

Six Small (and Cheap!) Ways to Target E-Mail

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One of e-mail's benefits is its ability to target messages to sub-groups within your list. Yet going all-out on targeting and creating completely different versions of a message for each group can get expensive. Here are small, inexpensive ways to target a generic message to different groups. I've culled these examples from recent experience with my clients.

1. **"From" Address** Along with the subject line, the "from" address is key to getting an e-mail opened. When talking to multiple audiences, you may want to use different "from" addresses for each. For instance, we're doing a promotion for a product with a brand name well-known to adults. It features music from an artist popular with 'tweens. For adults on the list, we'll use the brand name alone. They probably wouldn't recognize the artist's name, anyway. For the 'tweens, we'll combine the product name (which holds more interest for them than the brand name) with the artist's name to add interest and to encourage them to open the e-mail.
2. **Subject Line** The subject line can be used to target an audience with just a little extra effort. In a mailing to adults, we used the brand name as the "from" address, and the names of products targeted to their children's age group at the beginning of the subject line, before a benefit statement. We got a lift from this tactic when we tested it against subject lines with just the benefit statement. Adding the names of products their children know and love make the message more personal, hence they're more inclined to open it.
3. **Personalization** There are many, many views on how and when to use personalization. Here are mine: I'm not a fan of putting a person's name in the "from" address or subject line. It just seems spammy to me. But I do like to use the recipient's name at the top of the body copy so it appears in the preview pane. It's a quick way to engage someone and give them the feeling the e-mail was prepared with them in mind. Most often, we use it above the headline or in a salutation ("Dear Leo"). You'll need to have a "slug" ready ("Dear Preschool Parent") to use in cases when you don't have a name. The slug should be as targeted as possible to the group.
4. **Links/Buttons** People don't *read e-mail*, they *skim* it. While this doesn't mean you don't need to have great copy, you should also have a group of links or buttons that (a) include the calls-to-action; or (b) provide one-click access to key online areas. Since the calls-to-action and key areas can vary, you can customize them for each group.

An e-mail to adults, who are purchasers, might include buttons to buy online; locate a nearby brick-and-mortar store; or obtain additional product information. The same message to children, who are not purchasers but influencers and recommenders, would have buttons allowing them to try the product online; add it to their wish list; and perhaps even send a message to their parents saying they want the product as a gift.

5. **Body Copy** We're finding small changes in body copy can go a long way toward making a generic message more targeted. Something as simple as using, "You

and your family are invited..." for adults and "You and your friends are invited..." for 'tweens can have an impact, even if the rest of the message reads exactly the same as it did in a more generic message.

6. **Closing** The closing tells the reader who the e-mail is from. Consistency with the "from" address here is critical. Using the examples above, an e-mail with a brand in the "from" address should close with some form of the brand name; similarly if a product and artist's name were included in the "from" address, one, if not both, should be included in the closing.

Customization requires a strong understanding of your audience and the ability to tweak e-mail copy so it addresses their needs. The calls-to-action must match those needs. Have your copywriter first focus on writing copy directed to all the audiences you're addressing. Then, go back and look at places where you can customize just a little. Many e-mail providers have dynamic content systems that can insert the customized phrases as needed, based on a set of rules. If your system doesn't offer this, you can create multiple versions of the message, then send each version to the segment it's targeted to. Sure, it's a little more work, but it should pay off in the long run with higher open, click-through and conversion rates.