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May 31, 2013

Green Eggs or Spam?

By: **Sandi Solow**

Green eggs or spam?

Let's talk about how email is perceived. Is email a source for bringing in the green, i.e. money, or is it all spam? Well, this opinion is all dependent upon who you're asking.

The marketers I surveyed all knew email to be a powerful channel by which to disseminate their messages. When I asked my non-marketing friends what they thought of marketing email, their answer was usually some variation of "A lot of what I get is spam."

A marketer could counter: "It can't be spam! They signed up for the mailing list!"

Well, is it spam? Seth Godin [has a wise answer to that question](#). As he says, "If you have to ask, it probably is."

It seems there's a disconnect between the marketing community and the population to which they're marketing. Those who are sending out marketing emails think their messages are on the money (like how I worked that back in?), but the population receiving these dispatches isn't always feeling the love.

I think it's because, too often, marketers forget to put themselves in the shoes of their recipients and ignore the interests of their audience. It's a case of "Let me tell you what I want you to hear," instead of "Let me tell you what I want you to hear in a way that meets your expectations."

Value is in the eye of the recipient. You, as the sender, may think your email message is indispensable — "I'm sending them coupons! Who doesn't love a sale? How can THAT be flagged as spam?!" — but we all have a different idea of what's "valuable."

At the outset, a promise should be made during the email signup process. In effect, when someone shares their email address, an item of great value to them, they're expecting something of equal value in return. A good signup form will include an explanation of the kind of content that will be emailed and how often. Deviation from this promise gets away from the value proposition of the email program — and this is what leads to the perception of a brand's emails being spam.

When marketer arrogance trumps customer expectations, spam is the result. Smart marketers know that one message does not fit all and good email marketers know how to tailor messages to different audience segments. When the two ideas are combined — content personalized to different audience groups — the likelihood that email will be perceived as spam decreases. If this took place more often, email wouldn't get such a bad rap from consumers.

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