

# 101

## The Four Elemental R's of Email Marketing

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# 1. The Lowdown

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When it comes to email marketing, here's an easy way to brush up on your vocabulary. Although there are many terms unique to this online marketing channel, the four you need to remember most reinforce the core principles of email while serving as guideposts to ensure your campaign is optimized for delivery, and maximum response.

These must-know “R” words of email marketing are:

- ✓ Reputation
- ✓ Relevancy
- ✓ Relationship-Building
- ✓ ROI

## 2. Why do I need to know about it?

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In email, your reputation is synonymous with character. The truth is that every marketer who sends email has a reputation, whether they know it or not, whether they actively manage it or not. That reputation dictates if their email reaches the inbox. (The real control over the email pipeline rests not with the government (despite federal legislation), but in the hands of the ISPs who are the gatekeepers of email boxes for millions of recipients).

### 1. Reputation

Today the good news is there are many tools for improving sender deliverability and reputation, but there are no shortcuts. You can't just publish authentication records, (such as Microsoft's Sender ID or Yahoo's DomainKeys records) and be done with it. You can't send whatever you please, whenever you please, and expect your deliverability team to “make a call” and remove an ISP mail block. However, following best practices to build your reputation aren't difficult, and make good business sense.

The single-best and most-proactive step you can take to ensure good deliverability and a solid reputation as an email marketer is to employ 100 percent, affirmative consent opt-in practices when acquiring email addresses. That means your request to join is clear, subscribers have genuine choice and control over being added to the list, and they receive an email confirmation of their action. While 100 percent opt-in list-building methods may result in the acquisition of fewer names than other methods (like pre-checked boxes), the trade off in quality over quantity will be more than worth it.

At the ISPs, reputation is based on a variety of factors, and there is no universally agreed-upon reputation scoring formula. However, ISPs routinely use three measures to gauge reputation: 1) bounce rates, 2) blacklists, and 3) inbox owner complaints. So steering clear of re-mailing bad or out-of-date email addresses, staying off blacklists, and ensuring your messages are highly relevant (see below) to your audience will go a long way toward maintaining a high reputation. For a reputation audit or help in this area, see Return



Path's Sender Score Reputation Management Service at [www.returnpath.biz](http://www.returnpath.biz).

## 2. Relevancy

It's a fashionable buzzword in email these days, but it's really nothing new to solid direct marketing. After all, direct is all about creating and growing one-to-one relationships, which require a relevant context in which to bloom. Sadly, with email's rapid growth has come a universal approach to messaging that does not reflect the core principles of good direct response—know your audience, and segment, segment, segment!

Knowing your audience in email means not only knowing the basics about them such as geographic and demographic (age, income, etc.) traits but also knowing as much as possible about their context – both the frame of mind they're in when they sign up for your list, and the behavioral context in which your messages reach them. For example, did they join your list in response to a request for free information? In that case, they'll likely welcome your email if it delivers on the promise by providing rich, timely, useful content when it arrives. If, on the other hand, they ended up on a list in response to a contest or sweepstakes, they're likely to be more interested in winning a prize than in doing business with you.

Understanding context also means asking list members at sign up to state their interests and then exceeding their expectations, as well as understanding and tracking patterns of response history to discern the most likely periods during which your messages will be opened and acted upon. Taken together, knowing how someone signed up, when they signed up, what they are interested in, and which geo-demographic profile they fit can, and should, drive your email list segmentation, creative, offers, and content. If you want your email to be highly relevant, don't develop a one-size-fits-all campaign. Instead, create different versions of your message customized to unique audience segments.

## 3. Relationship Building

Exceptional email marketing goes far beyond an amateur batch-and-blast approach and certainly beyond sending stand-alone promotions, news, and announcements. It engages prospects or customers in a relationship. As we find ourselves in the latter half of the 2000's, email marketers are at last beginning to experiment with trigger-based and dialogue marketing. Email is the ideal channel in which to do so because it is cheap, fast, and easy to deploy.

Building relationships with email is easy for retention marketers, those who already have a captive customer base. When a dialogue begins with email, primary messaging (such as a regularly scheduled email newsletter) is used as a starting and communications-maintenance point, and various degrees of response to primary email communications place responders on different dialogue tracks for further follow-up. Web interactions, during which customers proactively search for, or visit, your company's site, are more likely email dialog- starting points and can trigger different series of email communications.

For example, a customer visits her electric power company's site interested in its green energy program, requests information, and receives an email providing instructions for enrollment as well as a request for future action (perhaps the download of additional information or a request to subscribe to a conservation newsletter). Response to the email then generates the next communication and so on and so on until a conversion is achieved—until a call to action is completed and a desired transaction closed.



The most-successful email relationship-building programs are the result of well-defined strategies and pre-developed dialogue tracks created before primary messaging ever goes out the door. They employ a minimum number of proactive email contacts over the course of a year and branch into different routes governed by different response rules depending upon audience interaction over the specified interval. There is considerable forethought and planning involved with dialogue email marketing, which is what makes it both more complex and infinitely higher performing than less-sophisticated approaches.

#### 4. ROI

At the end of the day, it's only worth doing if it's working, and for most direct marketing initiatives, ROI is the ultimate measure of success. Simply put, did your program generate more economic value than its cost? Did the time and cost investment in email yield measurable gains? For e-commerce companies, the ROI of email marketing can be measured in dollars and cents, in sales revenue versus program costs. For myriad other businesses, this is not the case. Nonetheless, other measurement of success such as brand impressions, page views, downloads, forwards, completed forms, and qualified leads are valuable and merit tracking and value attribution.

A word of caution: don't get too caught up in measuring email process metrics like open rate, click-through rate, and conversion. While these are necessary and important benchmarking and comparative statistics, your CFO will want to know whether or not the email marketing campaign has made money. Maintaining a focus on ROI helps you translate email performance measures into the business performance measures executive management is most concerned with.

### 3. The thing to remember is...

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The goal of any email marketing program should be continuous improvement. Ultimately, you're competing with yourself, perpetually trying to top your last best-performing effort. Turn negative ROI into positive by practicing the principles outlined here and don't abandon the ship after an initial unsuccessful effort. This is a learning medium. Instead, constantly test, test, test and use the intelligence gained to improve poor ROI or maximize return on good ROI. By keeping the four essential R's of email marketing top of mind, the only place for your campaign performance to go is up.

#### About Synchronicity Marketing

Synchronicity Marketing™ provides integrated digital marketing vision, coaching, training, and consulting. Its mission is improving marketing effectiveness and increasing return-on-investment by harmoniously synchronizing individual marketing activities into a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The company is led by Karen Talavera, a nationally recognized integrated and email marketing expert. A 20-year marketing pro, Karen offers over a decade of expertise teaching thousands of marketers from all walks of life email strategy, compliance, best practices, and performance improvement tactics through the company's many education products such as live seminars, workshops, webinars, consulting, and coaching. She speaks, instructs and writes for the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), MarketingProfs, Marketing Sherpa, the Association of National Advertisers, and Fortune 500 Corporations. Synchronicity Marketing is a member of the Email Experience Council (EEC), the South Florida



Interactive Marketing Association, and the Florida Direct Marketing Association. The company is located in Lake Worth, Florida, an hour north of Miami.

For more information, call 561.967.9665 or visit [www.synchronicitymarketing.com](http://www.synchronicitymarketing.com). Follow Synchronicity Marketing on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/SyncMarketing](http://www.twitter.com/SyncMarketing) for daily email marketing tips, resources and industry insight.

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