



## Make Friends, Influence People, and Differentiate Your Brand with Goodwill Messaging

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Building a true relationship with your customer and differentiating your brand is getting harder every day. Open rates are going down, retention is becoming more difficult, and consumers just aren't responding to the same messages they used to. What's today's marketer supposed to do?

One solution is "goodwill messaging." Simply put, goodwill messaging is the idea of using e-mail to build and sustain long-term relationships with customers, and not as a one-way stream of promotional messages. Where too many unwelcome e-mails begin to feel like late-night shopping channels, goodwill messaging is the throwback to the country store. The shopkeeper greets you warmly, offers you a coffee, and gets to know you and what you're looking for – before any transactions take place.

Think partner, not prospect. Goodwill messaging can take many forms: it can offer a service, provide an opportunity for feedback, or even give a little bit of information to make the consumer's life a little easier. More important, goodwill messaging can make all the difference. Not only do customers appreciate this form of communication, they respond to it, too. This increased interactivity often translates into higher open rates, increased brand loyalty, and yes, even more revenue.

The following examples show how goodwill messaging – putting the customer's needs first – actually help marketers differentiate their brand and achieve their objectives.

### **How can we do a better job for you?**

What do your customers think of you? Do they especially like or dislike part of your product or service? What could you do to improve? If you don't know the answers to these questions, here's a radical idea: ask them.

Many companies are now including quality surveys in their overall communications plan. These e-mails allow the consumer to give feedback on how the vendor is doing or what it can do to provide better

service. The obvious benefit is that these companies can apply the lessons learned. But at the same time, this type of goodwill message demonstrates a proactive commitment to the vendor's relationship with the customer, which goes a long way towards increasing customer loyalty and retention.

A popular online movie rental service does this particularly well. Its subscribers have become accustomed to e-mails that check in to make sure they've received a particular movie (chances are they have), or to inquire when they mailed a movie back. Sales messages are notably absent. Instead, this company uses goodwill messaging to demonstrate that it cares about their experience and that it's refining its approach to provide faster, better customer service. Is it any wonder that this company's customers report high satisfaction and recommend it to others?

Another fine example is Avis Budget Group, one of the world's leading car rental brands. Avis sends a daily satisfaction survey known as the Voice of the Customer. This e-mail is a triggered communication that is sent daily to customers who have recently completed a rental, in an effort to obtain their immediate feedback regarding their overall rental experience.

### **Everything but a ride to the airport**

Consider how an online travel agency uses goodwill messaging to strengthen relationships with customers and promote more repeat business. After a customer books a trip, the communications then kick into high gear. The agency sends the customer a series of e-mails with weather updates, tourist attraction information, and even tips on what to pack and other helpful travel information. This content transcends the normal vendor relationship and puts a warm and friendly face on the brand providing it. You can almost hear it saying, "Call us when you land, and don't forget your sunscreen."

By using goodwill messaging, the agency demonstrates that it wants the customer to have a good experience, and even to share in the excitement of the upcoming trip. Success here helps a marketer achieve clear differentiation, cement long-term relationships, and achieve a significant advantage over their competition.

### **Reaching the non-responder**

While your consumers want you to take the time to understand what is important to them, sometimes they just want you to leave them alone. The non-responsive customer makes up a growing portion of every marketer's database, but most hesitate to stop mailing to them for fear of missing a potential



sale. Rather than continuing with the status quo – sending more e-mails that you know they won't respond to – try a goodwill approach.

Consider sending non-responders a short survey to ask why they've been so distant, or what you could change to appeal to them more. For example, they may want the option of reducing the frequency of your e-mails. Consumers appreciate the gesture and may give you valuable information for improving future communications. And who knows, you may be able to re-engage them with your brand.

The old adage says "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." While some marketers may object to referring to promotional e-mails as "vinegar," there is something to be learned by sweetening your customer communications. Consider adding goodwill messages to your overall e-mail program, and you may be surprised by the results you achieve when you put the customer's objectives ahead of your own.