

For Love or Money: Creative Approaches to Re-Activation

Gabe Joynt, June 2010

When a customer goes dormant, it's time to use an alchemy of creativity and incentives to woo them back. Like any relationship, an added dose of insight is key to making it work – and to knowing when it's time to let go.

Once you've decided to build a reactivation program, you are confronted by the key question: how do you get the attention of a group that has, by definition, stopped paying attention?

Love vs. Money

When considering how to get the attention of inactive recipients, one approach is obvious: bribes. Whether it's a discount, a partner offer or other reward, money can often buy attention. In fact, the pitfall of offering too much incentive is that it may work too well -- reactivating customers who won't continue to engage, and training customers to wait for an incentive before buying.

Less obvious than money are subtle forms of love, such as asking inactives how to make communications more useful using surveys or polls. Or by reminding them of what you've been offering. Maybe it just means showing a personal side, with a short note from a name and face within your organization that breaks up the flow and feels more personal. Humor can also be a surprisingly effective way to reinforce connection and pull them in.

Using the pillars of love and money as a framework, and the segmentation you've previously applied to the inactive list, it's time to get to work creating messages that will break through.

Creative Approaches

The first battle for reactivation is simply getting the message noticed and opened. For this, nothing works harder than your subject line. Easy to test and optimize, your subject line should stick out from your regular communications.

For the message itself, consider one of these five approaches:

- **Bribes:** Straightforward and classic, everyone understands a great offer. Try merchandising your offer in the subject line and pre-pending a blurb above a regular communication, calling out that this is a one-time offer and invitation to reconnect.
- **Threats:** A polite cutoff notice can be an effective way to reaffirm interest amongst recipients whose attention has wavered. Treating re-activation like a renewal, this could start with a simple "Would you like to continue receiving email from us?"

- Surveys: Giving recipients a place to provide feedback or refine their interests can help tailor future communications, especially if the survey can drive content personalization or segmentation in the future.
- Cuddle-ups: Perhaps just a little love is all it takes, with a short note from a real person within your company, inviting respondents to take action or reaffirm interest. Adding a photo and signature can help differentiate the note.
- Opt-downs: Perhaps you simply mail too often, and instead of unsubscribing the overwhelmed recipient would simply like to receive fewer communications. Invite them

In addition, consider time-shifting a re-activation message, to change things up and perhaps cut through or simply be noticed again. Similarly, suppressing communications for a period, then popping back up with a reactivation appeal might provide just enough of a disruption to get noticed again, without being overbearing.

Putting It Together

Finally, it's time to create a basic series structure for your mailing. This simply means identifying how many messages will be sent to each segment, and defining the purpose of each. This will ultimately help you set up testing and optimization routines for each component of the program.

Here's an example: for a segment that has been active in the past, but has turned MIA, let's start with a series of three communications. These could look like:

Message	Purpose	Approach May Look Like...
First: Notice	Disrupt the flow, remind them of what they've been missing, and notify them that regular communications will be cut off if they don't take action.	Suppress messages for 1-2 cycles, then send a dedicated email with the subject "Would you like to continue receiving our exclusive offers?" and a note from the head of merchandising. State that unless the respondent takes some action, even clicking a link, they will stop receiving messages at a specified date.
Best: Raise the Ante	Given them the best offer you have (whether it's love or money), to re-engage.	Send a regular communication with an offer called out at the top of the message. Test a subject line such as "Last week you missed 10% off, don't miss this" vs. "For [name] this week, 20% off any item."
Last: Auf Wiedersehen	A last chance, but not a desperation attempt. Leave the door open.	Either a dedicated email, or a personalized note above a regular communication. Tell them this will be the last communication unless they respond (click, opt in, etc.). Reinforce benefits of continued communications.

These are some building block concepts to consider as you create a program that will cut through the clutter. Put these together with an insight-driven approach, and the inspiration of love or money, and there is just one lesson left.

Knowing When to Move On

We all know that most inactive recipients won't reactivate, but it can still be hard to let go. By implementing a creative, insight-driven approach to your re-activation series, you will be free to prune your list, tend to your engaged customers, and never wonder what might have been.

About the Author

Gabe has 15 years' experience helping businesses in many industries plan and execute digital marketing campaigns. Gabe joined Razorfish in 2004, where he has led engagements for Visa, Microsoft, Washington Mutual, Toshiba and others. Prior to Razorfish, Gabe led the client management team at Convio, an eCRM software provider. In this role he was responsible for the success of the firm's 400 customers using the platform, including the Susan G. Komen Foundation, Share Our Strength, and Minnesota Public Radio. Prior to Convio, Gabe spent six years at Agency.com, where he led an eBusiness strategy team serving leading brands and emerging technology companies. Gabe has a B.S. in Journalism from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

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