

Five Best Practices to Improve Your E-mail Preference Center

By Tory Wortham, Account Director

An e-mail preference center is your first opportunity to impress potential subscribers and future customers. It is critical to invest significant time and energy into building a robust application because it sets the stage for one-to-one communication with key stakeholders. And yet, few companies have hearty preference centers. Consider these five general best practices when building or revamping your preference center. With a little hard work your program will flourish.

1. Offer an incentive with e-mail sign-up

Asking customers for their e-mail address should not be a daunting task, especially when you have something to offer in return. Nothing entices a consumer like free shipping or a discounted purchase. This is a small cost to incur when you consider the amount of revenue a single e-mail address can generate throughout the entire customer lifecycle.

2. Communicate confirmations, let your customers know you're listening

Set a standard of trust with your subscribers, from the minute they choose to opt-in. Double e-mail entry ensures receipt of the correct e-mail address and can improve your program's overall deliverability. Once confirmed, follow up with a welcome or thank you message offering an instant reward. This is just the beginning of your relationship, and it is essential you start off on the right foot. Continue to send confirmation e-mails when users update their preferences; these goodwill messages will show your customers you are listening and help you build a standard of trust. Continue to listen even when a subscriber opts-out; take this opportunity to refrain from sending them a "we're sorry to see you go" message.

3. Collect customer preferences

A new e-mail address is just the start of what you hope to be a long, fulfilling relationship. However, a lasting relationship won't take off with one special offer at sign-up. Use a preference center to collect customer data, which will allow you to target and segment your messages. Don't overwhelm your customers by asking for too much information upfront. Customer preferences can be gained over time; be patient and your relationship will grow. When users unsubscribe, ask why; take this information and learn from it.



4. Provide an easy and painless customer experience

Align your user interface with your company brand so it is familiar and recognizable when customers visit your preference center. By providing as much information as possible you will set subscriber expectations regarding content and frequency. Be transparent; offering information, descriptions of e-mails, and links to samples will allow subscribers to understand how your e-mail program works and know what to expect.

5. Give customers control

Allowing users to quickly edit and update their information will make them more apt to visit your preference center. One of the best ways to simplify this process is by offering pre-populated fields. Giving them control of e-mail subscriptions and frequency, along with preferred e-mail format (HTML, text, mobile) will ensure customers have optimal control over the messages they receive from you. In the end, this control will leave you with happier subscribers.

Global considerations

Many companies have disparate subscription centers for different business units and geographic locations. As a result, often times the same person is subscribed to multiple e-mail programs, from the same brand. It is well worth the effort to consolidate so that all business units, e-mail programs, and global locations live within the same application. Because of the amount of data that needs to be organized it is helpful to display a step-by-step process flow for the subscriber. Still, keep in mind global considerations like, language, differing postal code, and date formatting when creating your global preference center.

A preference center can become a profit center as opposed to a cost center for a company, if the data is well-managed and used to execute relevant e-mail programs. Be sure to promote your preference center in your e-mail campaigns and offer incentives for subscribers who select additional preferences. Good data is king; however, don't collect it if you aren't going to use it. Your subscriber is expecting targeted messages, if you ask the questions you better deliver.