

COLUMNS

Retailers too focused on the holiday, not the consumer

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Without fail, we start to see back-to-school marketing campaigns begin to rollout mid-summer, holiday promotions at the beginning of fall and then Valentine's Day emails start rolling in right after New Year's and the cycle continues each year for each and every holiday.

But when it comes to a holiday marketing strategy, are retailers getting too focused on the holiday rather than the consumer?

Old school

As retailers plan their holiday-specific campaigns, they also need to consider who they are not talking to and figure out how to best serve the underserved without getting too hung up on holiday marketing.

Take back-to-school, for example. There is clearly a market and opportunity here for retailers, as the [National Retail Federation](#) (NRF) reported that back-to-school spending was expected to reach \$83.6 billion in 2017.

According to [Deloitte](#), families with school-age children were projected to spend an average \$688 per child and average college student plans to spend \$1,051 this year.

To take advantage of this, retailers flood customers' inboxes with holiday-specific promotions for school supplies, new sneakers and children's clothing. But not everyone is going back to school.

According to [U.S. Census data](#), just 25 percent of the entire population ages three and up are enrolled in school. That means a lot of current and prospective customers are getting spammed with irrelevant offers and promotions.

This does not just apply to back-to-school, either.

Show the love

When it comes to a holiday such as Valentine's Day, retail marketers are doing themselves a disservice by solely focusing on marketing to couples.

While [NRF](#) reported that Valentine's Day spending was expected to hit \$18.2 billion in 2017, research from [Bing](#)

found that half of the American population identifies as single, and of those people, a quarter say they plan to do something for Valentine's Day.

Additionally, **NRF** found that 20 percent of U.S. consumers are going to give their pets Valentine's Day gifts, with each person spending an average of \$4.44, or about \$593 million in total.

With these statistics in mind, retail marketers will be alienating major segments of their audience if they do not account for shoppers who may not have significant others.

Marketers certainly should not ignore these holidays altogether. But in the midst of holiday planning, they do need to take a step back and ask themselves, "Is my marketing relevant to everybody?"

On target

As planning gets underway, retail marketers need to look at their customer database to determine how they can market to those not particularly interested in a holiday or event.

Consider this: What products have customers already engaged with from you, which emails excite them most, what other parts of your catalog can you expose them to and what messages can you be sending that are relevant and do not have anything to do with that specific holiday?

With more targeted email marketing to specific customer segments, a retailer will increase its brand relevancy in their customers' eyes, thereby increasing loyalty and the lifetime value of the customer.

As email campaigns are implemented, retailers can ensure that they are reaching every customer segment by having a healthy variety of email themes to suit the tastes and moods of each individual customer.

Perhaps there is a group of customers that are not shopping for children's school supplies or backpacks, but based on what a retailer knows about them would be interested in hiking gear for the fall instead.

With summer ended, there are going to be customers who will not be interested in shopping for notebooks and No. 2 pencils, but might be doing some fall cleaning and are looking for new home-office organization supplies. Or as we head towards Valentine's Day, make sure to have email campaigns targeted towards those who might be treating themselves to some new shoes instead of matching pajamas for a significant other.

Not only is this variety good for shoppers, but it is a great way to expose more of your product catalog, feature products that are not often marketed and, ultimately, increase sales.

AS WE MOVE into the holidays and the next calendar year, retail marketers should look to make sure their marketing plans are all-encompassing when it comes to their customer base. Who are you not talking to or addressing in your holiday promotion? Is there an alternative message that is more relevant to their interests?

If retail marketers make sure to address these questions as they head into each holiday, they will be setting themselves up for a successful relationship with their customers for years to come.

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