



**MarketingSherpa Research Study Excerpt:
Consumer Attitudes Toward Transactional Email 2007**

Brought to you compliments of StrongMail Systems

We're pleased that you've taken advantage of this special offer!

The opportunity to leverage your transactional email to drive incremental revenue is very real. With spam filters and inbox clutter eroding the effectiveness of your email marketing campaigns, transactional email is an alternative way of conveying your marketing message to a valuable segment – active, in-market customers who have just affirmed their affinity for your brand through a recent transaction – with much greater assurance that it will be delivered, opened and read. In fact, JupiterResearch estimates that the average online retailer could generate \$500,000 annually by simply making better use of these routine communications to up-sell products and reinforce their brand.

Yet, while the benefits are clear, there's been a lingering question about how consumers would perceive these marketing-enhanced, transactional communications. To answer that question definitively, StrongMail teamed with MarketingSherpa to field a consumer survey in January 2007.

After tabulating the results, we're pleased to report that the survey validates the use of transactional email for supplemental marketing. The vast majority of consumers – over 83% -- will accept marketing messages in their transactional email so long as those messages are relevant, used in moderation and tastefully executed. As with other forms of email marketing, it all boils down to best practices.

This special MarketingSherpa report excerpt will give you valuable insight into the practices that will satisfy customer expectations and ensure the successful use of transactional email for your company. Of course, that's just the first step. You'll also need a technology platform that easily integrates with your business processes and enables you to actually deliver on those best practices, such as the dynamically inserted content for message relevancy.

That's where StrongMail comes in. We invite you to take a look at our solution and learn more about why some of the world's most trusted brands, such as Macy's, Williams-Sonoma, Netflix and Intuit, rely on StrongMail for their transactional email. And don't forget to download our popular whitepaper, "Put the Action in Transactional Email," for the compliance and technical requirements you'll want to consider in mapping out your program.

Once again, we're pleased to provide you with this complementary report excerpt from MarketingSherpa. We're confident it will help you put the action in your own transactional email and make the most of this unique opportunity.

Sincerely,

Dave Lewis
VP of Market & Product Strategy
StrongMail Systems, Inc.

Consumer Attitudes Toward Transactional Email 2007

**Excerpted from MarketingSherpa
Ecommerce Benchmark Guide 2007**

Note: This is an excerpt from the full 294-page Ecommerce Benchmark Guide 2007.
To download the entire Guide, go to: <http://www.SherpaStore.com> or call 877-895-1717.
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Consumer Attitudes Toward Transactional Email 2007

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Questions? Contact Customer Service:
MarketingSherpa Inc.
+1 (877) 895-1717 (outside US call +401-247-7655)
Service@SherpaStore.com
499 Main St.
Warren, RI 02885 USA

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What is Transactional Email?

Attention is a finite resource. The online consumer is beset by new media and communications options, making it more difficult to attract and keep their interest. For marketers looking for ways to consistently connect with current and potential customers, one solution can be found in a variation on the oldest of new media – transactional email.

Transactional email (sometimes called ‘service-based’ email) includes any message that has to do with an existing relationship and is not primarily commercial in nature. The best known types of transactional email are:

- Receipts
- Shipping notices
- Account status notifications
- Changes in terms or features
- Warranty info/product recalls
- Subscription related

The Transactional Email and Marketing Study

We know people are likely to open and read transactional emails because they include information that is personal and important. That makes these emails a highly desirable platform for marketing. At the same time, recipients might be sensitive to any content that doesn't seem appropriate in this type of message. This tension was the underlying theme that we wanted to explore in the January 2007 Transactional Email Study.

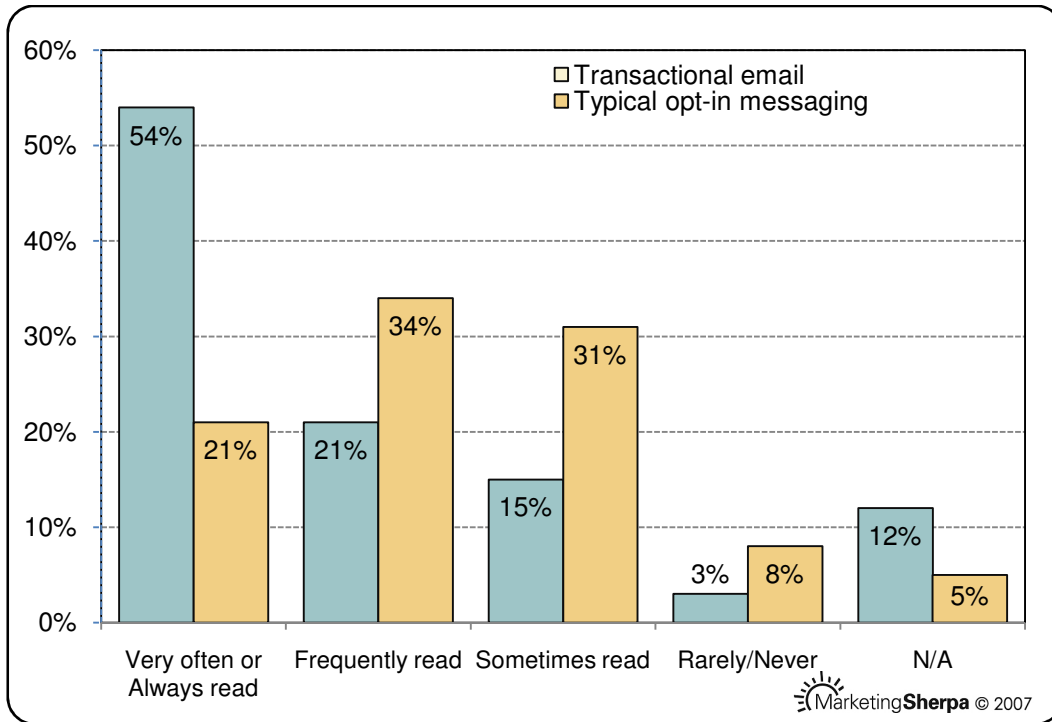
MarketingSherpa researchers, working with experts from StrongMail Systems, designed a survey that was taken by 1,323 nationally representative, adult members of Survey Sampling International's online consumer panel, during the week of Jan. 19. The survey was designed to provide answers to these key questions:

1. What is the opportunity of transactional email marketing in contrast to other opt-in campaigns?
2. How do consumers feel about email as a medium for transactional information and will the marketing opportunity grow or diminish over time?
3. What are consumer attitudes toward marketing content in the body of transactional emails?
4. What factors influence consumers' acceptance of transactional email marketing?
5. Do consumers' stated feelings toward transactional email differ from their visceral reactions to real-world examples?

The Opportunity

Opt-in email ranks among the best tactics for return on investment, but each year we observe a small decrease in the basic metrics, such as opens and clicks. Media fragmentation, inbox clutter and filtering are all eroding the efficiency of typical email campaigns. But transactional email is different. Our assumption was that the highly relevant nature of transactional messages would incite higher open rates and attention.

Chart: Transactional Emails Are Opened & Read



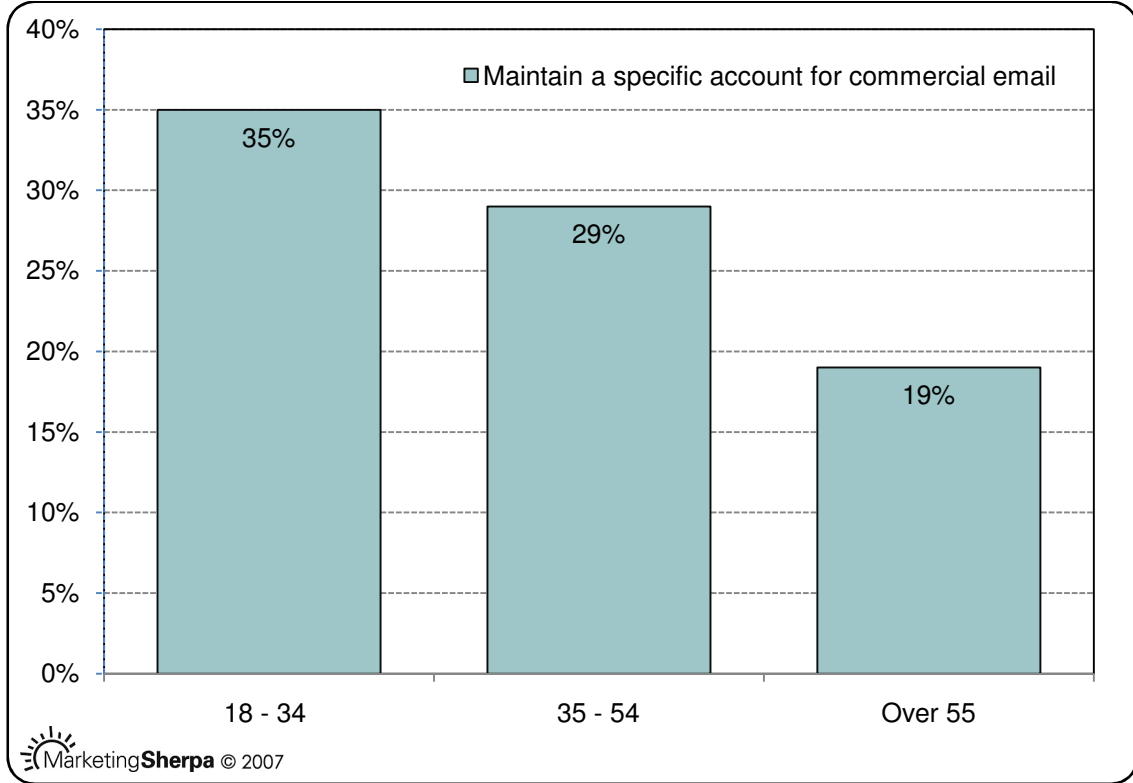
Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

The chart above shows the dramatic difference in attention paid to transactional messages. 75% of respondents told us that they opened and read transactional messaging ‘Frequently’ or ‘Very Often/Always.’ That’s a compelling number when compared to the 45% who say they open/read other permission mailings that often.

Adding to this self-reported data from consumers are several internal audits conducted by email service providers that suggest that the open rates for transactional emails average around 70% compared to an industry average that hovers around 20%.

For many online Americans, transactional email is important and distinct enough to warrant separate email accounts. This trend has been enabled by greater sophistication in how consumers use email and in consumer-focused email clients themselves, such as Yahoo Mail or Windows LiveMail, both of which allow easy creation of powerful, folder-organized email accounts.

Chart: One-Third of Consumers Maintain a Special Account for Commercial Emails



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

Reading the chart: Respondent answers are broken down by age group. Each bar represents the percentage of people in a given age group to use a specific email account for transactional-related emails.

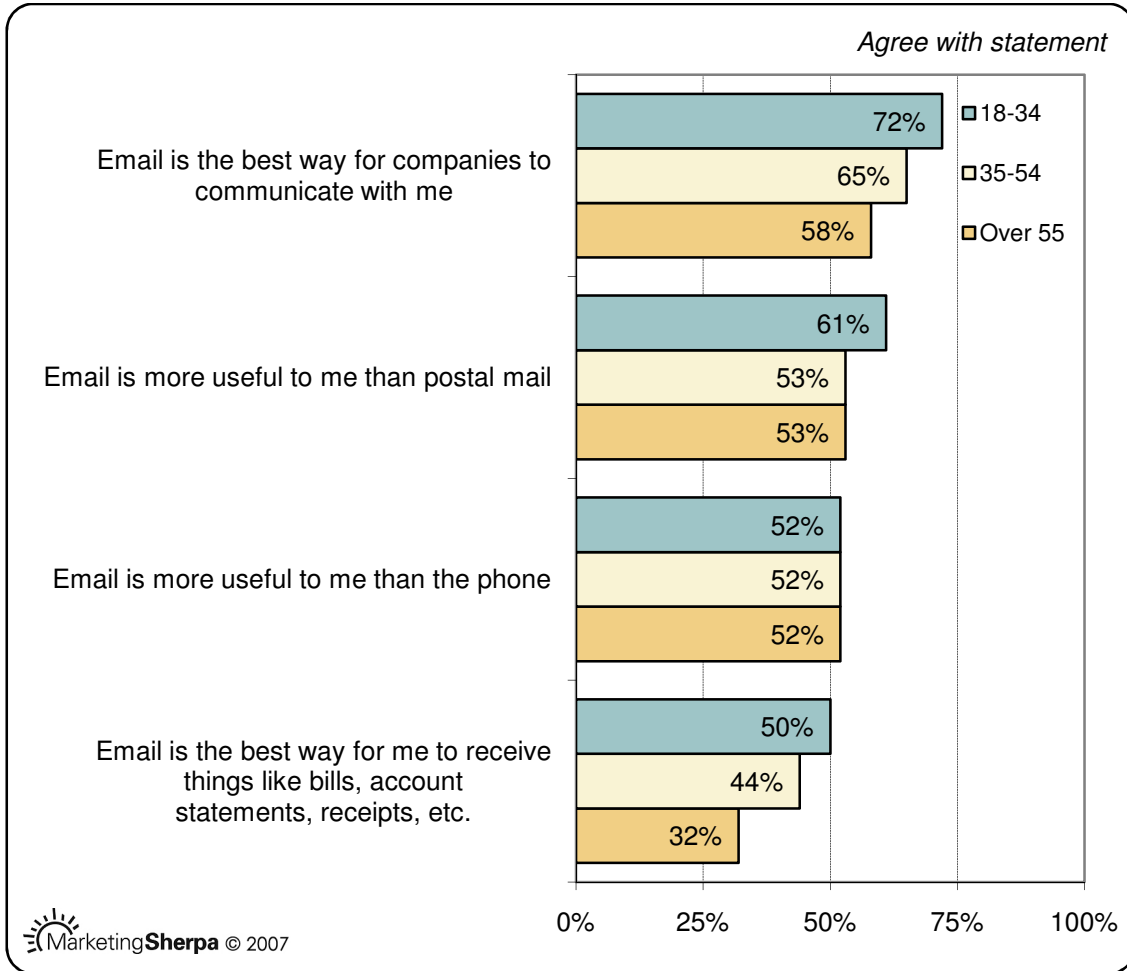
Roughly 27% of those we studied maintain a specific account for commercial email. Of those, roughly half limit that account to specifically transactional email. This group is especially desirable (they're wealthier than the average) and significantly more likely to prefer email for commercially-related activities, such as receiving bills and accounts statements. When broken down by age, the trend is strongest in the youngest demographic.

For marketers, this special account is one worth accessing. It's like an individually-built whitelist for highly relevant content.

Consumers' Use of Transactional Email

As part of the 2007 survey, we asked participants about the role of commercial email in their lives. Their answers prove that for online adults, email is an essential means of personal and commercial communication. Approximately two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement 'email is the best way for companies to communicate with me.'

Chart: Online Consumers Rely on Email and Prefer It



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

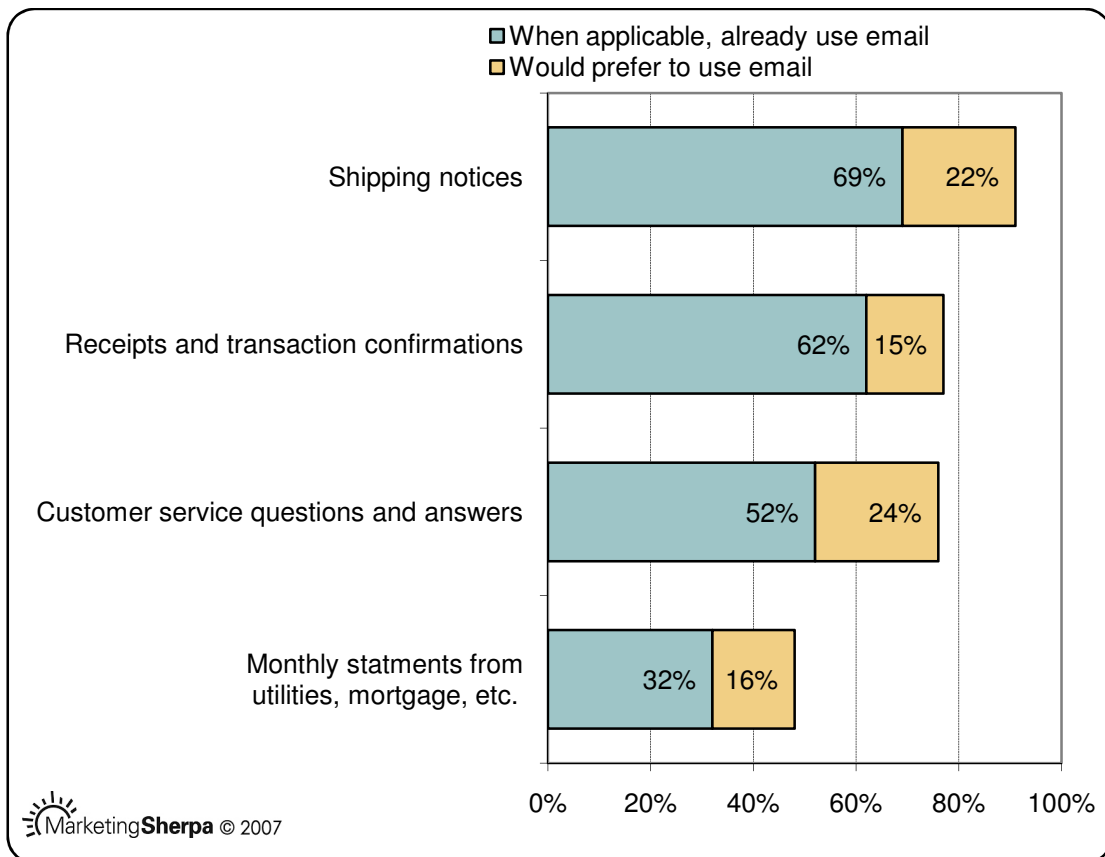
Reading the chart: Compares statement on the left with percentage of consumers agreeing with the statement. Averages are broken down by age group.

It's not surprising that age groups view the role of email differently; the surprise is that there isn't more variation. In fact, when it comes to preferring email over the phone, there's no age-related difference. Age does play a factor when it comes to postal mail, which is thought to be more useful than email by only 14% of younger Americans.

High income household members were also likely to be more accepting of email for personal, financial communication. 59% of these respondents prefer email for this type of communication, compared to an average around 45%.

On the surface, there appeared to be a discrepancy between consumers' attitudes toward company communication and a comparatively low acceptance of using email to receive bills, etc. Digging deeper into the answers, it becomes clear that when it comes to readiness for emailed transactional messages, two groups exist: bills and everything else. Consumers are ready and willing to get most types of service messaging via email but are skeptical of relying on it for the delivery of bills.

Chart: Not All Retail Transactional Messages Are Created Equal



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

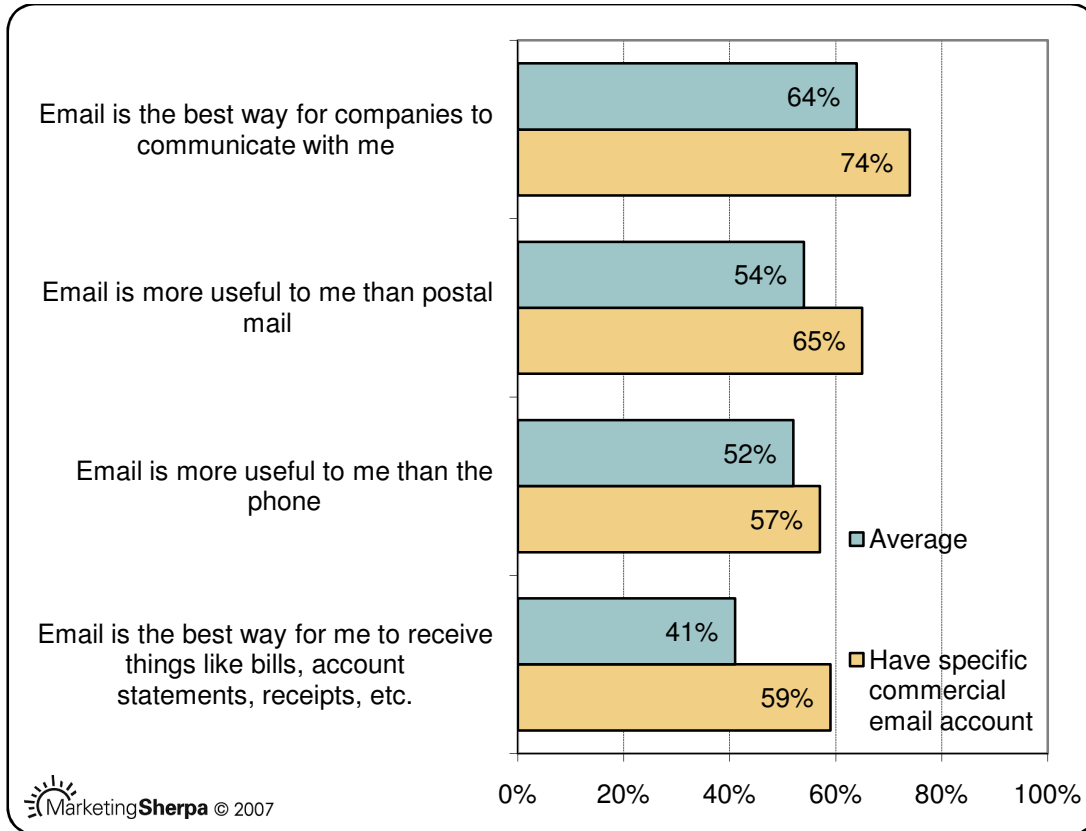
What we can't determine is the extent to which people would change their minds if the bill could be easily paid online. Obviously, if you need to pay offline, an email notification isn't nearly as useful as an invoice with a pre-addressed mailer.

Another positive for email marketers is that many people are moving toward dual delivery of bills, with electronic delivery complementing postal mail.

In every category besides bills, there's an overwhelming preference for email, topping out with shipping notices at 91% preference across all consumer groups, even those over age 55.

Again, high income households showed a greater acceptance and enthusiasm for email delivery of transactional messaging. 64% of affluent respondents already use email for monthly statements (or would prefer to) compared to the 48% average.

Chart: Having Special Commercial Email Accounts Equals High Preference for Email



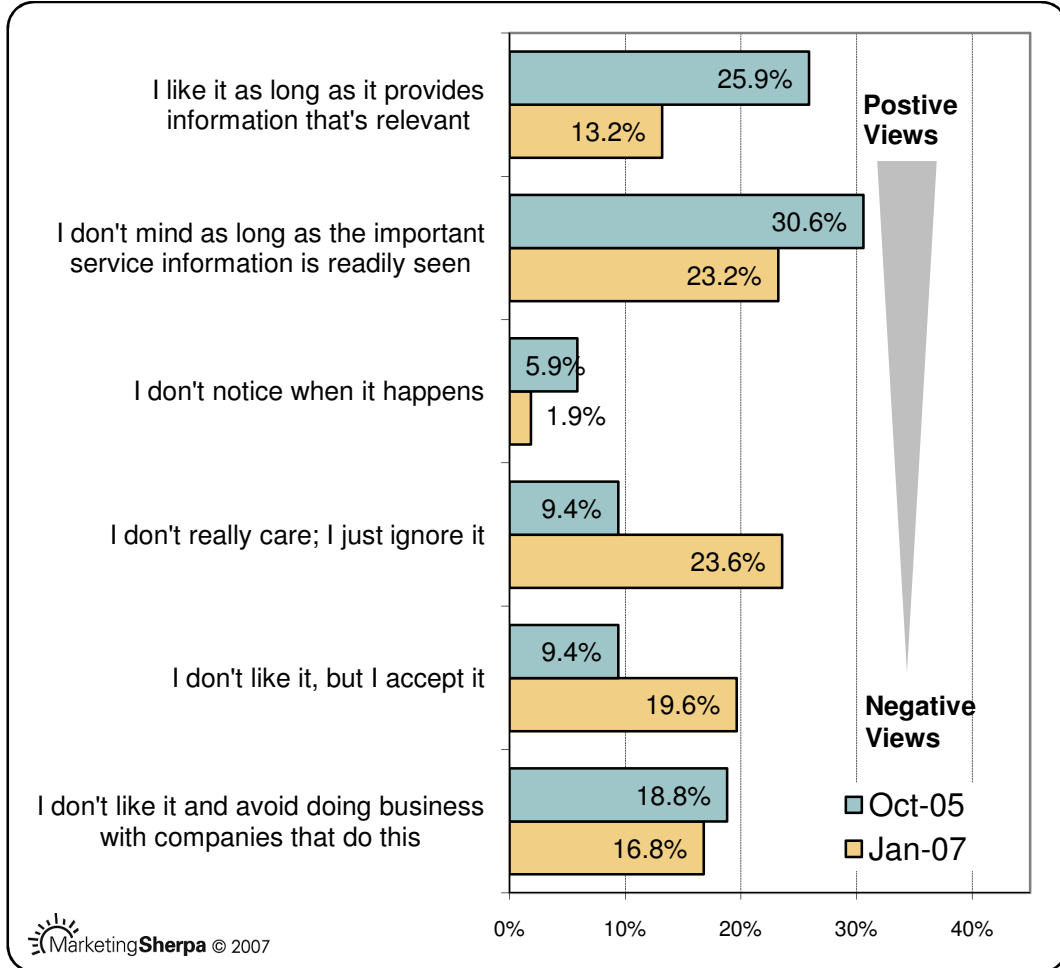
Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

It appears that establishing a specific account for commercial email correlates with an overall comfort and preference for email. Whether it's the chicken or the egg is difficult to determine, but the responses suggest that those with specific addresses for permission email are high-value customers who might be open to customer service and billing info via inexpensive email.

The difference is most dramatic when it comes to bills and account statements – the type of email transaction that is most problematic for average users. Almost 60% of the 'special account' respondents are comfortable with email as a delivery mechanism for sensitive content.

Consumer Reactions to the Transactional-Marketing Mix

Chart: Range of Reaction to Marketing in Transactional Emails



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

Methodology: A survey of 1,323 consumers was fielded on Jan. 19 and closed on Jan. 25. The respondents were members of Survey Sampling International's online consumer panel and are representative of the U.S. online population over age 18.

Reading the chart: Horizontal bars show the percentage of people who say that the given statements best describe their attitudes, and compare responses from late 2005 with those from early in 2007. Statements range from positive to negative as they move down the chart.

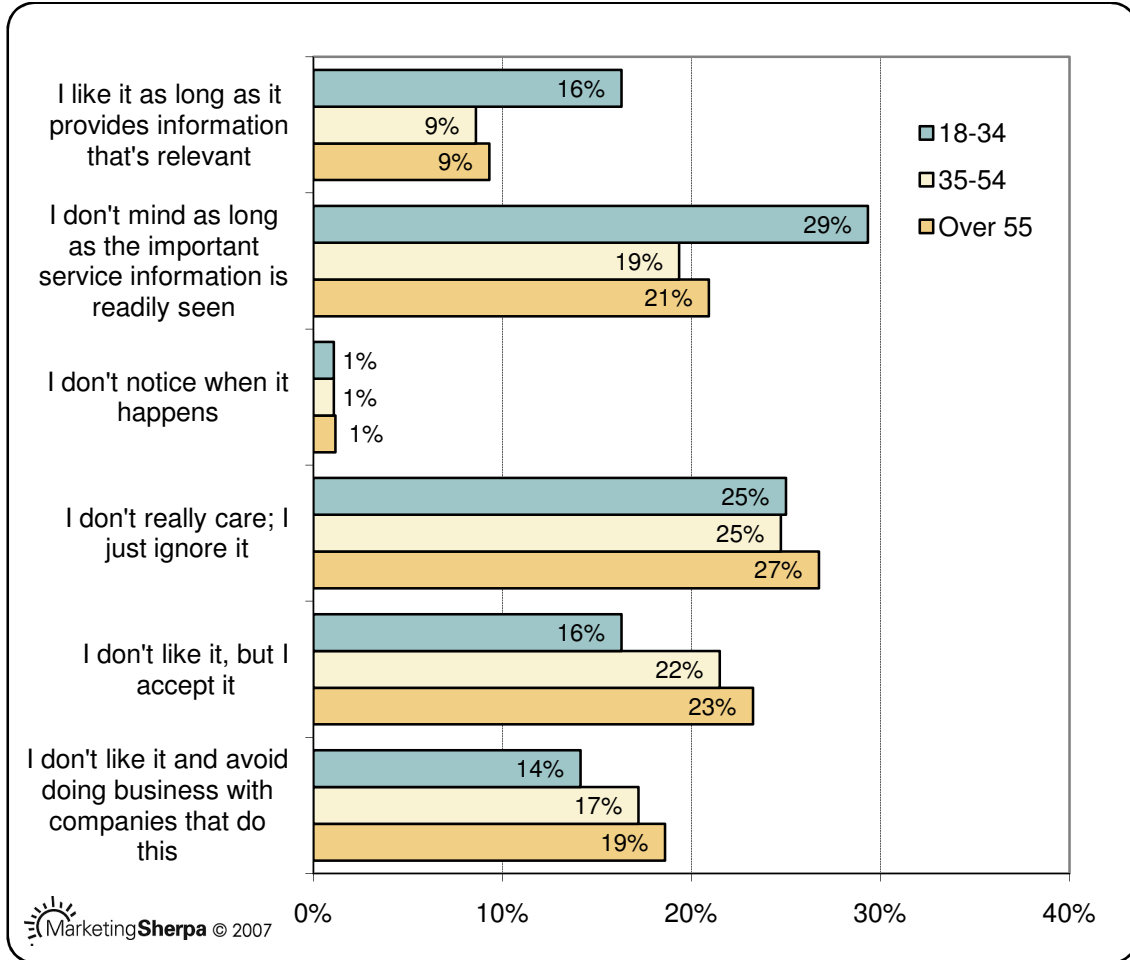
Back in October 2005, we asked a group of consumers about their feelings toward including marketing inside transactional messages. In January 2007, we asked the same question to see how things had changed.

The bad news was that many of the positive responses moved into neutral territory. Positives fell from 56% to 36%, while neutrals grew from 9% to 24%, taking up most of

the slack. While strongly negative views dropped two points to 17%, those saying that they 'didn't like it, but accept it' grew from 9% to nearly 20%.

As we dig into this issue, we'll see that the key to successfully including marketing with transactional messaging is execution. Those recipients who are neutral to negative can be positively influenced by proper handling of the information.

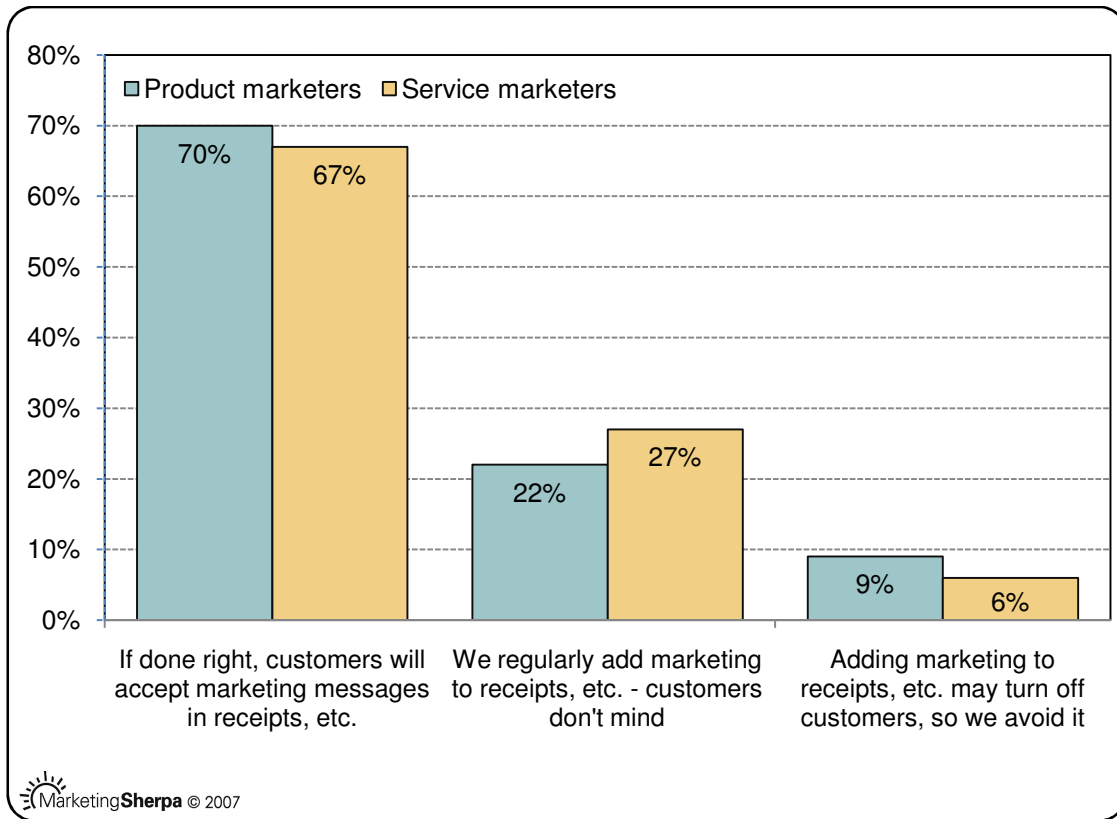
Chart: Younger Consumers More Accepting of Transactional/Marketing Mix



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

Younger consumers are significantly less concerned about the mixing of marketing and transactional messaging. Positive ratings from the 18-34 demographic rival the 46% of positives overall in 2005, which have dropped for older respondents.

Chart: How Do Marketers Think Customers React to a Marketing/Transactional Mix?

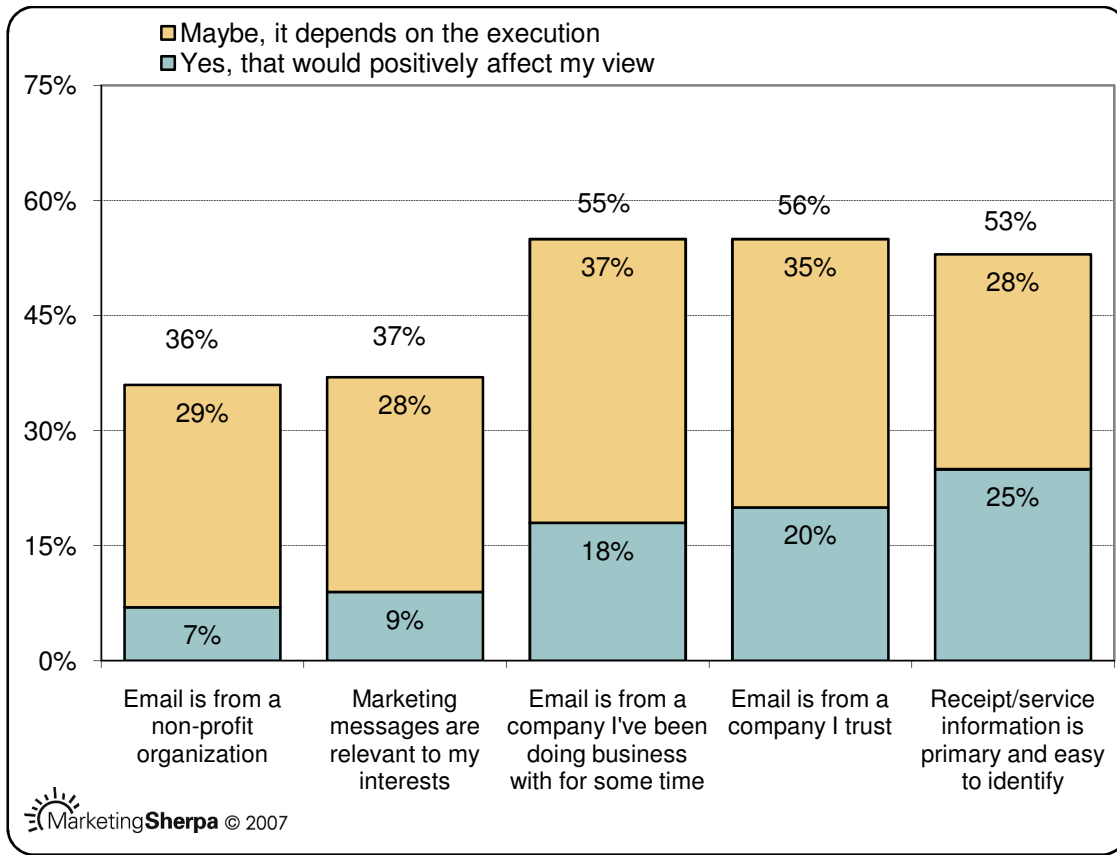


Source: MarketingSherpa, Ecommerce Benchmark Survey, January 2007

Marketers are in tune with customers' perception mixing marketing with transactional messaging. If it's done right, most are comfortable with the practice. The issue is that their overwhelmingly positive response suggests that they are somewhat blasé about what it means to 'do it right.' We know from observing email marketing in general that marketers are not always able to maintain best practices for every campaign. But typical email campaigns don't illicit strong reactions in customers in the way that transactional campaigns can, so it's especially important for marketers to plan them with exceptional care and attention to best practices.

Influencing Consumer Acceptance

Chart: Marketing/Transactional Mix – Factors That Influence Consumer Opinion



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

Methodology: A survey of 1,323 consumers was fielded on Jan. 19 and closed on Jan. 25. The respondents were members of Survey Sampling International's online consumer panel and are representative of the U.S. online population over age 18.

Reading the chart: The chart shows responses from only those people who have a negative view toward mixing transactional and marketing messages. Each bar shows the percentage of respondents who said that their views could be positively affected by the characteristics listed at the bottom. Bars are broken into those who said their views would definitely be positively affected and those who said it was possible, but depended on the execution. Totals are given above each bar.

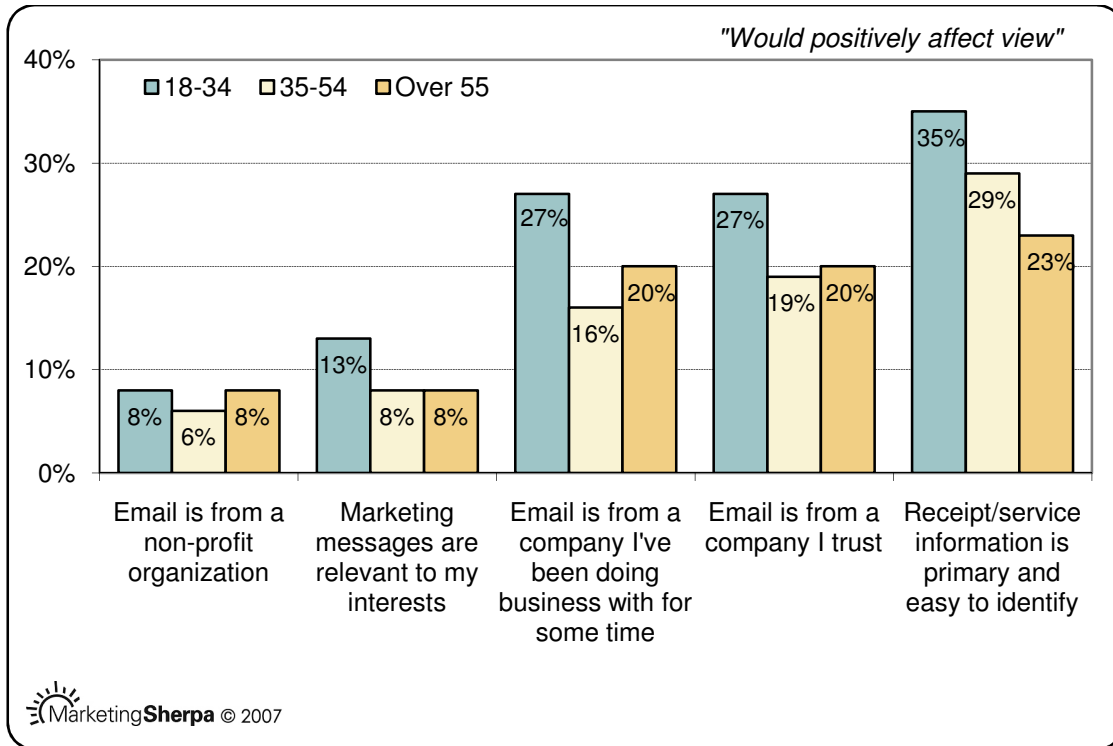
We exposed survey respondents to a number of different scenarios to gauge whether various factors would affect their acceptance of a transactional-marketing mix and, if so, how strongly. The chart above summarizes these findings. Note that two of the factors ('company I trust' and 'company I've done business with...') were given to different halves of the audience as a control.

Usability is the No. 1 factor that can sway acceptance in terms of strong reaction. If the transactional component is clear and easy to read, more than half of those with negative views can be positively swayed.

The depth of the relationship between customer and mailer is the second most powerful variable. This raises interesting questions for marketers looking to add marketing to transactional emails – whether to use the same treatment for new vs. returning customers and whether to expose new customers to marketing at all.

Although relevance is the mantra of modern email marketing, it scores poorly compared to usability/execution and trust. After examining all of the results of this study, we suspect that relevance will influence purchasing but isn't a primary factor in terms of a consumer's initial response to the marketing/transactional mix.

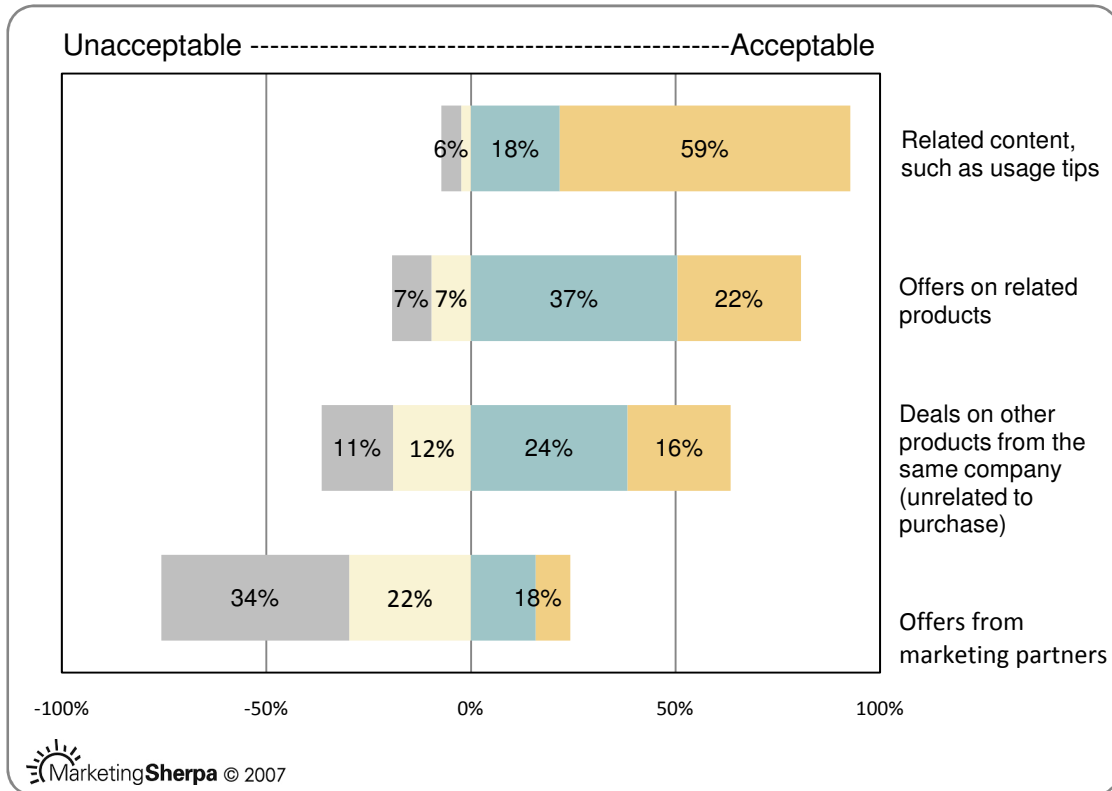
Chart: Marketing/Transactional Mix – Factors That Influence Opinion by Age Group



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

As might be expected, the younger the target demographic, the more likely they are to care about how and why marketing is delivered in transactional messaging, rather than simply disliking the practice out of hand. This doesn't mean that if you market to a younger audience you can deluge them with marketing. On the contrary, while they are more open to it, they are also more likely to unsubscribe to lists than older folks if they feel mistreated.

Chart: What Kinds of Content Are Acceptable?



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

Note: ‘Neutral’ views have been removed from the chart above to better show contrast between the positive and negative positions.

When we dissect the types of content that are likely to make up transactional email marketing, we see a strong preference for relevance. Content that is directly product related isn’t viewed as marketing at all, but as an aspect of customer service. For smart marketers, this may be some of the most fertile terrain for the introduction of related products, warranties, etc.

Related products (relevant products) also do well, with 55% viewing such content as somewhat or totally acceptable, and only 14% viewing it unfavorably.

Unrelated products garner a ‘totally acceptable’ rating from only 16% of respondents, but negative views are also limited, suggesting that this category is more about execution than content.

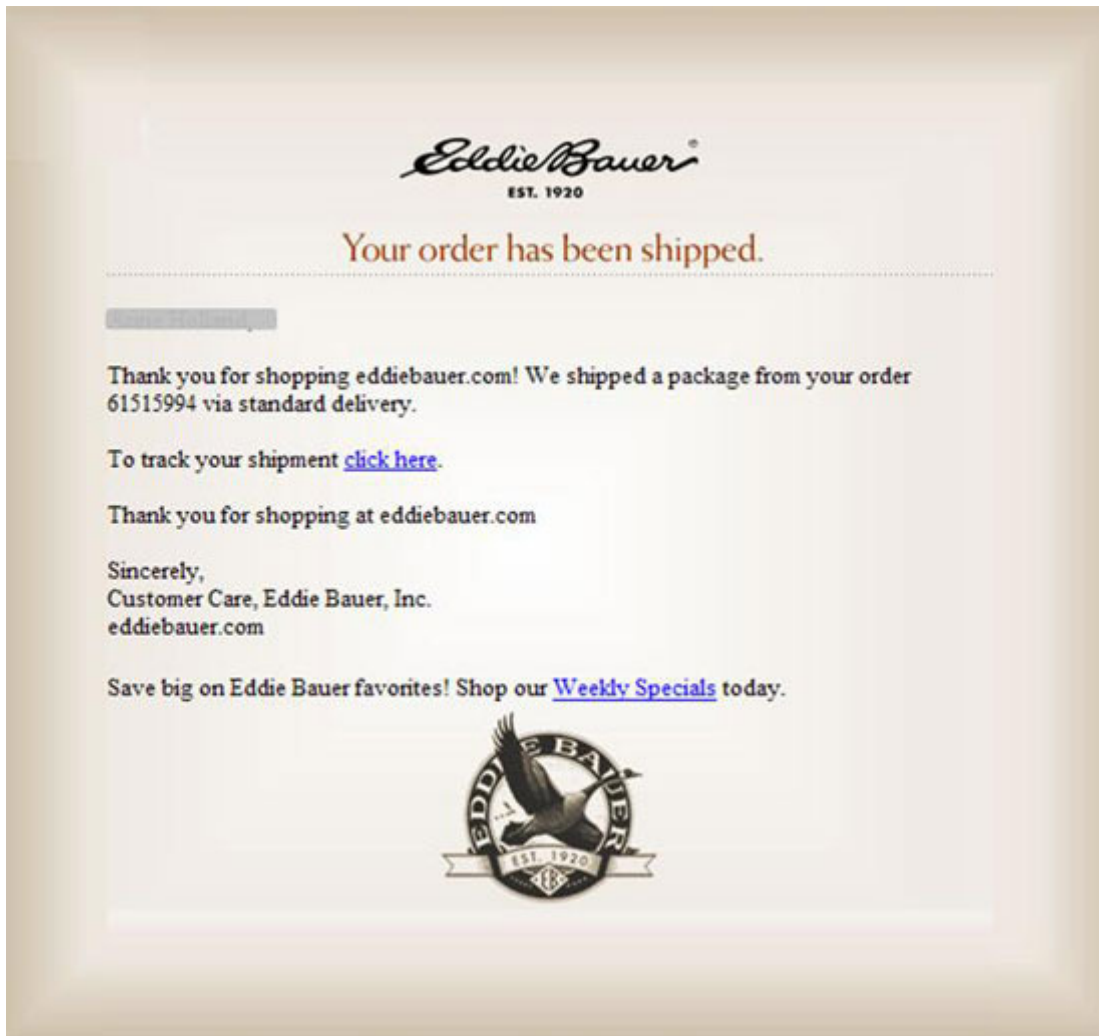
Finally, and to be expected, offers from marketing partners get a strong negative review. However, it’s highly likely that the execution of partnered marketing programs can alleviate (or exacerbate) the effect of seeing partner names where they don’t seem to belong. To put it in context, it’s likely that someone asked about partner marketing in the early days of credit card billing would have given the practice a highly negative rating. In time, these concerns abated.

Theory vs. Practice – Consumers React to Sample Emails

In another element of the transactional email study, we showed consumers images of specific receipts that contained marketing elements. The examples were chosen for being very different from one another in how marketing was integrated with transactional messaging.

Low Intensity Example – The Eddie Bauer email below is clearly focused on the transaction information. The only marketing element is a single line of text below the signature. The line “Save big on Eddie Bauer” includes a link to the Weekly Specials landing page but is otherwise very subtle.

Image: Marketing/Transaction Mix – Low Intensity Example



Medium Intensity Example – The Apple receipt shown below includes three recommended products in the right column. The recommendations are based on a relevance engine.

Image: Marketing/Transaction Mix – Medium Intensity Example

The image is a screenshot of an iTunes receipt. At the top left is the iTunes logo, and at the top right is the word "Receipt". Below the logo, there are two greyed-out boxes for "Billed To:" information. The main body of the receipt is a table with three columns: "Item Number", "Description", and "Unit Price".

Item Number	Description	Unit Price
Q0097	Wicked: the Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West (Unabridged) Write a Review	\$38.95
Q0319	Fallout Write a Review	\$1.99
		Subtotal: \$40.94
		Tax: \$0.00
		Order Total: \$40.94

Below the table, there is a section titled "Please retain for your records. Please See Below For Terms And Conditions Pertaining To This Order." followed by "Apple Computer Inc." and a link to the iTunes Store Terms of Sale. There is also a link to frequently asked questions regarding the iTunes Store.

On the right side of the receipt, there is a section titled "Those who bought your selections also bought:". It features three book covers with their titles and authors: "Cell (Unabridged) Stephen King", "In Cold Blood (Unabridged) Truman Capote", and "Forever Odd: A Novel (Unabridged) Dean Koontz".

At the bottom of the receipt, there are links for "Account Information" and "Purchase History", a privacy policy statement with a link to <http://www.apple.com/legal/privacy/>, and a copyright notice: "Copyright © 2006 Apple Computer, Inc. All rights reserved".

High Intensity Example – Because the term ‘high intensity’ could be taken as pejorative, we’ve decided to keep the organization anonymous.

Image: Marketing/Transaction Mix – High Intensity Example

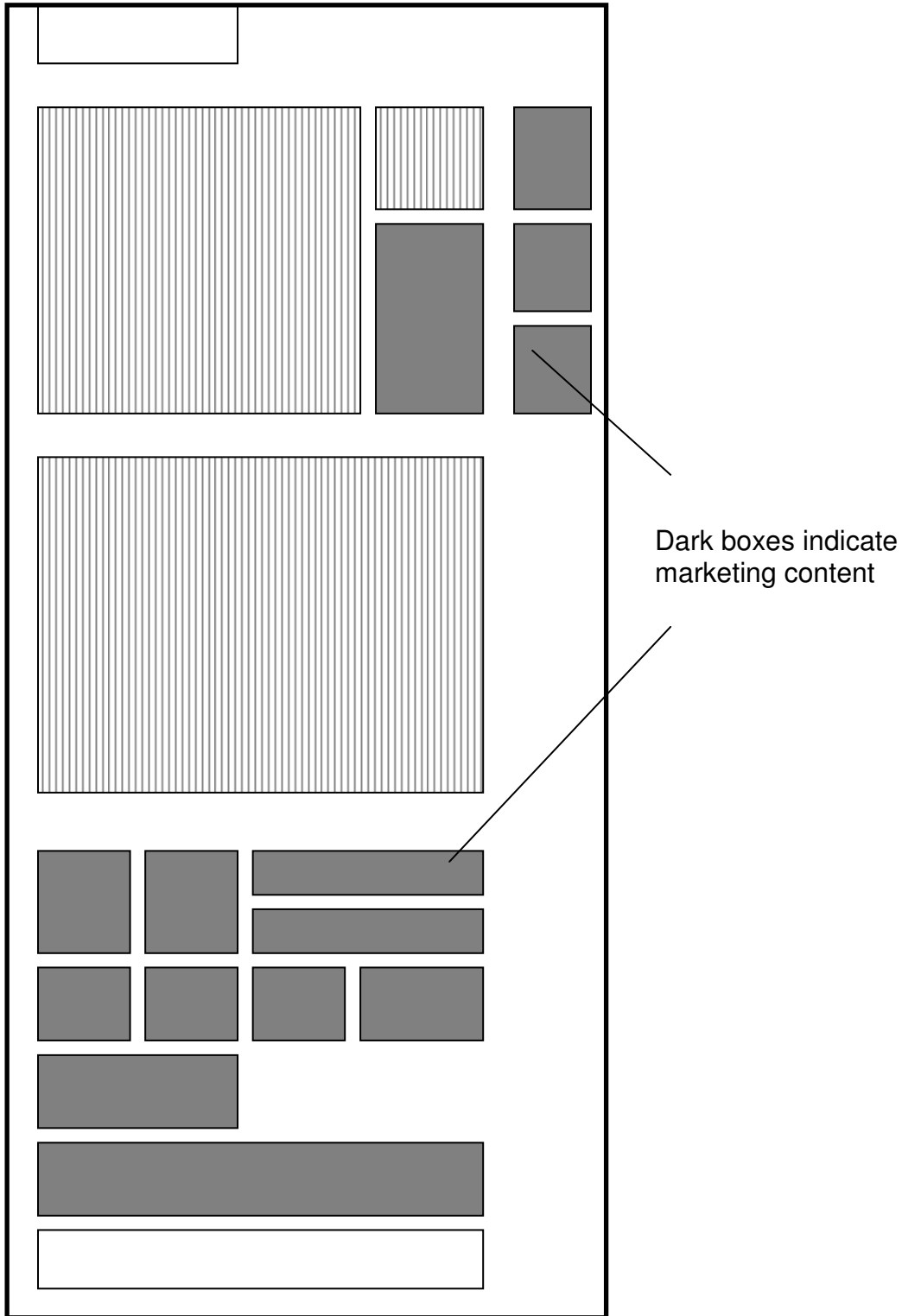
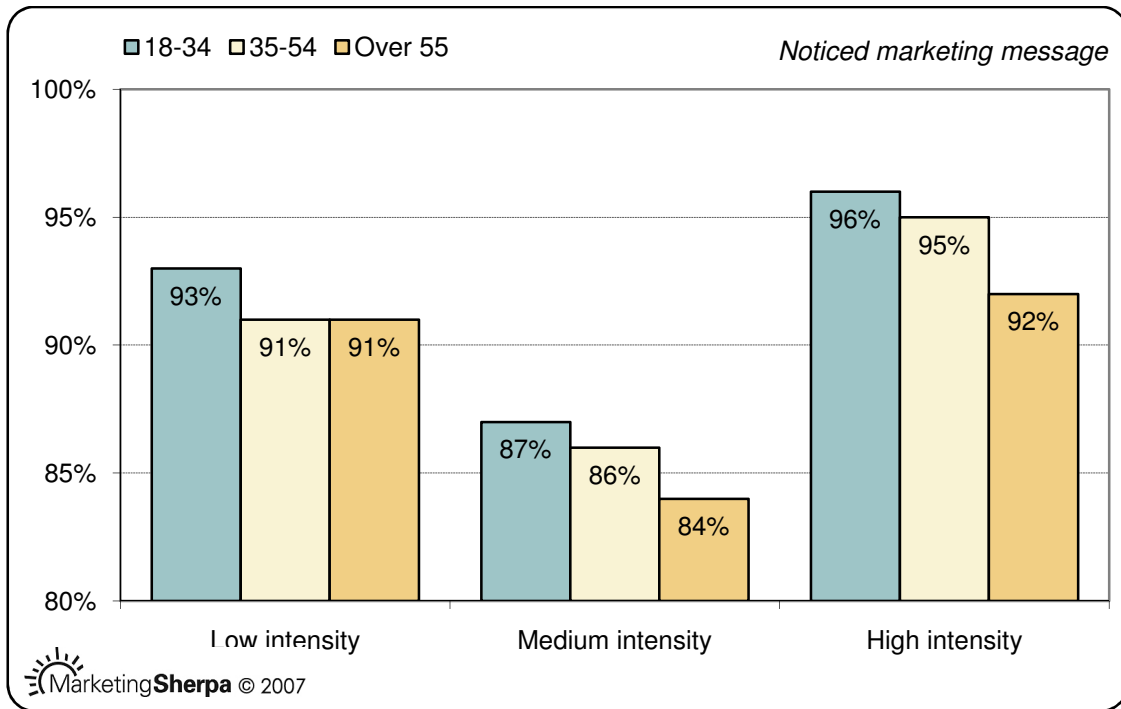


Chart: Marketing/Transaction Mix – Did Consumers Notice the Marketing?



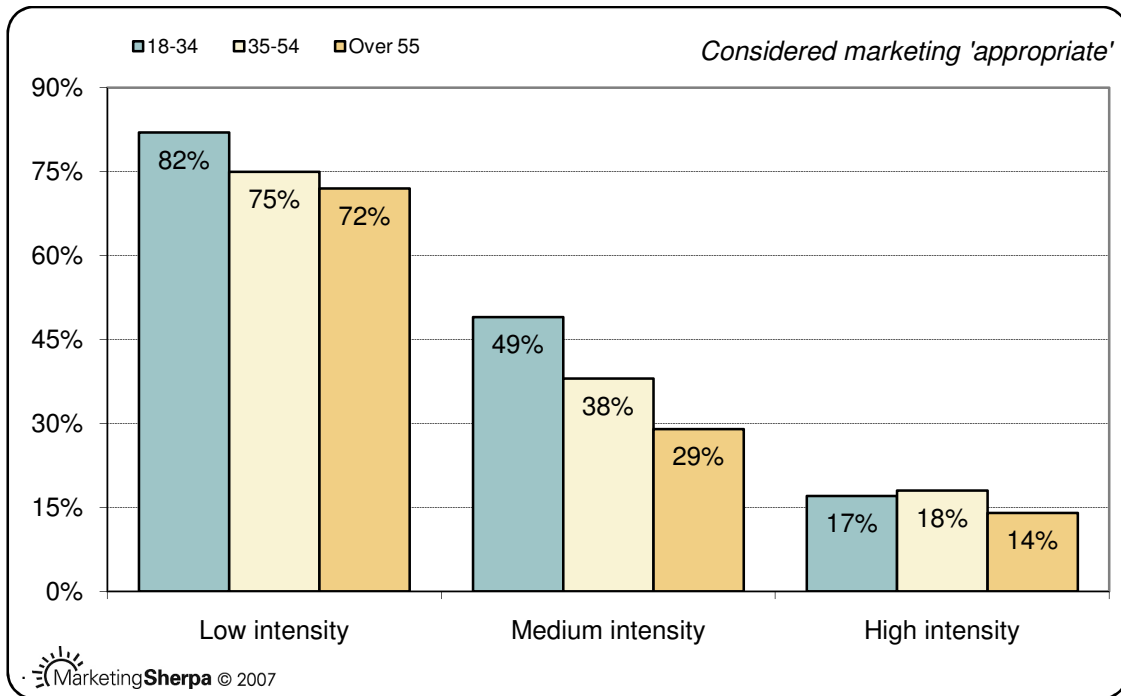
Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

After respondents viewed the sample emails, they were asked whether they recalled the content and marketing elements. Most people were aware of the marketing in all three messages. There was some variation; the ‘medium intensity’ example from Apple had the lowest recall rate, regardless of age group. We think that the design of the email is the reason. Marketing images were placed along the far right of the email and were the easiest to overlook. It should be noted that the images were viewed in the context of a survey page, not an actual email reader. Therefore, the right-hand placement didn’t suffer from preview pane issues; it simply wasn’t as noticeable as people’s eyes moved down the page.

Second, we expected a somewhat lower rate of attention for the text-only, ‘low intensity’ example. However, it ranked with the graphically intensive ‘high intensity’ example. This may owe to the clean, minimalist content of the email and to its central placement.

Before taking these results to the designers and abandoning a right column placement, it’s worth noting that the Apple design enjoys the best relationship between user acceptance (design is elegant, content is well placed on the page) and elements that increase the likelihood of making a sale (relevant products, product images).

Chart: Marketing/Transaction Mix – Did Consumers Find the Marketing Appropriate?



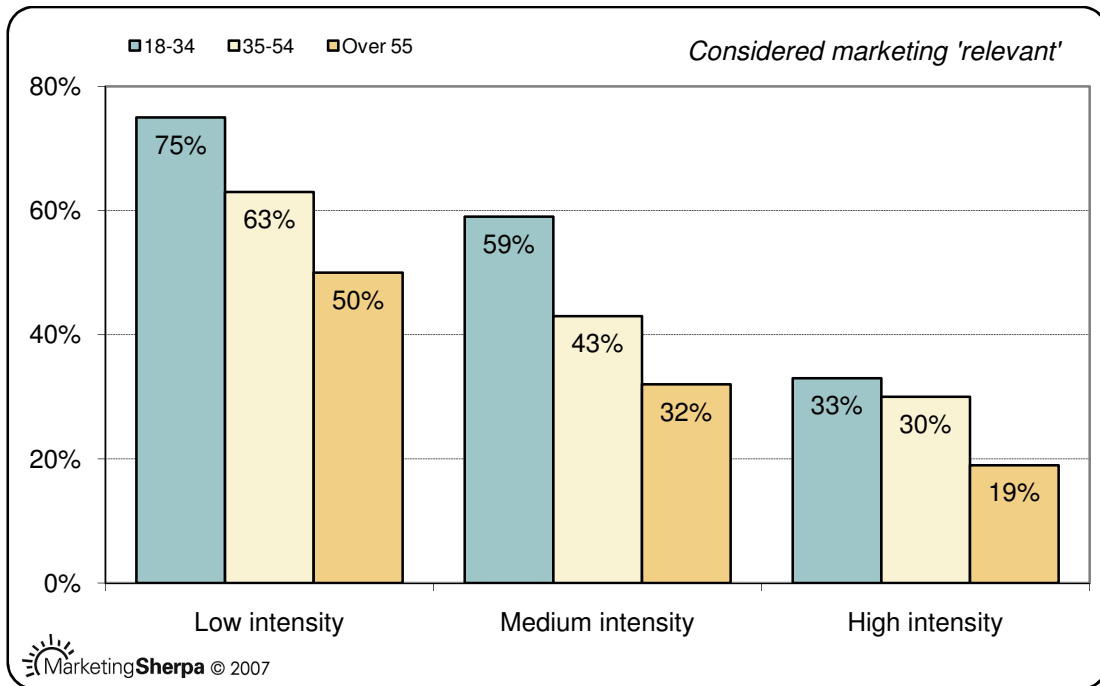
Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

This chart sums up the difference between how people think they feel about including marketing with transactional messages and their responses to actual examples. Even though nearly 38% of all respondents indicated a negative view of the practice in theory, that number is cut in half with regards to the ‘low intensity’ example. Presented with an email containing real marketing, 76% of respondents found the message appropriate and 19% were neutral. Only 5% said that this level was ‘inappropriate’ for a transactional email.

The ‘medium intensity’ example totaled 80% positive and neutral views, with the 20% negative still below the number who said that they didn’t approve of the practice in theory (38%).

Finally, only 17% found the ‘high intensity’ example appropriate, and with 26% neutral, nearly 57% gave it a negative review.

Chart: Marketing/Transaction Mix – Did Consumers Find the Marketing Relevant?



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

Relevance is in the eye of the beholder. Taken separately, the relevance of marketing messages was as follows:

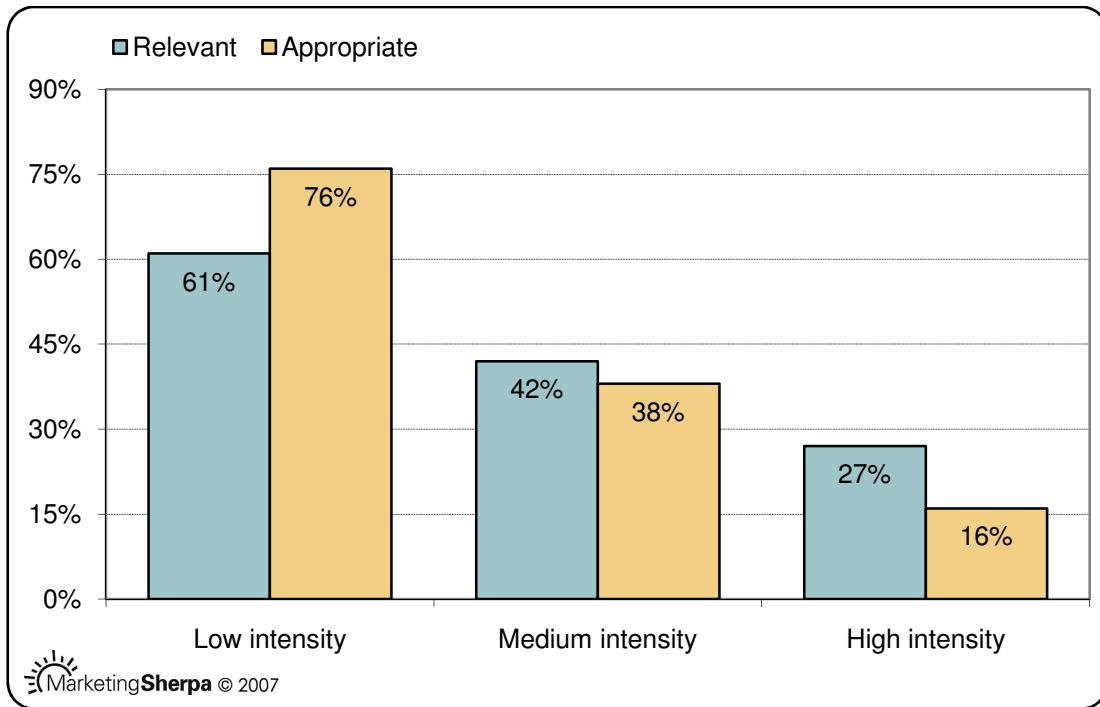
Low intensity example – marketing is not directly relevant to purchase (weekly specials note)

Medium intensity example – marketing is highly relevant to purchase (audio books bought by customers who bought the product in question)

High intensity example – marketing is somewhat relevant to purchase (products contextually aligned with product purchased)

Generally speaking, consumers decided relevance based on how obtrusive the marketing message was, rather than the actual relevance of the offer. Again, we suspect that relevance will contribute to ultimate conversion rates but is not a strong factor in how recipients feel about the marketing in the first place. However, this appears to be less true with younger consumers, who did a somewhat better job of assigning relevance.

Chart: Marketing/Transaction Mix – Comparing Relevance with Appropriateness



Source: MarketingSherpa, StrongMail and Survey Sampling International, Transactional Email and Marketing Study, January 2007

Summing up the dilemma of execution vs. content, more people found the medium and high intensity examples to be more relevant than appropriate. Neutral ratings have been removed to better show contrast.

Lessons Learned

1. The opportunity is worth exploring.

There's no question that in today's cluttered media environment, transactional messages present a unique opportunity for marketers. Emails containing receipts, shipping notices and the like are personal, relevant and very likely to be opened and viewed. As the public becomes more aware of the false positive phenomenon, we think these messages will also be the most likely to get white-listed, ensuring ongoing delivery.

2. Not a deal breaker.

When taken together, the various results of the study suggest that the public is open to, although not eager for, the combination of transactional messaging with marketing. As a newer medium, recipients are more sensitive to changes than they might be with more established marketing channels, such as ads that accompany their postal credit card statements. But, strong negative reactions are rare, especially to real-world examples.

3. Be careful – these are your customers.

Even though the public is open to transactional marketing, we think it would be easy to do 'too much, too fast.' That's how a marketer we interviewed referred to their early efforts in transactional marketing.

Transactional messages offer an opportunity to create marketing that has the same sense of relevance and urgency as the message itself. Using the same marketing in other opt-in email could produce positive results, but it ignores the unique platform of transactional messages and may not be the best way to take advantage. Done right, you can add to the users' experience, a better goal than minimizing their annoyance.

4. Execution trumps relevance.

To make money from email, relevance is the key. But before you can start selling, you have to build a relationship with customers. Transactional email is part of that process, and the findings are clear. Overwhelming customers with banner-like ads in transactional emails is a real turn-off and affects your brand in their eyes. For some, it may affect whether they return to buy again.

5. To take advantage, be prepared.

Engaging in transactional email marketing should be approached systematically. It's an important initiative and one that might garner customer complaints if done poorly. First, conduct an audit of existing transactional mailings. It's quite likely that the marketing department doesn't 'own' some or all of these emails. Bring them into marketing's domain and standardize their look, feel and delivery platforms. Then, you can set benchmarks against which to test.

Second, design a testing framework and schedule hard implementation dates. It's essential that you know how the program is working in terms of email and financial metrics as well as any customer satisfaction measures that are available.

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- Annual Benchmark Guides featuring primary research and collected "best-of" secondary research on statistics related to search marketing, email marketing and IT marketing.

Visitors to MarketingSherpa.com may sign up for their choice of eight newsletters including: specific case studies for business-to-business vs. business-to-consumer marketers, email-focused studies and Career Classifieds — the best way to find a great marketer or a great marketing job. Sign up for newsletters at www.MarketingSherpa.com

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Contact MarketingSherpa:

499 Main Street, Warren, RI 02885

Phones: (877) 895-1717 (if outside the US call 401-247-7655)

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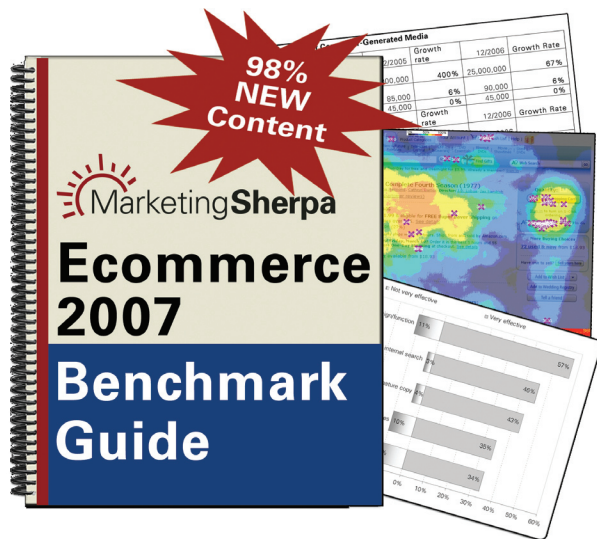
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About the Research

Most of the research presented here was first published in MarketingSherpa's Ecommerce Benchmark Guide in March 2007. The Transactional Email Study was designed by MarketingSherpa researchers, with topical recommendations from experts at StrongMail Systems.

MarketingSherpa researchers deployed a survey that was taken by 1,323 nationally representative, adult members of Survey Sampling International's online consumer panel, during the week of Jan. 19. Results were compiled, analyzed, and graphed by MarketingSherpa.

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