# Engaging Your Subscribers Using Interactive Media in Email

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When referring to email marketing, the terms "relevance" and "engagement" have been more than overused, but unfortunately, the message doesn't seem to be hitting home to quite a few email marketers. In a web 2.0 savvy world, the need for email marketers to be smarter with their email marketing tactics becomes even more of a necessity. So how can you provide relevance and create engagement? In previous whitepapers, we've discussed using analytics, automation, and triggers, all effective tactics for providing relevant content to your readers. Today, however, we are going to discuss using a web 2.0, or interactive strategy, to keep your prospects and customers engaged. Let's start by defining web 2.0:

> *Web 2.0 is a term describing the trend in the use of World Wide Web technology and web design that aims to enhance creativity, information sharing, and, most notably, collaboration among users. It does not refer to an update to any technical specifications, but to changes in the ways end-users use the web. - Wikipedia*

This whitepaper will cover the following topics and best practices for integrating these engaging elements into your current email marketing program:
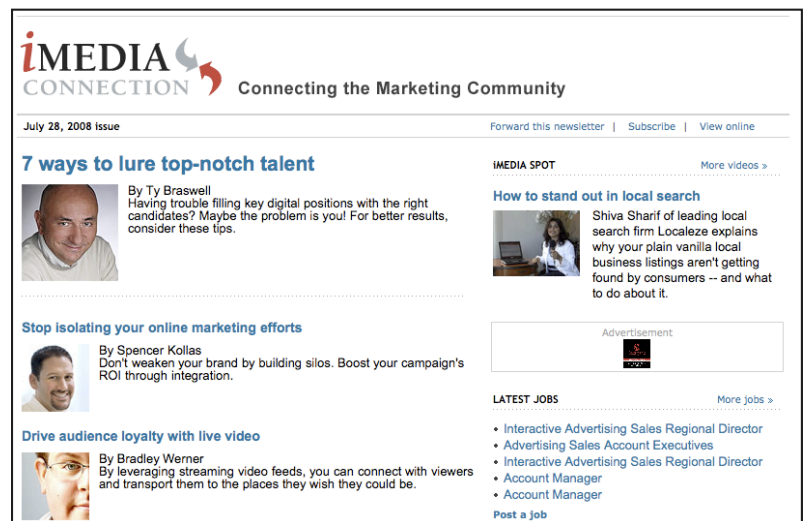
- Video In Email
- Utilizing Polls
- Flash
- RSS Feeds
- Conversion Paths

## Video in Email: Is it Okay? Is it Not Okay?

Video, if done well, can enhance your email message. The key is to keep it relevant and user friendly. No one wants to receive a video that doesn't enhance their viewing experience, nor do they want a video that is clunky to navigate through and can't be accessed easily.

It's important to utilize as many of these best practices as possible, but understand that all may not fit your business objectives. Use the following essentials as a guide to effective video use in email:

- **Always have the video stored outside of the email, and link to it.** Think You Tube, etc. If a recipient is engaged with the video call-to-action but the ability to view the video takes too long, then you're going to have respondents that are unwilling to stay engaged and click away.
- **Use text to describe the video.** You need more than just an image to capture the call-to-action. Include summary text that allows the email recipient to determine if they want to view the video. Consider including it above or below the video image.



iMedia often includes video as a vital part of their email marketing. The include a thumbnail of the video as well as a text call-to-action in the "How to Stand Out in Local Search" feature.

- **List the file size, length of video and formats supported.** By adding the elements of the  video, you allow your recipients to decide whether or not they have the necessary functionality to support viewing the video.
- **Use flash video (FLV) whenever possible to achieve higher compression rates.**
- **Offer multiple choices to accommodate all users.** Some audiences may have bandwidth challenges, so offer additional viewing options including streaming or downloading.

If you are considering video, keep the best practices mentioned above in mind as well as test. It's critical to ensure the customer experience isn't lost while including new interactive media.

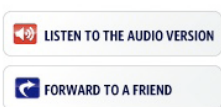## Polls: Let Your Customers and Prospects Voices Be Heard

Polls are a quick and easy way to put control in the hands of your recipients as well as keep them engaged. The key is to not utilize polls as a data mining expedition, but to add them as a way for your customers and prospects to communicate back with you. Don't mistake polls for research; they should be easy to respond to and not make the recipient feel as though you are being intrusive.

- **Don't tie them to your product.** The moment you make polls about your needs, and not the needs of your customers and prospects, you decrease the likelihood of response. Keep your polls fun and engaging while creating an emotional attachment to your brand.
- **What about the results?** You can give them instant gratification and show the respondents data immediately, or you can include the results in your next newsletter. Whatever option you choose, make certain to keep them engaged by giving them results. By including results  in the next newsletter, you may improve your results in the next campaign.
- **Avoid uncomfortable subjects.** Polls should engage your audience and further establish your relationship. Avoiding controversial content will allow you to avoid anything that could offend or disrupt your relationship with the recipient.

## Flash: Everyone Loves It

Everyone loves flash, but how well does it really re-act in email? The reality is that email browsers are just not equal to their web browser equivalents. To even further complicate things, your recipients utilize a wide variety of settings, preferences, security updates, versions, and third-party applications which make the user experience hard to predict. Ideally you should stay away from sending emails with flash imbedded unless you can identify that the email client your recipient uses can handle Flash content. Further, you should only send Flash/Rich Media content to someone who has requested it, or you have an agreed upon marketing relationship. If your executive and management team are sold on the idea of flash, consider adding a flash/rich media preference to ensure that subscribers have the capabilities to view it.

- **Consider sending a link instead.** Many email clients strip out flash content.

LISTEN TO THE AUDIO VERSION

FORWARD TO A FRIEND

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**July Low-Down.**

With increased consumer involvement and evolving technologies driving social media's popularity as an online marketing strategy, many marketers are now considering whether to incorporate social media marketing into their overall marketing plan for 2009. In evaluating whether social media strategies will work for your business, what do you see as the biggest obstacle with social media?

○ **Measurability.** You want to know exactly what you're getting for your investment.

○ **Experience / Understanding.** Social media marketing is new to your marketing team, and your staff doesn't have the necessary experience using social media to feel comfortable with making the investment.

○ **Control.** Utilizing social media means a dialogue with consumers and people in your industry, and you can't always control the dialogue.

○ **Budget.** You just don't know what costs are involved or how much to allow in your budget for social media marketing.

○ **Other: please explain**

CLICK TO ANSWER

OneUpWeb utilizes multiple interactive touches in their email marketing. Illustrated above is their use of audio as well as polls.

What does this mean? Your recipient could see an empty space. By sending your Flash content as a link, you can remove some of these limitations imposed by making the Flash content render in the browser rather than in your email.

- **Don't create an instant play.** Control your content with an onClick or other event. This gives your recipient control and allows them to choose when they are ready to engage the flash video.

## RSS Feeds: Promote Your Brand

Do you have a corporate blog or any additional news content sites that your recipients would be interested in? If you aren't already promoting it online and via email, then you should. Consider including a promotional banner or an RSS feed CTA (Call To Action) in your header or footer. Promoting this important component of your company communications is critical across channels. It also allows your recipients to engage with you further outside of targeted email campaigns.

## Conversion Paths: Engage Your Recipient Post-Click

You have crafted a highly engaging email campaign that includes various interactive content, but then send your recipients to the same landing page filled with an overwhelming amount of content that gives your respondents no control? Well, it's time to engage them post-click as well. Conversion paths allow your recipients to determine how they will segment themselves, and most importantly engage them interactively. Conversion paths are also a really good place to include interactive media such as widgets, RSS feeds, flash, and more. So consider using conversion paths to segment, qualify, and convert your audience.

Best Practices for Creating Conversion Paths

- **Match Your Message.** The post-click message should mirror the offer that initiated the first click.
- **Keep the Content Relevant.** The content should be compelling. If it isn't, it won't keep them engaged.
- **Learn From Abandonments.** Where are you losing your respondents? Analyze your content and create actionable solutions for creating more conversions.

Your respondents are alive and clicking, and your campaigns need to adapt. Consider delivering each individual the right-targeted message and fulfillment. So rethink your landing pages and begin to think landing experiences using conversion paths.

If you use the best practices described above for incorporating interactive media into your email marketing mix, you will give your recipients even more control over their experience and engage them time and time again.

## About Bronto Software

Bronto Software is an industry-leading email marketing service provider. Since its' founding in 2002, Bronto has simplified email marketing for businesses and organizations by offering a powerful, easy-to-use, email marketing solution together with industry-leading client services. The exceptional deliverability, detailed analytics and robust feature set of the Bronto application enables marketers in retail and other industries to easily and effectively implement email marketing that results in a positive ROI and business growth.