

INFORMATION DESIGN FOR EMAIL ADVERTISEMENTS

UMER RASHID

Department of Computer Science, Quaid-i-Azam University
umerrashid@qau.edu.pk

Revised August 2013

ABSTRACT. *The Frequent use of emails as a communication mechanism is observed in recent years. Now the emails are utilized in the marketing and advertisement of various products. The information design for the email advertisement is perhaps the less explored area. In this paper we have highlighted the role of email advertisements in marketing of the products. A process model for email advertisement is also proposed. The design guidelines for email advertisement are opted from various sources and proposed. The email advertisement design guidelines are categorized as the functional, administrative, aesthetic and cognitive guidelines. The email advertisement design guidelines can be utilized in the designing of emails based advertisements.*

Keywords: Email; Advertisement; Design Guidelines; Information Design; Email Advertisement Design Process.

1. Introduction. According to a recent survey number of word wide email accounts are expected to increase from 3.1 billion in 2011 to nearly 4.1 billion by the end of year 2015. In the year 2011 on the average each email user sends and receives 105 emails daily [1]. 430 billion email messages are delivered per day in 2011. Email is an inexpensive and fast way to communicate with the intended audiences [2]. Emails are flexible and lightweight. They buildup cluster of copied messages which are unmanageable and wide-spread [3]. More than 500 top US companies have integrated email as communication media in their marketing strategies. Mostly companies utilize email medium to communicate messages as Newsletters, Alert Services, Auto Responders, Product Pix-To-Go, Slideshows To-Go, Animations To-Go, Panoramic Virtual Reality To-Go, and One Caveat [4]. Due to the increase in the usage of email messages, their effectiveness in terms of flexibility, wide-spread ness, and integration in the online marketing model; it is predicted that the email will be the most utilized communication medium of advertisement within a couple of years.

Emails are the oldest software application exists on the computer networks, but within few years the use of emails as a communication mechanism significantly increases in online marketing. According to a survey email advertisement covers 2% of overall online marketing. Email advertisement can be broadly categorized into three main categories. Which are; **1)** embedded downloadable email advertisements, **2)** Content based email advertisements, and **3)** relationship based email advertisements. Embedded downloadable emails advertisements are provided by email service providers like yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail, AOL etc. in the form of banner ads along with the email messages. In these systems, email advertisements are not for specified intended audiences. Content based emails advertisements are targeted promotions and communications chosen by the senders of email messages. The Relationship based email advertisements are operational and social emails that allows office workers to communicate with venders, suppliers, partners, investors and service providers to run a business [5].

Although email advertisement is one of the wide-spread and economically feasible source of marketing, but the information design in email advertisements is perhaps the less explored area. In the article have explored and emphasis the role email advertisements in marketing. Various stages are involved in the designing of email advertisements. These stages are firstly discussed in this article. In this research email advertisement

design guidelines are opted from various sources. Some guidelines are also proposed. These guidelines are modified and categorized as functional, administrative, aesthetic and cognitive guidelines. The guidelines can be used in the design of email advertisements at functional, administrative, aesthetic and cognitive levels.

Following is the organization of the paper. In section 2, we will discuss rational behind email advertisements. The email advertisement design process will be demonstrated in section 3. The emails advertisement deign guidelines will be discussed and listed in section 4. In section 5, we will conclude our discussion.

2. Rational Behind Email Advertisements. Online advertising supports many Internet services, such as search, email, and social networks [6]. In the recent year's online advertising including, email advertisements, banner advertisements and embedded advertisements. The email based embedded advertisements is the main business model of online marketing in the social networks [7]. Email advertisements play a vital role in direct marketing. People may make buying decisions based on ads without being aware that they are doing so [8]. Email advertisement is a unique medium provides a low cost message communication mechanism for the targeted audience. This medium has potential to decrease transaction cost and make communication process more effective and efficient [9].

Email is considered one of the best online marketing strategy because email based communication is less expensive, quick response cycles are possible through emails, the email based marketing campaign results are measurable, email has wide acceptance and reach, email enforces the new registrations for the websites and increase web traffic, email builds customer relationships and strengthen the brand awareness. The email based communication mechanism is customizable, it saves time, it is implementable and requires limited resources [10].

Online marketing through email is considered the most cost effective mechanism of communication to contact with prospects and customers. It is the cheap source and much larger impact on immediate sales when compared with the traditional advertisements in the form of bulk postage mails. It is considered a powerful and effective online marketing technique. It allows buyers and sellers to freely communicate and facilitates them to build value and trust based business relationships. Email marketing is adaptable in Consumenr-to-Consumer (C2C), Consumenr-to-Business (B2C), and Business-to-Business (B2B) marketing strategies.

3. Email Advertisement Design Process. The email advertisement is considered one of the most simplified forms of communication in online marketing. The email advertisement is now considered best in every business seeking activity. It matures relationships among the customer, advertiser and the business. Tri-angular relationship among the customers, advertisers, and business and their association with email marketing is demonstrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Triangular Association of Customer, Advertiser and Business and their association with The Email Marketing

Tri-angular relationship of advertiser, business and customer represents that they are inter-dependant. Business objectives can't be achieved without advertiser and the customer. Advertiser must need understanding of the business as well as the customer. The Customer needs understating of business as well as the advertiser. Many marketing dimensions can take part to achieve objectives of tri-angular relationship; email marketing is among one of the essential dimension.

Email readers on an average spend 51 seconds in the reading of communicated messages in the email advertisements. Email message design needs considerations. The email message layout and writing need magnificent usability to survive in the highly challenging environment; where user's inbox is full of thousands of emails and they face shortage of time [4]. The email advertisement communicates advertiser's message regarding a product to the intended audiences. Email advertisement must be designed to communicate not just to inform ate. Email advertisement design is very essential. We propose an email advertisement design process.

The email advertisement design process includes 1) advertiser, 2) designer, 3) receiver, 4) design, and 5) representation. Advertiser has indentations to deliver the best futures of the product as an online email marketing message. He wants to communicate best features of the marketing product to the users. Intentions are to deliver eye-catching information regarding product very quickly. Designer must understand the advertiser's intentions. The Indented message is designed by considering important constructs of the marketing process like business and business demands, receiver and his information needs about products, medium and its technological aspects, advertiser and his primary intentions. The designer designs email advertisements in such a way that; 1) the receiver of the advertisement perceives relevant information in short period of time which is usually less than a minute, 2) advertiser intentions regarding the product features will be well communicated, and 3) technological options in the design of intended messages are well explored like designer selects technology for message design; HTML or plain text. Designed message is communicated through a medium after filtration of the indented audience. In case of online email advertisement the medium used in the communication is usually www; other protocols are also explored in restricted domains. Designed message needs revisions after its delivery to incorporate relevant feedbacks. Email advertisement design is governed by principles and design guidelines. Figure 1 represents the email advertisement design process.

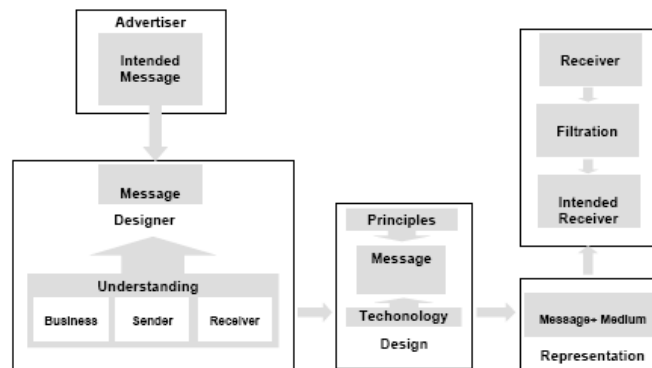


Figure 2: Email Advertisement Design Process

4. Design Principles and Guidelines. Email advertisements must be designed in such a way that they develop online community. This can be done by gathering information about the intended audience of the email advertisements. Lists of millions of potential indented audience are available from companies or organizations [12]. Advertiser must be aware that sending unsolicited commercial email on the given addresses breakdown user's trust and faith. This can be avoided by targeting selected users whenever possible [2].

Over the years best practices are identified for effective use of email advertisement. The best practices introduce email advertisement design principles. Patterson differentiates design principles as functional, administrative, aesthetics and cognitive principles [13]. The principles are followed by obeying their relevant design guidelines. We select email advertisement guidelines from iContact [11]. Information design guidelines are also opted from "IT-Depends" [13]. After analysis it is explored that some design guidelines are also valid in email advertisement design. Selected design guidelines from both sources i.e. iContact and "IT-Depends" are modified and recompiled. After modification and recompilation email advertisement design guidelines are finalized. After finalization, they are categorized with respect to functional, administrative, aesthetic and cognitive design principles. Table 1 represents 4 categories and 43 email advertisement design guidelines.

Table 1: Selected Guidelines for the Design of email Advertisement

Principles	guidelines
<p>Functional [proposed by author and opted from IT-Depends]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyzed advertiser by understanding his desired purpose of the advertisement. - Analyze available marketing budget time. - Analyze receivers by considering their personal details, preferences and business associations. - Catchments can be identified by studying intended user groups. - Identify prospective user’s details from the historical data, third party source, and forums. - Structured advertisement in such a way that user perceives indented information with in a minute. - Provide on demand additional information. - Avoid multilevel hierarchies in online email advertisements. - Email advertisement must be in HTML, plain text formats or in both forms. - Intended information can be emphasized by using typographic variations, headings and colors. - Text, typefaces, pictures must be legible in the email advertisements. - Avoid lengthy lines and paragraphs.
<p>Administrative [opted from iContact]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email messages will be sent on the receiver’s request. - Only the requested contents of relevant type will be delivered. - Sending frequency of email messages will be consistent. - Pick and stick with schedule whether it is weekly, biweekly, or monthly - The subject of the messages must be either your company name or its representative. - The from name must be selected carefully, and must be consistent in the future. - The message must be added at the top of emails, this improves deliverability. - Plain text and an HTML version of newsletter must be included. - The use of all capital words or multiple exclamation marks within subject line or body must be avoided. - Build list of email receivers. - Start using permission-based email software. - Decide on the type and frequency of email communication you will be sending. - Provide easy subscription and un-subscription.
<p>Aesthetics [opted from iContact & IT-Depends]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email advertisement contents fit well together and form harmonious relationships - Develop standard templates for email advertisement design. - Find balance between the design elements. - Identify receiver’s aesthetics regarding design of information contents. - Identify aesthetics classification based on receiver’s preferences. - Don’t mix a decorative use of color with cognitive importance
<p>Cognitive [opted from iContact & IT-Depends]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid spam catcher world in your message. - Personalize message as mush as possible according intended individual needs. - Perform customer satisfaction surveys. - Message must not have a misleading subject line. - Disclose information by considering age groups and gender. - Facilitate textual, visual, textual visual, symbolic, layout and color intentions. - Facilitate perceptions regarding closure, common fate, continuity, contrast, density, grouping etc. - Must obey perception rules regarding perception of text, figures, layouts, and colors. - Facilitate mental processing by emphasizing or understanding, comparing or ordering, and grouping or sorting. - Avoid delayed recognition. - Provide entertainment using textual visuals and symbolic representations. - Consider visual perception, capabilities and limitations regarding reading.

5. Conclusion. Email is considered as an important source of advertisement and can be efficiently utilized in marketing. The website information design gets attention in recent years, but the information design for the email advertisements is perhaps the less explored area. The design process of email advertisements is ambiguous. In this research we have discussed the role of email advertisements in the marketing. The design process for email advertisements is elaborated and functional, administrative, aesthetic and cognitive design guidelines for email advertisement design are proposed.

Acknowledgement. The author would like to acknowledge the provision of the research facilities provided by Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan to carry out this research study

REFERENCES

- [1] Radicati. S. (2011). Email Statistics Report, 2011-2015, *The Radicati Group, Inc.* A Technology Market Research Firm.
- [2] Grajek. S., Lynch. P., Cagnetta. L.(2002), Why to market IT services and how to do it, in *Proceedings of the 30th annual ACM SIGUCCS conference on User services*. pp. 252-253.
- [3] Werner. G., Jürgen. V., Cheng L. T. and Muller M.(2003). Supporting activity-centric collaboration through peer-to-peer shared objects, in *Proceedings of the 2003 international ACM SIGGROUP conference on Supporting group work*. pp. 115-124.
- [4] Dysart. J. (1999). Email Marketing Grows Up: *A Primer for the New Millennium*, Mix Media.
- [5] Shenoy. D.(2008). Measuring effectiveness and Value of Email Advertisements in Relation-Oriented Email Messages, *MS thesis*, MIT.
- [6] Guha. S., Cheng. B., and Francis. P. (2010). Challenges in measuring online advertising systems, in *Proceedings of the 10th annual conference on Internet measurement, ACM*. pp. 81-87.
- [7] Li. Y. M., Lien. N. J. (2009). An endorser discovering mechanism for social advertising, in *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Electronic Commerce, ACM*. pp. 125-132.
- [8] McDonald. A. M. and Cranor. L. F. (2010). Americans' attitudes about internet behavioral advertising practices, in *Proceedings of the 9th annual ACM workshop on Privacy in the electronic society*. pp. 63-72.
- [9] Janice C. S., Burke T. W., and Bonner. P. G. (2004). Should Spam be on the Menu? In *Communication of the ACM*, Vol. 47. No. 6, pp. 59-63.
- [10] L-Soft. (2010). Email Marketing Best Practices: Winning Techniques for Today and Tomorrow, *White Paper*, L-Soft international.
- [11] iContact. (2009). Best Practices for Email Marketing, *Report by iContact*.
- [12] Gopal. R. D., Walter. Z., and Arvind K. T.(2001). In *Communication of the ACM*, Vol. 44 No. 12, pp. 91-96.
- [13] Pettersson. R. (2012). It Depends—Principles and Guidelines, *Institute for infology, ISBN Fourth Edition 978-91-85334-24-7*.