Business *Not As Usual:*

14 Email Marketing Tactics to Test Now

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Every retailer is navigating waters so uncharted they may as well be in their own respective oceans. Some fortunate brands are experiencing a surge in sales, overwhelming their supply chains, while others have to shutter their stores and furlough employees as sales decrease. You already knew the spread of coronavirus is having an unprecedented and unpredictable impact on the retail industry. What you don’t know is how or when it will end.

One thing we do know is that consumer behaviors have changed. Some people have been economically impacted by the pandemic and are more cautious about their spending. Others are shopping in different categories and in different ways, suddenly more inclined to take advantage of curbside pickup options or shop at stores that offer a contactless checkout experience. According to a Coresight Research survey, 45% of consumers plan to avoid shopping centers and malls even after the restrictions are lifted.

This makes digital channels such as email more important than ever. Retail marketers are increasing their email volume and in turn, consumers are engaging more. From February to March, Sailthru’s commerce clients have experienced a 2.5% increase in email open rates.

To keep that momentum going, Sailthru has compiled 14 best practices, inspired by our clients and even what retailers have sent us, as consumers. Hopefully you can test and deploy these tactics, elevating your email marketing as people’s inboxes fill up faster and you continue to navigate these strange, uncharted waters.
Over-Communicate in Post-Purchase Messaging Like Target

Perhaps Amazon is partially to blame for spoiling us, but consumers have been conditioned to expect fast, free shipping. In fact, when people abandon their online shopping carts, a shipping fee is often the catalyst. According to supply chain management company Convey, ecommerce shipping was 8.6% slower in early April than it was in late February. For the most part, consumers don’t actually care, as long as the brands proactively communicate about any changes.

Target’s digital sales have increased by more than 275% this month so naturally, their ecommerce operations may be a little overwhelmed. But you wouldn’t know it from the retailer’s post-purchase messaging. On every channel, Target’s post-purchase goes beyond an order confirmation to include any updates to delivery status or date. That makes shoppers more inclined to give a good review when Target asks for one in the next touch of the post-purchase series.
Adjust for New Behaviors Like Best Buy

Last year, 11% of online purchases were picked up in brick-and-mortar stores. Omnichannel offerings like buy online, pick up in store (BOPIS) and curbside pickup were already growing in popularity. The only options for many consumers at the moment, they're even more prevalent these days.

Best Buy has done a great job showcasing these offerings with both email and mobile messages. Customers who take advantage of curbside pickup have a one-hour fulfillment guarantee and immediately receive helpful information to facilitate a smooth and contactless pickup experience. Best Buy also sends real-time updates while customers are parked, including some best seller recommendations for good measure. There's even an option to have someone else pick up the order, which is key given how many people are running errands for older, sick and at-risk loved ones.
Communicate Store Status in Real Time Like Windsor Fashions

While some states have started to loosen their stay-at-home orders and nonessential business resumes, other places remain on full lockdown. It’s important to communicate the status of your stores, of course. But for large retailers with many locations, that can be a daunting task. Windsor Fashions, for example, has more than 200 brick-and-mortar stores throughout the U.S.

Combining automation and personalization, Windsor Fashions keeps its customers in the loop with dynamic maps from our sister brand Liveclicker. As stores begin to reopen, this is crucial, as Windsor shoppers can see relevant, real-time information about their closest store, including whether it’s operational as they open the message. Email already delivers the highest ROI of any marketing channel. Advanced personalization elements such as dynamic maps can add an additional $20 for every dollar spent, according to data from The Relevancy Group.
Reward Your Best Customers Like Revolve

Per the Pareto principle, approximately 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. That applies to many things, including your sales. Your best customers will generate the bulk of your business and now is a great time to reward those people for their loyalty. Lean into targeting your best customers, and those who share their characteristics, to cement more loyalty down the line.

Early in the pandemic, Revolve sent this plain text email to its top shoppers to let them know how valued they are. For these customers, that means bi-monthly access to new styles ahead of everyone else, as well as access to Revolve’s personal stylists. Ally and Ryan are a differentiator for Revolve and its personalized shopping experiences, so it was smart to let loyalists know their services are still available.
Elevate Your Abandonment Messaging Like Nike

Maybe that “Did you forget something?” email does a great job jogging a customer’s memory. Or perhaps the customer was already going to buy that thing and was just waiting to see if you’d provide some incentive. Either way, cart abandonment is among the most effective triggered messages, resulting in opens 45% of the time.

Every cart abandonment email should include a picture of the item and a deep link, to facilitate a seamless checkout experience. But cart abandoners are high-intent shoppers, and you can (and should!) do so much more with these messages. Nike also includes personalized recommendations; notice the similarities between the abandoned and recommended sneakers. This email also highlights all the benefits of Nike+ membership such as personalized advice, free shipping and trial periods. Take these messages to the next level by including them in retargeting ads on social media or testing emails against mobile messages.
Revamp Your Welcome Series Like Raise

Whether someone just signed up to receive your emails or made their first purchase, they may not know much about you. Welcome emails are incredibly important because they give you the chance to make a great first impression as you share your brand values, app, loyalty program, and some of your best sellers.

Your business has likely changed over the past few months and it’s important to reassess your welcome series to ensure it reflects any adjustments. Raise’s refreshed welcome series is just as strong as ever, outlining how its gift card sales work, and including both an introductory offer and link to a preference center. However, the recommendations reflect the current reality. While travel brands typically sell well during the spring, Raise gives top billing to The Home Depot and Lowe’s as DIY projects peak in popularity, as well as essential retailers like Walmart and Best Buy.
Personalize *Everything* in Emails Like JustFab

Email was always a retail marketer’s best friend. With a median ROI of 122% according to the Data & Marketing Association, it’s by far the most lucrative marketing channel. And now with such limited foot traffic in brick-and-mortar stores, retailers are naturally sending more emails, making it that much more important.

To stand out in the inbox, brands need to lean on personalization. While many people hear “personalization” and think “product recommendations,” that’s just a small piece of the puzzle. Personalizing everything has long been a part of JustFab’s successful email program. JustFab uses personalized send time to reach a customer’s inbox when they’re most likely to engage. What’s more, the subscription retailer uses customer behavior to determine people’s preferences, and uses dynamic content accordingly. For example, if a customer is a big shoe shopper, JustFab will send emails with shoe-specific subject lines and hero images, as opposed to something more generic.
Mix In Feel-Good Content Like MZ Wallace

Many people aren't yet ready to resume their normal shopping habits, but that doesn't mean you should stop messaging them. Instead of focusing solely on products, you can add value to people's everyday lives with content like MZ Wallace.

MZ Wallace's The Edit is a round-up of cofounders Monica Zwirner and Lucy Wallace Eustice's “monthly must-haves, must-sees and must dos.” The founders often focus on their favorite products, though during the pandemic, The Edit has centered more on stay-at-home content. Lucy’s picks include knitting and Greta Gerwig’s 2019 adaptation of Little Women. At the same time, MZ Wallace seamlessly blends content and commerce so there are still some product highlights. Another of Lucy's picks is the Crosby Backpack, the versatile bag she carries most frequently, along with a link to shop its collection.
Share Your Good Deeds Like Thrive Market

Surveying 1,000 consumers, the American Association of Advertising Agencies found that 56% are happy to hear how brands are helping out their communities in response to the coronavirus pandemic, whether it’s donating money or products, or taking care of their employees. It’s worth noting that the 4A’s conducted that survey in mid-March, as we were all being inundated with “important updates around COVID-19.”

Thrive Market’s commitment to the world has been on display for the duration of this pandemic. Instead of surge pricing in the face of online grocery’s unprecedented popularity, Thrive Market established a relief fund. This charitable endeavor includes everything from coordinating deliveries for loved ones to donating grocery stipends to healthcare workers and first responders. Thrive Market raised more than $350,000 in the first month and a half, and CEO Nick Green has since pledged the remainder of his salary for the year.
Build a Pre-Order Strategy Like GameStop

Normally, a pre-order strategy is a great way to take a new product to market or promote best sellers. Now, retailers can leverage the same tactics to capture sales with fewer brick-and-mortar stores and disrupted distribution. GameStop has thousands of locations throughout the U.S. and they’re not all open for business. Still, GameStop has a pre-order option for everyone.

The Delivery @ Door service enables customers to call a store when they arrive to pick up their order and have an associate meet them at the door for a seamless, no-contact experience. For those customers whose pre-orders predate their stay-at-home orders, GameStop offers delivery fulfillment, free of charge. This frictionless process will ultimately help the brand in the long run. Since the coronavirus pandemic began, video game sales have skyrocketed.
Bring Personalized Customer Service Online Like Williams-Sonoma

Though ecommerce has been on the rise for years, the overwhelming majority of retail sales traditionally occur in brick-and-mortar stores. Physical stores allow consumers to interact with products, as well as people. In-store customer service closes countless sales and Williams-Sonoma has brought that online.

People are cooking more — Google searches for “How to make bread” have never been higher — which gives a brand like Williams-Sonoma a chance to shine. Letting it be known the retailer is “here to help,” this email deep links to a portal where consumers can connect with experts. Assistance options run the gamut from product advice and recommendations to virtual consultations on kitchen reorganization and how to use gadgets.
Make EGC the New UGC Like The RealReal

User-generated content is a staple in retailers’ emails. For one, it works; think of how many people trust reviews and best seller recommendations. UGC is a positive affirmation that vouches for your products and your customers can be valuable brand ambassadors. So can your employees.

Think of employee-generated content as the new UGC. The RealReal does a great job making the most of limited creative resources, using its head of brand identity as a brand ambassador while also keeping current consumer behaviors in mind. According to data from Attentive Mobile, women’s apparel sales increased 4.97% from March to April, but of course, that growth is concentrated in a handful of categories. As we work and socialize from home, people are considering what’s comfortable and what looks good on camera (from the waist up). Here, Kaitlin shows off four pairs of eye-catching earrings in an all-too-relatable environment: Zoom.
Highlight Gift Giving Like Alex and Ani

Consumers want to hear what brands are doing for their communities; they also want to give back to themselves. Why not work that into your marketing? Alex and Ani certainly has, with a series of emails focused on gifting. Rather than “Shop Now,” the call-to-action in this email is “Make Someone’s Day.” Each product recommendation is paired with relevant editorial content, such as tips on how to connect with loved ones while social distancing. One suggestion is to send people a surprise gift, including an e-gift card from Alex and Ani.

This email was part of a whole series about gifting. Another message focused on essential workers, with charms celebrating teachers and nurses, and relevant content to match. In this case, you can see an Alex and Ani employee’s child making cards for first responders, in addition to thank you messages hanging near the company’s Rhode Island headquarters.
Pivot and Improvise Like MATCHESFASHION

Adversity breeds innovation and in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, retailers are forced to reconfigure their business to make sense now. That could mean an unlikely celebrity partnership that helps drive traffic and contributes to a good cause. Or it could mean pivoting because your core product offerings are in categories that are struggling at the moment.

Luxury marketplace MATCHESFASHION sells high-end fashions from the likes of Gucci, Prada and Alexander McQueen. These brands will likely have a tough time in the coming months, according to Bain & Company, which predicted luxury sales could fall as much as 60% as a result of coronavirus. However, MATCHESFASHION has done a masterful job tailoring its email marketing to reflect how customers are currently living. That means relaxed jeans for hanging around the house, comfy sneakers for their daily walks, and table accents to help enjoy life’s simple pleasures.
About Sailthru

Sailthru, a CM Group brand, helps modern marketers drive higher revenue, improve customer lifetime value and reduce churn by using its powerful suite of connected capabilities. Sailthru’s high-performance email, website personalization, mobile marketing automation, and unique integrations power new customer acquisition by leveraging machine learning and first-party data to easily deliver relevant, personalized engagement across all channels. The world’s most innovative publishers, including Business Insider, Refinery29 and Food52, and the world’s fastest growing ecommerce companies, including Rent the Runway, JustFab and Alex and Ani, trust Sailthru to help them succeed.

For more information, please visit www.sailthru.com.