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Holiday Email Marketing Strategies

Another holiday season is fast approaching, and despite talk of a recession many signs still point to strong consumer spending patterns. Though inflation has forced some changes in spending habits, Q3 results from retailers like Wal-Mart and Home Depot topped expectations, showing that the consumer desire to spend hasn't entirely gone away.

When looking ahead to Q4 and the upcoming holiday season, projections are for spending to be up year over year. According to eMarketer the 2022 holiday season will see healthy consumer spending patterns and a more stable supply chain. They expect holiday retail sales to increase 3.3% to $1.262 trillion, with brick-and-mortar increasing 0.9% to $1.026 trillion and ecommerce climbing 15.5% to $235.86 billion. Impressive numbers indeed!

Many of you have no doubt ramped up your planning for the holidays, and although you may be well-versed in holiday marketing, it never hurts to have a refresher. That is the intent behind this guide, and if by chance you're new to holiday marketing or email marketing in general, then welcome! We hope you find this guide helpful.

Campaigner has been in the email business for well over 20 years, so we're sticking to what we know best in the content that follows. After all, email is still the best channel for ROI at $36+ for every $1 spent, so the odds are good that it's a cornerstone of your digital marketing strategy.

One quick note, for every area of email marketing that we've covered here, there are some that we inevitably left out. Everyone has their favorite tips, tricks and must-dos that can be added to what we've provided here.

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The Value of Email

We already mentioned the ROI of email, and during the pandemic it was a lifeline for many businesses. Our sending stats from Q4 2021 certainly lend some evidence to that, as our customers propelled Campaigner to record sending levels.

- **Campaigner customers sent over 13.5 billion emails in Q4 2021**
- **On Black Friday they sent 184.3 million emails (11% increase vs. 2020)**
- **215 million emails went out on Cyber Monday (18% increase vs. 2020)**

We're seeing early signs of volume ramp and we are anticipating a very busy Q4.

> *Now seems like a good time to take a moment to thank our customers for their business, so **THANK YOU** for trusting us with your email campaigns! We are grateful for you and we look forward to continuing to serve you in 2023.*

To recap…billions of dollars will be spent this holiday season in spite of inflation and talk of a recession. Consumers are poised to approach this holiday season with open wallets - are you ready to capture your share?
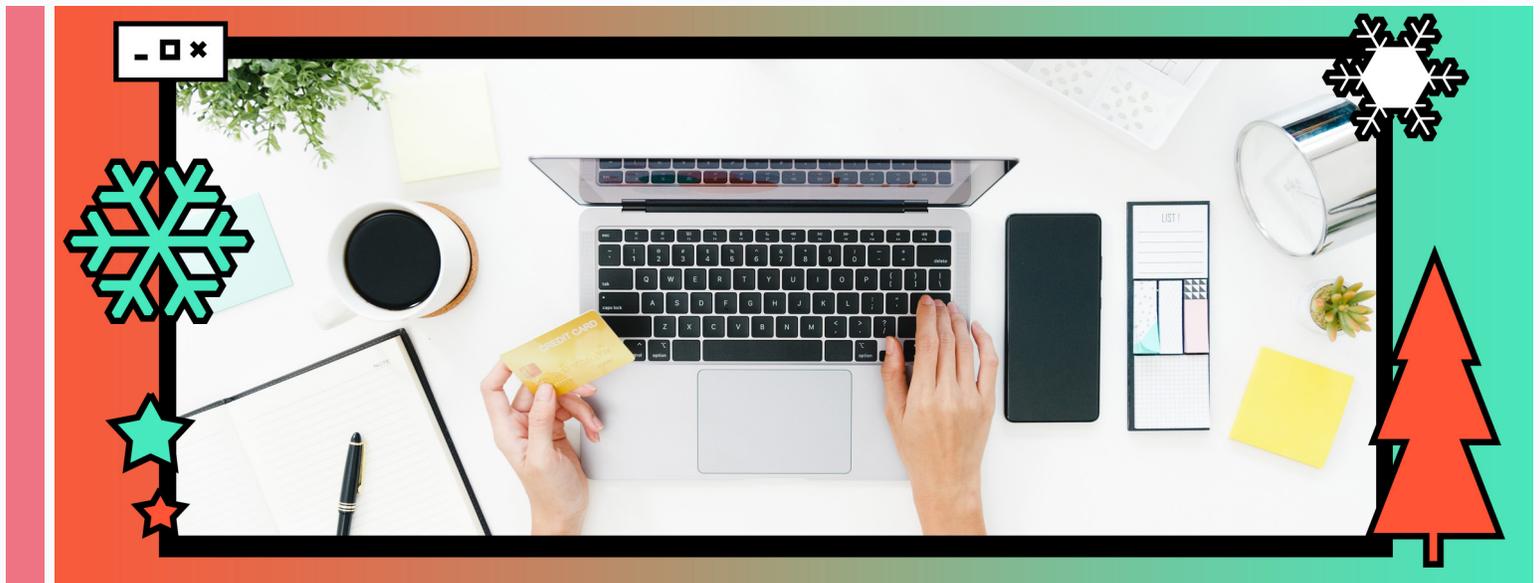
Preparing Your Email Marketing Campaigns for the Holiday Season

While there is much that goes into preparing for this time of year, we'll leave the inventory planning, promotions calendar, and so on to you. What we can do is offer some tips to make sure your holiday email campaigns are optimized for the best results possible.

Planning

Get a head start.

It may seem obvious, but the season can sneak up on you. Giving yourself time to plan your email campaigns well before November arrives can give you confidence in your messaging and design, and also allows you to properly plan out any automated email series or drip campaigns.

Give your customers a head start too!

If you've done your planning then it's good to give your customers time to plan how they're going to spend. Send your first campaigns early enough that you can catch their attention, and make sure they know when it's time to start shopping for the best deals.

New lead form submission

Welcome email

Let's talk tomorrow?

+

Send SMS reminder

CLICKS AND CONVERSIONS
^ 16%
1,634

Product Name

Buy Now
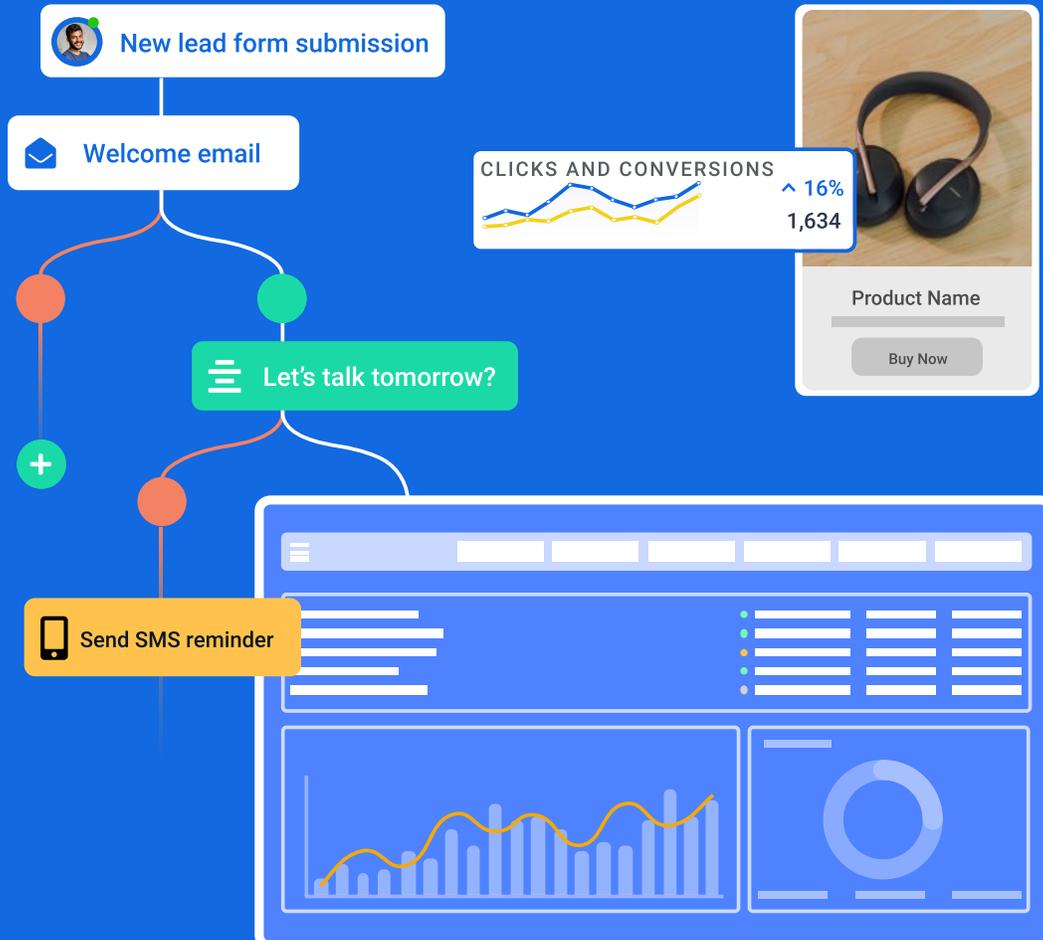
Review your lists and segments.

This is a good time to review any mailing lists or contact segments you've created to see if they are aligned with the campaigns you plan to send. For example, if you want to use the holidays as a chance to win back lost customers, is that list up to date?

Know whom you're sending to in advance. It helps you be more organized in your campaign planning, and also helps with setting appropriate success goals for each campaign.

Don't forget to do the (list) cleaning!

If you're going to take the time to review your lists, you should use this opportunity to do a good list cleaning. Remove known invalid email addresses or create a suppression list if needed. Now is also a great time to validate the email addresses in your lists by using an email validation tool like Reputation Defender if you're a Campaigner customer, or check out a company like Kickbox if you prefer to purchase one-time email validation credits.
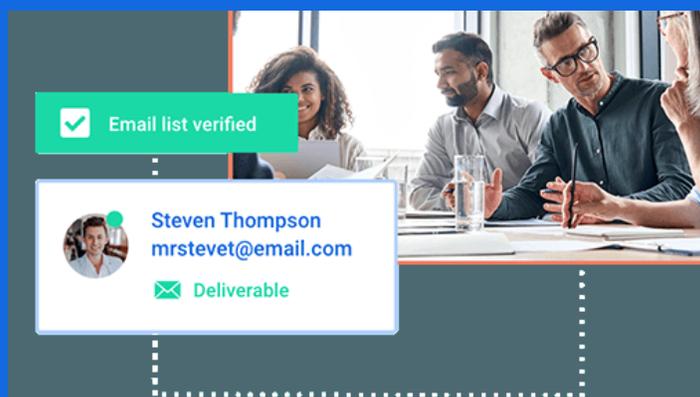
Find the best time to send.

This one really comes down to your own data. What day or days and time of day delivers the best engagement? If you have the answer, then stick with what's been working. Certainly there is nothing wrong with an A/B test to further optimize results (more on that later), but otherwise stay with what you know works for you.

Check your planned frequency of sends.

Even the best content or the most attractive offers can go ignored if you wear out your welcome by sending too many emails. The truth is there is no "right" number of sends, however we do suggest taking time to go through your reporting and engagement data, and anything else you know about your audience/customers to help you decide what's right for you.

You know your business best, so we're confident you'll get this right! That being said, it never hurts to take a moment to review what you have planned as a final check before kicking things off.

Design & Content Tips

It starts with your subject line.

Yes, this seems very obvious, but it's often the toughest part of crafting an email. It's the first touchpoint with your reader and it can make a measurable difference in engagement.

- **47% of email recipients open email based on the subject line**
- **69% of email recipients report email as spam based solely on the subject line**

The email inbox is a busy place. During the holidays it's the equivalent of a crowded New York or London subway at rush hour, with potentially hundreds of unread emails. The right subject line is your opportunity to stand out, so give it the attention it deserves.

Don't forget to add a preheader to entice the reader even further. Gmail, iOS mail, and Outlook allow for preview text. Along with your subject line, a preheader is an excellent way to convey the "what's in it for me" message.

Have the right mix of images and text.

Images in your email are always a good idea, but if they are disconnected from the content then it won't connect with your reader. If your email has been opened, it's reasonable to assume the reader is going to do a quick scan first. Whether they are aware of it or not, their brain is looking for images and text to "sync up" to create meaning.
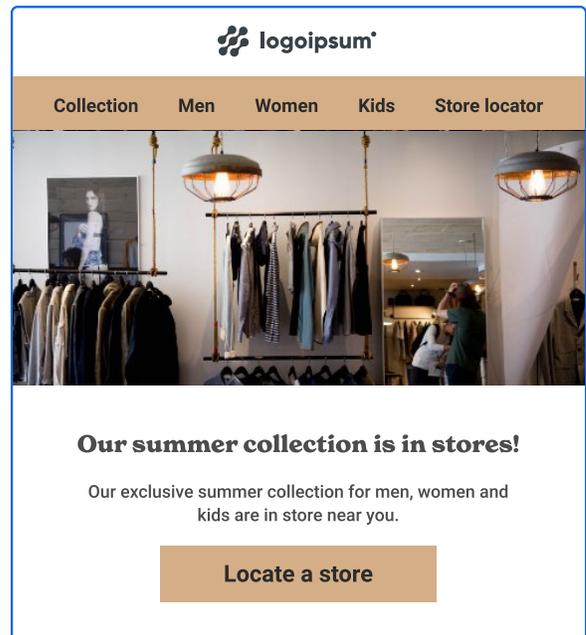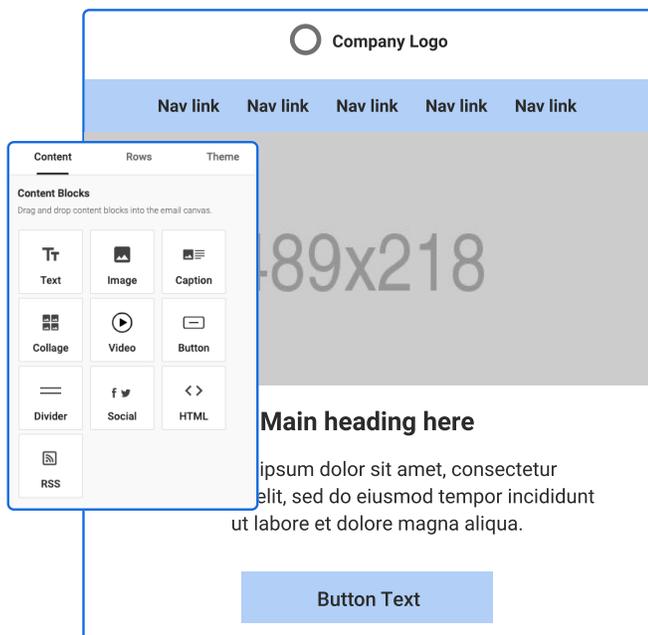
When images and words work together the message comes through loud and clear, making it much more likely that readers will convert. Make it easy for your readers to quickly gather relevant information. The more efficient you can be with conveying your message, the more likely your readers will be to click through.

While we could do an entire article on the layout, but here are some of the tried-and-true best practices:

- **Design for a vertical layout rather than horizontal**
- **Use properly-sized images for optimal rendering and to ensure the email loads quickly**
- **Put CTAs in prominent places with clear call-outs**
- **Be concise – too much text is overwhelming**
- **Use spaces, images, or dividing lines to create breaks in content**
- **Make your email responsive**

One final note on this. If you have a lot to say, use your email as a sneak peek to entice the reader to click through for the rest.

Maybe some animation to draw the eye?

When used properly, animation can be incredibly effective. It catches the reader's eye and can lead them to what you most want them to see very quickly.

Avoid the temptation of overusing animation though. Much like images, if the animation is out of context you may actually distract from your message, AND you risk annoying readers if your email has so many moving parts that it's unclear what it's for.

A countdown timer is one of the most popular examples of a simple animation that works very well. Which brings us to our next point...

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Create FOMO.

Fear of missing out often drives customers to buy products, especially during the holidays when discounts are the most attractive. Messaging about flash sales, limited time offers, and low inventory all help to create a sense of urgency. Last-minute sales work amazingly well for this reason.

Maintain brand consistency.

While mixing in holiday colors and themes is expected and certainly acceptable, be sure not to stray too far from your overall brand look and feel. Keeping elements of consistency in look and feel maintains the trust and connection you've formed throughout the year.

Execution

Make the most of automation.

Automation is a very powerful tool, and when used correctly can save time and generate revenue with less effort. A marketer's day is busy enough at any time of the year, and for many the holidays ramp up the activity to a hectic pace. Automating your most important holiday campaigns frees you up for the ad hoc tasks that inevitably arise.

If you're not already doing so, make sure you have automation (workflows or simple autoresponders & triggers) set up for the critical events that can make a difference for your business - abandoned cart offers, welcome emails or promotions.

It helps to list out those critical moments in the customer journey, and then decide the type of automation that's most appropriate.

If you have automated messaging in place already, now is a good time to review and if needed update your messaging.
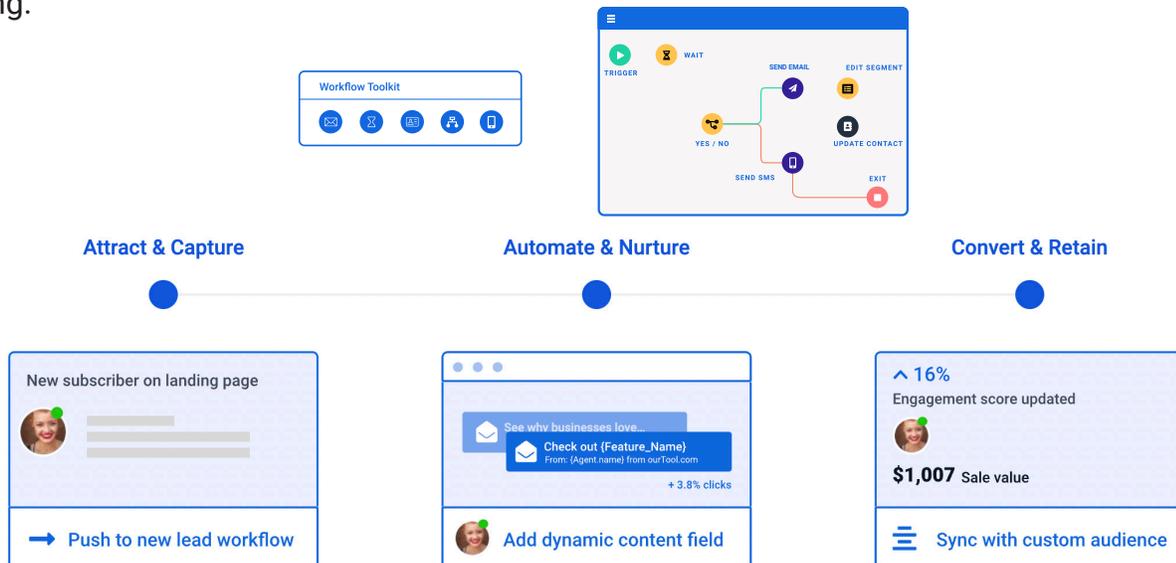
Test, optimize, repeat.

This is a good practice at any time of year, but this is a particularly big season for revenue generation and you want your email campaigns to perform as well as possible.

A/B testing everything from subject lines and preheader text to offers and different calls-to-action will help you understand what's resonating most with your audience. Use those results to build your follow-up campaigns and test alternate versions of those also.

Most ESPs (and Campaigner is no different) allow you to easily set the conditions by which a winner is chosen and sent to the rest of your audience, so you can be sure the most effective version of a campaign is getting to most of the people on your list.

How does it look?

Many ESPs have email editors which will do much of the work for you, but that doesn't mean that your email design will have the same effect on a 23-inch screen and a 6-inch one.

Send tests to as many friends and colleagues as possible to see how your email renders across devices, or for added insurance use one of the available email preview tools. Litmus is one of the most well-known ones.

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A Little Holiday Inspiration

There are countless ways to promote, sell, and connect with your audience during the holidays, and we can all use a little inspiration now and then, so we selected some holiday-themed examples covering some of the more common use cases for the time of year. Enjoy!

1 Saying Thank You

The last couple of years have been challenging for so many. Loyal customers were the lifeline for many businesses. The holidays present the perfect opportunity to say thank you and perhaps reward that loyalty.

Discounts are the first thing that come to mind of course, but perhaps a donation to charity or just a simple thank you is all that's required. You know your customers best, so choose the one that you think is most compelling.

Target nails the simple thank you in this example:

WHAT WE LOVE AND WHY
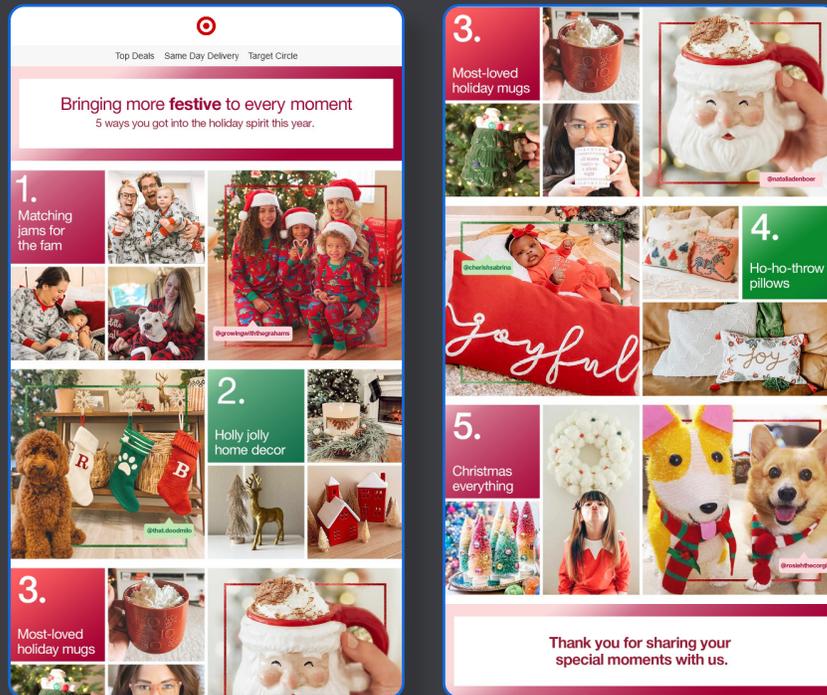
Imagery. The images are all holidays and family, which will be sure to conjure up memories for many readers. You may not even realize they are showcasing their products!

Social proof. Said products are images shared by Target's audience via Instagram. We all know the power of showcasing other people using your products, and this hits all the right notes.

A simple thank you. Right at the end comes the thank you, which was clearly the aim from the beginning, but what a great way to get there.

2 **Early Promotions**

If you're going to start promoting your products early, here's a clever and very simple example from J.Crew.
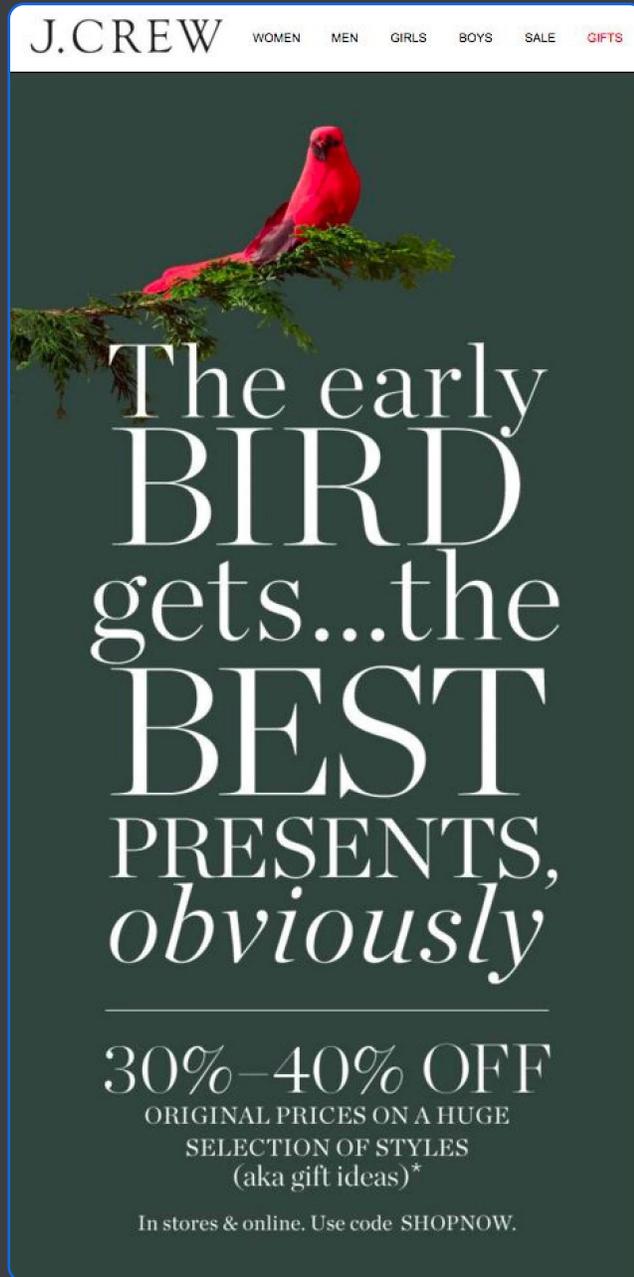
Holiday themed with clever imagery. The bird may be the early bird, but its red color with the green background immediately conveys the holidays.

A compelling offer. The reward messaging offers two benefits: The best gift selection (for being an early shopper) and a compelling discount to go along with it.

3 Clever Subject Lines

Marks & Spencer does a really nice job of taking a well-known line from a Christmas carol and using it in a clever way.

*Subject Line: It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...*

The subject line: The subject line is compelling because it's so familiar, but is also serves as a clever nod to their seasonal clothing.

Bright Images: The bright and festive images evoke a sense of warmth and cheer – just what you want during the holidays!

4 **Staying True to Your Brand**

This email from Vans is a good example of our earlier point about maintaining brand consistency.
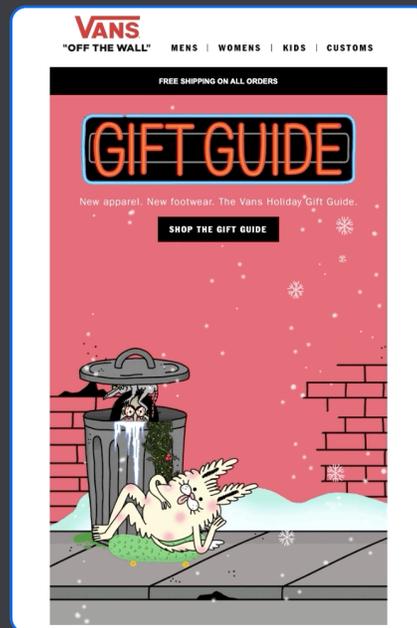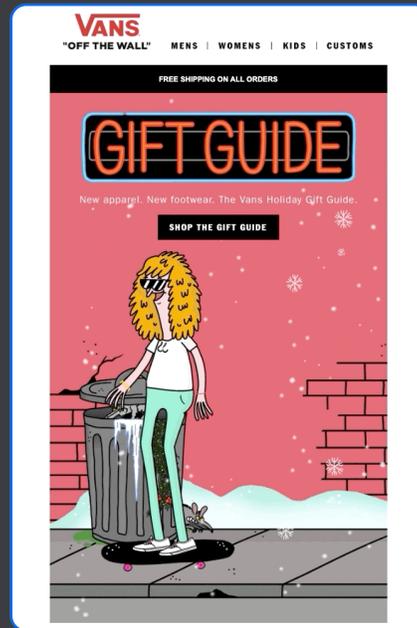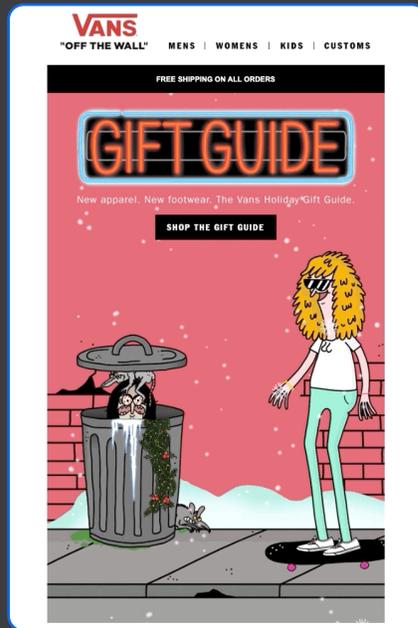
Shows the fun side of their brand. Though holiday-themed, Vans doesn't forget its brand identity. Keeping it light connects well with their audience.

The gift guide. Rather than a single offer, they've chosen to create a gift guide to give shoppers a choice of their full inventory. It's a great idea, especially when sending those first few seasonal emails when people are still looking for gift ideas.

5 Surprise and Delight – Last Minute Deals

Though starting a sale early has advantages, <u>79% of shoppers did last-minute shopping in 2020.</u>

Last-minute sales can attract the attention of the shopper who still has to find that perfect gift. Here is an example from <u>Kate Spade</u>.

Creates FOMO: Kate Spade makes their last-minute deal email impactful, and uses the taxi imagery to reinforce urgency. The offer itself could not be more clear or compelling.

6

Surprise and Delight - Flash Sales

Another spin on the surprise and delight theme is to use a flash sale. <u>They can increase transactions by 35%</u>, and flash sales during the evenings do exceptionally well since many consumers are home and online.

Here's a great example from Ann Taylor.

It appeals to our sense of curiosity. It doesn't say much, be we all know what a flash sale is and I know I would be compelled to find out more!

The CTA. "Drop everything and shop" is not your everyday call-to-action, and it's pretty perfect for creating a sense of urgency. Well done!

7   **The Ever-Important Win-back Campaign**

For a variety of reasons, a certain segment of your customers will become inactive over time. They may stop engaging with your emails, or perhaps they only ever intended to purchase from you the one time.

Regardless of the reason, why not see if the need to buy gifts during the holidays can get them to come back? A simple win-back campaign like this one from Sephora can be very effective.

The use of the colors: Black, gold and white together gives a luxe, elegant look and it's right on brand. The "oh what fun" message is of course a reference to Jingle Bells, and is equally appropriate for shopping with a discount as a reward.

Clear CTA and Offer. There isn't a lot of text here, and it's a great example of an email that takes no time to read yet you understand exactly what is being offered.

8 Value-added Offers

Consumers often look to splurge a little when buying Christmas gifts; especially for those closest to them. Offering product bundles can be a good strategy to entice them to purchase, and it can increase your order value in the process.

MAC cosmetics has a nice example to follow.
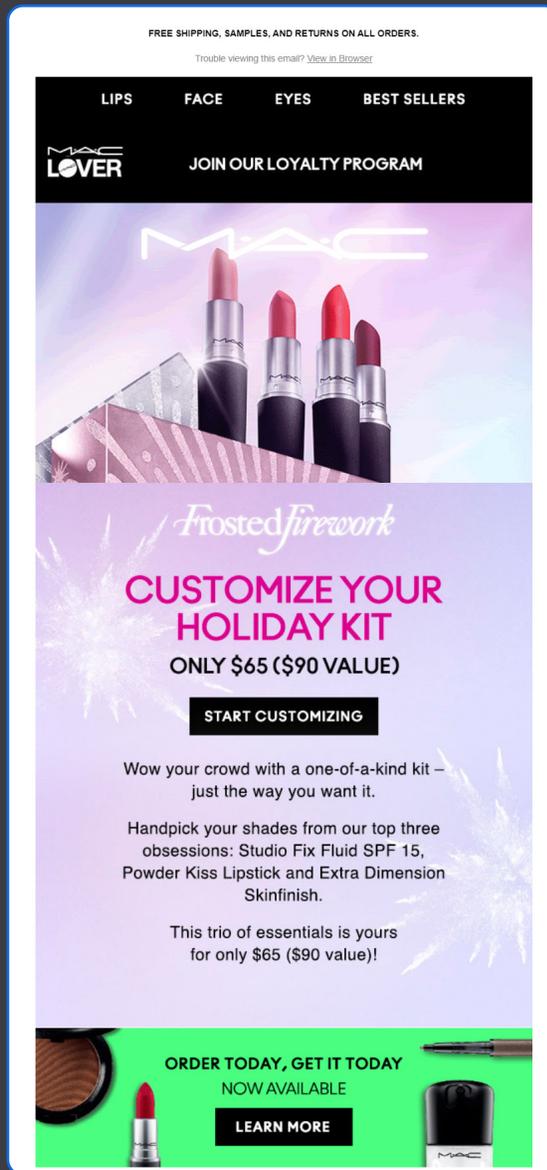
WHAT WE LOVE AND WHY

They offer choice. MAC has created a holiday bundle but still offers the freedom to choose shades. A bundle with some flexibility provides a great customer experience, as sometimes these offers can feel like the merchant is simply putting items that don't sell into one package with one or two popular items. The CTA reinforces that you have the freedom to choose.

9 **Do Something Different**

Holiday emails usually mean sales and discounts, but changing the narrative can work well for your brand. Since your audience expects the usual from you, surprise them, just like in this example from Everlane.
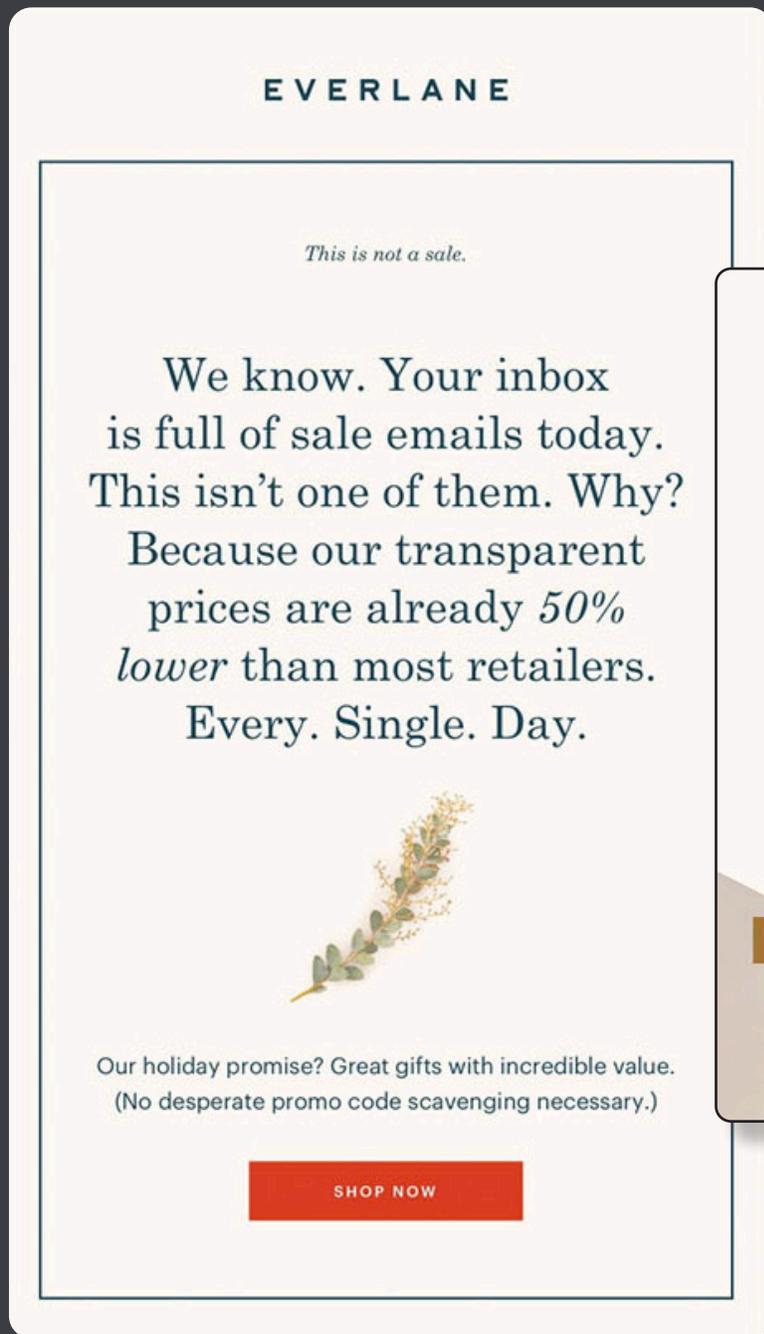
It's refreshing, and that gets attention this time of year. When every other brand is vying for attention with their sales, Everlane chose to reinforce what is already true. Overall, it is a very witty email copy with a clean design.

10 Give Back

Finally, since this is a time to remember that there are many people less fortunate than we are, a giving campaign is perfect for the season. It's now reflected in #GivingTuesday, which comes right after Cyber Monday.

This example from charity: water is one of the best we've seen.
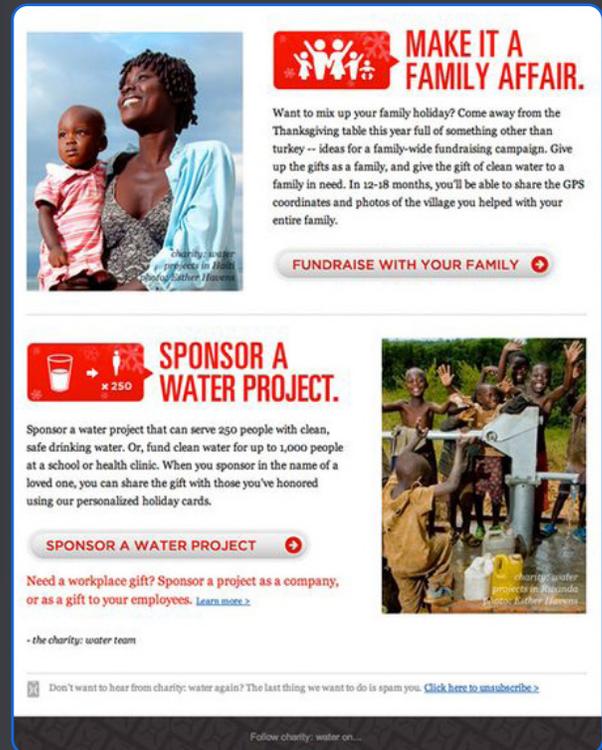
The spin on holiday gifting. Nearly one-third of all giving happens in December. With that in mind, this email is all about doing something different with gift-giving.

They offer choice. The CTAs allow someone to either participate by fundraising or give a direct donation. This demonstrates an understanding that some people who want to help may not have any money to give themselves, but by fundraising they can do a lot of good. For those that prefer to simply donate, that option is also there.

charity:water also demonstrates that it understands the power of a fundraising campaign to increase donations.

BONUS Content – SMS Marketing

While email is something we've been doing for 20+ years, we are now two years into also offering SMS marketing natively in the Campaigner platform. If you've not tried SMS marketing before, and if you can spare the budget, this holiday season is a perfect time to try it out.

Quick Stats to Consider

- **SMS messages have a 98% read rate**
- **Most messages are read within 3 minutes**
- **50% of people who receive SMS marketing will end up making a purchase**
- **Almost 70% of customers do not receive any promotional SMS messages**

We hope that last one caught your attention. You could very well give yourself a competitive advantage by making this the year you start using SMS messages as part of your digital marketing plan.

Because text messaging is just text, it's a little different than email campaigns but there are a number of ways to stand out and get conversions. Here are just a few:

- **Create a holiday hashtag for social that's tied to a discount offer.**
- **Send an SMS message to non-openers of your email campaigns**
- **Encourage customers to come into your store and provide a discount code (or a QR code) to use when they come in**
- **Make important announcements – the last day for shipping to ensure your gift arrives for the holidays is a great example.**

The truth is SMS can be used for many of the same things as email – saying thank you, a giving campaign, and so on, but it leverages the one device we can't live without and a means of messaging that we can't seem to ignore. It's very powerful for those two reasons alone!

Just like email, please be sure that your subscribers have opted-in to receive your SMS messages, and be sure to clearly identify your brand so it's perceived as a trusted message.

And Finally...

Thank you for taking the time to read through our holiday marketing guide. We wish you a successful and wonderful holiday season and the very best for the year ahead!

If you would like to get in touch with us regarding the content in this guide, or if you have questions about Campaigner as a platform, please feel free to connect with us by sending an email to campaigner.marketing@j2.com.