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## E-Marketers Getting Crafty in Spam-Flooded World




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Overcoming inbox clutter is no small feat today, said Amy Black, president of DigitalFX, which operates the HelloWorld.com social networking site. It offers businesses the chance to use video e-mail, among other tools, to market themselves. "E-mails are commonplace, often ignored and in many cases dreaded." In contrast, she said, video e-mail is "one way to almost assure a message will be seen and heard."

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Even in a post CAN-SPAM (Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act) world, where legal protections and technological advances give consumers more control than ever over their inboxes, e-mail  remains a key component of many interactive marketing strategies.


Commercial e-mail remains a cost-effective way to reach consumers, especially for businesses that are eager to reach out to their existing or past customers.


For marketers eager to reach new audiences, however, the need to get creative to get the message out has spurred the creation of new techniques and the leveraging of new technologies. From desktop widgets to video e-mail and mobile text messages, marketers are eager to continue to leverage the interactive channel, where results can be tracked easily and where the overall cost of reaching consumers remain low.

Each new innovation brings its own new challenges, however, and privacy groups continue to express concern about the tactics of marketers, who are increasingly leveraging data about Web users to better target messages.

### New Tools in the Toolbox

[Google](#) (Nasdaq: GOOG)  and others are moving to foster adoption of widgets as alternative advertising vehicles, attempting to leverage the viral nature of the gadgets and the fact that content can be dynamic and regularly updated.

There are now thousands of widgets that can be loaded onto desktops or fed into customized home pages on [Yahoo](#) (Nasdaq: YHOO) , Google and other Web portals, or that can come preloaded onto PCs.

Other marketers are using customized [USB](#)  (universal serial bus) drives as another way to get users to load widgets onto their machines.

[Flash By Design](#), part of PTI, offers such promotional USB flash drives as tools to hook users into Web content while also giving them something of value -- a free flash drive to transport files.

The devices appeal to marketers because unlike other ways of enhancing brand awareness, their effectiveness can be measured directly.

"For the first time in history, a promotional products can be tracked," PTI President Ron Friedman told the E-Commerce Times. "You can say that of the 25,000 drives you distributed, 62 percent are being used three times a week. You can't do that with a T-shirt or mug."

Better still, he added, the use of Web-based widgets enables RSS (really simple syndication) feeds of updated content to be delivered. Some drives, for instance, will include video messages from the sponsors along with links to other Web content. In addition to using the drive itself to port files between computers, users can be exposed to changing messages each time they load the device.


"You're adding real value for the end user," Friedman said. "That's the key. People are looking for value and they don't object to getting marketing messages if they come in the context of something they find useful."

## **Going Mobile**

Marketers are also extending the value of the contact they do have with consumers with multichannel campaigns, which increasingly involve a mobile component.

Current estimates are that as many as 96 percent of text messages get read by the recipient, said Phyllis Dealy, a partner at New York-based ad agency Woods Witt Dealy & Sons.

"It's still early enough in the mobile messaging market that the field is pretty wide open right now," Dealy told the E-Commerce Times. "Marketers that can get in and test the technology now might find a more welcoming market."

In the end, text messaging marketing may be driven more by smaller businesses than large ones -- though there have been some high-profile campaigns by the likes of Pepsi and others. Local real estate agents and doctors' offices can use them to build customer loyalty  and for follow-ups, for instance. The two-way nature of text messaging also makes it ideal for data-gathering, such as collection of contact information at promotional events.

Dealy said she was surprised to see little mobile promotion during the Super Bowl advertising frenzy, with none of the major ads including a text-message component. "It's growing and the return on investment is clearly there, but a lot of companies still aren't convinced."

That will happen over time, especially as text messaging gains traction with a broader swath of the population. "Younger people are texting more than the rest of us, but I know plenty of 40-year-old women who spend all day sending messages on their BlackBerries," she added.

## **Not Deleting**

Getting commercial e-mail messages through filters, of course, is only part of the battle. In order to get consumers to respond, messages must first be opened and read.

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Video e-mail messages are still unique enough to get a higher level of interest, some of it just on the "gee-whiz" factor alone, Black argued.

The technique is also affordable enough to be used by small businesses, such as realtors, who can offer home tours inside e-mails and automobile dealers, who can give customers a real-life view of cars for sale.

Another unmistakable trends in e-marketing is to present commercial messages in new ways, such as by

blending them into the content around them.

"The most innovative techniques are those where the people don't realize that they are being marketed to," Dave Taylor, the founder of Web marketing firm Intuitive Strategies, told the E-Commerce Times. "Most marketing campaigns underestimate the critical power of storytelling. Instead of sending out yet another boring press release, why not have an engaging story or case study?"

Taylor describes the technique as marketing in a consumer friendly way and while the tactic needs to be used carefully to avoid alienating consumers, it may represent another option for cutting through the increasing online marketing clutter.