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From e-mail to in-store: A few tips that'll have them beating down the door

By Judd Marcello

There is an old adage in the retail game that goes like this: "Location, location, location". It's that simple, right? You have the goods, you have the place and you have the friendly, "customer knows best" service. Customers will be beating down your doors and pulling products off the shelf!

Simple...or at least it was until the location went from brick and mortar to brick and mortar and the Internet. The proliferation of the shift of sales from offline to online has been talked about since [Jeff Bezos](#) sold his first product on Amazon.com (by the way, do you know what that product was? Don't feel bad; I didn't either. Check out the answer at the bottom of this post). Yes, more products are being sold online, but we can't shut the store doors just yet.

The Influenced and the inspired

What is a retailer to do? Does it really matter where you make the sale as long as you make one? Yes, absolutely. Unless you are an online only retailer or you still haven't embraced this new fangled thing they call the Internet, you should be employing a multichannel retail strategy.

Recently, [Forrester Research](#) published [their forecast](#) on e-commerce growth through 2014, and, if they are right, it is telling. In Western Europe (inclusive of the UK), Forrester expects the e-Commerce Annual Growth Rate through 2014 to reach 11% (114.5b). In the US, a +10% AGR is expected over the same period (\$250b).

Need even more convincing that people will buy more goods from the web? How about these additional Forrester U.S. centric predictions:

- By 2014, 8% of *total* retail sales will be from e-commerce (up from 6% in 2009)
Free IT and analytics departments to focus on higher-value initiatives
- 154 million. That is the number of people in the US who bought at least one product online in 2009 (that is 67% of the online population, up +4% from 2008)
- An estimated 53% total retail sales (U.S.) will be online and "*web-influenced*" offline sales (+9% from 2009)

It is that last stat that grabbed my attention. What does "web-influenced" mean? Actually, it is just what it says it is: online research, ratings and reviews, product comparison sites, social media, forums, etc. Over half of all retail sales in the US were web-influenced. That is a huge number...\$917 *billion* huge.



One of the biggest influencers on the web, especially where driving consumers in-store is concerned, is e-mail. [Further research](#) by Forrester states that, “e-mail marketing is nearly as effective at driving action offline as it is online. 44% of surveyed email users in 2008 were inspired to make an online purchase as a result of a promotional email versus 41% who said the same for *offline* purchases”.

Putting out the “Welcome Mat”

Considering that consumers are a only few clicks away from making an online purchase after reading an e-mail, the fact that 41% are inspired to go in-store and buy the product says a lot about e-mail’s influence.

So, you want to drive more sales in-store and you want to use e-mail as the linchpin in your multi-channel strategy? Good to hear, but what tactics should you employ? Here are few tactical executions that you can use in your e-mail campaigns to get more traffic in your stores:

Engaging MOEs

We have talked about MOE (“Moments of Engagement”) in [previous posts](#). MOEs are messages that resonate with consumers because they are triggered by actions or events related to the e-mail recipient (*me & you*). If your goal is to get people out of their homes and in your stores, here are two opportunities for generating MOEs.

New store openings:

If a store opens and no one is there to visit it, does it make a sale?

You already have your subscriber’s attention, so let them know about this big event. Send out a specific email announcing the opening and the events, sales or promotions that will be occurring at the grand opening celebration.

Want to encourage high register rings to ensure a successful opening? Provide subscribers with an in-store certificate to receive a discount when they spend a specific over a specific amount.

Be sure to target users in the same postal code as the store opening to increase the relevance factor. There is no sense inviting a customer to an event if they can’t get there easily or get there at all!

In-store events/services:

There are many different in-store events and services that can be communicated through your e-mail mailings: exclusive after hour friends and family sales, e-mail subscriber only rewards such as a session with a personal shopper, product demonstrations, food tastings, workshops, celebrity book signings...and these are just a few.

While buying online provides the luxury of convenience, the in-store environment provides the opportunity to provide a unique (branded) shopper experience. Are you launching a new designer clothing line? Why not invite your most loyal customers in for a special runway launch party where they get to see the new fashions before they are hung up on the racks for sale.



While you have them there, offer them a free makeover consultation with the designer. Even better, offer them an opportunity to buy items at a discount at the event.

The in-store environment is your opportunity to connect with your consumers in an engaging fashion. Be it an event, a service or a chance for them to touch and feel the products or get that all-important face-to-face contact with the floor staff, your customers should walk away thinking, “I can’t wait for the next one!”

In-store sales promotions:

Ok, this may be the most effective and least complicated to motivate your subscribers to visit your stores. Everybody loves a deal, so give them one that rewards them for being a faithful subscriber and in-store shopper.

- Include in-store only coupons in your e-mails. Incorporate “offer valid” parameters to drive traffic on specific dates/timeframes.
- Announce an exclusive product or collectable to your subscribers. Give them first access to them when they redeem a certificate once they come to visit you.
- Offer discounts on product that are exclusive to your e-mail subscribers only. Reward them for their attention!

Ship-to-store programs

This is an effective way to reach predominantly online shoppers and encourage in-store traffic. Offer them free shipping to a nearby store where they can pick up their product. While they are there, in an effort to up-sell them, serve up a unique on-the-spot offer to upgrade their purchase or to encourage add-on sales.

Promoting in-store pick-up to last-minute shoppers is another effective way to drive traffic at key selling periods throughout the year, such as Christmas.

Check out what Chad White, Research Director for the Retail Email Blog, for [his take](#) on a few (actual) ship-to-store e-mail executions.

Subject lines

Do not underestimate the importance of and the impact that a well-crafted subject line can have on enticing consumers to get off the computer and go into your stores.

Aside from some “Subject Line 101” rules of thumb, such as keeping it to 60 characters or less, using personalisation and highlighting consumer benefits, there are other specific call-to-action techniques that can be used to motivate your subscribers.

- Convey a sense of urgency with specific timings: “this weekend only”.
- Where offer codes and coupons are concerned, use phrases such as, “print this” or “bring this with you”.
- “Exclusive to [brand’s] e-mail subscribers: X% off when you visit us...”
- “Visit us for exclusive in-store offers...”



- “Last minute shopping! New, extended store hours...”

Thank you for coming

Congratulations! Your exclusive after hours in-store event for friends and family, that you announced via very effective event specific e-mail, complete with high-impact subject line, was a complete success! You invited your customers and they showed up. Now, how well did you do with when you tracked the impact of offline conversions?

You *did* track the offline conversion impact... *didn't* you?

Tracking the offline impact of your online e-mail communication is an essential part of the programme. While tracking offline is neither as easy nor accurate as tracking online conversions, it is still possible to do so with meaningful results.

Here are a few ways to track traffic and the impact on sales and engagement:

- **Exit interviews or surveys:** This is a very effective way to get instant feedback on their entire email to in-store journey. Keep the survey smart, simple and specific.
- **In-store testing:** If your event is occurring in multiple store locations, this could be a good opportunity to test a new initiative such as a store layout or new point of sale materials. Establish a control and test location and monitor how customers respond.
- **Primary Marketing Research:** Ask customers if they wouldn't mind participating in an onsite focus group or extended interview. Extensive primary research project can be very costly. While you have your target market in your stores...ask them some questions!
- **Use unique promotion codes or coupons:** Tracking offline sales in this manner can be very effective. Depending on the offer criteria, you can track more than just sales. You can also target specific store locations, particular products, repeat customers and/or specific traffic periods (time of day/night visited).
- **Loyalty Cards:** This is a powerful way to track customer habits. All of the data captured through the loyalty card tells you the what, where, when and how products were purchased. Not only that, but customers get benefits for being a member: win-win.

E-mail and in-store: kindred retail spirits

OK, so what did we learn? We learned that the Internet is fast becoming a preferred channel for purchasing retail products. We also learned that while e-commerce is expected to grow and grow fast, we cannot count out traditional brick and mortar business just yet.

The smart retailer understands that when it comes to online and offline tactics, one hand washes the other. The smart consumer understands that the Internet is a powerful provider of knowledge and as a result and even more powerful influencer when deciding what products to buy at which retailer.

The *smartest retailer* is the one that builds a multichannel strategy and leverages the web to influence consumers to buy products from them...and what is one of the most effective influencers on the web? E-mail.



Hopefully, some of these tips on how to effectively use e-mail to influence store visits has customers lining up around the block (*with exclusive e-mail subscriber only, in-store coupons gripped tightly in hand*).

It's your turn...

Have you used any of these tactics before? How successful have your tracking measures been? What are some other tactics that you have used to get customers to visit you?

Trivia Answer:

OK, still want to know what that first product ever to be sold on Amazon.com was? Here you go: "[Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies: Computer Models of the Fundamental Mechanisms of Thought](#)", by Douglas Hofstadter.

Bonus points go out to the reader who can tell us who bought it!