



Don't Misfire When Launching a New Brand

By Arthur Sweetser, *Chief Marketing Officer*

Admit it. It's tempting. You have a great e-mail marketing list, and you know current customers would love to hear about the new brand you're launching. So why not e-mail them to tell them all about the exciting new brand? Not so fast. There are ways to leverage your existing customer base and convert them to customers of your new brand through your existing e-mail channel, but it can be a delicate maneuver, with some specific do's and don'ts.

Let preferences be your guide

An easy and painless way to promote a new brand to current subscribers is to update your preference center with an option to hear about your new brand. If you don't have a preference center, now is the time to develop one. It can be a valuable tool not only for drumming up interest in a new brand, but also for gathering information on customer interests and attitudes.

The Gap family of brands does a nice job with this concept. The preference centers for The Gap, Old Navy, Piperlime and Banana Republic all offer the option to subscribe to e-mail from their sister sites, no matter which brand's Web site you are currently visiting. They also offer links to the privacy policies of each site on the sign-up page.

Make a simple announcement

Depending on the format of your current e-mail campaigns, there are a couple of ways to announce your new brand. One method is to modify your e-mail template and add a banner or module introducing the new brand and directing customers to your Web site for more information. Using this method, it's possible to use this space for cross-promotion once the new brand launches. Keep it simple and subtle, more like a post script than your main message.

Another way to introduce a new brand is to include a one-time announcement in your current e-mail campaign. As long as you clearly state in the subject line that the message is to announce your new brand, most recipients will see it as a valid use of their e-mail address.

Good intentions may not be good enough

If your new brand is in a similar category or related to your existing brand, it may seem like a no-brainer to simply add your current e-mail subscribers to a new mailing list for the new brand and let them opt-out later. While it may be likely that there is overlap between the two groups, it's important to remember that e-mail is a permission-based medium and subscribers added without permission could flag the message as spam. This could seriously impact your reputation and lower deliverability rates for all your mailings. Not to mention it could be a violation of CAN-SPAM regulations.

Using the "from" address of your current brand to send new brand messages isn't the answer either. Some recipients might be pleasantly surprised by the introduction of a new brand. However, others might be peeved to suddenly receive an e-mail "from" their favorite brand but about some new brand they've never heard of. They could feel it's a violation of their trust and their expectations, leading them to opt-out of all your e-mail messaging, which is the opposite result of what you intended.

This tactic has been used by some marketers and the impact can vary based on the recipient and their understanding of the relationship with your existing brand and the company. For example, The Gap recently sent e-mails for Piperlime to subscribers who signed up to receive messages from The Gap, Old Navy, and Banana Republic -- even when the recipients had not opted in to Piperlime messaging at the preference center. These messages were "from" Old Navy but the subject line and content were all about Piperlime. This is an odd choice for The Gap to make, since they do have a preference center and can easily segment out customers who choose not to receive news about Piperlime.

Build trust, not in-box abuse

Today's in-boxes are so full of commercial messages that even the ones consumers ask to receive are often ignored or deleted, simply due to lack of time or relevance. The last thing a marketer wants is to be seen as an in-box abuser, sending messages with little value.

Use preference centers, surveys, and Web behavioral data to get a well-rounded picture of your customer. With that information in hand, you can create relevant messages based on lifecycle, which builds trust. That trust will be your foot in the door when announcing a new venture.