

BENCHMARK REPORT

2012 Email Marketing

Research and insights for
engaging email subscribers

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2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report

Research and insights for engaging email subscribers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS FOR ENGAGING EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

As email marketing continues to mature, and digital communications expand, organizations need to become even more strategic in email campaign implementation, to deliver value on subscriber's terms. To accomplish this goal, email marketers must exceed the rising expectations of email subscribers and ISPs. Subscribers demand organizations speak to their unique interests and communication preferences.

Because of overcrowded inboxes, consumers also seek new, more efficient tools with which to review emails. Webmail clients are responding to this need by implementing engagement metrics to determine both access and placement inside a subscriber's inbox.

In this "it's all about me" consumer climate, engaging content is crucial to a brand's success. Last year's benchmark report indicated that email marketers know this as they reported creating relevant content indicated as their number one challenge.

In the *2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report*, we will examine the barriers that exist in preventing subscriber engagement and the best practices to increase the accuracy and velocity of email communications.

Benchmark Reports

MarketingSherpa Benchmark Reports provide marketing executives and practitioners the comprehensive research data and insights needed to compare an organization's practices and performance against industry benchmarks, and guide strategic decisions and tactical planning.

The information and collective wisdom of 2,735 email marketers

For the ninth consecutive year, MarketingSherpa has conducted one of the most extensive studies in the industry, to help email marketers make better decisions based on their fellow marketers' insights and data. More than 2,700 email marketers shared their valuable knowledge and experience of what is working (and what's not) in email marketing today. This comprehensive report enables you to benchmark your organization's practices against the industry and gives you a starting point to begin to optimize your team's email marketing performance.

Benchmark data from multiple viewpoints, organized for quick reference

The *2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report* is an all-inclusive reference guide, containing more than 170 charts with analytical commentary, hundreds of informative insights from your peers, several abridged case studies of real-life social marketing success stories, and more. To help you quickly locate the information most relevant to *your* team's situation, we have segmented data throughout this report by:

- Average of all respondents
- Primary sales channel
- Key industry sectors
- Organization size
- Phases of email marketing process maturity

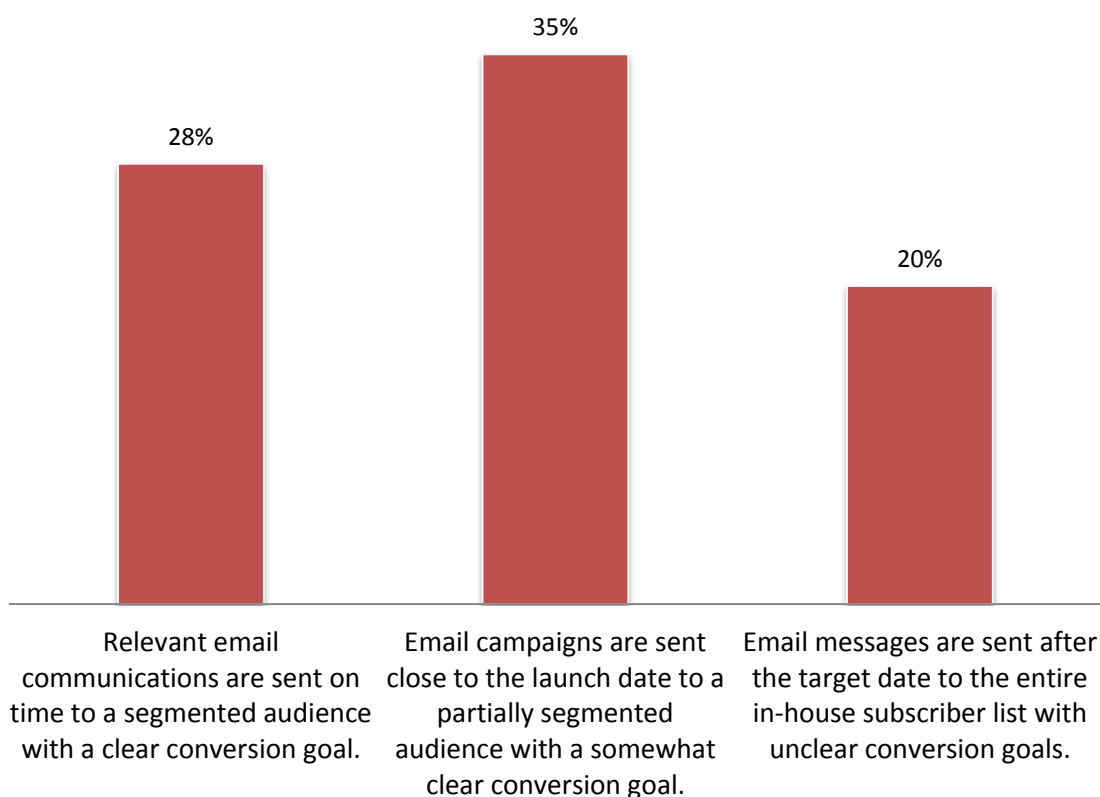
KEY FINDING: CHALLENGING FOR EMAIL MARKETERS TO SEND RELEVANT MESSAGES

To understand the current state of email communications, we asked survey participants to indicate how their organizations were sending email communications, based on four key areas: relevant content, sending time, segmentation of subscribers and the clarity of the conversion goal in the email.

This chart highlights the good news that almost one-third of respondents were sending relevant email communications, sent on time to a segmented audience with a clear conversion goal. However, the other two-thirds of marketers were broadcasting less relevant emails.

Chart: One-fifth of marketers send emails late without clear purpose

Q. Please select the statement that best describes the current state in which your organization executes and sends relevant email communications.



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded July 2011, N=2,735

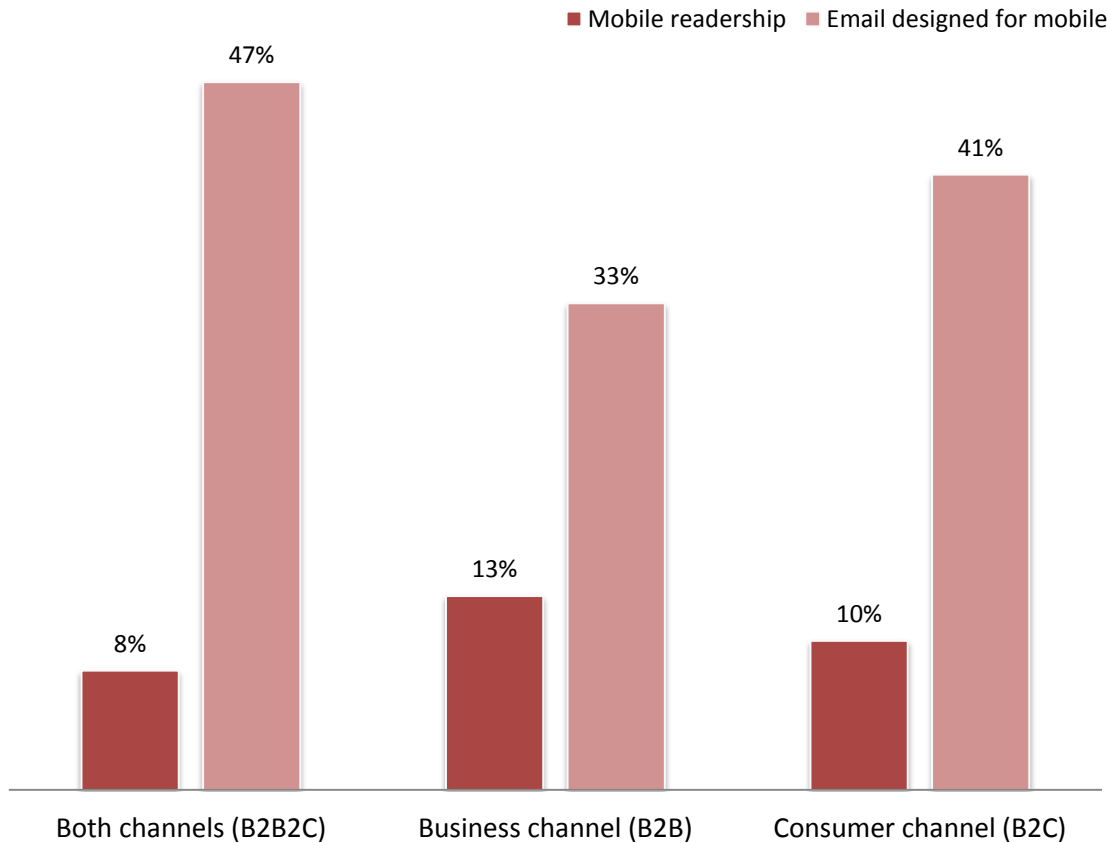
This chart is not surprising, considering the complexity of sending relevant communications, not to mention the time and resource constraints of email marketers. To overcome these challenges and meet the expectations of *your* customers, a predictable process to manufacture and deliver messages must be in place. In this report, we analyze the strategies and tactics of top performing, high-maturity organizations, so *you* can learn from their success and apply proven tactics to increase the accuracy and speed of your campaigns.

KEY FINDING: MARKETERS RESPONDING QUICKLY TO SUBSCRIBERS VIEWING PREFERENCES

Marketers regularly look for revealing insights on how their customers make purchasing decisions. A customer's behavior can be tracked, documented and analyzed to uncover true intentions. In Chapter 5: Crafting Relevant Content, we look at a variety of methods to send relevant communications. These include the top tactics to create engaging content, the degree to which an organization can segment its database, and what percentage of emails are automated.

While segmenting an email list by purchasing behaviors, funnel stage and user declared preferences have proved successful. Marketers need to continue to listen and look for shifts in consumer lifestyles. Forty-nine percent of marketers in this survey said they could not segment their email lists based on viewer device habits. This is significant. In May 2011, Nielsen reported that 38 percent of mobile users own a smartphone, and 55 percent of all new phones purchased were smartphones. With the quick adoption of smartphones, there has been a shift in how people view emails – moving from traditional desktop PCs and laptops, to mobile phones and tablets. We found that on average, 11 percent of email messages are read on mobile devices. The good news is that the industry is moving closer to seeing the majority of firms design emails for mobile readership.

Chart: Marketers preparing for mass mobile readership



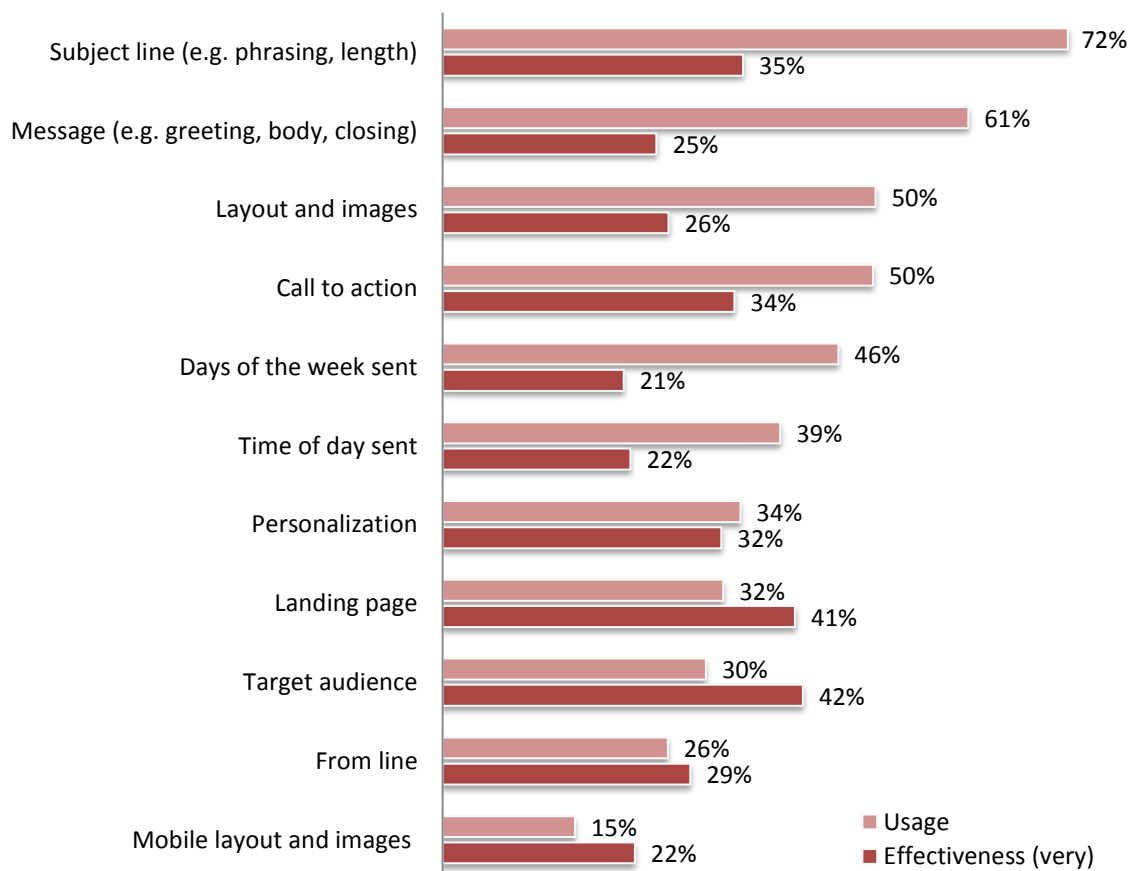
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded July 2011, N=2,735

KEY FINDING: LESS POPULAR EMAIL ELEMENTS TO TEST ARE FOUND TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE

Testing and optimization practices have proven to be extremely efficient means to increase email performance. Routinely running tests enables marketers to discover new approaches, initiatives and insights, leading to more effective communications. In fact, Chapter 9: Testing Drives Innovation is dedicated to email testing and optimization practices. In the chapter, we examine the amount of emails tested, and the allocation of budget and human resources dedicated to optimization.

One of the more interesting discoveries was that the most popular testing elements were not always the most effective. In the chart below two of the least tested elements, landing page and target audience, were found to be the most effective elements to test.

Chart: Landing pages found to be more effective elements to test than subject lines



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded July 2011, N=2,735

Additionally, we inspected the entire testing process, broken down into traditional steps, to learn upon which parts marketers can improve. We found an opportunity for organizations to glean more knowledge from their own research by focusing more on a few strategic areas of the testing cycle. Only 15 percent of respondents said they routinely brainstormed new testing ideas, or took the time to define key metrics. Likewise, only 17 percent of marketers routinely reviewed the results and decided on follow-up tests. These three steps are vital in the overall learning progression for an organization.

KEY FINDING: 67% OF ORGANIZATIONS PLAN ON INCREASING EMAIL BUDGET IN 2012

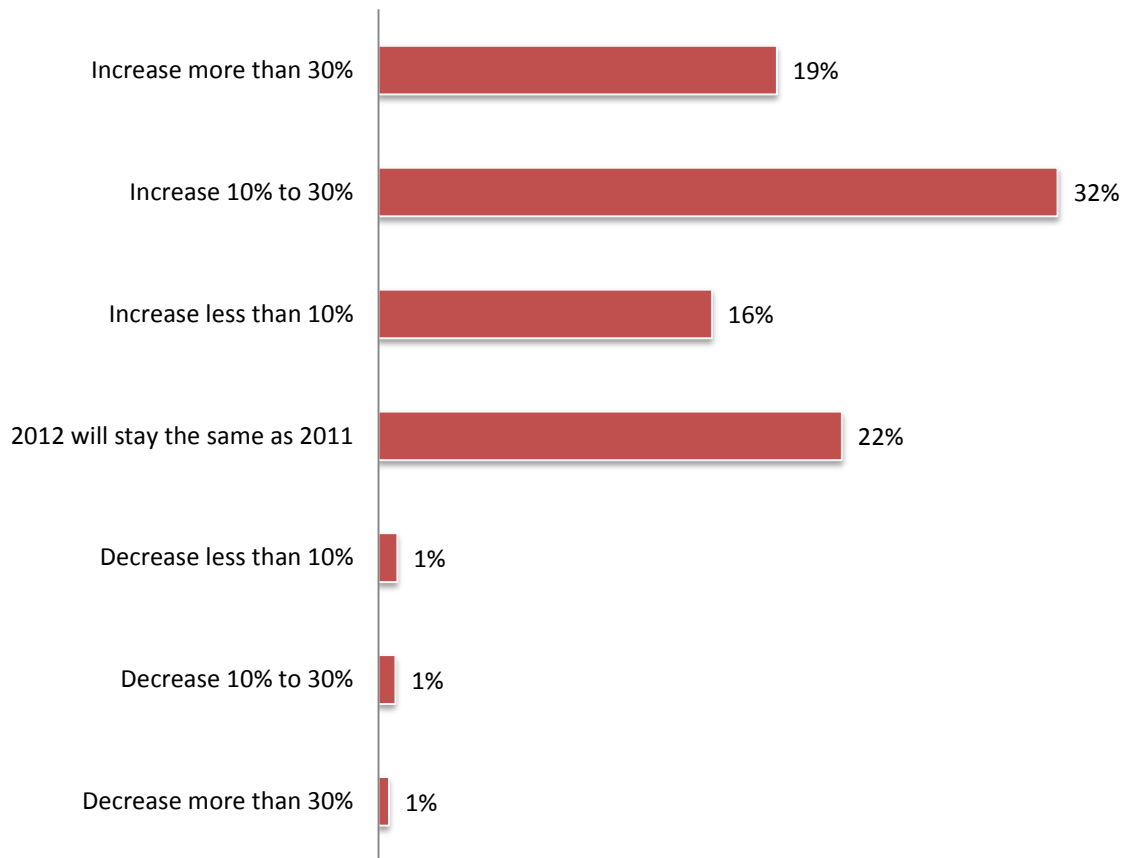
In Chapter 3 we investigate marketers' priorities, challenges and barriers to successful email processes. We learned that "growing and retaining subscribers" ranks as this year's top priority, narrowly edging out "delivering relevant content." Marketers reported that the greatest challenge is "integrating email data with other data systems," and greatest need for improvement is "using email for funnel optimization."

These challenges are intertwined in a firm's ability to send email messages that meet today's subscriber expectations. To keep subscribers, email marketers must be able to understand their individual situations, using all available data, and delivering relevant communications at each stage of the buying process.

While marketers may feel frustrated by these challenges – they report their biggest barrier to success is "inadequate staffing resources and expertise" – there is some positive news. We found that 67 percent of organizations expect to increase their email budgets in 2012. Hopefully, the increased budget will be spent wisely on addressing these challenges, and, in the case of one survey respondent, to focus on "Funnel optimization because we lack the content and resources to support it."

Chart: Nearly one-fifth of email marketing budgets set to increase more than 30%

Q. How much do you expect your organization's email marketing budget to change from 2011 to 2012?

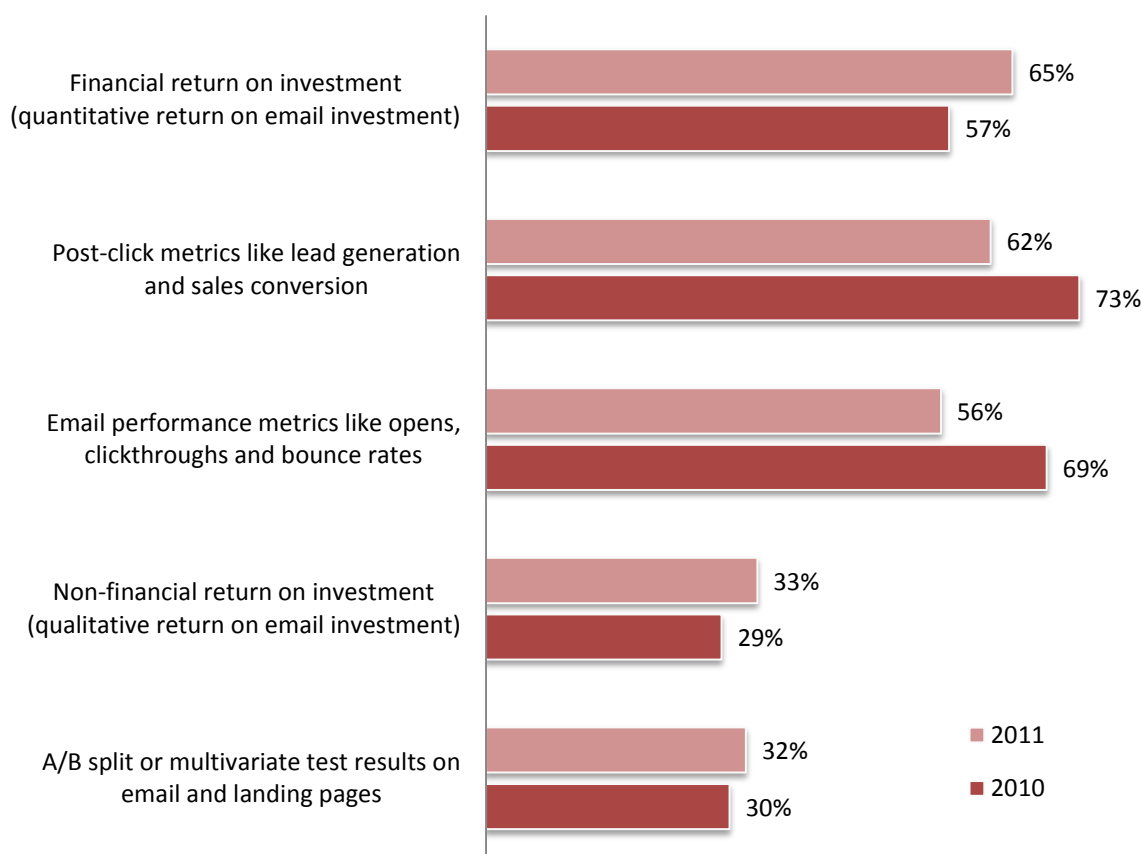


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded July 2011, N=2,735

KEY FINDING: FINANCIAL EXPECTATIONS RISE FOR EMAIL MARKETING PROGRAMS

These greater budgets will come with greater scrutiny and expectations from the C-suite. We found a shift in the factors CMOs use to determine the business value of an organization's email program. In the past, post-click conversion metrics and email open and clickthrough rates were sufficient. Today, CMOs expect email to provide a financial return on investment.

Chart: CMOs seeking financial ROI to determine emails value in 2011



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded July 2011, N=2,735

Increasing measurable ROI because we lack the available data to determine what a lead is worth, and proper tracking throughout the sales cycle to see where they originated from.

-Marketer insight on challenges

This request will be difficult to fulfill for a majority of firms, as 68 percent of surveyed marketers did not have a method for quantifying email marketing ROI. It is disappointing, but not surprising, that almost seven of 10 marketers do not have a method to measure ROI. It is daunting for many organizations to find the right balance for maintaining control of the data, identifying outcomes, and having the resources required to manage the process.