

INBOX

Boosting client engagement through personalization of content

A guide for law firms and legal practitioners



Executive summary

Law firms need to start looking for smarter ways to engage with their clients. These days, people are bombarded by marketing emails. Despite this, effective email marketing that delivers tailored and interesting content remains one of the best ways of engaging and retaining clients. A recent report shows 70% of consumers expect email to be in use 10 years from now and 72.1% of 25-34 year olds are bullish about it¹.

Email marketing is more important than ever, according to marketing guru Brian Solis, who points out that even in a world dominated by social media, 77% of consumers prefer to receive permission-based marketing communications via email². “The answer isn’t to send more emails. The answer is to know who you are talking to, what’s important to them and how you could capture their attention and do something with it,” says Solis.

Traditional push marketing, when an organization ‘pushes’ its product or service at the client, is no longer enough. The downside of push is that the client gets your message at your convenience, not theirs. The chances are that your marketing email will not reach them at the optimum moment and may even run the risk of turning them off.

This is where pull marketing comes in. Pull marketing can help develop a high value proposition and stickiness for your law firm that in due course ‘pulls’ in customers. The following whitepaper sets out how push and pull marketing work together to boost client engagement and retention.

Key challenges in email marketing

1 Adding pull to push

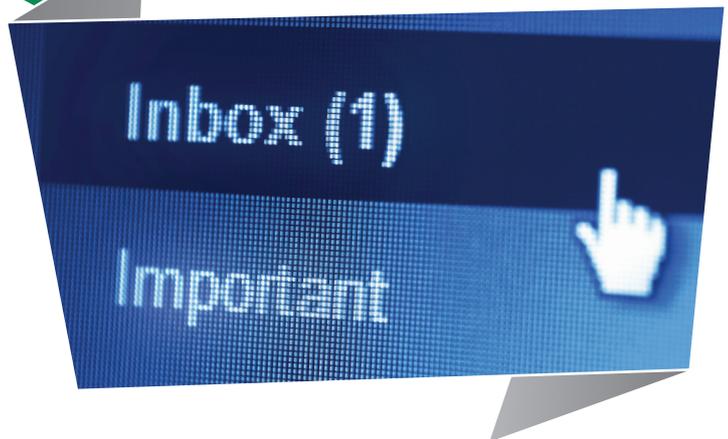
Law firms know that they need to ‘do’ email marketing (emarketing), but many are stuck at the stage of sending out traditional, one size fits all marketing emails that are having a declining impact. The challenge for the legal sector is to move their marketing to the next level, adding pull marketing to the traditional push methods. This means communicating with, not broadcasting to, existing and prospective clients with engaging and personalized communications, while meeting the specific challenges digital marketing poses when it comes to marketing legal services.

2 Email reputation

In 2015, only 79 percent of messages from legitimate senders were delivered into subscribers’ inboxes, according to a Return Path study³. Of those undelivered email, 83% were a direct result of the poor emarketing ‘reputation’ of the sender. Email reputation is a technical measure of how your organization is perceived on the web, and many law firms are scoring very badly. A firm sending out 200,000 emarketing emails a year may well be failing to reach 50,000 contact points. If this applies to your firm, and likely that it does, it is time to take urgent action.

3 Compliance

The legal sector is in the spotlight when it comes to managing contact lists. Law firms might be expected to demonstrate a good grasp of the regulations when it comes to ensuring privacy, compliance and data protection, but embarrassingly, some of the biggest law firms in the world have failed to lead by example when it comes to sticking to the rules. Using opt-in methods for list management is a challenge for the conventionally flat hierarchical structure of law firms as there are no tried and tested methods for sharing lists among partners.



Return Path’s ‘2016 Sender Score Benchmark Report’ analyzed a sample of more than 4 trillion email messages and revealed that only highly reputable email marketers are able to reach their intended audiences consistently. For example, senders with the best possible reputation score of 99-100 saw only 2% of their messages being blocked or sent to spam. This figure jumped to 10% for senders scoring 81-90, and to 24% for senders scoring 71-80. For senders scoring 70 or below, only a small fraction of messages were actually delivered⁴.

Email reputation scores focus on technical measures of deliverability including whether or not the infrastructure being used to send the emails is set up properly. Reputation scoring systems assess whether email is properly identified in accordance with email marketing standards. Another major aspect is how the emails are set up to handle complaints – is there a process for the recipient to block the sender, report the email as abuse or to label the email as spam?

Reputation technology tracks data on the decisions made by people receiving your emails and on any ‘bouncebacks’, where emails do not reach their destination. It also collects data relating to honey-pots or email traps – when a known invalid email address is added to an email list to identify firms using poor quality lists. If your firm sends an email to that address, it is clear that the source of your emarketing lists is suspect. If the sender of marketing emails – and that could be your law firm – is not aware of their low score when it comes to email reputation, then their emarketing will not reach its intended recipients.

Taking a smarter approach

Pull marketing needs to work hand in hand with push to take your firm to the next level of marketing. Push marketing should be about connecting people to ideas that they might not be aware of. In some ways, it is not unlike the approach taken by social media – getting the contact interested, saying ‘if you want more here’s where you can find it’ and linking to content. This way, through push marketing, clients and prospects uncover interesting and relevant content. The ‘uncovering’ process is at the heart of the value of combining pull and push marketing, building a positive reinforcing cycle.

Of course, even the most sophisticated strategy of push and pull marketing will be ineffective if emails are not reaching their targets due to reputation issues. According to the Direct Marketing Association, 94 billion spam emails are sent across the globe every day – most never read. Yet, 86% of people say they feel a greater connection with a business through relevant correspondence. Your emarketing software must address reputation so that you have a solid foundation on which to build push and pull marketing. Email reputation is not a separate technical issue outside the jurisdiction of the marketing department. There are steps that marketing professionals can take to improve emarketing reputation.

This is not a sexy part of the marketing role, but it is fundamental to success. It includes knowing and monitoring the firms’ actual email reputation score, noting your bounceback emails, creating exclusion folders of email addresses, that must not be used and making sure that checks are carried out against these excluded email addresses before campaigns begin. That has the dual impact of reducing the amount of bouncebacks and making sure that your firm is not caught in an email honey-trap. Dealing with bouncebacks is reactive, coming into play when an email has already been sent. You can supplement this activity with proactive measures to get email addresses right using validation services.

Opt-in email marketing is a well-established practice but many organizations continue to get it wrong. The news that they have a poor email reputation may help galvanize law firms to act on introducing opt-in best practices.

Moving away from spreadsheets

Legal marketing professionals have generally upped their game and progressed from Excel-driven email marketing towards using mailing list management solutions such as Mailchimp, Campaign and GetResponse to push out emarketing. The next generation of emarketing solutions goes so much further, tapping into the power of integrated digital publishing to combine greater personalization of push marketing than has ever been seen before, with pull marketing that offers content delivery that will engage and retain target contacts.

The latest closed loop communications transform emarketing from a one-way broadcast model to a two-way conversation. A single view of each client brings together all the information available about their interests and concerns, and enables legal marketing professionals to target them with content that is of real interest and adds value to their relationship with their firm. That information might include each person’s response to previous campaigns

and may also draw in information from a customer relationship management system or contact management solution.

Personalization is the final piece of the marketing puzzle, which until now marketing professionals in the legal sector have struggled to address. Capturing all this information and combining it with the marketing campaign closes the loop and enables tailored, personalized communications.

The next step is to create special access to this content for high value clients. Key clients should feel that they have access to something that is created especially for them. Perhaps you might create a subscription service that gives certain clients privileged information. If your firm has vouched for the integrity of legal information, clients will value it far more highly than anything they might find via a simple Google search. A deep level of personalization, underpinning sources of information that are high quality and relevant, is key.

Creating a content-focused culture

Legal marketing professionals can play a vital role in developing a culture where all employees collaborate on creating content on the intranet, putting in place technology to combine this content with emarketing, based on preferences.

There are a number of ways of creating and delivering content. Content ranging from briefing notes, legal updates and even blogs may be re-purposed and used for marketing communications. The barrier to content creation needs to be as low as possible, removing any requirement to work to specific formats at the initial stage. A next-generation content portal can act as a high quality internal information resource as well as a platform for developing content for external dissemination. It can underpin client programs, and subscription-style services.

Return on investment

There are a number of routes to measuring return on investment in personalizing content to boost customer engagement. The goal is to make your communication sticky, keep contacts interested and keep them with you. If you are successful, your firm will no longer be simply a purveyor of legal advice but will have become a trusted advisor, resulting in an improvement in client retention rates. Done properly, push and pull marketing provide clients with the information that they need, when they want it. As a result, clients spend less time contacting lawyers in person for information and advice and your valuable experts can become more productive. Enhancing the pull side of marketing can even create a whole new stream of revenue, with new opportunities to monetize content.

Quality content has a major role in boosting client engagement. Combining engaging content with technology that enables deep personalization of emarketing, legal marketing professionals can keep their law firm top of mind. Outside of the legal sector, the need to listen to the voice of the customer and respond to what clients are saying is well established. Legal marketers who succeed in introducing a responsive and personalized approach to their firm’s marketing communications, integrating the latest generation closed loop marketing communications, will very quickly reap the benefits.

Top tips to get started

- 1 Consider how to build a content creation culture across the organization that can act as an internal information resource as well as a resource for external marketing communications content.
- 2 Develop aggregated content collection, selecting from the best resources of the web. These data feeds are best used to supplement the true added value that will come from content created by your own internal legal experts.
- 3 Listen to what your clients are saying. It is time to move away from that internal dialogue about whom to approach and start listening to and understanding what contacts are saying.
- 4 Keep it simple. Start small rather than give in to temptation to use all the bells and whistles on your emarketing solution from day one. Keep the design and the messaging simple and manage your aspirations closely.
- 5 Just do it. There is no time to waste in getting effective email marketing up and running.

References

- ¹ Litmus report: Email marketing in 2020 – 20 experts share their visions of the future of the channel.
² Brian Solis, 'What's the Future of Business? – changing the way businesses create experiences'.
³ <https://blog.returnpath.com/3-things-we-learned-about-email-in-2015/>.
⁴ <https://returnpath.com/newsroom/new-research-return-path-investigates-effect-reputation-email-marketing-success-90-percent-delivered-messages-come-reputable-senders/>.
⁵ Direct Marketing Association <http://dma.org.uk/article/direct-mail-by-numbers-key-statistics-about-the-world-s-favourite-marketing>.

About Tikit

Tikit builds products that help law firms achieve their objectives of being profitable, efficient, connected and supported. Tikit is the ideal technology partner for law firms looking to boost customer engagement with the latest generation of email marketing and content solutions.

Tikit is one of the largest suppliers of technology solutions and services to legal and professional services firms, and is part of BT Group. Tikit's client list totals more than 1,450 firms globally, including 90 of the UK's top 100 law firms, 250 US law firms and 12 of the top 20 European law firms. Tikit is a complete technology partner offering a broad portfolio that includes software solutions, IT outsourcing, communication, networks and hosting. Tikit develops its own software and has long-standing relationships with other top best-of-breed providers, matching expertise with a reputation for excellent customer service.

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