

Adding Value to Customers and Developing Brands through Electronic Newsletters

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ABSTRACT

Online communication is highly efficient for contemporary business, in most market sectors. In this context, companies use several online instruments in order to achieve a wide array of objectives. Among these, online newsletters (e-newsletters) are widely used, since they offer a lot of benefits for companies. Since they are flexible in terms of format and content, they are suitable to address a wide variety of publics. Therefore, e-newsletters could be not just informative (as they are widely seen), but also could add-value to customers and support branding processes and relationship development. The present paper investigated various benefits of e-newsletters in this context and highlights some rules to ensure an effective added-value e-newsletter. The research made on the e-newsletters of 5 of the leading publishing-houses in Romania shows that, at least in this market sector, this instrument is not used at its full potential. It is considered in most cases a way to stimulate sales, either directly by announcing sales, or indirectly by announcing new books releases. In some cases news on events and on the activity of the publishing-houses are presenting, leading to image development.

KEYWORDS: *e-newsletter, branding, publishing industry, Romania.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M39, L89*

INTRODUCTION

The Internet today is extremely appreciated as a communication tool both by companies, as well as by their publics, and it changes the way marketing is designed and implemented (Tapp and Hughes, 2004). Marketers are under more pressure to augment brand awareness and increase online transactions, in the context of increased number of communication channels and tightened marketing / branding budgets. Email communications continue to be an important function in qualifying and identifying prospects. By assigning content assets with key takeaways and progressive calls-to-action, organizations have the ability to use marketing automation assets to monitor responses, refine messages and build momentum to turn prospects into buyers Chaffey (2008). Marketing strategies have shifted from command and control methods to more open and inclusive tactics. In this context, a brand is no longer separated from the conversation; rather it is expected to participate. These discussions are not scripted, rather organic and free flowing. Many marketing mavens find it difficult to communicate concisely in a world of multitasking and always-on-the-move

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consumers whose attention spans perpetually shrink. Nevertheless, the old adage, “Tell me and I forget; show me and I remember; involve me and I understand,” still rings true today.

1. THE INTERNET AND THE PUBLICS OF AN ORGANIZATION

The critics of the Internet argue that the online communication is not “real”, especially when targeting the establishment of a relationship. Since the Internet offers real-time bidirectional communication between two or more partners, it provides a platform for communication and public relations. As mentioned above, it can provide connectivity both in a personal context, and a professional one. The widespread and its characteristics, as well as the evolutions in the contemporary society recommend the Internet as a must when considering promotional strategies. The online communication evolved fast from transmitting information through emails and corporate websites, to online advertising. This is the most aggressive and visible form of online promotion, but the Internet is increasingly more the support for other more refined means of promotion. Jain (2003, 499) reviews the reasons for the increased popularity of online advertising. Most of his arguments are related to the characteristics of those online (who is a part of the companies’ publics), in the context of a critical mass of people using efficiently the Internet. A new shift in the use of Internet as a commercial communication instrument is the fast development of social media, especially of the Facebook.

Besides online advertising, websites and emails as the most common and widespread online promotional tools, a large variety of other instruments are used in the context of commercial communication. We mention blogs (corporate or personal), emailing lists, e-newsletters, online discussion forums, social networking sites and others. The online communication is nowadays a must, part of the promotional and public relations strategies. The Internet is a compulsory tool for the public relations specialists of any type of organization.

Despite the facilities offered to companies, the Internet also presents disadvantages as a means of communication. The most frequently mentioned are: limiting the audience to specific segments, the need to search for the message to receive it which makes the visibility of the message quite low, the reluctance of audiences to messages online, abundance of information propagated via the Internet, etc. Some of these aspects are no longer valid or the limitations are not so strict any more. For instance, only youth and young adults living in urban areas used to be online, but nowadays the variety of people online is much wider.

A difficulty of the commercial Internet communication is that the public used to surf online perceives negatively commercial messages (Kotler, 2002, 325). The public wants to take control of online navigation and of the information it receives. Thus, the risk of a negative attitude of the public vis-à-vis the online messages is quite high, as most clearly illustrates the phenomenon of “spam”. Some forms of online communication are seen as intrusive and aggressive, and Kotler (2002, 326) stresses that online customer wants to initiate communication and to control, to decide what information and opinions prefers to absorb. In this sense a person using the Internet would rather subscribe to a newsletter of interest than accept to receive unwanted information from a company, even if that company might be of interest. More than that, the Internet empowers consumers to interact with the brand

(Christodoulides, 2009; Rubenstein, 2002), therefore the e-newsletter should provide this opportunity.

Another sensitive issue is the credibility of the messages transmitted online, the degree to which the public has confidence in the messages sent on Internet through various means as well as the tendency to pay online. We believe however that this problem tends to be equally strong when considering the communication offline, since the reliability is actually related to that company's image more than with the means of transmission of messages.

In the context pictured above, the positive aspects, which are related to the Internet are more relevant than the negative ones. In the same time, a suitable strategy would be able to minimize the risks related to the online communication. We stress one more aspect - The major advantage of the online communication over the written communication, or the communication via traditional media is real-time interactivity with the public or even among audiences with or without mediation of the organization. Another important advantage (that only TV still has it) is that it offers (online) experiences. These last aspects recommend the Internet as a useful tool of branding. Even more, the Internet can enhance the essence of branding – the brand experience (Rubenstein and Griffiths, 2001).

2. BRANDING ONLINE

Increasingly used as a means of communication and being in many instances preferred both by organizations and the public, the Internet could decisively contribute to brand development, at least when targeting those segments which are very active online (Simmons, 2007). Many authors show the importance of brand for any organization. Kotler et al. (1999, 575) argue not only the importance of a strong brand for a manufacturer / distributor, but also for its consumers and even to the society. Among the benefits mentioned are: satisfaction through high quality consistency; greater variety of supply due to competition between brand owners to maintain the uniqueness and their market position; consistent brands because consumers are more informed and critical.

One can consider an online brand, not only an offline one (seen as non-online). The first is part of the second, but the latter also influences it. The online image should not be different from the offline one, but there may be some different nuances and emphases placed on brand attributes according to the target audience online. The two basic directions one needs to go to build the online brand is the online reputation and identity. The first component provides confidence in the organization, its offer and its messages transmitted over the Internet. The second component allows clearer identification of the company, also contributing to increased confidence in the company and it may lead to augmented interaction, stronger relationships and even online sales.

Online brand building must consider the specific audience that the organization can rely on the Internet. In addition, a major change related to the online communication is that the Internet allows for real and effective communication. As Merwe et al. (2005, 40) observe, one cannot speak of the online communication “towards...”, but of online communication “with...” The dialogue is genuine and simultaneously by means of the new digital technologies, especially when considering the social media. The Internet provides more facilities for certain types of experiences, therefore for customer engagement, but it also offers more challenges to the traditional branding strategies (Simmons, 2007, 544).

The online audience has expectations and specific interests in the communication. From this perspective companies have to consider specific segmentation of the public online. We mention only a first distinction between the young public and others who go online. The first category are intensively using the Internet, experiment the new platforms and facilities offered by the Internet, are actively seeking information, they are curious about the online presence of organizations and individuals and even want to interact online. The second category using the Internet (sometimes very often) stays online with a well-aimed purpose (email communication, obtaining information on a very specific issue of interest for them, etc.). They are not so willing to spend more than strictly necessary on a specific topic online. Of course, this distinction is not as clean-cut as presented. Increasingly more adults stay online and interact in commercial or personal contexts. A company should be aware that people online are very diverse, not only in terms of online behavior. As in offline communication, knowing the company's public and segmenting it correctly is one of the ingredients for success.

Because the online audience is more dynamic, currently searching online databases, generally being younger and more active in online communication, the online public is considered to be more informed. Therefore its approach must be adapted to this context. Another characteristic of the online public would be that it responds negatively to online business communication. This suggests that online communication strategy should secondarily pursue commercial objectives. It should focus on the usefulness of the information transmitted, on the communication-related experiences and on the interaction with the public, not on the commercial message itself. However it is vital to provide immediate marketing facilities. In this way, the public could use them both for its benefit and for the one of the company.

Other sensitive issues related to online communication are of ethical and legal nature. Legislation must be observed both when transmitting information or when processing and using of personal data. As in the case of "traditional" brand promotion and communication, the online communication aims to create loyalty to the brand. This means not only loyalty in the context of purchasing behavior (online and offline), but also in online loyalty to the company. This could be reflected in the consistent search for information about the organization, repeated online interaction with it.

Given that the online audience is an audience actively seeking information about a company, it is important that useful and stimulating data can be easily found, but also to attract attention online. In this context, "brand recognition" is an attribute as important online as offline. This is achieved by promoting visual online identity, possibly with specific components for the digital environment. By interacting with the public, through specific design of the online interface, a company can get "brand awareness" also on the Internet. The more the online discourse and services are personalized, the more increases the recognition, the perception and the confidence in the brand online.

The Internet has an important role both in building brands and increase customer satisfaction (Harridge-March, 2004). It provides a comfortable platform of interaction; friendly and fast communication via the Internet can be maintained; constant contact with customers can provide post-sales assistance. In order to build a strong brand online, to support a global brand, the organization has more strategies available. Among the most effective, which generate credible differentiation, we mention only two. The first, relatively

easy to design and support, is extensive and diverse online presence strategy, constant communication through various online means. This increases the chances that many audiences have access to the messages released by the company, so they notice and evaluate its online presence and make a (positive) judgment about this. The second strategy is the construction of microsities. They can be specialized on different topics, addressing specific audiences and contributing to their better serving. These microsities are extensions of the company, better shaping its image.

In essence, online brand building involves providing added value to the customer via the Internet. The customers are communicating with a brand establishing relationships, is a little like going out on a date. Imagine showing up for a first date and being handed a three-page form that asks for everything from your name, address, and income to your medical history and how many children you want to have. What are the chances that you'll want to go out with that person again? Pretty slim. But it is amazing at how many companies run their websites exactly like that (Esrock & Leitchy, 2000). Instead of keeping the first date friendly and low-pressure, they drive potential customers away by asking all kinds of overly personal and seemingly irrelevant questions Chen (2003).

When striking up a relationship with a new customer or prospect, the following guidelines should be kept in mind:

The company is not the best friend of the customers

Nothing is worse than the used-car salesman type who pretends to be your best friend before he even knows your name.

Everything should be short and relevant

It is not recommended to ask for all kinds of personal information right away. When inquiring, clarifications are needed: why certain questions are asked and what value the customer will get in return.

Listening to the customers

Online customers expect to be in control, and if the company listens, they'll tell what they're interested in.

The company should deliver immediate value.

A message should start with a short email with some relevant information or a special offer.

If a company follows these simple guidelines for basic polite behavior, it will quickly establish a solid foundation for a meaningful, committed customer relationship (De Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2007). Simmons (2007, 547) highlights the most common ones. He also stresses that the most important impact on brand equity is generated by a positive customer online experience. This can be achieved if the customer is actively using in his/her favor the established online relationship with the organization. One common example of such relationship tools is the newsletter of an organization.

3. ADDED VALUE NEWSLETTER

Newsletter publication appeared as a domestic activity, by which the enterprise informed its employees about company's strategy, new practices, the company's offer, news, or events. In this context, an important contribution of the newsletter for the company is the building of an organizational culture, and even of a strong internal brand. Newsletters later opened to the larger public, to external customers of the organizations. Through newsletter

customers are always kept abreast of company's activity, new products, it aims at building a consumer behavior, it stimulates customer satisfaction in order to achieve/strengthen loyalty. In terms of branding, the newsletter aims to communicate with customers and other audiences, to build an attractive and strong organizational image.

Kotler (2002, 286) considers the newsletter one of the major media (the 8th out of the 11). The main advantages highlighted are the control of the content and of the public who receives the newsletter, the possibilities of interaction offered and low costs. When considering the last aspect mentioned, special attention is given to the possible underestimation of real costs, even when considering the online versions of a newsletter – not just the printed one.

Despite its usefulness, the printed newsletter has not become a common practice for many commercial or non-commercial organizations. Designing, producing and distributing a newsletter requires many efforts from the organization - human, financial, logistics. Currently, because of the possibility of transmission of digital messages and democratization of access to the Internet, the e-newsletter is a tool accessible to anyone and used extensively by all kinds of organizations.

The use of an e-newsletter does not require great efforts from an organization – it is not expensive, it is relatively easy to generate an appropriate online newsletter and to attain public impact. Effectiveness of an online newsletter strategy adopted depends on the objectives, the public aimed, the communication plan, the content, the design, and the degree of interactivity with the audiences. When considering the public, we stress again that it could reach either employees or external public. In both cases, newsletters can help, as mentioned above, the construction of the brand by offering added value to the public to which it is addressed. Mangold and Faulds (2010) present several ways of adding value through engagement of the customers by means of social media. Some of them could be also achieved through smart newsletter strategies: providing discussion platforms, provide information, provide exclusivity, and utilize the power of stories and others.

Even in the case of the internal public, the engagement of the readers is extremely beneficial. For instance, if the staff is addressed, by giving them up to date and personalized information about the company, the employees can better meet their responsibilities. Newsletters can help staff training. Or employees could become internal PR agents, including by designing themselves a relevant internal newsletter (Wherry, 1986, 12). By having a more informal internal newsletter, with personal information on employees or reflecting their interests (such as hobbies, personal anniversaries etc.), the staff would be more attached to the company. They will also feel more appreciated by the company if they will be the first to find out news relevant referring to the company, and they will not be informed on what is going on through mass media or via other Internet channels (Wherry, 1986, 10). Their numbers proves the strong impact of internal newsletters: two-thirds of the newsletters sent by the American corporations are internal (Smith, 2008, 168).

The main, most obvious and most accessible contribution made by newsletters addressed to external audience is public information. Because of the Internet facilities, organizations can receive immediate reaction from the public and send back messages in return. Kent and Taylor (1998, 36) show how this feedback can be immediately integrated into public relations tactics, helping to build sustainable and lasting relationships. A unique

characteristic of online newsletters, which is not enough exploited, is that they not only put the company in touch with different audiences, but also connect customers among themselves, or with people with specific interests. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to corroborate the organization's website and newsletter with other online media. The newsletter is mainly a public relations tool, directly influencing different audiences. It is also a useful tool in combating rumors, maintaining active and constant relations with the public. Ultimately, a newsletter helps build and enhance brand image, to support the organization's brand.

Another advantage offered by newsletters is to educate the public about the use of the company's products, how to behave properly in different contexts and others. This helps to increase customer satisfaction with the product and its producer, contributing to its attachment to the brand. It can also lead and motivate the public, to stimulate it, to better and even more intensive use of the product.

4. DESIGNING AN E-NEWSLETTER

The newsletter format gives the opportunity to provide robust content around specific themes relevant to the subscriber. B2B marketing topics may evolve around a particular industry or market the company services. For B2C businesses, the content may encompass a particular hobby, holiday or health habit.

The design and copy must be clutter free, easy for the reader to scan and find the most relevant articles. According to the Nielsen Norman Group, the average reader will spend 51 seconds reviewing each newsletter in their crowded inbox. Multiple headlines, bullets and links to the complete article on a website are common newsletter features to facilitate scanning. Design elements of evocative images, simple graphs and meaningful numbers can grab a reader's attention.

A newsletter is the chance to aggregate recent news and deliver it to the brand partners on their terms in a simple, useful and easy to read format. It provides a service that allows users to keep up-to-date on the industry or their favorite activity. Newsletters lean towards goals of brand awareness and website traffic rather than actual transactions. These objectives allow the company to provide a wider variety of stories and offers within the specific topic to peak the reader's interest.

One of the decisive factors influencing the newsletter's strategy is the targeted public. When designing an e-newsletter, the organization must consider who and why reading this electronic publication. The most common category of readers, who otherwise are considered a priori by the newsletters, is the company's customers. It should be borne in mind that those who choose to receive electronic newsletters are usually particularly interested in the messages coming from the organization. Often, these people are characterized of high fidelity.

In addition to loyal customers, others may be interested in the company's activity, therefore subscribers to its newsletter. Among these other categories of public we stress the importance of the opinion leaders who sympathize with the organization or who are related to it. Another category worth mentioning are the stakeholders. In the case of large organizations, they have significant impact in the society, decision makers could also

subscribe to their newsletters. Media representatives might be also interested in the messages that the organization is launching. The business partners and competitors also have special reasons to be aware of company's activities and monitor how it communicates with its customers. Another possible category of subscribers consists of the company's employees (who would individually subscribe to the external newsletter even if they would receive an internal newsletter). To meet the interests of all and each category listed above, making the newsletter an active instrument of increasing their satisfaction and of brand development, the newsletters have to be tailored to all the audiences they address, or contain information of interest for several categories of public.

An organization may opt to send multiple newsletters for different audiences. For example, newsletters can be designed for employees or for the public outside the organization. Also, especially the latter, can be of several types. Some are general, addressing the public at large, some may specialize in fields, or can be customized taking into account certain categories of public, mentioned above. Although it is difficult to make several newsletters dedicated to various publics, they are more efficient and help increase the satisfaction of the public which receives them, they add substantial value to the relationship with the organization, they better serve the development of the company's public image and lead to increased loyalty.

There are several types of external newsletters, mentioned by Smith (2008, 168): advocacy newsletters, special-interest newsletters, and subscription newsletter. The first type mentioned aims to persuade readers to have a certain opinion or to change their attitude and behavior. The second type is specialized on a topic/field of activity/industry, providing very specific information and analysis. The last category mentioned is not for free, therefore the information provided is of high quality and exclusive.

An important strategic decision is the overall approach and content of the newsletter. The two extreme alternatives are the newsletter that informs, and the one that analyzes. The first focuses on general news and data transmission to the public. It is the most common approach, probably also because it is easier to design. The second type is more complex and more diverse in terms of content and approach. It may include opinions, presentations, tests, interviews, surveys, etc. The persons expressing their views in these newsletters could represent the organization or be independent analysts, public figures or other relevant voices. This type of newsletter could appeal more to people outside the organization because the messages may be considered more credible, less biased and more objective, therefore it could have an increased public impact.

Confidence in the messages included, as well as their usefulness is vital factors in ensuring a positive impact of a newsletter. In this context, the perspective presented should take into consideration the public's interests (Smith, 2008, 168). Only in this context, the public will consequently read the newsletter and it will stimulate it to act. Just by constantly adding value to its readers, a newsletter is a useful communication tool, and it helps not only to inform and maintain the relations of the company with the public, but also leads to image development, it strengthens the brand and increases the satisfaction and the loyalty of the public.

Unless a steadfast strategic executive who effectively communicates the brands values at every turn leads an organization, the value proposition probably is interpreted differently

within that organization. It may change slightly to take advantage of a business opportunity or defend a market position. One pillar is the focus when speaking with a customer and another highlighted with a vendor. Designing the format and the content of a newsletter, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the brand's value proposition.

The company's value proposition is not something created in a brainstorming session like a corporate slogan or vision statement. The value proposition is not an edict. Rather it is driven by customer need and discovered by asking unbiased questions regarding the organization, employees, rivals and the marketplace.

Whether a company is reviewing an existing value proposition or creating a new one, it should keep it simple. In the interest of clarity, there is only one question a company needs to consider when developing the value proposition and it requires stepping into the shoes of the customers.

Q: If I am your ideal prospect, why should I buy from you rather than your competitors?

To answer this question a company has to review its customer profile, competitive analysis, past campaigns and its performance metrics. Next it has to identify the potential categories of the value proposition, based on the customer profile. In order to be effective, it is helpful to find at least five key points that distinguishes the solution proposed as being unique and better than the competition with credible facts to back up the claims.

It is highly relevant to measure the impact or force of the statement. A way to examine and rate the value proposition drafts is to assess four criteria:

Appeal

For appeal, essentially the degree to which the value proposition is desired by the ideal prospect is assessed.

Exclusivity

For exclusivity, the degree to which the ideal prospect can get this value elsewhere is considered. How unique is the offer? What sets it apart?

Credibility

For credibility, the believability of the claim is evaluated. For instance, in the case of exclusive rights to a legitimate cure for male-pattern baldness the challenge for the company wouldn't be appeal or exclusivity, it would be credibility. The value proposition must be stated in such a way that it is instantly credible.

Clarity

For clarity, the succinctness and speed at which the statement is understood using both cognitive and emotional intelligence are assessed. What facts cut through the clutter and effectively communicates the brands unique attributes?

Therefore, the rules of online branding and relation with the customers are similar with the fundamental (offline) brand building approach (Clauser, 2001; De Chernatony, 2002; Cocoran, 2007; De Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2007). Customer insight is vital, but also emotional connection and consistency should be considered.

A newsletter's success also depends on its design and comfortable format, on the ease with which it can be read and with which readers can navigate within. The simplest form is the e-mail. It can be designed so that the reader can fast browse inside, jumping from section to section. Otherwise, it is indicated to include very short messages, and to make direct reference/link to the organization's website. Even if the newsletter looks like an email, it is desirable to make reference to the company's identity, to include relevant pictures, and the fonts to be more specific. The general appearance must remain airy, friendly, easy to read and navigate.

But most effective is to have a special design for the newsletter. Since it is a branding tool, it must include company colors, corporate visual identity, to highlight the attributes and brand personality. As regarding content, the newsletter can present the full text of information (recommended to be navigable inside) or present only summary items and their details to be made available only by clicking on specific links. It is recommended that the newsletter(s) to have dedicated space on the company's website. So anyone might have access to the information, including to past issues, if interested.

Although it seems easy and very cheap, an efficient newsletter is based on a complex communication strategy. The form and content of a newsletter could become a branding tool or it could remain a simple information tool.

Another important issue to consider is the relationship between communicating via e-newsletter and via other online tactics. This also influences the style and approach of the first mentioned one. The debate of which tactic will survive (social media vs. email) has simmered down. Email proponents have been reassured by the success of daily deal sites like Groupon, with its once-a-day email offer for a lone local merchant. Meanwhile email opponents continue to watch Facebook's newest applications. The latest allows business pages to receive private messages from their fans on the social network. Having weathered the storm the attention now turns to maximizing the impact of these potent communication channels.

However, there has been a consequence to email from the rapid rise of social media. Consumers' personal inboxes are overcrowded and are looking for ways to simplify. Android mobile phone users can access an app to create a single message stream in a unified inbox, allowing users to read social media messages, email and text in one common place. List operators can look up their contacts, read all of their recent email conversations and review their colleagues' LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook or blog posts. Hotmail clients can quickly use a social media tab to filter messages to only allow the user to see social media updates. These inbox solutions now impact how email messages are constructed to ensure delivery.

Social networking empowers the email marketing efforts by building a new group of prospects. Deciding to follow or friend someone takes just a click of a button; it is a low-risk action for people, yet an entrance for a brand to start a conversation towards convergence. Whether an e-newsletter is hosted on a company or ESP website, a link to a Web version of the e-newsletter can be created and posted on the brand's Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter page. Sharing email content on social streams expands its reach and opens the door for followers to learn more about the products or services a company offers. This passive awareness makes for an easier transition from casual communications on

social networks to email, a communication channel that enables a brand to send the right message at the right time, turning conversations into conversions.

Email has always prided itself on being a two-way communication channel and social media can enhance this positive trait. Product or service endorsements, reviews or ratings can be captured and used as content for the next targeted email message. As we know, opinions of fellow customers have a larger influence on a prospect's buying decision than any brand claim, and a company can select the most applicable commentary to educate the buyer.

In addition, a company may be able to identify brand advocates who share its coupons, emails, videos or whitepapers with their followers. Listening to how these evangelists speak, share and direct the brand message can provide invaluable information for future marketing endeavors. This feedback has reminded many organizations of the importance of personal conversations in which they do not talk at a subscriber, but rather with them. Today, the audience drives the tone – and they expect the messages to have a human touch, reflecting the brand's personality.

A recent trend is to hire a brand journalist who can create interesting information that serves to educate and inform consumers. This person has the skill set to uncover human interest stories that personalize a brand, giving readers revealing insights into a company's culture, products and services. Brand journalists do not write standard press releases, promotional messages or even whitepapers. Their talent lies in telling interesting stories that can be shared.

Another aspect to be considered is to increase the effectiveness of words and stimulate the opening and reading of an e-newsletter. Adding a company or brand name to the subject line has several benefits. Locating the brand name in both the "from" line and "subject" line makes a logical thought progression in the mind of the reader and signals the message is coming from a trusted source. Constructing the content as part of a branded series can comfort the subscriber in setting clear expectations. As mentioned previously, many times subject lines end up as social media updates where the company will want its brand's name to be prominently displayed.

Experienced copywriters understand the importance of communicating the brands value in a way most relevant to the reader. Every subscriber is thinking WIIFM or "What's in it for me?" Considering the reader and thinking about how they would like to be addressed, will aid the company in creating better one-to-one communication. The customer profiles will give the company the insights to their needs and interests. Messages focused on the subscriber's desires are more likely to engage the reader than the features and benefits of the products.

The body design of the email continues the reader on a straight path to take an actionable event. The most common goal is to earn a click. Well-integrated marketing plans will prompt offline actions such as phone communications, redemption of coupons at retail stores or reserve a meeting time with a sales person. The channels may be different but the goal is singular in scope. To achieve the stated objective a number of pieces need to be aligned.

The length of the copy should be only long enough to communicate the value of the one desired action the company wants the subscriber to take. The reader's time is valuable and should be respected. Adding unnecessary information will potentially frustrate or distract the thought processes of the subscriber to the e-newsletter. Similar to the layout design, the copy is short, easy-to-scan paragraphs are used, the brand's voice could invite the reader to take a specific action. In telling the brand's story and defining the market space, letting consumers know what the brand is, can be just as important as presenting the offer. Openness and transparency translates into buyer confidence.

5. MEASUREMENT STRATEGY

Today's business environment has shifted from leaders asking employees, "What have you accomplished this past quarter?" to "What have you sold in the last five minutes?" Every employee, in every department is now responsible for creating an engaging customer experience and contributing to the firm's bottom line. Consumers heightened expectations for an authentic relationship in which companies recognize, understand and solve their challenges, enable marketing and IT departments to have a larger influence on a firm's success.

With this responsibility, marketing teams are under more scrutiny to be accountable for the money spent on marketing initiatives. It is not easy endeavor to update cross-functional teams and earn budget approvals. Marketers must maximize all of their business and intra-relationship skills to accurately measure and report results to reap the recognition and rewards they desire. Unfortunately, the task is not getting any easier, our research 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 and email performance metrics were sufficient. Today, CMOs presume email to provide a financial ROI.

The majority of organizations track delivery, open and click through rates. ESPs and MAs easily provide this response data in their campaign reporting systems. As an email marketing program matures and become more complex, marketers seek post-click metrics like conversions and revenue per email. For many marketers the short-term goal of an email is to get a click. Moving the subscriber to take action to visit a landing page or make an offline task represent success. This is why CTR is often used to measure an email or newsletter's effectiveness. However, it is important to consider how CTR is calculated, again due to the "open" tracking technology the 75 unique clicks may not be from the 200 people who "opened" the email, there may have been many more subscribers that read the message in the preview pain or text format. When reviewing the results of the campaign, the company has to go beyond metrics and try to understand the link between the message and receiver. For instance, open may exceed CTR if the subject line peaks the subscribers interest, but does not match the value in the email, thus they do not click. Conversely, if the subject line is narrowly written for loyal recipients and not for wide consumption, few people will open the message. However, those brand evangelists who do, will click through and CTR will exceed open rate.

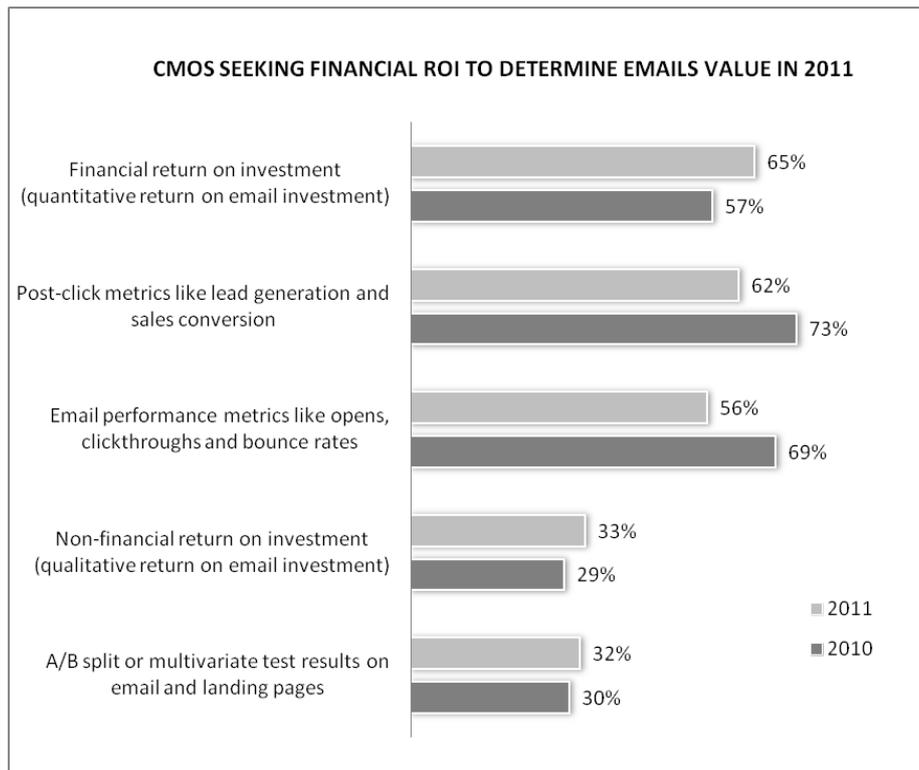


Figure 1. CMOS Seeking financial ROI to determine emails value in 2011

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

Assessing the impact of the Internet communication on brand is not a simple matter (Chen, 2001), but it is of high importance for a company.

6. BRANDING STRATEGIES IN PUBLISHING – SOME PERSPECTIVES

6.1. Methodology of the research

The main aims of the investigation are to identify the way in which the Romanian publishing houses are communicated through newsletters and to see in what extent their newsletters support their branding and commercial strategies. We included in the panel only those top selling brands who have a formal newsletter and invite people to subscribe to them from the company's website.

Considering that commercial success is related to the way companies communicate, the samples takes into consideration the most successful publishing houses, considering the latest evaluation in this market sector. A Forbes top reveals the following commercial success of the Romanian publishing houses (Borcea, 2011): Adevărul Publishing House, Litera International, Polirom, Curtea Veche, Art Editorial Group, Humanitas. Amongst these publishing houses, just Polirom and Humanitas are not relating their success to selling books with newspapers. Therefore it is obvious that the commercial success in Romania is

not so much a matter of branding, and it strongly depends on the large-scale availability and attractive pricing. This phenomenon worth further investigation and it is not our intention to cover it in the present paper. We stick with the selection criterion mentioned: the publishing houses considered to have a newsletter and to invite people to subscribe to it via their website. Litera International, Polirom, Curtea Veche, Art and Humanitas meet this condition. Therefore these brands constitute our sample. The period of monitoring is January-March 2013.

The newsletters of the brands included in the panel are analyzed based on a form comprising the following items: aim, online conformity, public, format, structure, personalization, tone of voice, interactivity and keyword. The aim refers to the main targets of the newsletter: commercial, brand development, relationship development, presentation of the activity of the organization (authors' lectures, awards obtained, fairs participation etc.), stimulate book proposals by authors, other. The online conformity denotes the way the brand message is included in the newsletter: presence of the slogan, presence of visual identity elements, and no reference to the brand. The public is an item identifying who is the main audience of the newsletter: readers, authors, librarians, book sellers, other categories of public. The format refers to the general design of the newsletter: text dominant, image dominant, balanced, standardized design. Structure is an item identifying the way the content is planned, if there are fixed sections. Personalization refers to the concordance between the brand personality and the newsletter's attitude. The tone of voice detects how the public is addressed: friendly/informal, formal, condescending, elitist, technical, and other. Interactivity refers to the way the newsletter stimulates action from the reader: buy online, ask questions, go to book launches, participate to authors' lectures, contests, register/go on Facebook page of the company, other. The keyword refers to the strong-proposal contained in the subject-title of the newsletter, aimed at generating higher click and reading of the newsletter.

6.2. Findings and discussion

The 5 publishing houses monitored have different approaches in terms of approaching the newsletters, both in terms of sending strategy as well as content. Some similarities are also present, such as the common target: all the companies are exclusively addressing their readers. Another similarity is that all include their brand logo and some brand identity aspects, but these aspects are of secondary importance in all cases.

Table 1. Delivering frequency

Publishing house	January	February	March	Total
Litera	3	5	1	9
Polirom	4	4	4	12
Curtea Veche	4	4	5	13
Art	0	0	2	2
Humanitas	2	11	16	29
Humanitas Fiction	0	2	6	8

Source: author

Just Polirom and Curtea Veche, from our panel, have regular newsletter (weekly). Curtea Veche sent in March one more issue of the newsletter announcing a special event and inviting people to join.

Table 2. Aim of message (in % of the total messages)

Publishing house	Commercial	Brand development	Presentation of activity
Litera	89%		11%
Polirom	100%		20%
Curtea Veche	92%	38%	15%
Art			100%
Humanitas	30%	10%	75%
Humanitas Fiction	25%	12%	75%

Source: author

Isolating the main aim(s) of sending a newsletter is a tricky matter (and it does not accurately reflect the actual intentions of the company). We took into consideration just the clear situation, and also set several intentions if the case, considering the message and the approach of the newsletter. Therefore, some newsletters are considered to have several main direct aims. In the case of Humanitas, the informative approach determined us to consider that the impact is rather on this than on brand development, even if maybe the company also intended to strengthen the brand by developing special cultural activities (readings, launches, debates and others).

Other aspects investigated, as mentioned, were the tone of voice and the format. The tone of voice might influence the brand personality. We evaluated if the companies have a formal / informal tone, how friendly they are, if they address directly their readers. In all cases, the approach is either formal or simply informative. This is also related to the format. In the cases where images are predominant – Humanitas and Litera – the latter approach is preferred.

When considering the format, we evaluated two aspects: the existence of a standard form and the relationship between text and image. The publishing houses tend to consider a template of the newsletter, with the exception of Art. In the case of Humanitas, there are two "templates". The most used one is including the poster of the events promoted. The other template includes a list-presentation (including cover-images) of the newly printed books. Therefore, in the case of Humanitas images are prevalent, while in the case of Polirom and Curtea Veche one could argue that texts tend to be dominant.

To better understand the specific approaches of each publishing house consider, we further present the specificity of each of them.

Litera Publishing House has a special situation considering the newsletter. In March it stopped sending it, and at the present time there is no option to register for a newsletter on the website of the company. The newsletter has almost the same design as the website,

presenting very factual the offer (a grid of books considered to be more appealing than the others). The appeal of the books was initially considered the trigger to reading the newsletter and to accepting the commercial offers of the company. In the beginning, the subject-line of the newsletter referred more to benefits (interesting titles, abilities to develop, special gifts for friends and such). Later on, the approach changed, and "discount" become the power-word.

Polirom approaches the newsletter in a commercial manner, sending weekly messages to the registered users. The main aim is to present the offer to the readers, highlighting sales promotions available. The keywords used alternatively are discount, promotional offer, good price and new titles (referring either to actual new publications, or to "new titles" at discounted rates). The format is standard, having a fixed structure and an informative formal tone of voice.

Curtea Veche Publishing House has a standard approach, too. The weekly edition of its newsletter has a standardized format. Small variations are included in order to accommodate special events, such as book launches or author lectures. When special events are organized (such as in the case of Alain Pease conference in March) a special newsletter was sent. The structure is clean-cut: presentation of the offer segmented in new books, reprints and blog entries. The design is simple, including the brand identity elements just at the end. The triggering element considered is "discount" (the word is presented in 9 out of 13 subject-lines). The format is generally text-dominant, but additional illustration is included in the case of special events. The aims of the newsletter seem to be checking the offer in order to buy and stimulate reading the blog of the organization (book presentations on blog are proposed in most cases). Therefore, the aim of the newsletter seem to be mainly commercial, and secondarily brand consolidating since it presents all the important events of the company and invites people to join. The only public address is the reader. We consider that the approach of the readers is functional and straight.

Art Publishing House has the most inconsequent approach in communicating through its newsletter. The strategy behind is not so simple to extract. It sent just two messages in March announcing large-scale discounts and a book launch. We mention that the previous newsletter was in November 2012 announcing another book launch.

Humanitas Publishing House is the most brand-oriented in communicating via newsletter, since most of the messages sent present various events that it proposes. Once or twice a month information on "news" regarding the company is also spread, in a standardized format of the newsletter. Later, in March, information on the weekly events are also transmitted. Therefore, the role of the newsletter seems to be rather informative and brand supportive, rather than commercial. Very frequent mentioning of the leading authors and other endorsements in the subject-line of the newsletters strengthen the brand. In the same time, it seems that Humanitas has the most flexible approach, since the newsletter is not sent regularly and it is related with the activity of the company. This is the reason why several times during the monitoring period 2 newsletters were sent in several consequent days or even in the same day (referring to activities related to the two divisions – Humanitas and Humanitas Fiction). Another approach in strengthening the brand is the special attention given to communicating both mentioned division. Since the first of February, newsletters informing on Humanitas Fiction are sent to the readers (but no formal selection between those receiving information on Humanitas or Humanitas Fiction could be

observed). Unlike the other publishing houses, Humanitas does not stress any discount (just in one newsletter, as inside information). It counts on the prestige of its authors and books, as well as on the high quality of its events. Sometimes it uses intriguing titles, but many times, the event-title is just plainly named counting on the readers to understand the high quality of the events proposed. Therefore, Humanitas counts on the cultural background of its readers and probably implicitly sends an elitist message to be associated with its brand. Still, brand reinforcement is more likely secondary in online communication, the first aim seems to be rather informative and action-call (participate to the events).

CONCLUSIONS

E-newsletters could contribute in various ways to add value both to companies and customers. In order to achieve this objective, several aspects have to be considered, from content to format. The rules of branding (consistency, customer insight, adding value, relationship building etc.) are to be observed when developing the e-newsletter strategy. Nevertheless, it is not simple to apply these rules, and just a few companies seem to successfully succeed.

Today, effective marketing naturally interacts with consumers as they go about their daily lives. Marketers must use a combination of channels the recipient permits or is willing to be interrupted by to communicate. It is about a multichannel approach of both online and offline mediums. These channels may include outdoor, in-store, online or mobile advertising. No one channel will be the silver bullet to impact a sale; rather, success is achieved when tactics work in conjunction with one another. Emailing is emerging as the dominant digital channel, not for its pizzazz, but for its ability to roll up its sleeves and tether tactics together. Email is evolving in this new marketing ecosystem. Traditionally, email is used in push tactics — exemplified in the distribution of daily deals. However, email newsletters can be a pull strategy when share buttons are embedded, enabling bookmarking, linking to blogs, and reissuing on social media sites. This evolution is highlighted in 2012 Lead Generation Benchmark survey in which nearly a quarter (23%) of marketers' surveyed classified email as an inbound tactic.

When considering the Romanian publishing industry, just secondarily some publishing houses use their newsletters in brand development. In most cases the intentions are to increase sell, to traffic on their websites or to make readers participating to their events. Since the commercial aims are dominant, just readers are targeted via this communication channels. Not all the publishing houses have a clear communication strategy when considering the newsletter. In most cases, the approach is formal and does not create any kind of relationships with the public. Therefore, a thorough audit of the e-newsletter communication strategy should be undergone and new approaches are welcomed in order to have a relevant impact on the customers. Publishers who focus on quick growth may not make it a priority to build long-term relationships with their email subscribers.

Yes, having a huge list of customers' email addresses can be beneficial. However, it is only an asset if the subscribers need the solutions your organization provides. The size of the list is secondary to the relevant desires of the shoppers in the database. Publishers today do not have tight control of their brand. It lives and breathes with consumers, in their interactions on channels of their choice. What publishers *can do* is be calculated and discerning in selecting whom they empower to become brand evangelists. Email commonly carries a

company's best offer and insider brand information, so is better to keep it exclusive and to try to build relationship or to hold conversations with people willing to collaborate in the brand's success. A tactical approach for publishing houses is to seek building a vibrant tribe who thrive on creating a community of mutually beneficial relationships. Additional considerations include your audience's preferences on how the consume communications. Are they in the office or on the road? Viewing the email on a laptop or mobile phone? Do they have the time to read an in-depth article or are they looking for a quick sound bite? The answers to these questions can be provided by testing each channel in order to validate the hypotheses, only through testing and optimization will you find out what works best for your company and more importantly your customers.

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