

Statistical reporting of e-mail marketing campaigns can be lacking in transparency

Advertisers carrying out e-mail marketing campaign tests on several platforms sometimes face the unpleasant surprise of discovering a 2 to 3 point variation in the e-mail opening rate from one platform to the next, or else a delivered message rate of 97%, whereas if you dig deeper you find out that 15% of the messages sent have been blocked by anti-spam filters. Food for thought...

Let us take the example of the number of undelivered messages. This concerns the number of messages that do not arrive in the inboxes of web users. Either the e-mail address is wrong - hard and soft bounces - or the e-mail has been blocked by the anti-spam filters of the messaging systems. However, two calculation methods exist: one simply adds up the number of hard and soft bounces, while the other goes further, taking into account the number of messages blocked by anti-spam filters. Without doubt, the first method is less transparent than the second.

Another difference, and not the least, is the measurement of the number of e-mail openings. Technically, the opening of a campaign e-mail is linked to an image - often invisible - present in the body of the HTML code and hosted on the server of the service provider. When the e-mail is opened, this image triggers a call to the server, which will record this opening. This is what is termed as the actually observed number of openings.

Over the past few years, e-mail marketing has seen the arrival of new statistical indicators: estimated opening rate and *corrected* opening rate. What does this mean exactly? The *estimated* or *corrected* opening rate involves extrapolating for all recipients the actually observed opening rate. Some justify this extrapolation inasmuch as the opening of an e-mail is decided on the basis of its subject line and the name of the sender, which constitute elements that are not influenced by the HTML code. What is more, the opening of an e-mail cannot be measured if the web user is offline, or else if the images in the message are blocked by default by the client messaging system, as is becoming increasingly prevalent.

Here there can be no doubt, either, that the *estimated* or *corrected* opening rate is therefore, by definition, artificially higher than the actually observed opening rate. The lack of transparency resides in the fact that each service provider has its own extrapolation calculation mode, whereas the actually observed opening rate is a technical measurement.

Beware the definitions ascribed to key indicators!

To palliate this lack of clarity, advertisers need to be able to rely on the definitions that their service provider ascribes to the key indicators of campaign results.

It is therefore more realistic to analyse the number of clicks or else the web conversion rate, rather than the opening rate itself, which may be influenced by the message delivery rate.

E-mail marketing requires technical tools, a team of dedicated specialists, daily relations with ISPs, both marketing and technical advice, and long-term support and follow-up. That means human time and financial investment.

No longer will it suffice to make available an e-mail routing interface and a technical e-mailing environment while leaving it to the advertiser to take responsibility for deliverability management. On the contrary, it is a matter of being entirely transparent about the key indicators, whether good or bad, and proposing real solutions throughout the relationship, and adapting them as problems occur, with the purpose of optimising the genuine campaign rates.