

Email marketing is still top-dog when it comes to digital communications. There have been audacious claims that email is dead, but the numbers disagree:

7 in 10 people say they made use of a coupon or [discount from a marketing email](#) in the prior week.

74% of consumers prefer to receive [commercial communications via email](#).

Email marketing has an [ROI of 4,300%](#).

It's difficult to overstate the importance of maintaining a robust email marketing strategy, or the value of the marketing metrics you use to maintain it.

The right metrics will help you analyze and improve your marketing strategies. They will be flexible enough to maximize insight from each campaign, and consistent enough to monitor growth from one season to the next. The right metrics will measure your entire system, and produce big-picture insights, so that you can keep improving year after year.

## Analyze the Strategy

[Alchemy Worx \(@AlchemyWorx\)](#) is a digital marketing firm that focuses entirely on email. One client hired them to analyze their weekly email strategy. The client's weekly newsletter sought to inspire a one-time purchase from subscribers, and seemed to have stable opens and CTRs. The conversions weren't happening, though, so Alchemy Worx set out to figure out why.

"[The] newsletter uses a complex segmentation structure where subscribers are labelled into one of seven dynamic groups in an effort to create targeted offers," explained an Alchemy Worx consultant. "We used subscriber-level analytics, such as reach and frequency, for each group and for the programme as a whole in order to gain a full picture of the programme. This told us precisely what each subscriber was receiving and how they were responding."

It turned out that the basic metrics showing opens and CTRs were not telling the whole story. Alchemy Worx discovered that engagement declined dramatically weeks after leads subscribed, because they were being sent repetitive offers.

Alchemy Worx clarified, "Our advanced analytics techniques allowed us to pierce through the complexity of the segmentation programme, and realize that most subscribers were actually receiving the same offers week after week after week. Because the segmentation was dynamic and changed on a weekly basis, it was necessary to use these subscriber-level metrics. We suggested revamping the entire structure of the client's programmes to ensure that this could never happen, so that the content in the subscribers' inboxes would always be fresh."

# Improve the Strategy

Email testing and analytics firm [Litmus \(@LitmusApp\)](#) had fallen victim to the unhealthy doctor effect: too busy taking care of their clients to maintain their own systems properly. New Email Marketing Manager Matt Byrd and the Litmus engineering team started by setting their sights on Litmus' onboarding emails.

"We had two emails that were sent to everyone that signed up for Litmus, regardless of how they signed up and what plan they signed up for," a Litmus contact explained. "While these emails were helpful — offering links to log into the user's account; information on how to upgrade, downgrade, or cancel; and some useful tips on how to get the most out of their Litmus account — everyone received the same email. Users that had access to Email Analytics (an optional feature) never received information specific to this feature. In addition, some users missed out on hearing about [other] optional features. It was a major missed upsell opportunity."

The Litmus team developed two tracks for the onboarding emails, and then expanded the strategy to four tracks. They used coupons to measure giveaway trials at events and via content marketing.

CTRs were being measured, of course, but more than that, the Litmus team wanted to increase and monitor overall engagement with their services.

"With our new tracking abilities (thanks development team!), we were able to look at whether subscribers were using the tools in their accounts, and which tools they were using most often," said a Litmus team member. "Through this data, we've discovered which tools people were most interested in after signing up, and have used that knowledge to customize acquisition campaigns for new users. In addition, these new onboarding emails have **doubled** the number of people who were using the tools inside their Litmus account within the first 24 hours of signing up."

# Run a Fresh Campaign

[VerticalResponse \(@VR4SmallBiz\)](#) is a digital marketing firm that offers a suite of tools including email, social media, mobile, and more. One team member said they frequently send out special offers and promotions based on non-traditional occasions: "We've been known to send out awesome savings during our CFO's summer vacation – shhh! – or in honor of Talk Like a Pirate Day, for example."

A recent buy-one-get-one-free campaign offered a specific set of VerticalResponse clients a limited number of free email credit for every one purchased, using a special promo code.

Basic metrics were monitored to determine how enticing the offer really was: "We measured this campaign by open rate and click-through rate, as these are the standard metrics for email marketing, as well as revenue generated, since this was a promotion offer. We had a better-than-expected revenue turnout; those

who redeemed the offer spent 430-percent more per purchase, on average, than the norm.”

## Measure the Effect

U.S. Cellular commissioned the data analytics ninjas at [Cardinal Path](#) ([@CardinalPath](#)) to dig into their metrics and, “uncover the true impact of its digital media efforts on both online and offline sales. The telecommunications company also relied on Cardinal Path’s expertise to formulate and integrate a new analytics reporting solution focused on data accuracy.”

Cardinal Path built a custom analytics framework that combined three unconnected reporting systems within U.S. Cellular. “This new solution accurately tied transaction data to customer behavior data across all sales channels,” Cardinal Path explained, “and allowed [us] to analyze nearly 288 million rows (10 terabytes) of historical customer data from multiple sources. Cardinal Path investigated the role of each channel at different stages of the customer journey, and reclassified U.S. Cellular’s inaccurate sales attributions.”

These insights helped U.S. Cellular make a series of adjustments, including:

- Successfully reassigning offline sales.

- Establishing an accurate representation of sales performance across various channels.

- Creating a good foundation for additional forecasting.

- Properly crediting digital media for its role in driving traffic.

Katie Birmingham, U.S. Cellular’s Digital and E-Commerce Analyst, commented, “We’re now in the enviable position of having an accurate view at each stage of our customer journey. Cardinal Path has enabled a custom cloud analytics solution that not only gives us a business advantage, but helps us shape a great customer experience, and ultimately ties in to our values of industry-leading innovation and world-class customer service.”

## Learning From the Process

Of course, no part of marketing metrics is about the numbers themselves. Different metrics will help clarify what needs to change as you continue to refine your email systems, but they will also reveal some valuable lessons that apply to other campaigns as well.

Fine-tuning an email strategy is a big process, but the metrics used at each stage isolate three big-picture tips:

# 1 - Analyze Customer Behavior

Metrics and emails don't happen in a vacuum. If something is failing, it's important to figure out why before jumping in to try to make up the gap.

As Alchemy Worx (@AlchemyWorx) analyzed a client's email strategy, they were able to point out why the client's strategy failed: "The client's original idea to use complex segmentation and targeting rules in order to send personalized offers was good in theory, but it failed in practice. It did not take into account the fact that the large majority of subscribers will not take action every single week. As a result, [it] ended up sending similar offers every week to subscribers who had not yet acted, thus driving engagement into the ground due to the repetitiousness of the offers."

# 2 - Revamp One Step at a Time

Litmus' (@LitmusApp) strategy for their onboarding emails needed a lot of help. They weren't paralyzed at the size of the task, but they also didn't go overboard with changes all at once.

"Bite off a little bit at a time and then continue to branch out," advised a Litmus team member. "This will enable you to take a look at your results and user behavior, and adjust your email programs appropriately. It's also easier to manage, and allows to you learn as you go, making small improvements and tweaks over time.

Their patience also ensured that while they made the most important changes first, they were building a strong, adaptable system overall: "With our new onboarding program, we started by segmenting Basic users first due to the popularity of the plan. This strategy allowed us to make an impact quickly with the highest number of users, enabling us to get the data we needed to keep moving. So while we started with two onboarding tracks, we now have four — and it's relatively easy to add more."

# 3 - Keep the Strategy Fresh

VerticleResponse (@VR4SmallBiz) continues to send quirky, seasonal email offers because the metrics continue to demonstrate that it works well with their audience. As they hone their strategy, they have learned how to time the offers: "It's important not to send them too often, so that your audiences aren't accustomed to getting them too frequently. You don't want to run the risk of having them potentially delaying their purchases because they think a discount is just around the corner."

## Get Out of Your Rut

Winning marketing metrics systems all have one thing in common: flexibility. Don't marry any one idea or strategy, and never put all your metric eggs in one basket. Your marketing metrics should help you constantly analyze and improve.

The Cardinal Path (@[CardinalPath](#)) team was reminded of this as they rebuilt U.S. Cellular's data metrics system: "The biggest potential pitfall with any company is the failure to continually improve established data analytic systems. Companies should reevaluate their technologies, tools, methodologies, processes and partnerships on a regular basis to ensure they are taking full advantage of all possible data opportunities, while eliminating any potential data integrity threats, time wasters or financial drains."

When was the last time you reviewed not just the results of your metrics systems, but the systems themselves? When was the last time you tried something new to improve your insights? If your systems are starting to develop a rut, take a step back and start analyzing the process itself so you can find the first small step that will lead to bigger and better metrics systems for your team and your company.