

Email marketing as a strategic tool in digital competitiveness

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El email marketing como herramienta estratégica en la competitividad digital

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzed the role of email marketing as a strategic tool within digital marketing and demonstrated that this channel continued to be one of the most relevant, effective, and profitable for companies in a market characterized by digitization and competitiveness. It was identified that email not only functioned as a means of direct communication with consumers, but also as an adaptable and measurable resource that provided commercial and relational benefits. The research showed that the success of campaigns depended on the relevance and personalization of the messages sent, based on data provided by users. These characteristics allowed companies to segment their audiences, influence purchasing decisions, and accompany consumers through all stages of the process, from initial stimulation to post-consumption experience. It was also highlighted that email marketing facilitated the analysis of key metrics such as open rates, clicks, bounces, unsubscribes, and return on investment (ROI), which allowed for continuous strategy optimization. It was concluded that email represented an accessible and flexible option for companies of different sizes, with advantages such as low cost, speed, and mass reach. Its complementarity with social media and its ability to build customer loyalty through personalized and retargeting campaigns were also highlighted. However, the study pointed out challenges such as inbox saturation, the need to generate relevant content, and compliance with legal aspects related to data protection and privacy. Ultimately, it was determined that email marketing has established itself as an indispensable strategy for strengthening business competitiveness and building lasting relationships with customers.

Keywords: Email Marketing; Segmentation; Loyalty; ROI; Consumer.

RESUMEN

El estudio analizó el papel del email marketing como una herramienta estratégica dentro del marketing digital y demostró que este canal continuó siendo uno de los más relevantes, eficaces y rentables para las empresas en un mercado caracterizado por la digitalización y la competitividad. Se identificó que el correo electrónico no solo funcionó como medio de comunicación directa con los consumidores, sino también como un recurso adaptable y medible que aportó beneficios comerciales y relacionales. La investigación evidenció que el éxito de las campañas dependió de la relevancia y personalización de los mensajes enviados, sustentados en los datos proporcionados por los usuarios. Dichas características permitieron a las empresas segmentar a sus audiencias, influir en las decisiones de compra y acompañar al consumidor en todas las etapas del proceso, desde el estímulo inicial hasta la experiencia posterior al consumo. Asimismo, se resaltó que el email marketing facilitó el análisis de métricas clave como tasas de apertura, clics, rebotes, bajas y retorno de inversión (ROI), lo que permitió optimizar estrategias de manera continua. Se concluyó que el correo electrónico representó una opción accesible y flexible para empresas de distintos tamaños, con ventajas como bajo costo, rapidez y alcance masivo. También se destacó su complementariedad con las redes sociales y su capacidad de fidelizar clientes a través de campañas personalizadas y de retargeting. Sin embargo, el estudio señaló desafíos como la saturación de bandejas de entrada, la necesidad de generar contenido relevante y el cumplimiento de aspectos legales relacionados con la protección de datos y la privacidad. En definitiva, se determinó que el email marketing se consolidó como una estrategia indispensable para fortalecer la competitividad empresarial y construir relaciones duraderas con los clientes.

Palabras clave: Email Marketing; Segmentación; Fidelización; ROI; Consumidor.**Submitted:** 03-06-2022 **Revised:** 18-10-2022 **Accepted:** 25-01-2023 **Published:** 26-01-2023

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INTRODUCTION

Today, digital marketing has established itself as a primary tool for companies to position themselves in an increasingly competitive and dynamic market. Within this landscape, email marketing holds a prominent place, as it has evolved into a versatile and far-reaching medium that enables direct communication with consumers, fostering brand loyalty and generating business opportunities. Unlike other channels, email combines low cost, accessibility, and customization, making it an effective strategy for businesses of all sizes.

Authors such as John Arnold point out that email can generate both benefits, including increased repeat purchases and loyalty, as well as challenges, including complaints about spam, bounces, or unsubscribes. In this sense, the success of a campaign depends mainly on the relevance and appropriateness of the content sent, as well as the ability of companies to segment their audiences adequately. The information provided by users is a valuable resource that, when used well, can lead to personalized campaigns capable of directly influencing the purchasing process.

Email serves not only as a communication channel but also as an analysis tool. Through it, companies can obtain detailed metrics on consumer behavior, such as open rates, clicks, bounces, and unsubscribes, allowing them to optimize strategies and maximize results. Similarly, in the context of e-commerce, email marketing helps maintain brand visibility, drive conversions, and foster stronger customer relationships.

Studying the purchasing process is essential to understanding the role of email in this journey. Stages such as stimulation, the moment of decision, and the post-purchase experience have evolved with the incorporation of concepts like the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT), proposed by Google, which refers to the search for information that occurs before purchase. In this context, email can be present at any stage, decisively influencing consumer choice.

It is essential to note that the effectiveness of email marketing extends beyond the design of campaigns to encompass compliance with legal and ethical aspects, including the protection of personal data and the responsible handling of user information. In short, email marketing is establishing itself as a strategic tool that combines communication, analysis, and trust, key elements for competitiveness in today's digital environment.

DEVELOPMENT

Within the theoretical framework, based on the ideas of John Arnold, email marketing represents an opportunity to experience both the thrill of increased customer loyalty and repeat business, as well as the agony of bounced emails, unsubscribe requests, and spam complaints.

Whether consumers accept or reject your email marketing strategy depends on your ability to effectively deliver relevant, purposeful emails to potential customers and those who need your information.

The data provided by consumers can be leveraged by marketers to generate competitive advantages through personalized and segmented campaigns, thereby having a greater impact on the consumer and influencing their purchasing process.

Additionally, email marketing can be used to gather various metrics and identify patterns in consumer behavior.

Email is not just about delivering an email; certain factors must be analyzed to measure the success of an email, which will

be examined throughout the research.

We will begin by defining the stages of the traditional and online purchasing processes, then explain what is meant by consumer behavior. Next, we will discuss email marketing in e-commerce, and then define the key concepts that encompass email marketing.

Purchasing process

The purchasing process includes three stages of classic purchasing decisions: stimulus, purchase, and experience.

Stimulus occurs when a consumer sees an advertisement in a medium and feels the need to learn more about the product or service that interests them.

The Purchase or FMOT (First Moment of Truth) occurs when the consumer is faced with different product or service options, either in-store (physical purchase) or online (online purchase).

⁽¹⁾ It is the moment when one evaluates the available options, comparing their characteristics, differences, and attributes.⁽²⁾

Finally, the experience or SMOT (Second Moment of Truth) refers to the consumer's experience with the product or service they have purchased.⁽¹⁾

Currently, a new crucial stage called the "Zero Moment of Truth" (ZMOT) has been incorporated, located between the stimulus stage and FMOT (First Moment of Truth).

The "Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT)," as identified by Google, refers to the moment when a consumer begins researching before making a purchase. This can be done via computer, mobile phone, or other device with an Internet connection. It is the moment when first impressions are formed and, in general, the purchasing process begins.

Email can be present at any point in the purchasing process and can be a key factor in deciding what to buy.

Consumer behavior

"The behavior that consumers exhibit when searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services that they expect to satisfy their needs. Consumer behavior focuses on how consumers and families or households make decisions to spend their available resources (time, money, effort) on consumption-related items".

Email in E-Commerce

In the corporate world, email is not only a classic part of the communication process but also a key factor in generating sales and driving business.

This communication channel is not just for large companies or those that require significant investments. It can be used by all types of companies, regardless of their size.

According to MDirector, email marketing offers several advantages and benefits:

- Customizable email marketing enables you to segment subscribers by address, tailoring emails to each individual based on their location, interests, preferences, or gender. E-commerce companies can develop targeted campaigns for specific audiences.
- It stays in the consumer's mind, allowing you to maintain daily, weekly, or periodic contact with users. Email marketing ensures that consumers do not forget brands.
- Email is obvious, as practically everyone has an email account. In addition to being an inexpensive,

convenient, and accessible medium, it is also a tool for work and leisure. It is present on all devices.

- It saves time because it is an easy-to-use tool that is accessible to all users. With a small quantity of practice, any e-commerce business can develop a successful email marketing campaign.
- It is economical, with a wide variety of platforms allowing for free or low-cost email marketing campaigns.
- It builds customer loyalty, as e-commerce businesses can offer personalized products or services to customers. In this way, the company retains users.
- Last but not least, email marketing can be measured, providing statistical data on almost everything. Another section will discuss the statistical data that email offers.

Campaign design

As pointed out in a study conducted by ITH⁽³⁾, when an e-commerce business decides to carry out a campaign, the following aspects must be taken into account for it to be successful:

- **Campaign objective:** The first step in designing a campaign is to determine the clear, precise, and measurable objective to be achieved. Brand awareness, direct sales, loyalty, and other objectives can be achieved, but each requires a distinct message, format, and content.
- **Target audience:** One of the biggest challenges is having a well-structured database that allows for accurate filtering and the identification of the proper recipients for the message.
- **Personalization:** This enables us to tailor each of these fields as needed. We can personalize campaigns so that the recipient feels “satisfied,” special, not just another face in the crowd, as is the case with mass, impersonal messages.
- **Format:** Email allows messages to be sent in two formats, text and HTML (the format used for web design). Text is the simplest and safest option, but HTML allows us to send more information and offers total flexibility when it comes to the graphic design of the campaign. We can include links to any photos/images, videos, files, flash animations, etc., as well as allowing us to study all the results thanks to web technology.
- **Results:** The results of sending campaigns are obtained automatically, quickly, easily, and in real time. The results can be monitored, which also reduces reaction times.

When determining whether an email campaign was effective, we rely on campaign measurement, as these metrics are crucial. With them, we obtain all the data we need to know if we have achieved our objectives. Below are the main metrics that should be analyzed in a campaign according to BannisterGlobal, a blog by professionals:

- **Open Rate:** Indicates the percentage of emails opened in relation to the number of emails delivered.
- **Click-Through Rate:** Corresponds to the proportion of emails delivered in relation to how many users click on a link within the email sent.
- **Bounce Rate:** Provides information about emails that, for some reason, did not reach the users' inboxes.

There are two types of bounces: soft bounces are due to a full inbox or a server crash. A hard bounce typically occurs because the email account does not exist or due to typing errors.

- **Unsubscribe rate:** This indicates the number of users who have unsubscribed from these lists.

Email marketing campaigns do not have to replace social media, nor vice versa. You can take advantage of both options, as social media allows you to gain online presence, while an email marketing campaign will enable you to generate traffic to your website.

Sendinblue, an email marketing company, introduces another indicator called ROI (Return on Investment), stating that its purpose is to calculate the profitability of a campaign by comparing the benefits it generates with its cost.

Legal aspects of email marketing in Argentina

When talking about current laws in Argentina, we are referring specifically to Law 25.326 of the National Directorate for Personal Data Protection, which explains that in all communications for advertising purposes, such as newsletters, the sender is obliged to expressly indicate the possibility for the owner of the information to request the total or partial removal of their name from the databases.

In terms of relevant background information, we will take into account some studies pertinent to this research, starting with DMA⁽⁴⁾, a British association with a significant impact on the world of marketing, which conducted a study in February 2017 in which it refers to several relevant data points, stating that email continues to be “important” or “very important” for the majority (95 %) of marketing specialists.

Continuing with the same DMA study⁽⁴⁾, it points out that the average ROI for email has increased slightly year on year, with an average return of £30,01 for every £1 spent, once again making email one of the most profitable tools.

Marketing specialists argued that a “lack of content” has become a growing problem since 2012, being the primary driver of ineffective marketing. Furthermore, the DMA's study⁽⁴⁾ found agreement between marketing specialists and consumers, stating that “trust” is the primary factor in persuading consumers to subscribe to brand emails.

One of the reasons why B2B marketers take advantage of email marketing is that, according to DMA⁽⁴⁾, this study reported that email was the third most influential source of information for B2B audiences, behind recommendations from colleagues and industry-specific opinion leaders.

Continuing with the background from the same year, Neetwork Digital Business School, a digital marketing school in Bulgaria, released statistics on some essential factors of email, noting that 59 % of consumers say their purchasing decisions are influenced by email marketing, and 50 % said they make purchases from email marketing at least once a month. In addition, mobile phones were the most commonly used device for opening emails.

In conclusion, Neetwork Digital Business School states that individuals who purchase products or services as a result of being exposed to a promotional email spend 138 % more than those who do not receive email offers.

In 2018, Mdirector released data on abandoned shopping carts, stating that customers of different e-commerce sites

who have received multiple emails about abandoned shopping carts are 2,4 times more likely to complete their purchase than those who receive only one follow-up email, and that the best conversion rate for a retargeting campaign occurs when the email arrives in less than an hour.

On the other hand, according to a study conducted by DMA⁽⁴⁾, 59 % of consumers prefer email communications from brands over any other channel, regardless of the context, which lends importance to email as a communication tool. Furthermore, since the introduction of the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), customers feel more confident about how brands handle their personal data.

DMA⁽⁴⁾ emphasizes consumers and the number of emails they receive in their inbox, noting that they have fallen from 73 a year ago to 57 emails in 2018, that 56 % of consumers say they open and read more than half of their emails, and that only 14 % said that the emails they receive from brands are relevant.

This study highlighted that when customers want to buy something from an email on their smartphone, only 10 % would buy immediately, with most preferring to check the company's website first or wait until they are on a PC.

Continuing with the consumer, the key factors for signing up for an email, according to DMA⁽⁴⁾, are, first and foremost, to receive discounts and offers (51 %), followed by being a regular customer (46 %). The most common reasons for unsubscribing are receiving too many emails (59 %), followed by information that is no longer relevant (43 %), and not recognizing the brand (43 %).

Over time, email has become a communication tool for many brands, B2B companies, and B2C companies. According to Sendinblue, a Spanish email marketing company, in 2019, an average of 293,6 billion emails were sent daily, with 86 % of consumers considering that more than half of the emails they receive are not helpful. More than half would not open an email unless they thought it was relevant to their needs.

There is interesting data in some email campaigns that are carried out, one of which is that including the person's name in the subject line increases the open rate from 10 % to 14 %. Another piece of data highlighted by Sendinblue is that email marketing is 40 times more effective than Facebook or Twitter in reaching your target audience, and email influences the purchasing decisions of 59 % of recipients.

Other relevant data is provided by GetResponse⁽⁵⁾ on email metrics and benchmarks, referring to global levels, where the average email open rate was 22,15 % in 2019, and the average email unsubscribe rate in 2019 was 0,20 %. Spam complaints averaged 0,02 %.

Concluding with the background information, we proceed to a study conducted by DMA⁽⁶⁾ in January 2020. As emphasized in previous studies, consumers today continue to believe that email is the most effective channel in various contexts, and they prefer it almost twice as much as other channels, according to this study. In addition, the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) continues to try to reassure most customers over time, but some wonder how brands obtained their email addresses.

Compared to previous studies, consumers said they receive an average of 55 emails per week in their inboxes, compared to 57 in 2018, adding that the most critical factor in opening an email is "recognizing the brand," followed by the "subject line," and 13 % of people say that more than half of the emails they receive are useful.^(7,8)

This year saw a 4 % increase in smartphone use compared to the 2018 study for making purchases via email. Receiving "discounts and offers" remains the main reason for subscribing, while receiving too many emails is the main reason for unsubscribing.⁽⁸⁾

Some conclusions that can be drawn are that this year's insights into how consumers act, interact, and feel about email serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of the channel, as well as the challenges it presents.

We have seen how email remains the preferred way for consumers to hear from brands throughout the customer journey. However, the GDPR did not have a particularly encouraging effect in reassuring more people about how their personal data is handled.

Meanwhile, the ownership, usage, and number of emails consumers see each week remain similar year over year.

Loyalty remains a key factor in customers signing up to receive emails from a brand; however, brands need to be mindful of the frequency and relevance of the messages they send.

To conclude the relevant background, DMA⁽⁶⁾ noted that only by valuing customers, understanding their needs, and offering them relevant content can we address the current imbalance that consumers perceive. The imbalance around data, privacy, trust, and usefulness that we have seen in this and other research.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of email marketing as a strategic tool within digital marketing enables us to affirm that this channel remains one of the most relevant, practical, and versatile for companies in the current context of high competitiveness and digitalization. Throughout the research, it has been shown that email is not only a means of direct communication with consumers but also a measurable and adaptable resource that offers excellent commercial and relational benefits.

Firstly, it is noteworthy that email marketing combines the advantages of low cost, accessibility, and the possibility of precise segmentation, making it a valuable resource for both large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises. Its capacity for personalization, based on data provided by consumers, enables the creation of relevant and differentiated messages that have a significant impact on the purchasing process, from the initial stage of stimulation to the post-consumption experience.

Likewise, it concludes that the effectiveness of this channel is closely linked to the correct management of metrics such as open rate, click-through rate, bounce rate, and unsubscribe rate, among others. These indicators not only enable the evaluation of a campaign's performance but also inform strategic decision-making and the optimization of future mailings. Additionally, the return on investment (ROI) offered by email marketing has consistently proven to be high compared to other digital channels, reaffirming its importance as a profitable and sustainable tool over time.

On the other hand, email plays a fundamental role in e-commerce. Evidence shows that email marketing campaigns do not replace social media, but rather complement them, generating synergies that favor both brand visibility and customer loyalty. The ability to consistently remind consumers of the brand's presence, combined with the capacity for retargeting—as in the case of abandoned shopping carts—reinforces its effectiveness in increasing conversions.

However, the study also reveals the main challenges companies face when using this tool. These include email overload in inboxes, the need to generate relevant content, and the importance of complying with legal aspects related to data protection and user privacy. In this sense, trust and the perception of security are key factors in ensuring the acceptance and effectiveness of campaigns.

Email marketing not only remains relevant but is also consolidating its position as an indispensable strategy for companies seeking competitiveness, loyalty, and growth in the digital environment. Success lies in balancing creativity, segmentation, metrics, and respect for consumer privacy, thus ensuring lasting relationships and mutual benefits between brands and customers.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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