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**One of the simplest rules of marketing – make it relevant – is also one of the easiest to break when messages are sent to a mass audience.**

With much of the world in recession, many shortsighted marketers see email as a cheap alternative channel that will help them cut marketing costs. This is manifesting itself in an explosion of irrelevant emails sent by marketers with the misguided hope that they will drive sales and increase the ROI on their rapidly shrinking budgets.

In recent months we have seen far too many organisations sending far too many messages. They appear to justify this with the belief that because a consumer opted-in to their programmes and that their actions are within the scope of the law, that they have the right to send whatever they want, when they want.

"When you send irrelevant content to your subscribers, they will immediately tune out. And not just from that communication but quite possibly from all future communications resulting in a [drop in open rates](#) and other measures of engagement. Many marketers may be unaware that ISPs track if consumers open or interact with emails. If the level of interaction is continually low this can impact your [reputation and long term deliverability](#)," warns Tony Cheung, Epsilon International's regional director, China.

***Irrelevance is the New Spam***

Spam used to be defined as email messages that were unsolicited. While this definition still holds true, the growing popularity of email marketing amongst brands globally has seen consumers further define the term, as they become more demanding of the relationships that they have with marketers.

"To avoid being mistaken as a spammer, stop acting like one. Segment your audiences according to their expectations of the relationship," suggests Adrian Hoon, Epsilon's regional director, Asia. "Customers want timely relevant content that brings value to the relationship. Offer your customers choices about the types of content and their preferences for frequency, and track their behavior every time you communicate with them, so you can profile on implicit interests."

Consumers are now better informed and more aware, and believe that granting consent to receive promotional emails or e-newsletters is not an open invitation to send any and all forms of content and offers. [Epsilon International's Asia Pacific Consumer Email Survey 2008](#) revealed that close to half of the respondents (42%) said that they have used the "Report Spam" button for legitimate emails that they had at one time signed up to receive, rather than unsubscribing through other

mechanisms – a clear indication that the communications marketers are sending are now no longer relevant or the content of any value to consumer.

A real danger here is that the marketer will never know that the consumer wishes to unsubscribe and will continue to mail to them while being filtered and possibly blocked by the ISP.

“People’s needs and desires change; if you want to remain relevant you need to have constant dialogue with consumers, so that you can build a better understanding of their interests and preferences and refine your offering,” advises Cynthia Richmond, Epsilon’s regional director, Australia & New Zealand.

The good news is that the majority of respondents (96%) to the Epsilon survey said that they are receptive to email marketing that carries **relevant** offers or messages; and they will make more purchases (54%) after receiving a well-targeted promotional email. In fact, two thirds (66%) are open to sharing more personal information with marketers *if it helps targeting future offers to meet their needs*.

Here is a quick checklist to ensure your email is relevant:

1. Does the message have a clear value for both the consumer, as well as your organisation? If you are unable to clearly articulate the value you should not be sending the message.
2. Does it match their individual needs and interests? Relevancy can be based on both explicit and implicit information from the consumer. First of all, collect data about their interests at the point of registration. Then over time test small pieces of variable content within the newsletter and track the interaction at the individual level. This implied relevancy has a marked impact on response rates over time.
3. Take the time to have a conversation with the consumer, ask them through polls or surveys how you can improve the content or the offers.
4. Do not be afraid to give consumers choice and let them opt-out; make the process easy and transparent. What was relevant to a consumer last week may not be relevant this week.