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Value your brand? Then why delegate responsibility for your email marketing, asks **Malcolm Auld**.

Don't leave email to amateurs

Over the last year I've been discussing with marketers some of the reasons email marketing has choked on its own success. After all, never before has a new media been so readily accepted by consumers, yet so comprehensively abused by marketers to the point of consumer backlash and the establishment of legislation against the use of the media.

Yet that's precisely what's happened with email. As little as five years ago there were commentators predicting the death of snail mail due to email. But now, thanks to variable data and digital printing, we're on the verge of a direct mail renaissance, while email has legislation restricting its use to opt-in lists. Making it more difficult for email marketing are the companies that have regular 'email free' days. You don't see companies having 'direct mail free' days do you?

Email is no longer the valuable media for acquisition of customers it once was. Its real strength comes in communicating with existing customers or prospects, who have agreed to receive email messages. It's an excellent media for selling to or informing current customers, or conducting surveys of a list via a quick poll. Paula O'Connell, general

manager of Returnity, an email distribution company, says about 95 percent of their customers are using email for surveys.

Some email distribution companies such as Xpedite won't even send emails to rented lists anymore – they'll only send to opt-in house lists – as part of its commitment to prevention of spam. This restricts the ability to solicit new customers via rented lists, opt-in or not, which is probably a good thing for the industry.

Spam is the main reason for the problems facing email as a marketing media. But what types of spam and the reasons they exist needs to be analysed.

There are a couple of types of spam. The obvious is scam spam, such as that which offers get-rich-quick schemes, an improved sex life, or baldness cures, etc. But worse still is the spam sent by established brand marketers – either intentionally or in ignorance. And the main reason brand marketers become spammers is the way marketing departments are structured.

If you work in marketing or an advertising agency you know that one of the easiest tasks in your job, after a bit of sweat and debate thinking about it, is to create brand advertising. Marketers are smart people who know lots about their cus-

tomers and write briefs for their agency. The agencies are full of people dedicated to the task of creating the ads – account managers, creative types, media planners and buyers, strategy planners, production people and more. If the ads don't work after being broadcast to the masses, the marketer stops running them. And guess what? Customers don't notice, or even care.

One of the hardest things you have to do in marketing is to create advertisements that talk personally with relevance to your customers or prospects – the people who pay your salaries – and get them to stop what they are doing and respond to your communication. Either by picking up the phone, completing a coupon, replying by email, visiting a website, sending an sms or visiting a store.

It's difficult to create personalised communications that speak with relevance to your customers. That's because there are not a lot of people with the necessary skill to do it, or because marketers don't always have quality data to allow relevant communications, or worse still, the responsibility is delegated to marketers without experience.

In most marketing departments the responsibility for creating brand advertising – whatever that is – is usually assumed by the most senior

people. They love to get involved in the development process of the advertising. The responsibility for talking directly to customers or prospects with relevance, however, is more often than not delegated down the marketing hierarchy.

Marketing departments should be turned upside down – delegate the creation and planning of brand advertising to the juniors in the marketing department. You can always supervise them. But give the responsibility for talking directly to the people who pay your salaries to the most senior people in your marketing department. You cannot afford not to – particularly if you value your brand.

In the past, if someone caused me grief, I would threaten to put their name on the *Reader's Digest* mailing list at least five times (with due respect to the *Digest*). Now I just threaten to opt them in to porn.com. People hate being deluged with irrelevant messages delivered directly to them. And the thought of being on the end of mail order lists or spam lists is enough to frighten anyone.

Personalised media is so intrusive and such a powerful way to communicate, you cannot risk sending irrelevant messages. Email, for example, is one of the cheapest ways to do major damage to your

brand when used incorrectly; conversely it's also one of the most efficient and inexpensive ways to do wonderful things for your brand when used properly.

Consider how you feel when you receive irrelevant messages in your in-box or letter box. Or when a marketer calls you over dinner at home while you're feeding the kids, or

of months to stop telemarketers calling them.

Unfortunately few marketers understand that the personal media are the most powerful media for building your brand. They'd rather pass on the responsibility for email, direct mail, telemarketing and sms.

But it doesn't have to be like this. If you understand the way the vari-

ering a first time purchase – you ask friends, family or colleagues for their opinions.

Face-to-face selling either in a retail store or a sales presentation is the next most influential. Companies such as advertising agencies, for example, pay a fortune for specialists to look after their clients. They know that most busi-

tions and negotiate on the telephone, but you can't on a website.

Email also allows you to engage in a dialogue, as well as deliver rich content. The first thing most people do when they get to their office in the morning or log on at home is check their emails. Business would grind to a halt without email; remember the recent disasters with the Telstra email problems. Email is an essential communication media, so you abuse it at your peril.

Think about what you like about email. And what don't you like. You're probably no different to your customers. Remember how you feel about email when you start to create email messages.

And don't fall into the trap of many marketers who thought that because email travels across the internet, they should use the web refugees to distribute it for them. After the great 'dotcon' most of the out-of-work web developers jumped onto the email bandwagon and became instant experts – although they knew nothing about direct marketing. They didn't establish call centres, mail houses or list broking businesses, yet somehow these web refugees convinced marketers they knew all about direct communications, just because they were web guys and email is part of the internet.

EMAIL... IS ONE OF THE CHEAPEST WAYS TO DO MAJOR DAMAGE TO YOUR BRAND WHEN USED INCORRECTLY; CONVERSELY IT'S ALSO ONE OF THE MOST EFFICIENT AND INEXPENSIVE WAYS TO DO WONDERFUL THINGS FOR YOUR BRAND WHEN USED PROPERLY.

watching something important on the box like *The Simpsons*.

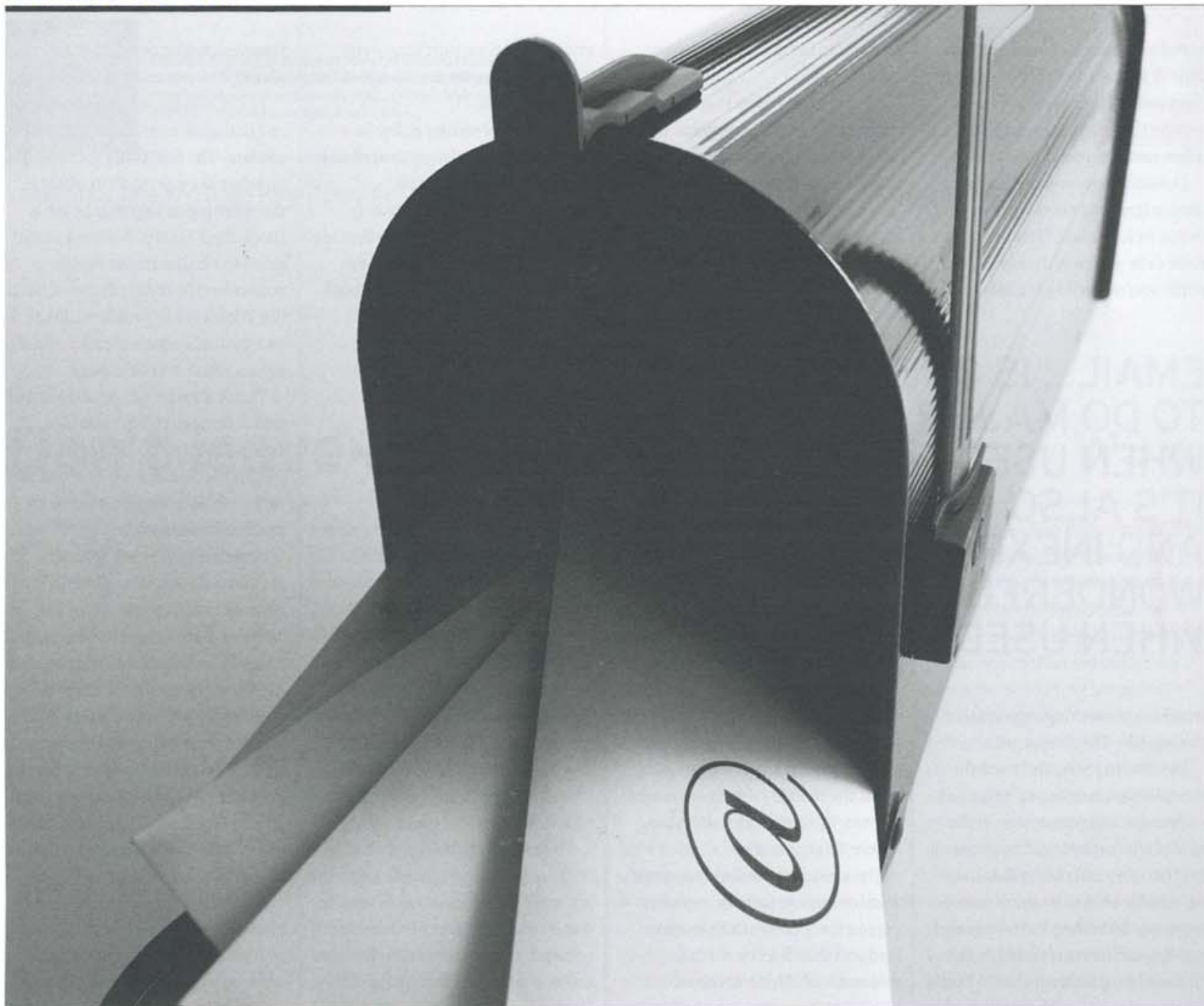
You don't appreciate it and the intrusion arouses strong emotions, even anger and phone rage in the case of telemarketing. The phone is another personal media that has been badly abused by marketers. So much so, that when the telemarketing opt-out list was created in the US, nearly a quarter of the US population registered in the first couple

ous media impact your brand, you'll realise how to leverage them to your advantage. The more personal the media – the more powerful it is. You run a big risk if you ignore this principle.

The strongest media is of course word of mouth. Just ask any salesperson for their best value sales lead and they'll tell you it's a referred lead. Think about where you get information when consid-

nesspeople buy relationships, not just products or services. How often do you see accounts or clients follow an account manager or salesperson when they change jobs?

The telephone is very powerful because you can engage in a dialogue with your customer – it's the reason more people use websites to research and the telephone to order, rather than just ordering directly from a website. You can ask ques-



In their pursuit of more work for their portfolios, they were responsible for distributing enormous amounts of spam on behalf of brand marketers who didn't know any better – or because their junior marketers were doing it. That is, sending irrelevant email messages to any list they could get their hands on – rented, harvested or house – and this helped lead to the spam backlash. In fact people can get angrier at receiving unwanted messages from brands they know, than from scam spammers.

I regularly get asked by web guys 'How can I get around the *Spam Act*?'

to which I politely suggest they ask another question. If you want to get around the *Spam Act*, you shouldn't be using email for marketing – it's the wrong question. You should want to work within the *Spam Act* and legislation.

One radio station in Sydney sent a broadcast email to people who had registered on their website. I had done so as part of my research and when I received an email, I rang to ask their marketing manager about it. He claimed they hadn't sent any emails – I explained I was looking at one on my screen. He disagreed with me and went to check with his staff.

To his horror he discovered a person from the promotions department had thought it would be a good idea to send an email promoting one of their competitions, without checking with anyone else first. They asked their web guys to do it for them. Apart from being a privacy and security issue, it was an abuse of the people on the list, because they hadn't opted-in to receive the type of message that was sent. Worse still the marketing manager didn't even know the message had been sent.

And that's a major reason why there has been so much irrelevant

email, or spam, clogging our in-boxes and fuelling the creation of the *Spam Act*. Marketers and their web guys delivering unsolicited email or irrelevant messages to customers or prospects are just as responsible for spam, as the scam spammers who offer to enlarge your personal bits.

If you're going to get involved in email marketing, take responsibility for it at the highest level. Talk to your direct marketing agency first, or an email distribution company, but be cautious of the web refugees who are alleged email marketing experts. If you value your brand it's the least you can do for it. ■