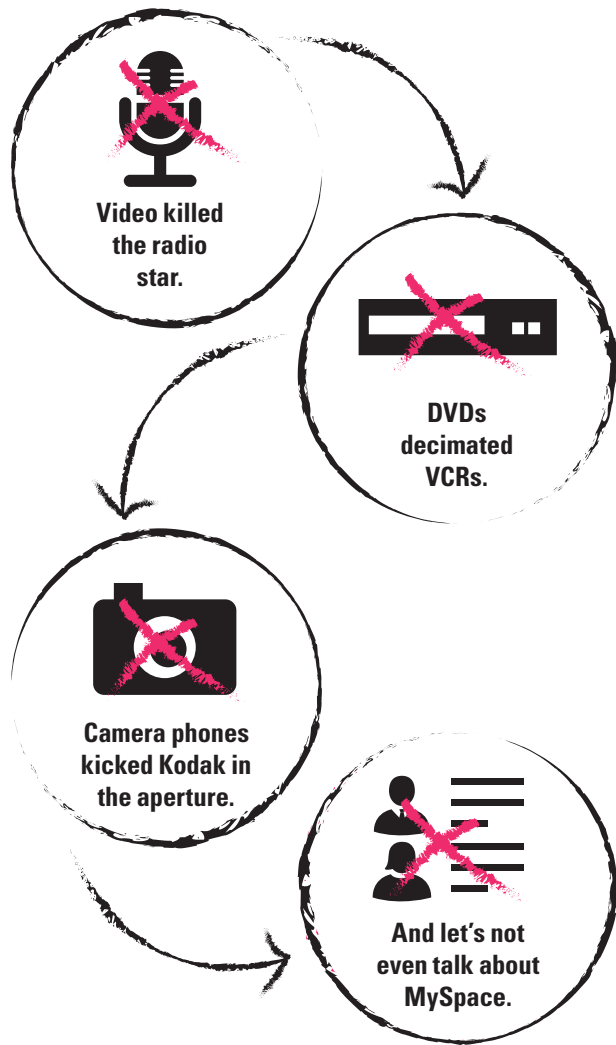


A man in a dark suit, light blue shirt, and dark blue tie is shown in profile, shouting with his mouth wide open. He has a frustrated or angry expression. Several paper airplanes are flying around him, some appearing to be stuck to his face and clothing. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

BY KATIE HENDRICK

# STAY OUT OF THE TRASH!

*Are you trigger happy  
with lame, spammy messages?  
Learn what makes customers  
open their emails (and wallets)  
with glee.*



As we rush to embrace shinier, easier and faster ways to communicate, today's hot new thing evaporates faster than a SnapChat.

Follow the digital evolution and you'd assume email is headed toward extinction.

Not so fast, say online marketing experts, armed with impressive statistics and compelling reasons that suggest the inbox won't be joining the cassette tape anytime soon. Low costs, creative control and sophisticated tracking capabilities are just a few traits that give marketers reasons to live for email.

Still need a convincing vital sign? Email boasts the most numbers of any form of digital communication. By year's end, there should be 4.3 billion email users, according to The Radacati Group, a market research firm. Its 2014 report found that 84 percent of Americans use email and 91 percent check it at least once a day. Those with a smartphone are checking it 34 times daily, according to a 2014 article in *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

"Email may be an old tactic, but it remains a vital one," said Peter Roesler, president of Web Marketing Pros and a columnist for Inc. That vitality owes plenty to affordability and readability. Unlike texting, which eats up data and racks up charges, email exists beyond the phone, doesn't cost anything to receive and offers more space for content, "allowing for better marketing," he said. Customers avoid data drain; marketers avoid content restraints. (Imagine how lifeless your open house invitation or "Best Mom" contest would look reduced to a few characters on a phone screen!)

"It's definitely the most effective way to connect with and engage consumers," said Jason Dulay, founder of Dummy Proof Marketing, a Washington, D.C.-based firm that educates small businesses about search-engine optimization, social media and e-commerce.

According to McKinsey & Company,

a consulting firm, email is 40 times more successful at acquiring new clients than either Facebook or Twitter. Similarly, Campaign Monitor, an online marketing application, found customers are six times more likely to click on a link in an email than one in a tweet.

Additionally, email marketing gives small business owners something they crave: control.

"You decide when your message goes out, who receives it and how it looks," Dulay said. Social media marketing, by contrast, "puts you at the mercy of the hosting site. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram — they make the rules." Organic posts (i.e., the ones you don't pay to promote) "have a very small reach."

On Twitter, where Dulay has 1,547 followers, he contends with a conversation stream that's refreshed by the second. And on Facebook, there's the much acknowledged, but little understood algorithm. "Basically, Facebook will increase the number of people who see your post based on the number of likes, comments and shares you get," he said. So unless your post gets a lot of interaction right out of the gate, chances are, most of your followers won't see it.

"There are literally millions of Facebook statuses written each day," with the vast majority only appearing before a fraction of the desired audience, he said. "The 'viral post' everyone dreams of having is extremely rare."

Email faces a lower barrier to entry. Send an email and, barring the rare full inbox, you can assume it will arrive. Whether it gets opened? Well, that's where the message — not the medium — is key. It's up to you to give that message life beyond the screen. And when you do, it pays.

According to a 2013 Direct Marketing Association survey, 66 percent of consumers report having made an unplanned purchase online as a result of email marketing. When they click through to "buy now," businesses get not only a sale but also valuable information about the email-induced customer.

"Technology has advanced so companies can easily track website and purchase behavior and use that to send targeted, personalized emails," said Kristin Bond, author of the blog "Email



**GOODWILL HUNTING** Karin's Florist in Vienna, Virginia, uses email to inform customers about the shop's charitable efforts and to encourage them to help out too by purchasing a special arrangement.

Snarketing," who's coordinated campaigns for Warby Parker, One America and Food52.

The sobering news? Consumers have also become savvier in how they use email, Bond said. Many sign up for just the first-time "welcome" discount. The challenge is converting these "one and done" subscribers to lifelong readers and flower buyers.

Compelling emails share certain traits: substance, style, a personal hook and a sleek look. And the most successful email marketers are analytics addicts who monitor open and opt-out rates and consistently fine-tune their approach. They're keeping email alive — and you can, too, with these five hacks to dodge the delete button and deliver powerful messages.

## HAVE A CLEAR GOAL IN MIND

Gone are the "You've got mail" days of joyfully checking your inbox. The average American sends/receives an average of 121 emails a day. With no clear reason



**DAILY DEAL** Ashland Addison Florist in Chicago keeps holiday reminders subtle (and not tiresome) with email messages that change every day.





**“You don’t want to be the brand that’s sending emails all the time just because they drive a little site traffic.”**

**Kristin Bond**  
Email Snarketing

d’être, your email is headed toward the trash. Send aimless, worthless messages too often, and you’ll quickly be part of an unsubscribe digital cleanse. According to a survey by The Relevancy Group, a market research firm, 44 percent of consumers say receiving too many emails is their biggest pet peeve and the primary reason they ditch companies’ lists.

Before you click the send button, ask yourself: What do I want to achieve (a sale, a signup, a chance to brag)? And then try to identify the benefit to your customer. If either answer is hazy, hold back.

For Rick Rivers, “email fatigue” is a grave concern. The owner of A Floral Boutique in Ormand Beach, Florida, recalls several big brands that “exhausted” him with daily messages and consequently landed on his unsubscribe list.

To ensure his shop doesn’t meet the same fate, Rivers practices email restraint, limiting them to **delivery confirmations and holidays**. Through call-em-all.com, he invites customers to opt in for an email (or text) receipt of their order, which arrives with a photo and a coupon for their next purchase. So far, 20 have signed up and Rivers reports a “phenomenal open rate” of 97 percent.

Beyond this, Rivers reserves email marketing for “flower dominant occasions”: Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, birthdays and anniversaries. “These are the times I know my (mostly male) clients really want my products, but they might have forgotten they do,” he said. When he emails them reminders, they’re grateful. “I’ve done them a service keeping them out of trouble.”

Rivers’ customers get three pre-holiday emails: seven days, three days and then one day before the holiday.

# SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

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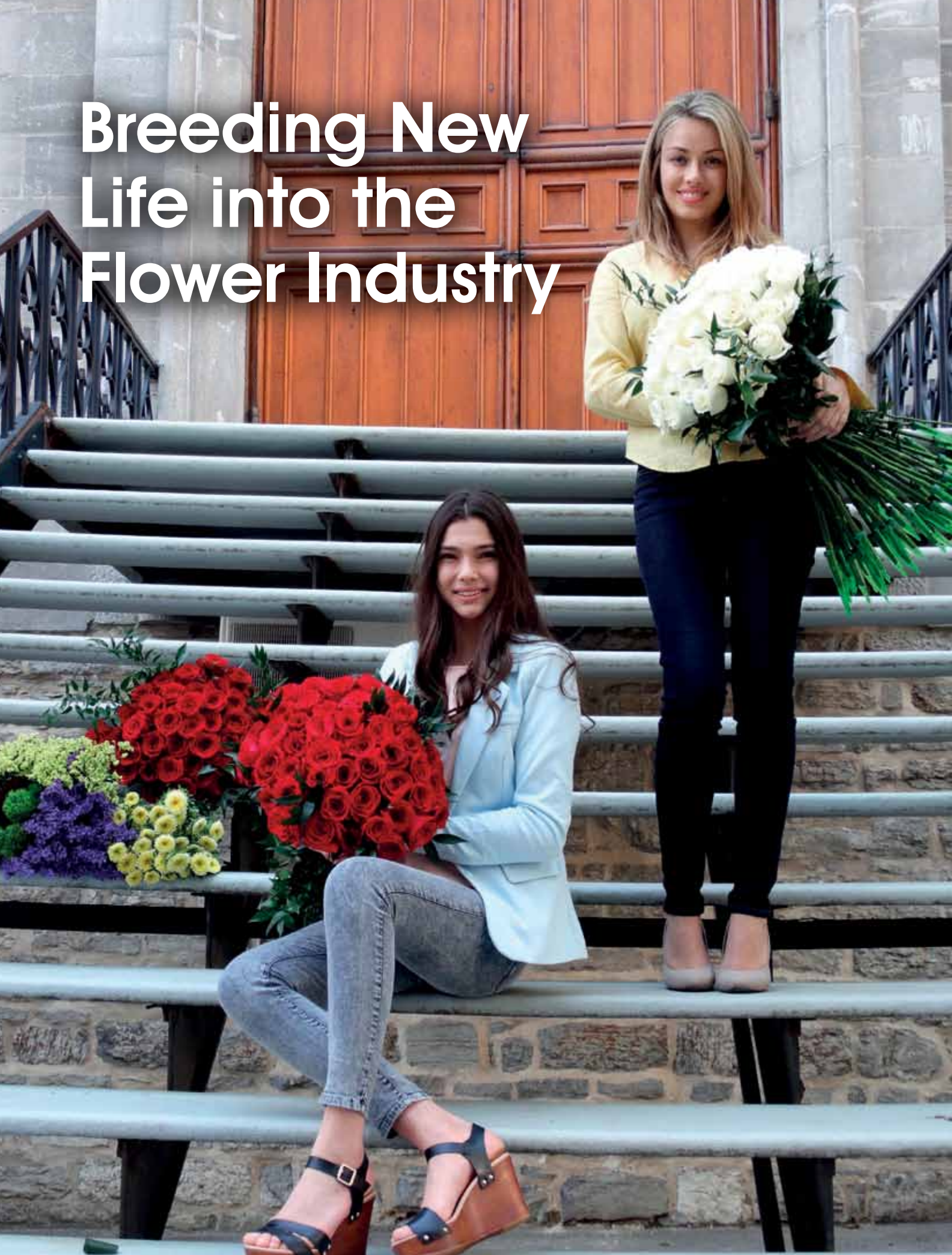
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To catch their attention, he uses playful “fear” tactics: for Valentine’s Day 2015, he featured a cartoon of a sad woman in the office, surrounded by colleagues smiling with their flowers; in 2014, it was a guy sleeping on the couch. The respective subject lines: “Don’t let this be your girl” and “Don’t be this guy.”

In Chicago, Ashland Addison Florist, which has five locations, also treats email as a digital string around the finger for big holidays. From Feb. 9 through 13, Marketing and Communications Director Bridget Carlson, AAF, emailed a different daily deal for Valentine’s Day.

“It was a way to remind customers the holiday was coming up without being obvious,” Carlson said, and to make them curious and excited to see the next offer. “It’s like clothing stores that do a month of summer sales,” she said. “They might kick it off with sun dresses, which you don’t want or need, but you’ll keep checking in every day until you see a deal for swim-suits or tote bags.”

It’s important to consider customers’ shopping habits and schedule your emails accordingly, Bond said.

“If you’re marketing a product that people buy every week, like food, multiple emails a week might be okay,” she said. “If you’re marketing something people tend to only buy a few times a year, then daily, year-round emails can be really annoying.”

Emails sent outside your busy season(s) keep you top of mind, but they must have a strong purpose, Bond said. “You don’t want to be the brand that’s sending emails all the time just because they drive a little site traffic,” she said, emphasizing it’s not worth soliciting a few clicks if you have dozens who unsubscribe at the same time.



**IRRESISTIBLE OFFER** Bouquets available at a remarkable price point get customers clicking on Beneva Flowers’ email messages.

Retailers need to ask themselves, “Is what I’m about to send something of value to the customer?”

**Offer tips** such as “what to send a friend in the hospital” or “flowers that hold up well for an outdoor summer wedding.” Bond recommends keeping a list of frequently asked questions (“What should I bring to my wedding consultation?” or “Could lilies poison my

cat?,” for instance) and using them for email fodder during slow weeks.

Maris Angolia, AAF, president of Karin’s Florist in Vienna, Virginia, uses email to **highlight the shop’s good deeds** through a charitable program called “Karin’s Gives.” Each month, Karin’s works with a different community organization in northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., or Maryland, and creates a special arrangement in its honor; Karin’s donates 10 percent from each one sold to the organization. The messages net a few additional sales every month and generate goodwill, Angolia said, adding “Customers like reading about people who make their community a better place to live.”

At Beneva Flowers in Sarasota, Florida, owner Art Conforti, PFCI, aims for **impulse purchases** with his \$20 Tuesday email campaigns.

“It’s a deal that is simply too good to pass up,” he said of the weekly bouquet specials, which include delivery. They consistently sell out (sometimes within an hour or two, as was the case when the shop featured peonies this past May) and have earned him “more corporate business than you’d ever imagine.”

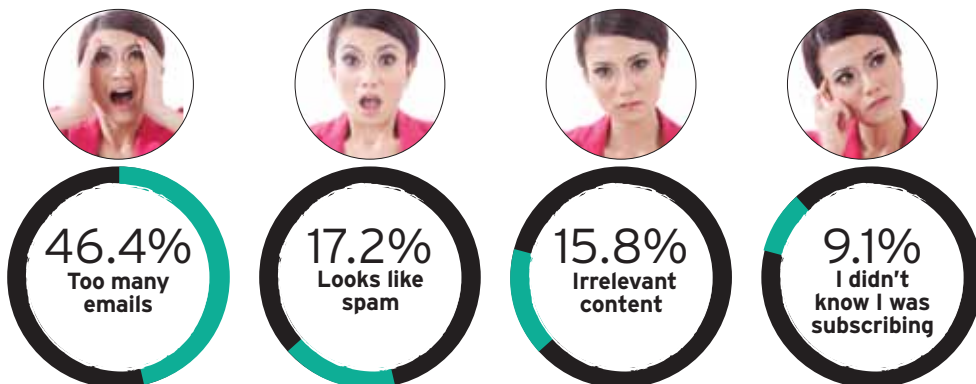
These emails “get us in the door,” Conforti said. A lot of people don’t view \$20 (“less than the price of two movie tickets”) as indulgent and thus give in to the temptation. Then, when the flowers arrive “looking much more expensive than what they paid for,” people are impressed, appreciative “and eager to do business with us again,” he said.

Carlson strikes a similar approach at Ashland Addison.

“We want to capture people who would buy flowers for no particular reason,” she said. “If we could get every

# THE WORST OFFENDERS

What turns customers off? Earlier this year, software developer Get Data queried 500 Americans between ages 25 and 44 about why they unsubscribe from brands’ email lists. Here are their top pet peeves.



one of our existing customers to buy one extra arrangement a year 'just because,' it would have a huge impact on our bottom line."

About 70 percent of Carlson's email campaigns center around **selling a particular design that uses excess containers** and flowers purchased in bulk. Carlson's subject lines convey urgency with phrases like "limited offer at a great price point" or "don't miss our biggest rose sale ever."

Other times, she'll use email to advertise something unusual and exclusive, such as lilac or proteas, to **generate in-store foot traffic**.

The messages "aren't always about getting a fabulous deal," she said. "But our goals are usually the same: to encourage an impulse purchase and to move specific product."

## SHOW SOME PERSONALITY

The most captivating email campaigns have a voice. Even as the world seems to revolve more and more around technology, "people still crave human interactions," Dulay said. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube may have moved the conversations online, but "deep down, they're all about connecting with other people."

If you want to resonate with customers (and not come off as overtly sales-oriented — one of customers' top pet peeves, according to GetData), you want them to see your true colors and how you can make their lives richer.

"**Telling a story** is one of the best ways to make a positive impression," Dulay said.

Instead of issuing a bland, generic pitch ("Buy flowers for Mother's Day!"), talk about a new father picking out his



## "Whether you make them laugh or cry, if you strike an emotion, that's good."

Jason Dulay

Dummy Proof Marketing

wife's bouquet — how he chose marigolds because they corresponded with their daughter's birth month (October) and how he deliberated over the card message ("Thank you for giving me the greatest gift of my life.") Wrap it up by saying how your staff "can't wait to help you pick out the perfect bouquet, customized for the special woman in your life."

During prom season, you might start a message about the latest design trends with an anecdote (accompanied by a delightfully dated photo, of course) about what you wore to your own big dance. Segue with a sentence about how you wish you were a modern day teenager, so you could wear "the glamorous illusion-neckline gowns and flower crowns so popular these days" and what you would give "to relive the fun days of young love and childhood friendships."

"Whether you make them laugh or cry, if you strike an emotion, that's good," Dulay said.

Furthermore, with stories, you're shifting the focus from your products to the people.

"It shouldn't be about the flowers," he said. "It's about the service. People want to see how you can benefit them."

Showing some personality means ditching the stilted, professional tone for a **conversational one**.

Consider these two messages:

*Hello. Thank you for ordering flowers from us. We are very appreciative of your business.*

*Hi! Thanks for shopping with us! We're thrilled to be a part of your special moment and can't wait to show you what we can do!*

Which sounds friendlier?

"If you use language that's too formal, too structured, you sound robotic," Dulay said. "People who give you their email address like you. And they want to read

an email that sounds like you would if you were greeting them in your shop or over the phone."

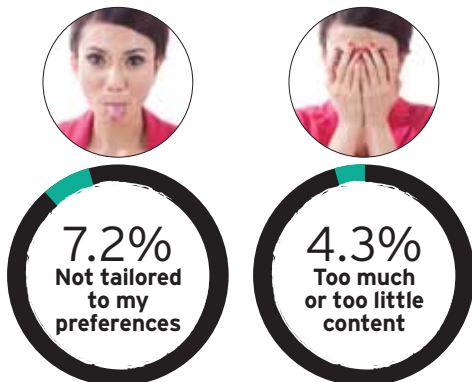
To bring Ashland Addison to life in her emails, Carlson likes to **name-drop**. "For a teaser, I might say, 'Wait till you see what Suzanna created this week!' It reinforces that we're a local, family run business with real people making custom designs," she said.

**Personal photographs** shot behind the scenes at the shop give customers a snapshot (literally) of what goes on in the design room and are yet another way to form a bond, she explained. "It's also important that they see what the flowers really look like," she said. "That builds trust."

Afraid amateur phone photos aren't "good enough"? Well-lit, professional photography has its place (your website and wedding portfolio, for instance), but when it comes to email marketing, "you make more of an impact with photos shot on your phone," Dulay said. Why? "If the photo looks too good, customers might think it's Photoshopped and their 'oh no, this corporate entity is trying to market to me' guard goes up."

## GET PERSONAL

Many things are one-size-fits-all, but shouldn't be. Chief among them: lingerie (agree to disagree, Hanky Panky) and email marketing.



**CLOSET CLEANER** Bridget Carlson, AAF, markets weekly specials through email to move excess containers with impulse purchases.





## “Your success rate goes way up when you match your offerings to their preferences.”

Art Conforti, PFCI  
Beneva Flowers

Back when email marketing was in its infancy, “blasts” to a company’s entire list were the norm. Today, email providers offer sophisticated tools to send precise messages.

“Emails that are targeted well almost always perform better than bulk messages, because they have content that’s relevant to the users,” Bond said. “It takes more time, but it’s worth it.”

Florists have long been sending targeted emails for customers’ birthdays and anniversaries, but **age, gender and previous purchases** are springboards for more segmented campaigns, Bond said.

For instance, a teenage girl who comes in for a prom open house may have a graduation party in the near future. She might pledge a sorority (an occasion for which many mothers send flowers to their daughters), fall in love, get married and have a baby, all within a few years of that party.

When you have a wedding consultation, get the email addresses for both bride and groom. “Chances are, the new husband is going to need flowers for future Valentine’s Days,” Bond said. And, as weddings typically add relatives to the family dynamics, you could also put your newlywed customers on a list for a “don’t forget your mother-in-law!” email in May, she suggested.

Carlson targets customers by **ZIP codes**. “When we did a ‘Free Flower Happy Hour’ at one shop, we made sure the email only went to customers in that geographic area,” she said.

Many email platforms will track not only who opened the message but also the time spent on links clicked. You can use that information to **send tailored messages based on shopping patterns**.

“Your success rate goes way up when you match your offerings to their preferences,” Conforti said.

For instance, if he sees a customer spent half an hour deliberating between a \$195 tropical design and a \$200 rose arrangement, Conforti assigns him or her to his “luxury items” list. Customers who click from one \$25 design to the next will receive emails promoting Beneva’s “best value” items.

Emails triggered by customers’ browsing history and past purchases average 70.5 higher open rates and 152 percent higher click-through rates than traditional bulk messages, according to Epsilon, a marketing consulting firm in Irving, Texas.

## MAKE IT EASY TO TAKE ACTION

In Chicago, where many commuters ride the “L,” Carlson assumes a lot of her customers read her messages on the go. To make it easy to order while in transit, she **embeds everything with a link**: the product code, the price, the name of the design, the images. “They shouldn’t have to go to another window or pull out a piece of paper to write anything down,” she said. “They should be able to just tap through to get to the appropriate landing page.”

And it must **be mobile-optimized**: 65 percent of consumers read their email on a mobile device, according to Movable Ink, and a 2015 study by The Relevancy Group showed that 21 percent of respondents said they immediately delete messages that aren’t well formatted for their phones.

If your email platform doesn’t automatically optimize messages for mobile devices (most do — see sidebar), make sure they look good on tiny screens by adopting the adage **“less is more,”** Dulay said. Multiple calls to action, photographs, sidebars and links to your website or blog will distort your message and “confuse customers about what you want them to do,” he said.

Consumers like **short, direct sentences** that follow the “subject + verb + direct object” construction.

“It’s what newspapers do and it’s easy to read,” Dulay said. “Your paragraphs should only be one or two sentences long. Make the return key your friend.”

The optimal word length depends on your content, he said. If you’re sharing a really compelling story, people will keep scrolling. Generally speaking, though, 500 characters is a good target, Dulay said. “People are remarkably lazy and will quit reading if you ramble at all.”

And **don’t neglect the “little details”** that influence open rates: the “from” field, subject line and **pre-header** (the text that appears to the right of the subject line).

If you send an email from noreply@abcflowers.com, you’re subliminally saying, “we don’t want to talk to you.” A message from **adam@abcflowers.com**, on the other hand, reinforces that there’s a real live human ready and eager to help.

Your **subject line** is your first impression and arguably the trickiest piece to write. “They take a lot of experimentation,” said Dulay, who urges florists to try two different subject lines for every email to see what works best. To kick off your brainstorming session, here are a few tips :



**ON TARGET** Customers who click on high-end arrangements after opening a Beneva Flowers email get assigned to the shop’s “luxury shoppers” list.

- Keep it short (50 characters or less).
- Avoid the proven spam triggers, such as “salesy” words (“buy,” “free,” “order,” “discount,” “clearance”).
- Avoid gimmicks (“click here,” “not junk,” “you won’t believe your eyes”) and excessive exclamation points.
- Use personalization. (Most platforms can automate your subject line to include your recipient’s name.)
- Ask a question.
- Add an emoji.
- Tell a joke.

“A lot of brands mostly focus on the body of the email and the subject line, and forget about the pre-header,” Bond said. She observes numerous pre-header bloopers, such as omitting one, repeating the subject line verbatim, using the default, “to view this email in a browser, click here,” or, “worst of all, showing a bunch of code or a very long URL” (common on image-only messages).

A good pre-header “can supplement the subject line, and give the subscriber more reason to open the email,” she said. They are especially useful for brands that use very short or coy subject lines meant to pique interest without revealing the message’s content and are “also a great way for brands to show a little personality,” she said. (Remember hack no. 2?) Try a call to action, a personal message or an incentive (such as a coupon) to increase your open rates.

(See infographic, right, for more samples, and find more advice with detailed examples at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline)).

## TEST IT AND TRACK IT

There are dozens of variables, from subject lines to time of day sent, that impact open rates. “Figuring out what works best is a matter of trial and error,” Dulay said.

Professional marketers use a process called “A/B testing,” in which 50 percent of the email list receives one form of a message and the other half sees something slightly different. This function is standard on most email marketing platforms, Dulay added.

“Send some the message in the morning and the others in the afternoon or try two different subject lines,” he said. “You could even experiment with what you’re offering.”

# ANATOMY OF AN EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Emails that boast the highest open rates and the most click throughs have stellar substance, but they don’t neglect style. Give due attention to the nuts and bolts of your emails, making each piece personal and precise.

## SUBJECT LINE

Happy birthday, Amy!

Use the subject’s name

Are you ready to celebrate?

Ask a question

## “FROM” EMAIL

From **katie@abcflowers.com**

use a name, never “noreply@” or “info@yourshopname”

## PRE-HEADER

Treat yourself to some flowers! 🌸  
No fete is complete without a bright, beautiful bouquet!

Use an emoji

## BODY

Dear Amy,



We hear it’s your special day! To celebrate, your friends at ABC flowers would like to present you with a colorful, fragrant, calorie free treat. Stop by any day

this week to receive a complimentary bouquet or enter the code BIRTHDAY and get a 30 percent discount on any online order.

- Short sentences
- Conversational
- Purpose: Drive store traffic





**“There are dozens of variables, from subject lines to time of day sent, that impact open rates.”**

**Jason Dulay**

What’s a more popular special: orchids or roses? “You’ll never know unless you A/B test it,” Dulay said.

Nearly every email platform provides statistics for each email you send. When evaluating the effectiveness of your campaign, these are the five key metrics you should study, Bond said:

- **Open rate:** the percentage of recipients who opened the email
- **Click-through rate:** the percentage of recipients who clicked on a link in your email
- **Unsubscribe rate:** the number of recipients who opt out of your emails
- **Conversion rate:** the number of purchases divided by the number of emails sent
- **Average order value (AOV):** the average dollar amount spent out of the people who made purchases

There is no standard “good” numbers for any of these, Bond said. “You’ll just want to track them and see how they change between emails,” looking for some correlation between subject line, or the timing of an offer, for example, and a higher (or lower) response rate.

And don’t hesitate to dig deeper than the numbers. With her weekly special emails, Carlson always checks the order sheets to read the customers’ card enclosure messages. “Happy Birthday!” indicates a sale Ashland Addison likely would have gotten, with or without the email. But when Carlson sees, “Just thought this would brighten your day” or “A beautiful bouquet for a beautiful girl,” she smiles. That suggests her email spurred a coveted “just because” purchase. 🌸

**Katie Hendrick** is a contributing writer and editor for the Society of American Florists. [katiehendrick@gmail.com](mailto:katiehendrick@gmail.com)



## EXPERT-TESTED EMAIL MARKETING PLATFORMS

There are a dizzying number of companies that provide email-marketing templates. Our sources shared some of the best, based on price point, simplicity and tools for customization. Among them:

### **MailChimp** mailchimp.com

#### **Key traits:**

- Subscriber profiles that show a customer’s engagement and website activity
- Automated emails based on customer behavior and preferences
- Advanced analytics reports you can access on your computer or mobile device

**Pricing:** Clients with fewer than 2,000 subscribers can send up to 12,000 emails a month for free. For \$10 a month, gain access to extra features such as delivery by time zone and chat support.

### **Constant Contact** constantcontact.com

#### **Key traits:**

- Mobile friendly templates
- Statistics on clicks, opens and forwards
- Unlimited emails no matter how many people are on your list

**Pricing:** \$20 to \$45 a month for a month for unlimited emails up to 500 subscribers; \$35 up to 2,500 subscribers; \$55 up to 5,000 subscribers.

### **iContact** icontact.com

#### **Key traits:**

- Mobile friendly templates
- Easy-to-navigate user interface
- Tools to integrate email and social media marketing

**Pricing:** \$14 a month for unlimited emails up to 500 contacts; \$32 for up to 2,500 contacts; \$52 for up to 5,000 customers.

### **AWeber** aweber.com

#### **Key traits:**

- Mobile friendly templates
- Seamless integration with WordPress, Facebook, PayPal and many other sites
- Live customer support available seven days a week

**Pricing:** \$19 to \$49 a month for unlimited emails up to 500 subscribers; \$29 for up to 2,500 subscribers; \$49 for up to 5,000 subscribers.

### **Robly** robly.com

#### **Key traits:**

- Mobile friendly templates
- OpenGen, a retargeting tool that identifies who doesn’t engage with your emails and automatically switches tactics (subject lines, time of day sent, etc.) in subsequent emails
- Complimentary consultation with marketing and design experts once a year

**Pricing:** Robly offers multiple tiers of services. Its standard package starts at \$15 a month for clients with up to 2,500 subscribers. Its comparable professional package starts at \$29 a month.



For a comprehensive assessment of these and other providers, visit the

**Email Marketing Services Review at [email-marketing-service-review.toptenreviews.com](http://email-marketing-service-review.toptenreviews.com).**