

COLUMNS

Preparing for Gmail's passive opt-out unsubscribe feature

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Google's Gmail recently announced several updates to its platform, including the release of a new unsubscribe feature that gives users the option to automatically unsubscribe from emails with which they have not engaged recently, potentially in the past month.

Today, a "passive opt out" is an email subscriber who no longer engages with your brand but continues to consistently receive emails. With this newly introduced functionality, Gmail appears to be helping subscribers who have passively opted out take the step towards un-subscription and keep a cleaner, more manageable inbox.

Can it

Users could previously opt out of email lists by unsubscribing or hitting the "Spam" button within Gmail. Typically, a brand's unsubscribe link is buried at the bottom of an email, and Gmail made headlines back in 2014 when it introduced the "unsubscribe" button at the top instead.

This next iteration of the easy unsubscribe button will take the burden off the user by suggesting brand communications that consumers should unsubscribe from based on activity rather than requiring users to identify unwanted email themselves.

The update is not a surprise coming from Gmail. The email giant is known for its continued efforts to optimize the user experience, which likely explains why the number of Gmail users has **nearly doubled** in the last three years while its competition is lagging.

Surely if it is easier to unsubscribe, there will be a mass exodus from marketing emails, right? Should marketers begin to panic?

The answer to both is a resounding no.

While this new opt-out feature might cause concern for some marketers, it is not all bad news. Much like the **Apple iOS 10 unsubscribe button** in 2016, the update will likely:

- Help marketers weed out unengaged subscribers and non-purchasers within their email database
- Identify “passive opt outs” as unsubscribes thus making database activity more measurable and accurate
- Improve deliverability at Gmail by reducing the number of emails sent to inactive subscribers

Additionally, by making it easier for users to unsubscribe from emails they do not engage with, the update will help marketers cut through less noise in their loyal subscribers’ cleaner inboxes.

This is not to say marketers should relax, embrace an influx of unsubscribes, and watch their other email key performance indicators (KPIs) soar.

Marketers need to proactively shift their email lifecycle messaging and customer loyalty approach to avoid losing high-quality subscribers as a result of this opt-out feature.

Marketers should focus on making their content more informative, fun and engaging if they are to avoid popping up on Gmail's recommended unsubscribes.

Note: that does not mean sending a number of high-value offers that cut into your margin. Before the new feature launches later in the year, savvy marketers should consider a few different tactics to strategically re-engage subscribers.

Tactics to boost engagement and prevent passive opt-outs

Knowing that Gmail has given marketers 30 days to ensure their subscribers engage with their emails allows brands to incorporate and test various strategies to boost engagement within that timeframe.

Mix up messaging cadence

Subscribers will start to ignore marketing emails if brands reach out too often or at the wrong time.

Use and promote preference centers that enable subscribers to select their preferred mailing frequency and type of email content.

Additionally, track what days of the week drive the most engagement.

According to recent data from **our firm**, Fridays generate the highest engagement, while Saturdays see the highest conversion rates.

Incorporate Fridays and Saturdays in your mailing calendar to increase the chance for engagement.

Try reaching out on day 28

To avoid losing subscribers who have been dormant for nearly a month, send a campaign that stands out around day 28 which would motivate an inactive subscriber to open or click through before the passive opt-out window closes.

And make sure that these emails are personalized.

Aside from addressing the subscriber by name, marketers should be honest about their intentions.

Let subscribers know that you want to bring them back into the fold and entice them with offers that highlight items in product categories they have purchased or browsed in the past.

Invest in, and innovate your, triggers

Triggered emails, which are sent in response to specific consumer actions, generate on average, **almost five times the click rate**, almost double the open rate, and almost triple the click-to-open (CTO) rate of standard email communications.

There are a number of triggers that brands can easily implement, from abandoned cart and purchase confirmations to anniversary and real-time triggers.

GrubHub, for instance, sends emails promoting its food delivery service, triggered by location-specific weather conditions, such as snow or rain.

Dunkin’ Donuts sends a different type of real-time trigger campaign, one that is informed by a subscriber's home-team win.

Offer unique, relevant content

Now that the stakes for engagement are much higher, marketers need to do more to motivate subscribers to

open and click.

That means learning more about each subscriber or audience segment, and offering relevant, timely content that meets their unique needs.

These messages need to be different from business-as-usual emails.

For example, a brand or retailer that recently sold a crock pot to a subscriber online could follow up with emails offering seasonal crock pot recipes.

WHILE GMAIL HAS only recently announced these updates and the passive opt-out feature, email marketers would be smart to start thinking about and experimenting with new tactics to boost engagement now.

Driving engagement has always been a priority for email marketers and my hope is that this new feature will add another layer of motivation to keep us all pushing the limits of content.

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