

Talking Technology

How to market with the customer's permission

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor



Dealing with constant interruptions from companies or individuals trying to market a product or service to you can be annoying.

They continue to bombard me with phone calls or with SPAM e-mail that is clogging up my inbox, without regard to whether or not I'm interested in what they have to say.

Time management experts tell us the average worker spends over 30 per cent of their workday being interrupted. These days most of the interruptions are related to SPAM e-mail that simply floats into your inbox.

If you don't have a good SPAM filter, you still end up having to delete the message out of your inbox.

If you are diligent in using a rules-based SPAM filter then you take the time every time some new piece of SPAM arrives to make sure that you don't get something similar again.

Really, what a complete waste of our time!

We need to radically transform the way that we market to potential customers.

To me, interruption marketing, which is based upon the principle of forcing someone to pay attention to your message without asking their permission, does not work very well.

Why do advertisers need to fight for a person's attention by interrupting them? Isn't there a better way? There is way too much going on in our busy lives for us to accept being interrupted anymore.

For instance, why do we accept advertising that strategically interrupts us just as something really important is going to happen in our favourite TV show?

Why do commercials have to be our "price to pay" for having the privilege of watching the rest of the program?

Not a wonder we are a generation of channel flippers, looking for something other than a commercial to watch.

A new advertising model is need, which is built around permission not interruptions.

The challenge for marketers is to persuade consumers to volunteer their attention by agreeing to learn more about a company and its products.

Seth Godin, who wrote the book entitled *Permission Marketing*, owns Yoyodyne Entertainment, which use the Web, e-mail, and other online media to create these new relationships.

All of its campaigns are built around game shows, contests, or sweepstakes.

Consumers give a company permission to send them messages in return for the chance to win prizes they care about.

The basic principle behind Yoyodyne is that consumers will grant a company permission to communicate only if they know what's in it for them.

Yoyodyne has over 1 million active participants in its games database.

It has sent more than 210 million e-mail messages to influence consumer behavior.

And it receives more e-mail responses than any other company in the world.

An example of permission marketing at work was when H&R Block wanted to introduce a new service aimed at upper-income customers.

None of those customers knew about the service before the permission marketing program started.

First they used banners on various Web sites that said, "H&R Block: We'll pay your taxes sweepstakes."

The only people who clicked on those banners were people who paid taxes and knew what H&R Block was.

More than 50,000 people responded by providing their e-mail address, which the company guaranteed would not be sold or used for any other purpose.

Participants became players in a contest for a chance to have their taxes paid by H&R Block.

In return, they granted the company permission to teach them about its new service.

Every week, they had to answer trivia questions about taxes, H&R Block, and other relevant stuff.

They got three e-mails per week for 10 weeks. Each e-mail included fun facts and a promotional message about this new service.

The average response rate per message was 40 per cent— meaning that, on average, every time 100 people got a specific e-mail, 40 wrote back or took action. Over the life of the promotion, 97 per cent of the people who entered the game

stayed in it and more than 40 per cent of participants actually signed up for the service.

What I like most about permission marketing is that it challenges some of the most cherished assumptions about marketing.

In this model, you care more about deep relationships than quick impressions.

You measure the success of your marketing by how many consumers have given you permission to talk to them and how far that permission goes.

No matter what business you are in you can apply permission marketing.

It is really surprising how much better your marketing results are when you ask someone for their permission to send them more information.

While you might not need all of the gimmicks of a sweepstake game, you will need to really understand what your target audience really values.

Permission marketing can be as simple as asking an existing customer if you can send them further information about similar products to what they have just purchased.

It can be the online newsletter that you send to clients that have granted you their permission to send it to them.

I was really impressed last week when a professional services firm e-mailed me to ask for my permission to continue to send me their newsletter.

They said, "You receive our newsletter regularly and we want to ensure that we are still adding value to your business by asking for your permission to continue to send it to you. Any feedback that you would like to provide would be greatly appreciated."

I granted them permission to continue sending me their newsletter and I took the opportunity to provide them with my feedback on how the newsletter could better suit my needs.

In my opinion, by asking for my continued permission they not only earned my respect but they definitely deepened their relationship with me. They really left me with the impression that they really cared about my business.

Here is a simple challenge for your marketing efforts—does every marketing piece you create invite consumers to "raise their hands," to volunteer to hear more? Every time you want a consumer to pay attention, do you offer some tangible benefits?

When is the last time you asked your existing or potential customers for permission to send them or continue to send them more information about your company's products or services?

Start using permission marketing and you will find that your marketing efforts will become much more effective.

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