

Testing, testing 1-2-3

The great thing about email marketing is that you've more than one chance to get it right. With each campaign, you and your customers get to know each other better and with greater familiarity comes better results. But you don't have to wait until you're two or three campaigns down the line to begin honing the effectiveness of your email marketing. You can start right now with our three step testing programme...

Step 1

This bit is easy but essential. Test that everything is working at every opportunity. Test connections to your web server, test that the graphical elements of your emails aren't corrupted and test that different browsers and email systems display your design properly. Put together a testing panel, all using different machines, connections and browsers, and send every email to them for feedback before your campaign goes live.

Step 2

OK, here comes the science bit. To test you're getting the best response from your email campaign, use the 'n'thing' methodology - where the n'th record in the database gets a slightly different message to the bulk of the list. By measuring the response you get to your n'th subset against the rest of the list, you can decide if you need to tweak the campaign - and what you need to tweak. You choose the n'th number, so you can make the subset as big or as small as you choose (a sample size of about 5,000 will give good results). And, because it's random, there's no bias, so the results are pretty accurate.

You can use this to test how all sorts of variables affect your response rates. Test different lay-outs. Emphasise content differently (does a banner get better clickthrough than the same link in embedded text?). Test subject lines, sender fields, time of delivery, content and offers, landing pages and how you greet people and personalise the email. You can't test all these things at once though! Just change one variable at a time and then build up your knowledge as you go.

Step 3

Once you've found a winning formula, track and refine incessantly. With, indigo's very own E-Marketing application, [ion](#), users can track which people click on a specific link and use it to further segment their database. Do this over time, constantly building data, segmenting messages and getting feedback.

This may sound like a lot of work but it's worth it on every level. It's not just about getting better response to your direct mail campaigns (although that's always nice). A scientific approach helps you get to know your customers and their preferences so much better - and that's information you can apply to every area of your marketing activity. And with systems like ion making it easier than ever to test and track your campaigns, there are no excuses.