



Is There a Benefit in Adopting Corporate Email Letterhead?

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Brand Building Programs

Today, many marketers are asking “How can we use email to deliver branded interactive messages to achieve our marketing goals?”

While most of the conversation in this area is about mass marketing, bulk mailing, opt-in lists and conversion rates, one channel is regularly overlooked. The missed opportunity is the one-to-one messages that we send everyday as white, text-only, generic email.

Can you imagine mailing a business letter without using company letterhead? Email letterhead has advantages far exceeding paper letterhead: richer graphics, active links, dynamic offers, and tracking, for starters.

Reasons to pursue email messaging include:

- Strengthen brand awareness and identity
- Achieve more profitable relationships
- Reduce the costs of communications
- Minimize customer acquisition costs
- Deliver personalized messaging to customers and prospects
- Increase reach, cross-selling, and up-selling
- Build customer/brand loyalty (lifetime customer value)
- Improve the results of PR and advertising efforts
- Increase marketing return on investment (ROI)

Why have so many organizations overlooked using a branded template for their professional email?

Need for Consistency

Delivering a consistent visual appearance in email is challenging. You could use the features built in to your email client, such as MS Outlook signatures, but signature files are controlled at the desktop level. It is almost impossible to present a uniform corporate identity. The ability of the employee to insert an image of his/her choice leaves the door open for undesirable variations of the company brand. Fortunately, these problems can be addressed by applications that operate on rules established by the marketing department.

How It Works

The leading approach to adding corporate branding to email is to add branding elements on the fly. Graphics are not embedded in the email; they are stored on an Internet server and referenced when the message opens. This approach offers more control to standardize branding for all outgoing messages, for all departments and employees. Tracking and feedback mechanisms are usually included. "Creative" employees cannot access (or alter) the templates. Using the ASP model, this solution takes some server load off the IT department because the provider serves the graphic elements.



This approach is for solicited email. It is not for spam or bulk email and does not require email lists. Each communication is therefore based on a legitimate one-to-one interaction and is not considered unwanted mail. Additionally, you can segment and target your message with respect to senders and recipients. Advanced features include integration with a MS Exchange server or SQL database. Database integration facilitates the insertion of particular header message into an outgoing email depending on the sender and recipient. Senders and recipients can be grouped according to what message you wish to send them. Furthermore, you can rotate messages so that one recipient does not continually receive the same message

Dynamic Messages

As an option, letterhead inserts are made clickable and can direct the recipient to a website or PDF providing them with additional information. This will increase traffic to your website. Furthermore, you can take traffic directly to particular pages on your website without the viewer having to find or drill down to more information.

The server can track all inserts sent and clicked. You can see who is interested in the inserted message and much more. For example, a salesperson can view detailed statistics on responses to messages inserted in his/her email. Details include recipient names and when or if clicked.

A client-server based solution means that the marketing department can change the messages for the entire corporation and align branded email letterhead with marketing initiatives. There is very little impact on employees sending email. They continue sending emails as they did before. Most email letterhead applications require the sender to use MS Outlook or Outlook Express.

Questions To Ask

When investigating service providers for one-to-one branded email solutions, consider the following key questions to ask a prospective vendor:

- Will graphics served into email make my messages "fat" or "light"?
- Will the solution differentiate between HTML and text-only recipients?
- Will the system work across various email client security patches, versions, operating systems, and email protocols?
- How will user account, template, and contact information be updated and managed?
- Will the system be affected by attachments, voting buttons, MS Word used as editor, proxy-server network configurations, or firewalls?
- What will internal email look like?
- How will/can users select and/or preview different templates?
- Is the system optimized for display across various email clients: AOL, Blackberry, Hotmail, Eudora, Entourage, Novell Groupwise, Outlook, and others?
- How will branded emails affect storage and bandwidth requirements?
- Will reply and forward behavior be handled to eliminate stacked graphics?
- Does the solution track click-through and download data by template, user or URL?



What's In It For Me?

Email letterhead combined with “marketing messages” allows organizations to use solicited everyday email to:

- **Standardize communication** – Branded email letterhead ensures that all the email communications leaving the company have the same standard branding and look and feel. This includes targeted headers and footer disclaimers.
- **Maintain professional look and feel** - Email letterhead ensures that email communications adhere to the same high levels of professionalism that is required at all points of customer contact.
- **Ensure effective and efficient branding and marketing** - Email letterhead increases the effectiveness of overall marketing and communication by leveraging every-day communications with clients and other relevant parties.
- **Improve marketing messages** due to live feedback and measurement – tracking enabled email letterhead allows immediate feedback on how interesting the marketing messages are. That enables the marketing department can adjust marketing messages that do not perform.
- **Align marketing and management** due to central control -Because branded email letterheads are administered from one location, less time is spent attempting to align and integrating all online and offline marketing efforts.
- **Increase sales and service** due to better communication – Email letterhead allows you to increase new business as well as to augment retention efforts by improved communication with existing clients

Summary

Your brand is measured at every point of contact. Today, you probably send ten times more email than paper mail. If your organization is typical, they have overlooked email as a branding tool. If you check your inbox you will probably notice many messages, sent by people from the same company, that do not display consistent signature lines. They change from message to message.

Worse—from a branding perspective—there is often no signature line at all, just the sender’s name. The company’s “trust mark” is missing.

Our exploration of how email letterhead is implemented by corporations has exposed two trends. The first is that many firms are using discreet, well-designed graphics of the same caliber used for letterhead and business cards. Unfortunately, this high aesthetic is juxtaposed by a second trend that gives the concept of email letterhead a bad reputation. We find garish banner ads passed off as letterhead.

As proponents of excellence in communications, we anticipate a day when a standard of excellence is established for electronic email that is on par with corporate standards for snail mail. Got an opinion? We would like to hear from you.

More Information

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