Stuart Nicolle, Managing Director, Purple Seven
Designing Effective E-mail Marketing Campaigns

Stuart Nicolle is the managing director and founder of Purple Seven, a UK-based tickets analysis software firm that offers the Vital Statistics box office analysis system. Vital Statistics is currently used by more than 100 venues and audience development agencies across the UK, Europe, America and Australia. Stuart is an experienced market researcher and data analyst and has worked for many prestigious arts organisations in the UK. He has been a guest lecturer at the University of Warwick on the subject of quantitative research and is a frequent speaker at arts conferences and consortium meetings in the UK and Europe.

This was a practical seminar about developing and improving e-mail marketing strategy. Stuart discussed a range of techniques that arts marketers could use to develop their e-mail marketing campaigns, based on research and case studies from arts organisations around the world.

Designing effective e-mail marketing campaigns

Purple Seven has a database of 250 million e-mail addresses which have been accumulated as part of several arts marketing campaigns in the UK and USA. This has meant that it has been possible to do a great deal of research on e-mail marketing and this, taken alongside the qualitative research which has also been undertaken, forms the basis for this seminar.

The seminar would look especially at data collection, e-mail design and e-marketing strategies. It wouldn't be about choice of e-mail marketing system, the benefits of e-mail marketing over other forms of marketing or deliverability.

Why do we do e-marketing?

Some key points that arose in discussion with delegates about the reasons for doing e-marketing included: cost-effective, personalised, quick, responsive, green, enables data-collection and brings brand awareness.

There is a strong link between airlines and the arts in terms of frequency. Some people come often, others once a year, others less frequently. So, why do we receive e-mails from airlines saying – come to The Bahamas for two weeks, it's £895, book by Friday and go next week? How many people can drop everything and disappear like that? Yet, the e-mails aren't as stupid as they seem, because it is effective in lodging the name of the company in your head and associating it with a trip to The Bahamas.

There are two types of e-mail marketing – the newsletter and the sales promotion – and different forms need different types of messages.

It's important to remember that people don't give you their e-mail address so that they can be sold to. Research shows that people join a mailing list for many different reasons that often contradict the reason we are collecting. We collect e-mails so that we have people to promote to, but the customer signs up to feel part of the company and make sure they don't miss out on things that might interest them.

Drive traffic to your website

This should be our number one objective for our e-mail marketing. There is a reluctance for people to read large quantities of material contained within an e-mail, it is much more successful to allow people to choose what they want to read and follow this through on the site and also customers are much more likely to buy something through the website than direct from an e-mail.

Among the ways that we can drive people to the website include: Google Search, links on other websites, offline advertising. The problems with all these techniques is they rely on waiting for customers to come to the site and when they are there we don't have control over where they go and what they do when they are there. E-mails however brings people into the websites much more directly by stimulating interest and linking through to the places we particularly want them to go. They will also be people who are already familiar with us and our brand.

It needs to be part of a circular process too so that it is imperative that new visitors to the site are encouraged to sign up for newsletters.


'Other e-mail addresses' means the addresses we have collected as part of our own relationship with our customers, **not** buying in lists or swapping lists with other organisations. It's legitimate to send e-mails out on behalf of other organisations if done well but swapping and buying will harm the relationship.

Don't miss the sign-up opportunity

The Natural History Museum does excellent e-marketing except that it is difficult to sign up on their site. This is partly a result of it being such a huge organisation that it is difficult for the marketers to change the site in the way they would ideally like.

To begin with it takes time to click through all the various options and then when you do get to the right page you are confronted with a daunting list of options to tick. Customers are happy to work through a range of options but they need to be taken through it stage by stage.

If we compare this with the Queensland Performing Arts Centre in
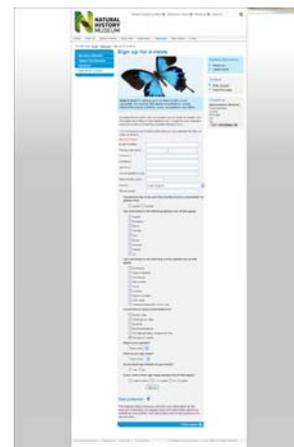
Brisbane, they dedicate the most important space on the website – the top left – to encouraging people to sign up to the newsletter. It's one quick click through to the sign-up page with a few simple options to fill in. There is also a 'view sample' button so that people can see what they'll be getting and easy to follow data protection guidelines.

They have phenomenal sign-up rates because they make it easy.

One thing that really annoys people once they've signed up for a newsletter is not receiving anything, so once they've signed up, send them something!

<u>What makes good e-mail design?</u>

Opening this question up to delegates elicited these responses – less is more, attractive but having the ability to read text within different formats, links which work, easy to read text in which the eye is guided rather than having reams of text.

There are some golden rules. For example, the longer you have been on an e-mail list, the more unlikely you are to open the e-mail (because you know what's there). If you do the same thing all the time, the opening rate will decline. Therefore, it's important to take people on a journey and change things around.

Regular communication is important, but make sure you have something to say that needs to be said rather than putting out frequent boring e-mails which don't stimulate interest. The research showed that the desired frequency of e-mails by customers was

- 60% at least monthly
- 20% more than once a month
- 20% less than once a month

This varies according to the type of organisation, but it is clear that the vast majority want to hear from you at least monthly.

This gives you permission to promote to these customers. A good relationship will mean that you are allowed, in their eyes, to be promoted to; the research shows that this can be up to two times in a single newsletter.

It's important to ensure that you give people reasons to be on your e-list. A good way to do this is to give them benefits which those not on the list will not have access to – special promotions, news, opportunities. In this way you will drive people towards a commitment – whether this be more regular attendances, becoming a member etc.

The things which ensure a good open rate include

- Regular recognisable e-mail address that the e-mail is being sent from
- Subject line – this is the marketing message – get this wrong and they won't open
- Content which is recognisable in the preview pane as this is how many people look at their e-mails (i.e. without fully opening it) – this includes text which is visible without the use of images
- Images
- Links – driving them back to the website

Good and bad newsletter and promotional e-mails

The characteristics of a poor e-mail bulletin might include

- lack of benefits to the recipient
- overly wordy text
- lack of link back to the website
- designing an e-mail like print – something that looks like a leaflet
- lack of reasons to click through and book

On the other hand, the Lastminute.com newsletter works well. Almost everything in the e-mail is clickable, it uses the visual language of the internet in that there are tabs and links and places to sign up. The content is not that important in itself. It's all about directing people to the website.

Some people might say it is a little messy in that it is trying to do several things at once, but nevertheless Lastminute have proven themselves through their e-mail – website connections.
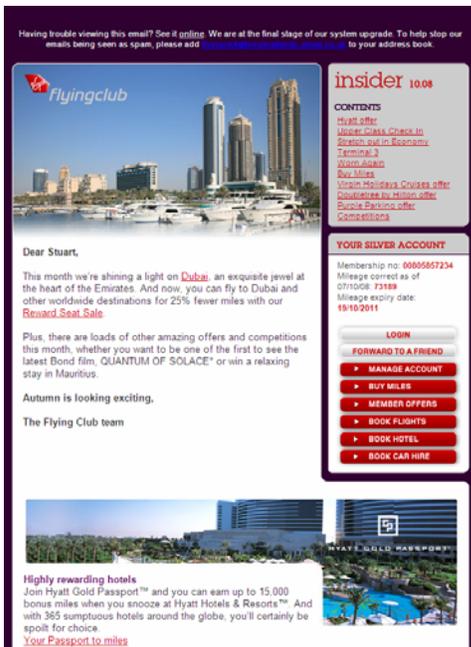
The Virgin Flying Club e-mail is long but it is attractive to read, with little chunks of text, a contents list, attractive images and straightforward navigation down the right hand side. They also carry the corporate ID through well, keeping the Virgin brand in mind all the time.

They know you are not going to fly every month (although there are very valuable people who do) so they concentrate instead on making sure you buy from them when you do decide to fly and they make you aware of their destinations, so you link that destination to them in your mind.

Virgin also include interesting news and information about the airline which isn't directly related to selling flights such as about Virgin Galactic, bio fuel and pollution and noise.

Reviewing how many e-mails come from Virgin, it is actually frequent as the grid below shows, with as many as 6 newsletters and promotional e-mails in one month. If you compare this to the arts organisations which are sending out newsletters every two months there is a noticeable difference. Frequent e-mail communication will encourage opening of the e-mails.

The average open rate of e-mails for arts organisations in the UK is 34%. The average number of click throughs for arts organisations is between 2 and 7%. If you get higher than 7% you are doing phenomenally well.

Quite a few e-mail newsletters use the same template and therefore have a tendency to look the same. The better ones tweak their templates to get better openings and click throughs. It's worth remembering that the eye reads from top left to bottom right, so take people on that journey but with added interest along the way.

Images in E-mails

Many people have problems with making images work. There are ways of making images appear properly in e-mails:

- If your address is in the recipient's address book it will not be categorised as spam and depending on their security settings the images will also automatically download. This is difficult to achieve though.

- Provide a link at the top of the e-mail which says something like – if this e-mail does not display correctly click here and it takes you through to a duplicate version on the website

- Encourage people to click on the bar which allows the pictures to download – in Outlook it says 'Click here to download pictures'

Hand-held devices

In a marketing sherpa report it was revealed that 64% of b2b decision makers read their e-mail on mobile devices. Of the demographic that come to the theatre, an increasingly large proportion of theatre goers will fit that group. The key thing to remember about this is to put your main content in the left column of an e-mail as that's the first thing that a mobile device will read – and remember the rule about your eye reading top left to bottom right so the key text is always the first thing that downloads, appearing at the top of the hand-held device.

It is also another reason to ensure that your e-mail can be read as a text only version. It works well on hand-held devices and is also good for people that use screen readers (for blind and partially sighted people). This can be done in quite a sophisticated way now so that if your recipient's browser is set to receive text only e-mails, the e-mail will automatically pick this up and open the text but not the html version. The way in which you do it will depend on the tools you are using to send out e-mails and the level of sophistication which they have.

Monitoring

The aim of the game is to drive traffic to your website and therefore it is important to monitor constantly the statistics: how many people opened, how many people clicked; ultimately you should be finding out how many people 'responded' be that buying a ticket, registering for an

event or requesting more information. The legacy of the e-mail doesn't end in the inbox – it ends on the website.

<u>Commitment</u>

E-mail is increasingly being used to build the commitment and engagement of the customer with the organisation, whether it be a touring orchestra, an arts centre, a gallery, an airline or a computer shop.
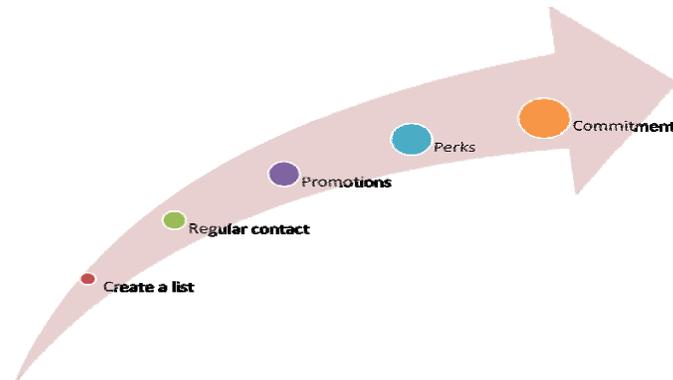
This is the journey that most organisations go on to create their strategy. Most start with promotions or regular contact. Then they move on to starting a few promotions. Then they provide perks specifically for the valued or e-mail subscribers. This might include invitations to private views, free 'upgrade seats' and other rewards. Reward your customers and they will reward you.

Finally, drive customers towards something, gently but steadily. Be it membership, donations or a higher level of frequency.

Translating this to the arts, this is the journey which you can take your customer on.

<u>Conclusions</u>

- Excite them
- Get the balance right: news vs. promo
- Make it easy to open
- Get the design template right
- Test
- Make them feel special – give them the perks
- Monitor your response rates
- Take them on *their* journey