VisualStoryLab

Email A/B Testing Guide

According to a 2013 benchmark study, only 14% of recipients open the average nonprofit email, and fewer than 2% click on a link. That means up to 85% of your members and supporters aren't seeing your carefully crafted messages, and 98% of your fundraising and action appeals are going unheeded.

Dear Supporter,
Please don't delete this email. Give us another chance! We used to be so good together....

someecards
user card

Fortunately, today's high tech email programs make it simple to set up side-by-side or A/B tests to identify the design, language, and photos that will generate the most clicks.

To conduct an A/B test, you send a "control" version of an email to a small segment of your list, and create a "test" version with one variation for distribution to an equal number of people. Then, select the top performer to send to the rest of your list. For an organization with 15,000 email contacts, we recommend a sample size of 750 people for each version of the email.

Here's a quick step-by-step guide for A/B testing of photos:

1. Prepare a simple fundraising or advocacy email that features a single image and a clear call to action. This will be your "control" email.
2. Develop an alternate, or "test" email that uses a different featured image, but is otherwise identical.
3. Send each email to about 5% of your email contacts.
4. After 24 hours, identify the top performer (based on click through rate), and send to the rest of your email list.
5. Document the characteristics of the winning photo—composition, subject matter, emotion, etc.

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Unlock the Power of Communication

The Obama campaign used A/B testing extensively during the 2012 election cycle, experimenting with different photos to identify the ones that raised the most money. Below is a fundraising email where they tested two different shots of the president, a close-up and a wide-angle shot. The wide-angle photo performed better—resulting in 19 percent more click throughs.

Because every email program is different, we recommend reviewing instructions specific to your provider. Here are links to a few of the most popular services used by our nonprofit clients:

- Vertical Response
- Constant Contact
- Salsa
- MailChimp

Have stories to share from your own A/B tests, or need some help to get started? Drop us a line at vizcom@resource-media.org.

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