you will know the name, company address and business sector of your target audience. Since we have been using personalisation to drive up response rates off-line for decades, why are we so slow in doing the same on web pages and landing zones?

If we could reduce the barriers to outcomes – just reducing the number of clicks needed to download a whitepaper would be a great start – then we will be more successful at converting clickers. Once they click-through you can assume that the clicker is the person that was sent the initial email and pre-fill any download/data cleanse/registration form with all the information you hold. Ask them to confirm the information is right and in one more click they have achieved your successful outcome!

Testing – always test

The final thing we can do with landing zones is test to find the optimum combination of copy, images and calls to action. Run an A/B test so that you serve 2 different landing zones to a small percentage of your audience. By comparing results you will be able to see what elements influence conversion. Pay particular attention to the first few lines of copy and call to action. Better still, use dynamic content to personalise the landing zone to an individual level until a “winning combination” is found and use your email marketing software to optimise future campaigns.

Conclusion

So the smart email marketers are now looking beyond the email message and are working hard on what generates the best conversion rates. It takes us into new territory (web analytics, usability, page optimisation), but these are the areas where the really big wins are being gained.