

3 steps to building a social email program

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Highlights:

- Social email is a low-cost, high-speed shuttle that can directly transport customers between social sites and your store
- The key to social email campaigns is a two-way information exchange between your email marketing database and your social sites
- An important way to collect data to power your social email efforts is to place sign-up widgets directly on your company's social network page

Most marketers understand that their marketing will achieve the best results when messages and offers are targeted to customer interests. And some marketers (although still, unfortunately, not enough) regularly include some level of customer preference or activity targeting as part of their overall program strategy.

Typically, targeting data is collected from web forms and preference centers, or by monitoring subscriber website engagement and purchasing activity. Today, however, with the rapid adoption of social networking across a wide range of consumer demographics, social sites offer marketers rich new sources of customer preference and activity data.

Brands tend to use social media in two ways:

1. By creating a social presence on networking sites to communicate with consumers.
2. By monitoring what's being said about their brands online.

Both activities are important, but neither provides an easily repeatable and scalable way to turn a brand's social media marketing knowledge into targeted follow-up campaigns that drive a desired action.

Social email: The missing connection

When it comes to eliciting a specific desired action from consumers, targeted email tops the list of effective marketing tactics. In fact, I'll argue that email's ability to generate sales by driving customers to a brand's website or brick-and-mortar store has never been more important. Yes, the rise in popularity of social networking sites coupled with increased brand presence on those sites can build brand and product awareness. However, social sites also hold the potential to increase the distance between consumers and the cart. Enter "social email," a low-cost, high-speed shuttle that can directly transport customers between social sites and your store.

What is social email?

Social email is a term used to describe the combined use of social media data and email data to accomplish several key online marketing tasks. These tasks include:

- Increase email relevance
- Improve targeting effectiveness
- Enhance social media engagement
- Drive online sales

When used alone, email programs and social marketing campaigns will not likely achieve the results that are attainable with an effective social email program. Social email combines preference and activity data from both channels to provide a more comprehensive view of your customers that can be used to target like never before.

Here's how it's done

The key to social email campaigns is a two-way information exchange between your email marketing database and your social sites. Only a small number of email providers currently provide the ability to automatically collect, view, and act on data from both channels in a single user interface. Still, although the time and resource requirements will be greater, most marketing teams can conduct the following three steps by manually collecting data from multiple social media marketing solutions to combine with email marketing data -- this can be deployed through virtually any email tool.

Step one: Get more from social sharing

"Share to social" or "share with your network" functionality is today's rendition of the forward-to-a-friend capabilities that were popular in the early days of email marketing. Many email marketing or third-party vendors offer tools that make it easy for email recipients to share your email content with members of their social communities. It's a valuable way to increase exposure for your messages and your brand. However, when it comes to social email effectiveness, one of the greatest benefits of social sharing is the insight the data provides for marketers. Use your "share to social" data to identify which members of your email subscriber list are frequently sharing your content. Look for social sharing patterns that identify your top social influencers.

Step two: Use social sites for list acquisition

Another important way to collect data to power your social email efforts is to place sign-up widgets directly on your company's social network page. In addition to helping grow your subscriber list organically, you'll also be able to identify which networks your subscribers were engaged with when they demonstrated interest in your brand by joining your email program. Use this data to do two things:

1. Automatically deploy welcome campaigns that are personalized based on social acquisition channels.
2. Optimize your social media marketing activities based on the top social networks driving subscribers to your email programs.

Step three: Engage and target

If you've followed the steps above, you now know which of your existing email subscribers are most socially engaged with your brand, which social networks they're socializing your brand across, and which social sites new subscribers are using to directly engage with your brand. Armed with these three sets of data, you're in a position to conduct true social email campaigns. Your email marketing is targeted based on social engagement, and your social marketing is optimized to the preferences and activities of your most socially valuable email subscribers.

Every brand's email subscribers and social influencers may be different, so the messages and offers you deploy through your social email program will need to be developed with that in mind. However, when you look at email and social data collectively, you create a few clear-cut paths in what once may have seemed to be an uncharted forest.

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