

An Email Marketing Plan for an Online Educational Startup Company: A Practical Approach

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Abstract

Nowadays, online marketing, which adopts Internet technology as a medium to deliver marketing information to customers, is becoming popular, and Email marketing is one important part in an online marketing strategy. This thesis is trying to find a systematical and suitable way for company to design and implement an Email marketing plan. Sharplet AB is the case company to achieve the thesis question. As an online educational start-up company, Sharplet AB is suffering the lack of funding on marketing activities. Facing the current situation, an Email marketing plan is on demand to achieve the goal to attract more customers to the company website and engage them in the service. This thesis took around seven months' work, and showed a real story of how a company came up with an Email marketing plan from nothing.

The process of making the Email marketing plan starts from a literature study. This research aims at using literatures to clarify the definitions of Email marketing related terms, analyze the advantages and disadvantages of Email marketing's current state, depict customers' behaviors in Email marketing campaigns, suggest the Executional tactics when create marketing Emails, and translate the customers' responses to data for analyzing purpose.

With enough literature support, the thesis reproduces the implementation process of the Email marketing plan for Sharplet AB. The business model canvas and business environmental analysis describe the current situation of the company, based on which the goal of Email marketing plan is settled. A/B Split test is the methodology used for improving the features in the Emails. In the end, the optimized Email marketing plan is completed as guidance for Sharplet AB to follow in the future.

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1. Introduction

This chapter is an introduction of the master thesis. Firstly it describes the background when writing the thesis. Afterwards, the research questions and limitations are introduced, followed by the theory gap and the thesis' outline

1.1 Problem Background

To deliver product and/or service information to customers in the competitive market, a business needs a marketing plan. A proper marketing plan is able to discover, create, arouse and satisfy customer needs. In the late 19th century, the New Economy brought a new form of marketing, which is called online marketing. Adopting Internet as medium, online marketing activities have many advantages comparing to the traditional. Email marketing is one important part in the area of online marketing. It relies on online Email servers in the communication with recipients. Many startup companies benefit from Email marketing.

This thesis researches on Email marketing, and shows the story of how a company adopts Email marketing campaigns to achieve its business goals. The case company Sharplet AB is a Sweden-based online educational platform, aiming at creating a knowledge retention platform that allows customers to learn more in less time. Although the company is in Sweden, the customers are from the international market. At the very beginning stage of a startup company, Sharplet AB is trying to attract as much global attention as possible with limited budget. Facing the current situation, the founder of Sharplet AB decided to take advantages of online marketing activities, and Email marketing is one important part of the online marketing plan to retain customers' attention to the company and engage them with service.

Although the company has a clear marketing goal, when coming up with the Email marketing campaigns, in Sharplet team there are no experienced members in the marketing field. This situation brought a perfect opportunity for a student with the background of marketing and media to be part of such team and contribute with the adequate knowledge. To design perfect Email marketing campaigns, theories are necessary but not the only thing to think about. It is of great importance to combine theories with company's current situation, and find the efficient way to implement and manage. Only in that way is a company possible to find practical and systematic Email marketing guidance to follow in the future.

The main purpose of this thesis is to design and implement an Email marketing plan for the case company Sharplet AB under the current situation of Sharplet AB being a startup company. The thesis is constructed by a literature study on Email marketing and the practice of how to implement

Email marketing campaigns in the plan. The result was evaluated based on the analysis of customer response, and recommendations for how to improve Email marketing plan is concluded at the end.

1.2 Research Question and Limitation

The thesis focuses on the case study (Sharplet) to design and implement the Email marketing plan. The research methodology is also applied to other startup company.

The main research question of the thesis is:

- What is the most suitable Email marketing plan for a startup company to achieve more traffic to the website?

The sub-questions are:

- How effective can Email marketing be nowadays?
- How does the recipients use the marketing Email?
- How does a marketer create marketing Emails of effectiveness?
- How does a marketer interpret customers' response?

There are many stakeholders related to an Email marketing campaign. However, this thesis is limited on the perspective of the company, trying to research customers' response. The Email marketing research targets Business-To-Consumer (B2C) market.

1.3 Theory Gap

Searching the keywords "Email marketing" in the Internet, people are possible to find innumerable tactics on designing, which are fragmented and unreliable. One important contribution of the thesis is that all the tactics mentioned in the literature and tested in the case study are on the basis of published work in the field. The careful selection on literatures improves the reliability of the thesis. The second contribution to the Email marketing is that the theories are tested in the real business life. To solve the thesis problem, theories are put into a considerable sequence fitting marketers' way of thinking, in which way the literature study makes more sense to them. In the case study, business model and business environmental analysis are taken into consideration. The practice of theories on Email marketing is implanted by the entrepreneur's concerns. For the marketers who plan to use Email for marketing purpose, the thesis systematically tells them how to start with and how to manage.

1.4 Outline

Chapter one is the thesis introduction. This chapter describes the theoretical background in the area of Email marketing. Considering the theoretical and practical situation, the main research question is stated, with a further explanation of sub-questions. To narrow down the research topic, there are a number of limitations mentioned below. The value of this thesis reflects in the theory gap section.

Chapter two shows the methodology adopted in literature study and case study. It is an outline of how these two studies are implemented in practice and the logic behind.

Chapter three is constructed by the results learned from the Email marketing literature study. Literatures are displayed to answer the main question as well as the sub-questions. This is what the case study is based on theoretically.

Chapter four is the case study under the guidance of Chapter three. The insight of implementation of different Email marketing campaigns is introduced step by step. The results of marketing campaigns are shown at the end, and are discussed.

Chapter five concludes all lessons learned from the literature study and case study, and recommends the way to test and improve Email marketing plan for marketers in other start-up companies.

Chapter six contains the future work. It is for other researchers to continue the study of Email marketing. It is also used for marketers in the case company Sharplet AB to perfect the Email marketing plan.

All of the reference and appendix mentioned in the thesis are displayed at the end.

2. Methodology

This Chapter shows the methods of how to accomplish the thesis purpose. The methodology includes two parts. The first part is the literature study to provide the theoretical support for the practice of Email marketing plan. The Second part is the implementation of the theories, a case study in Sharplet AB.

2.1 Literature Study

The literature starts with the definition of concepts that are related to the thesis topic. The concepts include “Marketing”, “Online Marketing”, “Email Marketing”, and. The definitions are necessary to clarify the scope of the thesis.

After the definitions, a SWOT analysis is adopted to show the present situation of the performance of Email marketing in the decision making of how to make Email marketing plan (Balamuralikrishna & Dugger, 1995). There are four blocks in a SWOT analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Strengths and Weaknesses internally exist in the nature of Email. Opportunities and threats are from other online marketing activities. The SWOT analysis is the basis to decide how to create Email marketing plan. When formulating an Email marketing plan, marketer is required to use the strength, grasp the opportunity, minimize the weakness and respond to the threat.

When designing the tactics, it is necessary to learn how Email is used from recipient’s perspective. Based on the research of Ellis-Chadwick and Doherty (2012), the process of people’s attention flowing among elements is expressed.

After learning the performance of Email marketing and recipients’ attention flow, a wide range of researches on tactics to reasonably design marketing Emails are collected. Study proved tactics are picked and expressed following the attention flow. The nature of Email account as a center account in the Internet world brings the possibility of integration of digital marketing activities, such as social media marketing, search marketing and the mobile. Online marketing integration tactics helps optimize the content and design, and apply the display of Email to the mobile environment.

To learn how to analyze the data from Email marketing campaign, the reason and consequences of positive and negative responses are learnt from Micheaux’s (2011) conceptual model of customers’ responses in Email campaign.

The literature study was finished with research on Email marketing related newspapers, journals, books, magazines, interviews and web pages. KTH Royal Institute of Technology’s “Primo” service and Google Scholar are the main information sources. Researches from professional organizations such as McKinsey & Co, Pew Research Center, Strongmails and Forrester are also used as references.

When searching for related literature, Key words such as “Email Marketing”, “Spam”, “Customer engagement”, were adopted. The definition of related concept in Email marketing literature study was learnt from the literature in the 1990s. However, to keep the thesis updated, most of the newspapers, journals, books, magazines, interviews and web pages were published between year 2008 and year 2014.

2.2 Case Study

The case study in Sharplet AB is an executive way to test the feasibility of the framework of Email marketing strategy in a real context. The case study is separated into two steps: Business introduction and the Email marketing plan for Sharplet AB.

Sharplet AB's business is introduced with the help of Business Model Canvas. Business Model Canvas is a strategic management template for documenting existing business models (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Respective information is filled in the nine building blocks in the Business Model Canvas. Both business model's current situation and the ideas in future are explained. Then, there is a business environmental analysis in the online Educational industry to show the environment Sharplet AB is competing with. Five forces model is adopted (Porter, 2008) to position Sharplet AB in the industry.

The Email marketing plan is designed and implemented in the following chapter, which is under the guidance of Watjatrakul and Drennan (2005) on activities in Email marketing plan. All the marketing Emails are created on Mailchimp.com, an online email marketing solution that is able to manage contacts, send emails and track results (Mailchimp, 2014). A/B Split test is adopted as the methodology of executional tactics experiments to find the most suitable way of Email designing. The data collected on Mailchimp is reported and discussed with the help of the literature study.

3 Literature Research

This chapter covers the literatures, aiming at solving the sub-questions by existing theories. It starts with Email marketing definition. An SWOT analysis is made to understand the current state. Customers' attention flow on marketing Emails is discovered, based on which Email marketing executional tactics are gathered. Finally, this chapter shows researches on how customers are possible to react to an Email marketing campaign.

3.1 Definition of Concepts

Marketing

Before the research of Email marketing, it is important to define what exactly marketing is. Business is about attracting a group of people to pay at a proper price for products or services. Not simply persuading people to purchase, marketing for a business is defined as “a tightly integrated effort to discover, create, arouse and satisfy customer needs” (Levitt, 1983).

Marketing plan is implemented through marketing campaigns, a coordinated series of promotional activities. From the object of marketing, the key of success is to focus on customers' demand. Marketing campaigns aim at attracting new customers and maintaining existing customers (Rettie & Chittenden, 2003), in which way the competitiveness of a business is improved.

Online Marketing

At the end of 20th century, digital knowledge and Internet technology brought New Economy, which means turning heavy industry into new technology based industry (Steinfeld & Klein, 1999). In terms of marketing activities, the New Economy brought new form of marketing, the online marketing, to substitute the printed advertisement. Online marketing campaigns adopt applications based on Internet technology as a medium to deliver marketing information to customers. As a result, business benefits a lot from online marketing. For example, online marketing is good at focusing on customers instead of products (Rust & Espinoza, 2006). In addition, the cost of online marketing campaign has dramatically decreased, and online marketing tools overcome the physical space barrier (Kim, Shin & Lee, 2006). Email marketing is one part in an online marketing plan.

Email marketing

Email marketing adopts Emails as the medium for marketing communication between marketers, people who promote or exchange product and service for money, and recipients, people who receive the marketing Emails. One Email marketing strategy is constructed by different Email campaigns. In an Email campaign, a series of marketing Emails are sent to different segments of

recipients. One marketing Email contains marketing information and “call-to-actions”, which is defined as the form of message to convince recipients to take a marketer desired action (Mindy, 2014). The objective of an Email marketing campaign is to achieve a business goal.

The term Email mentioned in this thesis refers to the permission-based Email. Only the marketing Emails that recipients mark “consent” is considered permission-based Email. At the early stage of the development of Email marketing before the permission-based Email was widely adopted, many recipients complained that they felt disturbed by the marketing Emails that are sent to them without permission. Over time, they set to ignore the unsolicited Emails. What’s more, laws to protect recipients from the unsolicited Emails are published by governments and organizations (Worthy & Graham, 2002), which is the legal basis of permission-based Email. Email servers are also equipped by algorithms to automatically block the unsolicited Emails. Under those circumstances, the best way of Email marketing is to adopt permission-based Emails (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012).

3.2 Email Marketing Present Situation Analysis

Email marketing has a great performance on customer acquisition and retention, product promotion, data collection (Watjatrakul & Drennan, 2005). But the improper adoption harms the relationship between the brand and the customer. Before making the Email marketing plan, an in-depth discussions of the present situation of Email marketing is conducted by the tool of SWOT to learn how to do marketing on the medium of Email, which is visualized below:

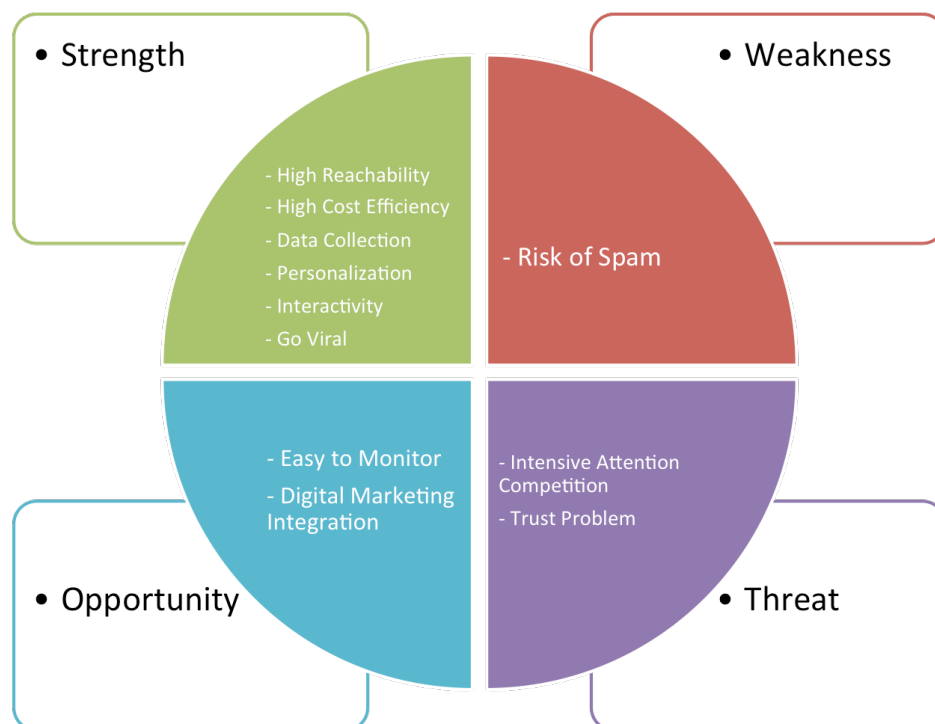


Figure 1 SWOT Analysis of Email Marketing Present Situation

3.2.1 Strength:

High Reachability

Email service has already established a broad user base. 85% of Internet users over the world check Email, but only 65% check social media webpages (Taylor, 2013). In terms of the usage of the mobile, checking email is also the most common behaviour (Smith, 2013). What's more, Email is given high opening priority when receiving digital communication information (Glenn, 2013). As a result, information sent through Email is of high possibility to reach a wide group of people.

High Cost Efficiency

It is cheap to deliver marketing information through Email, comparing with any other marketing methods (Taylor, 2013). Companies are not burdened financially by Email marketing activities. Thus, Email, as a marketing medium, is especially suitable for a small or a medium-sized business (Moustakas, Ranganathan & Duquenoy, 2006). However, the return from Email marketing is comparably high. One dollar from Email marketing budget was averagely able to bring \$28 revenue (Mark, 2013). ROI (Return on Investment) of email-marketing activities is twice as much as what was created by other online marketing activities (Pavlov, Melville & Plice, 2008). For example, Forrester (Sucharita, Patti & Douglas, 2012) found marketing activities on email more efficient than social media, because 30% of the 77,000 transaction in their research are started from a marketing Email, but less than 1% from social media. In the research "Email Marketing Industry Census 2014" (Econsultancy, 2014), approximately 70% of the tested company satisfied with the return from Email marketing.

Data Collection

An Email accounts is gathered from online purchase process or website subscription. As the centre account in cyber space, Email accounts are treated as the channel to track customers' interest in the online activities (Taylor, 2013). Preferences of customers are collected from the Email account, which is the basis of Email personalization. A company also obtains recipients' behavioural data in the process of using Email, for example the opening time, to improve the online marketing plan iteratively.

Personalization

Marketing information on social media targets a large community of fans of one brand, but Email marketing is about a closer customer relationship in the form of one-to-one relationship (eMarketer report, 2000). The content of Email marketing is able to be of high personalization with the help of big data. The data help improve the understanding of customers and the accuracy of

customer segmentation. Marketers design marketing Emails differently and put separated content for different segments, which makes the marketing information more relevant to the recipients and possibly creating more conversions (Adam, 2013).

Interactivity

Email allows business to communicate with recipients in different ways, thanks to the interactive features. There are 26 types of interactive features commonly adopted in the market, including unsubscribing, leading to landing page, customer service, ordering online and so forth (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). Comparing to the printed mail, where marketing Email is originated from, Email marketing wins in that the Email account is the centre of customers' online activities (Glenn, 2013). Email account makes it possible to integrate activities on various online platforms such as social media and online retail. Email is a pushing channel (Christopher, 2013). With proper guide, recipients are possible to take actions and reach the business goals that marketers desired.

Go Viral

Thanks to the widespread of Internet and mobile networks, marketing information is able to reach customers everywhere at anytime through Email. Email is a communication tools, allowing people to socialize by sharing and forwarding to others, which is a good base for the product and information to go viral and achieve "Word of Mouth" (Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry & Raman, 2004). Company usually attracts one group of customers and satisfies their needs. Then, that group of customers will continue the "infection chain" by forwarding to others. As a result, the process of drawing attention through Email marketing is sustainable and scalable.

3.2.2 Weakness:

The Risk of "Spam"

Spam is defined as "the practice of indiscriminate distribution of messages without permission of the receiver and without consideration for the messages' appropriateness" (Turban, Lee, King & Chung, 2000). Some companies adopt a "blast method" in Email marketing plan, which means to send Email to a large group of recipients without tracking customers' response. This might result in a great risk of creating spam (Sucharita et al., 2013). The capability for recipients to process marketing information is limited, so limited amount of marketing Emails is processed. Once Emails from a company are marked spam by recipients manually or the filters from Email server automatically, the marketing information will get no chance to reach customers. It is a waste of marketer's time and effort if the marketing Emails are considered spam, and physically it occupies disk space and network bandwidth (Moustakas et al.,

2006). Externally, spam can affect the image of a business in a negative way and alienate recipients (Watjatrakul & Drennan, 2005).

3.2.3 Opportunity:

Easy to Monitor

Many Email marketing service applications are available online to monitor the performance of Email marketing campaign. Behaviours like the opening rate, forward rate and click rate on specific Email campaign is easy to be collected and monitored in real time with low IT involvement with the applications (Taylor, 2013).

Digital Marketing Integration

As was expressed before, Email account is the centre of online activities. The nature of Email account brings the possibility of integration of digital marketing activities such as social media marketing and search marketing, and the integration is considered as one of the most effective strategies (Karen, 2011).

3.2.4 Threat:

Intensive Attention Competition

Nowadays, people are receiving information from many platforms, like SMS, social media, Email, blogs and so forth. What's more, more than 40% of Emails are received firstly on a mobile device. Thus, all information is possible to be arrived at the perfect time according to people's daily habits. The attention competition makes customers feel like sinking in the sea of information. If the marketing information in Emails is not relevant and readable enough, the marketing Emails will be easily ignored (Parik, 2013).

Trust Problem

The problems of trust include the distrust that marketers will not be honest with the marketing information (McKnight & Chervany, 2001) and the distrust that marketers will manipulate behaviours of customers in special situation (Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2003). Trust problem hurts the attitude toward the email campaigns (Cases et al., 2010). The increase of privacy concern caused by trust problem makes customers less likely to leave their Email account for Email campaigns to reach. In some other cases, recipients choose to have separated Email account to receive advertisement. All recipients' responses bring more difficulty for Email marketing campaign to win in the attention competition (White, Zahay, Thorbjørnsen, & Shavitt, 2011).

3.3 Email Recipients' Attention Flow

The attractiveness of a marketing Email decides the relationship between the attitude towards Email campaign and the response to the Email “Call-to-action” (Wilcox & Woodside, 2012). Before making the marketing Emails, it is necessary to understand behaviours of customers to design the satisfying features. Recipients' attention is not only focusing on one feature. From receiving a marketing Email until reacting the “Call-to-action”, there are three steps of engagement: attracting initial attention, sustaining attention, and engaging (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). Several elements in a marketing Email greatly affect the success of engagement. They are subject line, illustration, animation, headline, content message, hyperlink, interactive feature, and personalized feature.

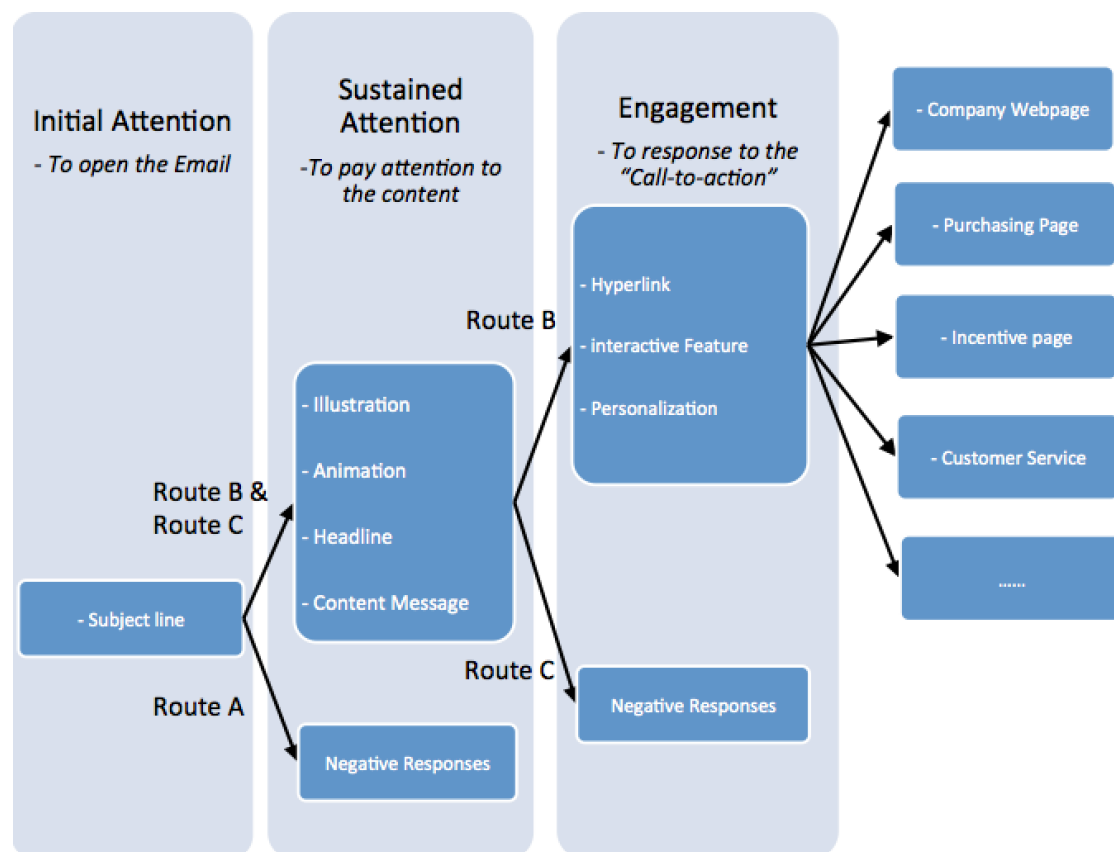


Figure 2 Recipients' Attention Flow

When receiving Emails, recipients will decide whether to open the Email or not, which process is called the initial attention. The initial attention is attracted through the subject line, a line of words summarizing what the Email is about. The decision on whether to open the Email is based on initial relevance judgment of a subject line to the recipients. In the initial relevance judgment, recipients categorize all Emails into the one type with no interest (Route A) and another type worth opening (Route B & C). Subject line is the very first

part in an email to reach recipients and attracts their initial attention. A good subject line motivates further reading and boosts the click rate, but a bad subject line thoroughly loses the initial attention. The second element related to attracting initial attention is the timing. Most of the Email opening occurs within one hour after delivering. 24 hours after sending, less than 1% of the Emails will be opened (MarketingCharts staff, 2012). To maximize the open rate, marketers are required to catch the “golden” hour. The success of subject line and timing drives recipients’ attention flowing to the content.

After considering it relevant, recipients will evaluate Emails elaborately by going through a part or all of the marketing information, which requires the related features sustaining recipients’ attention constantly. Once the marketing information inside of an Email is considered personally relevant, recipients will react positively (Route B) (Micheaux, 2011). In an Email marketing campaign, recipients do not have enough time to read the email in detail. After opening an Email, customers’ attention will most probably be focused on illustrations and animations contained in an Email. In that way customers are engaged and their attention will be sustained more effectively compared to the text content (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). The headline, providing the overview of the Email content, helps people to understand the marketing information easily and quickly, and also attract recipients’ attention effectively (Mayo-Smith, 2011). Only if the features of illustration, animation and headline are relevant to recipients and in a good coherence with the subject line is their attention able to be sustained (Micheaux, 2011). If recipients are really interested in the attention sustaining features mentioned above, there is chance for whole the content to be read. However when reading the content, the initial attention is lost and engagement is damaged by a long Email (Rettie, 2002).

To finally engage recipients in a marketing Email, there are three features working more effectively than the body text: personalization, hyperlink, and interactive features. Personal information of Email recipients such as their occupation and interests towards the company causes different reactions to the marketing Email. Personalization helps brand and make it easier for recipients to accept the marketing information, personalized Email campaigns based on proper customer study leads to more positive response (Postma & Brokke, 2002). Hyperlink is a new form of content in Email marketing, comparing to the printed marketing mail. Hyperlinks allow recipients immediately finishing the “Call-to-action” or reach further information. The third engaging feature, the interactive features, provides additional functionalities for Email marketing, comparing to the web-based advertising. More than only sustaining the customers’ attention, the interactive features acts as a bridge between recipients and the webpages that the “call to action” is leading to, such as an ordering online button or checking availability of stock (Sundar & Kim, 2005; Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012).

However, if not considering relevant, recipients feel the effort of reading through the Email and judging the relevance of marketing information unrewarded, which lead to more negative responses (Route C).

3.4 Email Marketing Tactics

The design of printed mail influences its attractiveness. Email marketing is an analogy of direct mail. Based on the Email recipients' attention flow, there are many executional tactics found in literature for the design of a marketing Email.

Subject Line

The subject line contains two parts: the Email sender and the subject matter. The Email sender includes the company name, and is proven to bring "brand benefit" to the marketing Email (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). The subject matter is briefly explained by a short phrase. The content of subject matter varies based on the purpose of Email campaign. For example, some campaigns are for seasonal promotion some others are for discount, and so forth. A good phrase for the subject matter is expected to catch the recipient's initial attention enough to encourage them to open the Email. Thus, the way to write the short phrase is recommended to be thought-provoking and intriguing (Mayo-Smith, 2011; José-Cabezudo & Camarero-Izquierdo, 2012).

Timing

Timing of Email marketing campaign includes two aspects, frequency and time of day (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). Frequency is the number of Email campaigns in a specific period of time. Christmas season is the time when a company usually sends the largest number of Emails, and the second largest number is in the first season of a year. About the time of the day an Email is usually sent, 8:00 AM to 14:00 PM during weekdays is considered the most common time span for launching an Email marketing campaign. However, the optimum time of day varies based on the area of business. To take a transaction promotional Email as an example, marketers is required to find out where and when people will most likely make transactions. Currently, most of the transactions happen on a desktop computer. In this case, timing of Email campaigns is suggested to be when someone is most likely to use a desktop computer. The opening rate and click rate (total number of click divided by the total sent Emails) are aspects that affect the suitability of timing.

Illustrations and Animations

Illustrations and animations are other commonly adopted content forms in Email campaigns to catch customers' attention by visualise the product (Mayo-Smith, 2011). The number of illustrations varies from one to more, and the sizes are the same or not. Body text always appears around the illustration.

Some research showed that more images brings higher response rate (Rettie & Chittenden, 2003). Some research showed that Email advertising in the way of picture mixed with text is very powerful in Email marketing campaign (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). Illustrations or pictures perform powerful in a printed advertisement, but not much in Email (Rossiter & Bellman, 2005). In terms of animation, only a small percentage of marketing Emails have contents in this form. The most commonly used animation always contains no marketing content, for example the twinkling star in Christmas season sales. However, the adoption of illustration and animation causes problems. The file size of a picture is larger than that of a text, so the Email opening speed is slowed down, which could probably result in losing customers' patience. When setting up an Email server, a certain number of people will refuse receiving illustrations and animations. In this case, the contained marketing information will fail to be delivered, and the "call-to-action" will fail to achieve.

Message Content

The message content is the body of Email. Without proper message content, an Email will be lack of readability. Recipients' attention usually flows from the subject line to the headline then to the message content, so these three parts are required to be kept in a good coherence. The acceptable tone of the content is showing the wish of creating a good relationship with customers instead of pushing them to purchase, and the content is recommended to show the benefit from customers' point of view (Karen, 2011; Rettie & Chittenden, 2003). In addition, the length of Email related to sustain recipients' attention as well. The length of Email varies from one page to several pages. The marketing goal is the main reason to decide how long an Email campaign should be (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). For example, the newsletter Email campaign will always be longer than the sale one. Too long Emails stop customers finishing reading the whole Email and switch it off. It required marketers using less word to express more.

Personalization:

Personalization is a way of communication that sends information tailored by personal preferences or characteristics. Email marketers are suggested by Karen (2011) to think about marketing Emails containing triggered information based on customers' personal data, like an anniversary celebration Email of their first purchase, to help improve information relevance, which requires a proper technology to collect customers' personal data. Personalization makes it more possible to help brand and for customers to accept the information (Postma & Brokke, 2002), but too much personal information in Email lead to negative attitude towards the Email, even if it is permission-based. To achieve positive result from personalized Email, marketers is required to justify why the offers in Email fit the requirement of recipients (White et al., 2008). Business is able to benefit from the relevant Email with a proper degree of personalization.

Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks is the new form of content in Email marketing comparing to the printed advertisement, allowing customers immediately finishing the “Call-to-action” or reach further information. Hyperlinks are attached to a logo or a picture, or directly posted in the body of the Email. The number of hyperlinks can be decided according to marketing goals. However, too many hyperlinks can cause negative effects (Geissler, Zinkhan & Watson, 2006). A complex Email with too many hyperlinks distracts customers’ attention and makes customers feel lost, unable to finish the “call to action”.

Interactive Features

Instead of only informing customers, Email campaign communicates with customers in different ways thanks to interactive features. All the interactive features in the Email marketing campaign are categorized into 26 types based on the focus of message (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012), which are listed in the appendix.

The most effective feature in a marketing Email was leading customers to visit the company’s website, which creates an interplay between Email campaign. That is why a great percentage of marketing Emails contained the link of website landing page. The un-subscription choice is the second commonly used interactive feature, due to the laws. What’s more, for the company having business both online and offline, the feature “Store locator” is a strong tool to connect the two part of business together.

The interactive features create deeper customer engagement by the action to click. At the same time, more information will flow between customers and companies. The decision on what and how to use interactive features requires various experiments that can last a long period of time. However, a great percentage of marketing Emails are lacking of interactive features (Sundar & Kim, 2005).

3.5 Recipients’ Responses

In the previous section, recipients’ attention flows through three routes and cause three different responses respectively. The responses are precious resources to improve the quality of Email marketing campaigns and to optimize the relationship with customers (Watjatrakul & Drennan, 2005). Thus, it is necessary for marketers to know how to evaluate marketing Emails by responses in a measurable way. All the responses are categorized into two kinds, the positive responses and the negative responses.

3.5.1 Positive Responses

Only if recipients’ attention flows through route C (see Figure 2) will the responses be positive, which also reflects the success of the design of

marketing Email. The positive responses are click, open and forward (Micheaux, 2011).

Open

Opening the Email happens after the initial relevant judgment. When people consider the subject line interesting and the brand attractive, they are motivated to open the Email for further reading. Without opening, there is no way for marketers to delivery marketing information to recipients and guide recipients finishing the “Call-to-action”.

Click

Click is the innovative form of positive responses, comparing to the direct marketing mail. After clicking, recipients are lead to another web page. Clicking happens after recipients read through the marketing Email and consider the marketing information relevant. Psychologically, they will let the advertising pressures from the marketing Email go. Then, they will make the decision to trust the content and finally click. Except of the unidirectional newsletter, marketers achieve the final business goals of a marketing Email by attracting more clicks, so the click rate is for judging the success delivery of a marketing Email.

Socialized Response

Email is a socialized communication tool. The satisfying marketing information in an Email is possible to be forwarded to others or shared in social media sources. The receiver of the forwarded and shared marketing Email is of high possibility to be interested in the marketing information as well, which makes the marketing Emails target recipients more accurately and effectively to the perspective of the marketers. The socialized responses form a good base for the product to go viral.

The positive responses from recipients are able to bring not only traffic in short time, but also positive categorization of marketing Emails from the sender in the future. Over time, the positive responses drive customer retention and can increase sales (Watjatrakul & Drennan, 2005).

3.5.2 Negative Responses

Negative responses are from either Route A or Route C (see Figure 2), and they include un-subscription, bounce and complain. The Email with high rate of negative responses is required to be improved iteratively.

Un-subscription

Un-subscription means that recipients choose no longer receive any Emails from the same sender, which is caused through either Route A or Route C. Although somebody through Route A chooses to unsubscribe, they will still keep a neutral attitude towards any information from the same sender. The

unsubscribed marketing information is filtered, but does not displease the recipients. Recipients might feel receiving too many Emails, but will not feel bad about the brand. However, if un-subscribing after reading the Email content, recipients consider offended by the Email sender, and choose to no longer receive Emails from the same sender (Micheaux, 2011).

Bounce

Sometimes, Email servers make the initial relevant judgment automatically. In Route A, a rejected Email by the Email server is called a bounce. There are two kinds of Bounces: the hard bounce and the soft bounce (Mailchimp, 2014). The hard bounce means that Email fails to be delivered permanently, which is probably caused due to a non-existing Email address, the complete block of information by Email server and so forth. The soft bounce is caused by temporary delivery problems, such as a full mailbox, too large Email, offline server and so on. Marketers are required to pay attention to the bounce number to make sure that the marketing Emails pass the Spam Law and successfully reach the recipients.

Complain

Email applications are usually equipped with a "This is spam" button. If the recipients consider the marketing information in Emails irrelevant (through Route C), they probably complain for the Email abuse and mark it as spam. One company is possible to survive with several complaints, because people sometimes treat this button as the un-subscription button. On the other hand, too many complaints can imply problems related to the Email content or the contact list.

In the long run, marketers are suggested to pay more attention to the negative responses through Route C. However, nowadays marketers are usually just chasing higher opening rates, regardless of the recipients considering such Emails as spam after reading them, which results in a number of consequences. Compared to Route A, the response is more negative and can be more harmful to the brand.

4 Case Study - Sharplet AB

In the case study for Sharplet AB, the business model and the industry are introduced by business model canvas and five competitive forces analysis. The process to come up with Email marketing plan is illustrated, and afterwards the results from recipients' responses are discussed.

4.1 Business Introduction

Sharplet AB is a Stockholm-based online learning platform founded in 2012. The mission of the company is to create a knowledge retention platform, providing online flashcard courses that allow customers to improve their efficiency and effectiveness of learning. Precisely in each course, a knowledge point will be written on a flashcard. A number of flashcards will appear repetitively to the customers in a sequence based on the space repetition algorithm to deepen the impression of the knowledge points. What's more, Sharplet AB provides a toolbox for customers to turn what customers want to learn into their self-created flashcard courses. Now, the flashcard courses and the flashcard toolbox are available on Sharplet webpage. The app will be released at the end of year 2014. New courses and new features are constantly being updated.

4.1.1 Business Model Introduction

The business model of Sharplet AB provides the background for the decision

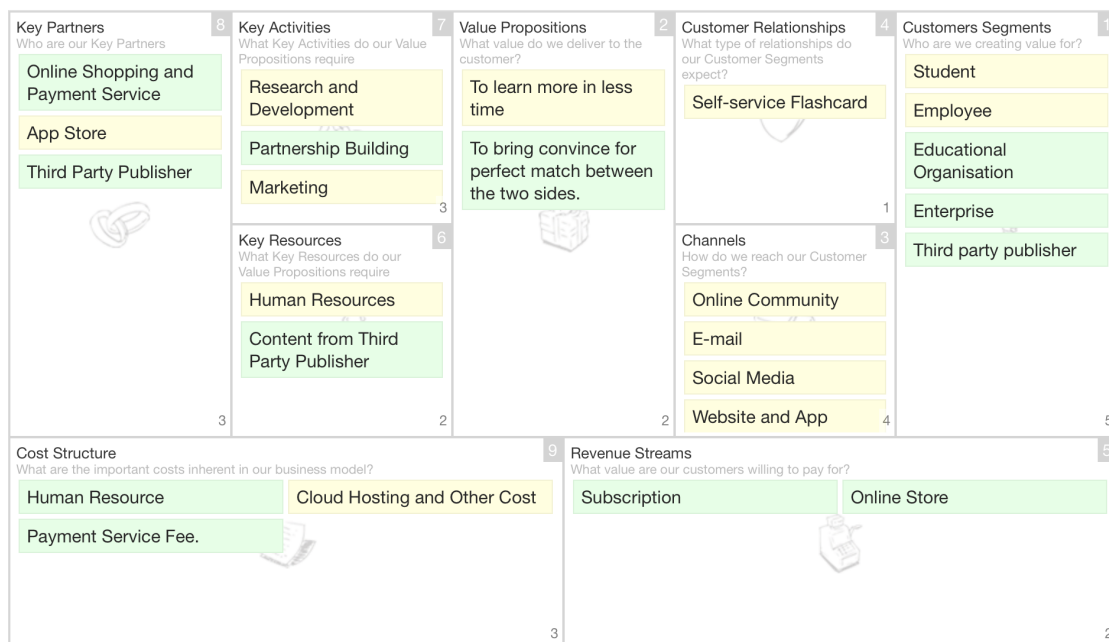


Figure 3 Business Model Canvas for Sharplet AB

of what and how to promote in a marketing plan. To systematically describe how Sharplet AB creates, delivers and captures value to the customers (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), a business model canvas was applied. The yellow box refers to what has been currently achieved and the green refers to what will be achieved in the future.

Customer Segment

Sharplet AB plans to cover both Business-to-Customer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) in the international market. Flashcard courses and customization toolbox are provided to effectively educate customers and monitor the progress of their study, which satisfy the requirement of self-learning in B2C market and managerial requirement of employees' training program in enterprises (B2B). Currently, Sharplet AB is focusing on the B2C market. It covers the students who wish to pass exams and employees who want to pass the professional evaluation in their career. The aging group is from eighteen to thirty-four years old and 70% of them are Male. The B2B market is still on preparation, and will target enterprises and educational organizations. In the near future, Sharplet is going to be an educational platform instead of a content provider one. All the customer segments mentioned above will be networked with 3rd party publishers providing course contents.

Value Proposition:

A student is required to earn passing grades, and an employee is required to continually endeavor on their profession. If customers need to meet the standard in an evaluation, their requirement to master the related knowledge is urgent. In B2B market, enterprises and educational organizations find training cost quite high, and the difficulties to monitor the progress of education quite high as well. Sharplet AB set the value proposition to help customers learn more in less time. In the future, Sharplet AB will work as a platform. Publishers on the one side of Sharplet platform will target customers who are interested in their content on the other side, and customers who wish to find content easily will show interest. Thus, in the near future, Sharplet AB will try to achieve its second proposition to provide convenience for the perfect match between content providers and the content users.

Channels:

There is no physical product and no offline channels in Sharplet AB. Sharplet AB is trying to attract public attention and enhance the traffic to the website by posting educational information on social media pages and online educational communities. Email is another communication channel trying to attract people to re-visit the website. Customers can choose a course to learn and purchase

on the Sharplet website, so Sharplet website are used as the product delivery channel. The website combining with the social media pages and Emails are adopted as customer support channel.

Customer Relationships:

After subscribing, customers are possible to use online courses and flashcard tools on Sharplet website. Hence, the relationship between users and Sharplet is in self-service type, which means users choosing courses and creating courses on Sharplet website by themselves. After the development of the flashcard customization toolbox, Sharplet is planning to charge customers in the way of premium, which means to pay a higher price for the tools of superior quality.

Revenue Stream:

Currently as Sharplet AB is at the startup stage, they are not making profit. After having a huge traffic to the website, Sharplet will decide a revenue plan among the three listed below. Plan one is that customers need to pay for the featured courses or a customization tools in the course store when they need to use such. Plan two is to pay an extra subscription fee for advanced courses and tools as premium. The third is related to the B2B market. The enterprise customers need a fixed monthly fee or fee per employee per month to use the management functionality. Without a clear customer relationship with the third party publishers, whether there will be revenue from them is not yet decided.

Key Resources:

At the start up stage, human resources on the website development is vital. Without a mature and featured service on the website, it is very difficult for Sharplet AB to win a place in the intensive online educational competition. To get the huge customer base, digital marketers are required. All the human resources at the company are currently people doing their internship. Sharplet AB needs course content as well, which is the most urgent resource to be acquired. They are asked to negotiate with content providers such as publishers, and ensure that no trademarks, patents or copyrights are infringed.

Key Activities:

Research and Development (R&D) on the website and the App is the core activity for Sharplet AB. Update versions are required to retain customers. In terms of turning Sharplet into a platform, Sharplet AB is required to build a proper social network with content providers for example publishers. In addition, Sharplet AB needs digital marketing campaigns to expose itself in the public.

Key Partnerships:

Because Sharplet does not wish to provide content, partnership with third party publishers is required. Sharplet AB is developing apps on IOS and Android. The partnerships with the mobile application stores under the respective system are required. When Sharplet starts charging for courses, the partnership with online shopping and payment service is indispensable.

Cost structure:

Currently, the cost on human resources (HR) is very low because people working in Sharplet are either self-employed, or are hired interns. However, as the requirements for professional skills are increasing, costs on HR are increasing as well. Cloud hosting and other costs are 80,000 SEK per year. After selling content, there will be money coming to the company from payment services, such as PayPal.

4.1.2 Business Environmental Analysis

Sharplet AB, as an online educational platform, is competing in the industry of online education and training. Online education and training industry is defined as forms of electronic supported education and training, aiming at affecting the construction of knowledge referring to individual experience, practice and knowledge of the learner (Tavangarian, Leybold, Nölting, Röser & Voigt, 2004). Different forms of media, educational technology as well as information and communication technologies (ICT) are adopted as tools for education. To position Sharplet AB in competition and find the purposes for marketing strategy, strategic framework “Porter’s Five Forces” is adopted. According to Porter (2008), not only rivalry amongst competitors but also the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers and the threat of substitute products shapes the profitability of Sharplet AB in the industry in both short and long run.

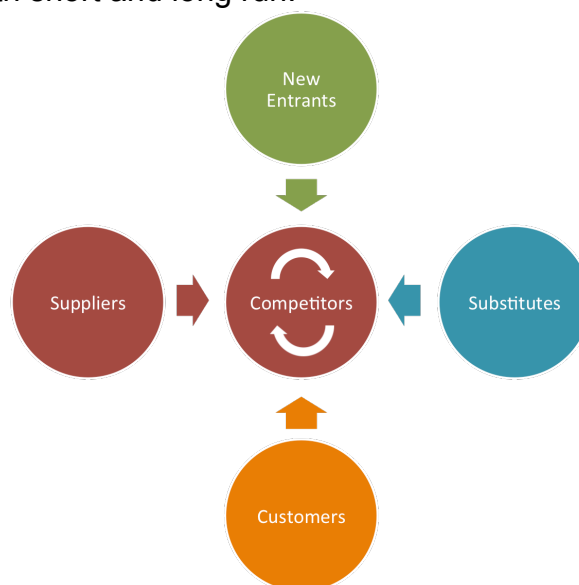


Figure 4 Five Forces Analysis for Sharplet AB

The degrees of competition with the five participants in the industry heavily affect the return to Sharplet AB. The five forces analysis is based on the current situation of Sharplet AB and the industry.

The threat of new entrants

The threat of new entrants refers to the possibility that new competitors might enter the industry and fight for specific percentage of the market shares (Porter, 2010). Video courses, for example the TEDx Talks, are possible to be accessed by the public. It costs low to produce video, and it can broadly target the users who are interested in by subscription. However, the flashcard study experience is popular among many people, especially in language study. New entrants are possible to entry when entry barriers are low. It is difficult to turn video courses to flashcard course. Thus, the possibility of the video courses replacing the flashcard study is considered medium in online educational industry.

The bargaining power of suppliers

High bargaining power of suppliers can also be detrimental to profitability, since it allows suppliers to capture more value for themselves or charge higher prices. Now, the course content on Sharplet website is all produced by Sharplet team. However, as mentioned in the business model, the CEO wants the courses supported by third party publishers and will be improved in the near future, in terms of quality. Therefore, the requirement of the partnership with third party publishers is urgent, and the bargaining power of suppliers is going to be high. After several negotiations with publishers, it is concluded that only if Sharplet obtains enough public attention will publishers promote their content on Sharplet.

The bargaining power of customers

Sharplet AB has around 2400 customers, and most of customers in Sharplet AB are employees and students, aging from year 18 to 35. The customers are sensitive to the cost of education. What's more, similar flashcard courses in the same topics are provided by many direct competitors of Sharplet AB and some are for free, which lowers customers' wiliness to purchase on course and leads the low switching cost to customers. Consequently, the bargain power of customers is high, which buyers require to capture more value compared to other industry players by forcing down the prices or demanding more services. Sharplet AB is required to provide good content, satisfying customer needs and to design a suitable revenue model. The high power of buyers is possible to be lowered by the support of publishers.

The threat of substitutes

The threat of substitutes refers to the products that satisfy same or similar customers' needs but in different means. Substitutes of flashcard courses on

Sharplet are physical flashcards and workbooks, but also educational consoles and video games. Compared to a physical product, an online flashcard course cost less, and is possible to access everywhere. Thus, the attractiveness of physical substitutes is already low and likely to further decrease. What's more, educational consoles and video games are more expensive and provide a different gaming experience, which shows the difference of Sharplet AB. The good price-performance ratio and high switching cost represent the low threat from substitutes.

Rivalry among competitors

There are a number of competitors currently in the market, ranging from company with millions of users to a small app company. Some competitors are interoperable with each other, sharing the same format of flashcard courses on different competitors' platform. According to the degree of the development of the customization toolbox and percentage of content made by customers, all competitors are divided into four groups. The "User Generated Content Platform" is competitors, whose course content is created mostly by users themselves with limited type of choices in the toolbox, such as Quizlet, gFlash, Cramberry and so forth. "Content distributor" provides courses provided by the company and third party publishers with the most basic for customers to customize such as Brainscape, in which the content is where revenue mainly comes from. "Customized Service Providers" are competitors who concentrate on service innovation according to users studying habits and requirements, for example Anki and Easynotecards. They sell their services and apps for revenue. Last but not least, competitors provide content of high quality and specialized services, which are called "Content Consultants". They target on enterprises, providing professional advices in education for employees. Currently, Sharplet is a "content provider". The topic of courses is wide, but quality of courses is not that satisfying. In terms of services, users could create their own flashcards by text, images and video, and set their own schedule on flashcard studying according to the forgetting curve. Compared to other competitors, video flashcard service in Sharplet is an innovation, but other services that Sharplet is providing on its website are commonly provided by competitors. Thus, the rivalry among competitors with different business models is pretty intense, and Sharplet is not dominant in the group of "content provider".

All in all, the industry is exposed to the competitive forces of suppliers that are extremely detrimental to profitability. Sharplet AB is trying to improve the user experience and to innovate constantly to chase and surpass the competitors. However, the most urgent requirement of Sharplet is to earn profit, to achieve which asks for the partnership of the third party publishers. Thus, the marketing strategy of Sharplet AB aims at increasing the traffic to its website.

4.2 Email Marketing Plan

The practice of Email marketing plan follows the consequences of activities of design, build, test, track, report and analysis (Boonlert & Judy, 2005), which process is shown in the picture below:

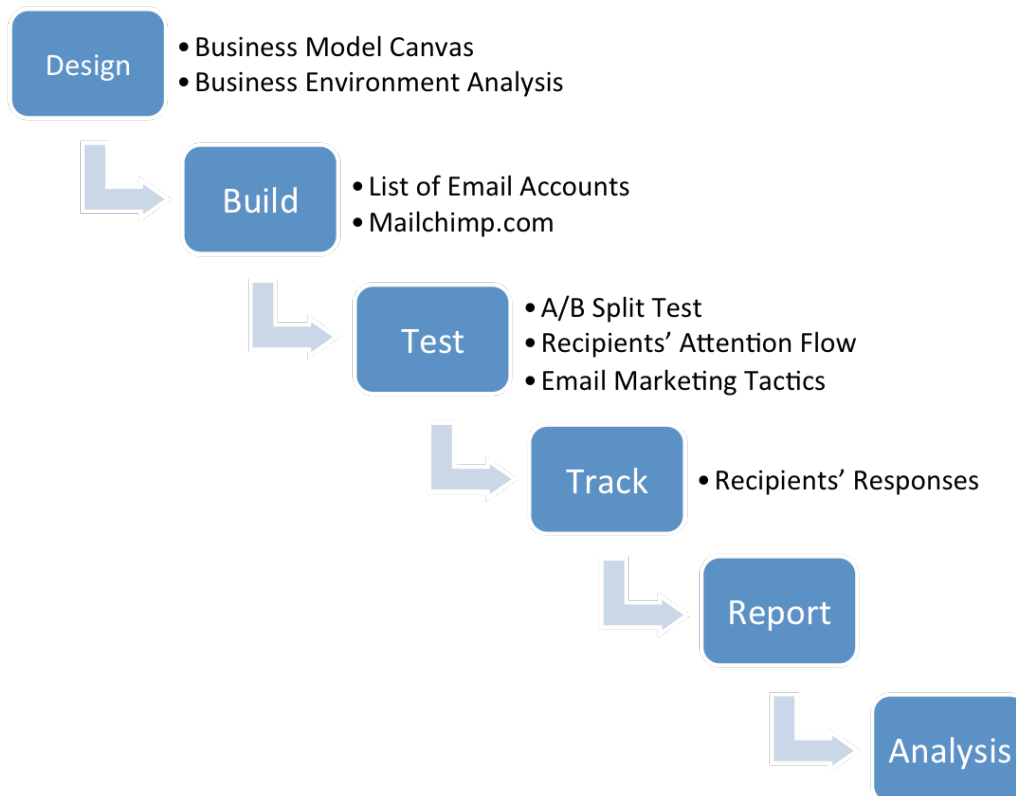


Figure 5 Activities in Email Marketing Plan for Sharplet AB

4.2.1 Design

Before actually producing the marketing Emails, it is important to figure out what the Email campaigns will serve. The business model canvas provides company information that can be promoted through marketing campaigns. The business environmental analysis shows the attitudes of industrial stakeholders especially the customers towards Sharplet AB, which directs towards a way to design the Email marketing plan.

Sharplet AB is required to build the relationship with course content suppliers in the coming future to stay unique among the competitors and start raising revenue. Sharplet AB aims at using Email marketing plan as the method to attract enough public attention, which is the most urgent requirement from the analysis of business model and the business environment. It is the important chain of the overall business model to start making a profit and the

prerequisites of two-sidedness as a platform. The Email marketing strategy is targeted to students and employees, eighteen to thirty-four years old. They are active citizens in the cyber space, and easy to reach by marketing Emails. To sustain their attention in the Email and finally make customers return to Sharplet website continuously, the company decided to have two topics in Email marketing plan: an introduction of the Sharplet website and the popular courses promotion. Recipients will receive the Email of introduction of Sharplet website firstly, and receive the course promotion one month later.

4.2.2 Build

After setting the business goal, marketers are to consider how to build the Emails. Building activity includes the process of composing marketing Emails and constructing the Email system.

To compose Emails, the first thing is to collect a list of recipients. In the marketing strategy in Sharplet AB, all the Email accounts of the recipients are collected when they log in the website of Sharplet AB. The marketer in Sharplet AB was planning to, but finally did not buy an additional Email account list from another enterprise. This is because the owners of the Email account are prone to neither be interested in the service, nor sustain faith on the brand due to the feeling of invasion of privacy. There were 1834 recipients registering in the website, out of which 1341 were valid.

Mailchimp.com was adopted as the IT infrastructure to build Email marketing system. It helps enterprises design and send marketing Emails. On Mailchimp, marketers are able to deliver a specific Email promotion program to a targeted segment of recipients. Then, marketers are possible to edit the pre-designing information including the sender, the subject line and the names of Email marketing campaigns. To design the marketing Emails, various pre-made themes were provided by Mailchimp for marketers as an outsourcing designing service. Marketers are able to compose and edit text as well as multi-media content under a theme in the design page of an Email. After finishing the design of the Email, the sending process was possible to be scheduled on Mailchimp. What's more, Mailchimp cooperates with third party services such as Google analytics, tracking and analyzing data from recipients' responses

4.2.3 Test

A/B Split Test is the methodology to discover the most suitable design by investigating the relationship between features in marketing Emails and customers' responses, which is adopted by Sharplet AB. It was a proper methodology for Sharplet AB, because the result is very clear and the evaluation process does not cost much comparing to other methodologies

(Kohavi, Longbotham, Sommerfield & Henne, 2009). In an A/B Split Test, one group of recipients received one Email. Two Emails, which are almost the same with only one feature different, are in an A/B Split Test. One is called the Control group, which is the existing version, and the other one is called Treatment group, which is a new version to be tested. The purpose of an A/B Split Test is to decide which feature, the one in the Control or the one in the Treatment, performs better to achieve marketing goal. After collecting the data, the result, which is to find the winner Email with more positive response rate, is evaluated from the significant difference between the two versions of a feature. An A/B Split Test involves two components, including randomization and assignment methods.

Firstly, all the Email accounts were randomized to eliminate the influence of different backgrounds. In order to randomize, all recipients' accounts in Sharplet AB were exported and put in a Microsoft Excel file. Then, the randomization function in Excel generated a random number for each account. All the accounts were rearranged in an ascending order according to the value of the random number. Starting from the account with the smallest random number, every 90 recipients were gathered in a group. All 1341 Email accounts were separated into 16 groups.

The second component was an assignment method, which means to design a marketing Email and split it into two with a unique separated feature. The selection of features to test in the Email marketing strategy was based on the Email marketing tactics according to recipients' attention flow. To take the subject line as an example to explain the assignment method, the two Emails for the two groups were the same and were sent simultaneously, except of the subject line. The feature of the winner, which performed better in recipients' response, was inherited to the next campaign competing with a new feature.

4.2.4 Track

Marketers evaluate the two Emails in an A/B Split Test by the tracking activity. Tracking activity is assumed to collect important data from customers' responses after they received the marketing Emails. The tracking process is completed on the platform of Mailchimp.com. From the literature study, it is learnt that there are both positive and negative responses from recipients in the process of attracting initial attention, sustaining attention and engagement. Mailchimp.com translated the positive and the negative responses into customer data of Open Rate, "clicks per unique opens", Geographic Distribution, 24-hour Performance, bounce rate and Un-subscription

The "Open Rate" explains the Emails performance' on attracting initial relevance, and the higher value means that the initial attention related features satisfy what customers are searching for. According to the recipients'

attention flow, after successfully sustaining attention, people will possibly engage in the marketing Email. The purpose of Email marketing campaign was to bring traffic to Sharplet.com. Thus, the engagement was valued by the number of 'clicks per unique opens' (called clicks below) attached in the marketing Emails. What's more, as there is not only one place to click, the data of top click link and click map were accumulated in a database. On Mailchimp.com, marketers are possible to check the number of 'forward' actions as important aspects, reflecting social reaction.

In terms of negative responses, Mailchimp.com records the bounced rate, the number of un-subscriptions, and the reason why people un-subscribed. There were many types of negative responses, among which the rejection from elaboration process (Route C) brings the worst consequence and should be avoided. The bounce rate shows why the Email server blocks some Emails. The soft bounced Emails are possible to be delivered by sending later. The number of un-subscriptions shows the percentage of recipients who response to the Email following Route C, and the reason of un-subscription gives hints to develop new Treatment Emails.

4.2.5 Report

All recipients were separated into groups named A1, B1, A2, B2... A8, and B8. Two groups, for example A1 and B1, were in one Email marketing campaign. There were two topics in the Email marketing strategy, which were the introduction of the platform called IntroAn ($n=1, 2, \dots, 8$) or IntroBn ($n=1, 2, \dots, 8$) and course content promotion called CrPrmAn ($n=1, 2, \dots, 8$) or CrPrmBn ($n=1, 2, \dots, 8$). To achieve the analysis purpose of finding the most suitable features, marketers need the result reported in an understandable way, which Mailchimp.com provided the reporting service, including all the data required to analyze. The entire Email marketing campaign A/B Split Test was launched from 6th Aug 2014 to 28th Oct 2014. All the experiments were separated depending on the features and reported in the form of feature experiment.

Experiment 1 Subject line

When testing the features of Emails, the first task is to find the subject line that brings the highest number of openings. The higher the number of openings, the greater number of 'clicks' could be potentially achieved. The more opportunities for 'clicks' make the difference of number of 'clicks' between the Control group and the Treatment group significant enough to find the more suitable feature related to 'clicks'. There were eight Emails constituting four Email marketing campaigns with the same Email content but different subject lines to find out the most suitable way to express in subject line. Four of the subject lines were from the platform introduction Email marketing campaign 1 and 2, and the other four are from the course promotion Email marketing

campaigns 1 and 2. The results of the eight subject lines are shown as below:

	Intro A1	Intro B1	Intro A2	Intro B2	CrPrm A1	CrPrm B1	CrPrm A2	CrPrm B2
Open Rate	30.7%	32.6%	24.4%	43.2%	18.1%	18.2%	18.8%	25.3%
Un- Subscribe No.	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	3

Table 1 Subject line A/B Split Test Result

The validation of subject line was judged in the aspect of tone of statement and the content.

Experiment 1.1 The tone of Subject line

According to the attention flow, the tone of subject line is related to recipients' first impression towards a marketing Email. There were many tones in a phrase, for example the imperative phrase (IntroA1) and the interrogative phrase (IntroB1), which were judged by the opening rate from recipients.

Experiment 1.2 The content of subject line

The subject line was concentrated from the content of an Email, which means that marketers need to pick up the most attractive content and abstract it into one line, in order to form a subject line. The content of showing product benefit to customers, the content expressing the "call-to-action", and the content containing the suggestions from the community were tested in the Email marketing campaign Intro2, CrPrm1 and CrPrm2.

Experiment 2 Illustrations

One Email campaign (CrPrmA3 & CrPrmB3) was implemented to test whether it is necessary to adopt images in order to achieve the marketing purposes. In the Email CrPrmA3, simple buttons with the names of promoted course were the "Call-to-action" for recipients to click. In the Email CrPrmB3, flashcard pictures containing the same course names and images visualizing the course topic are used as the "Call-to-action". For those recipients, who set not to show images, the alternative text showed the name of the course as same as CrPrmA3. The attractiveness of images in marketing Emails is explained by the following data.

	CrPrmA3	CrPrmB3
Clicks per Unique Opens	18.2%	19.0%
Un-subscribe No.	0	1

Table 2 Illustration A/B Split Test Result

Experiment 3 The Length of Email Message

After opening an Email due to an interest to subject line, the length of Email gives recipients the very first impression about the Email content. Four Emails in two Email campaigns, IntroA3 & IntroB3 and IntroA5 & IntroB5, were designed on the length of Emails. The two Email campaigns had the same “Call-to-action”, which was to attract recipients to find a course in Sharplet course store. IntroA3 contains an extra paragraph about the brief introduction explaining how the website works, located above the “Call-to-action”, but IntroB3 did not have that paragraph. IntroB5 contains an extra paragraph listing popular courses located below the “Call-to-action”, but IntroB5 did not have that. The analyses were based on “clicks per unique opens” to check how the length of Email influences recipients’ completion rate of “Call-to-action”, and the results are as below:

	IntroA3	IntroB3	IntroA5	IntroB5
Clicks per Unique Opens	24. 0%	40. 7%	50. 0%	26. 7%
Un-subscribe No.	2	1	0	2

Table 3 Length of Email Message A/B Split Test Result

Experiment 4 Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks are either aligned to a logo or a button or directly posted. One Email campaign (IntroA6 &IntroB6) was launched to test the most suitable way to attract recipients to explore the link. The Control group (IntroA6) adopted a button as a pattern of manifestation of a link, and wrote “learn more” to show what the button meant if clicking. The Treatment group (IntroB6) directly wrote the full hyperlink: www.sharplet.com in the Email. The feature with higher ‘clicks per unique opens’ in the A/B Split Test won and was recommended.

	IntroA6	IntroB6
Clicks per Unique Opens	36. 7%	40. 9%
Un-subscribe No.	1	2

Table 4 Hyperlink A/B Split Test Result

Experiment 5 Interactive Features

Instead of advertisers’ “expert talking” in direct mail, interactive features in Email bring a great number of new ways of communication with recipients (See appendix 1). In the Email marketing plan for Sharplet AB, two types of interactive features were tested. One interactive feature was to lead recipients

to the landing page of Sharplet website. The other was to ask recipients to take a course online. After charging the course, the second feature will bring revenue to Sharplet. The number of interactive features, and the way to express interactive features were explored.

Experiment 5.1 Numbers of Interactive features

Two Email marketing campaign (IntroA7 & IntroB7 and CrPrmA4 & CrPrmB4) containing four marketing Emails were launched to discover the relationship between the number of interactive features and the 'clicks per unique opens'. In the Email IntroA7, there were two "Call-to actions" leading to the landing page, but there was only one in Email IntroB7. For the Email of course promotion, CrPrmA4 contained three buttons in one row, guiding recipients to choose three different courses, and CrPrmB4 contained six in two rows for six different courses.

	IntroA7	IntroB7	CrPrmA4	CrPrmB4
Clicks per Unique Opens	19. 0%	33. 3%	15. 8%	9. 5%
Un-subscribe No.	1	0	1	1

Table 5 Number of Interactive Feature A/B Split Test Result

Experiment 5.2 Content of Interactive Feature

Some literature mentioned that the length of Email is possible to be shortened by posting the link of product category instead of listing every product. As for the interactive features to promote courses, the category approach was translated to provide a serial of courses for recipients to choose from. In this Email campaign, CrPrmA5 was the Control group containing three buttons to let recipients order a course from the three most popular ones. CrPrmB5 was the Treatment group, displaying three buttons of three most popular course categories. After clicking the button, recipients reached the course store in specific topic category page and are possible to choose one course from the category to take.

	CrPrmA5	CrPrmB5
Clicks per Unique Opens	21. 4%	6. 7%
Un-subscribe No.	0	2

Table 6 Content of Interactive Feature A/B Split Test Result

Experiment 6 Timing

The timing of Email marketing campaigns heavily affects the opening and clicking rate. Before finding timings to test in A/B Split Test, it is necessary to get the statistical data of the recipients' response throughout a day. The two timings with the highest click / open rate were considered and used to compose the two Emails in a test. To find the top two timings with highest click / open rate, the number of 'openings' and 'clicks' in every hour of a day from the result of IntroA1 to IntroA7 as well as the result from IntroB1 to IntroB7 were turned into the sum and put into a bar chart showing below:

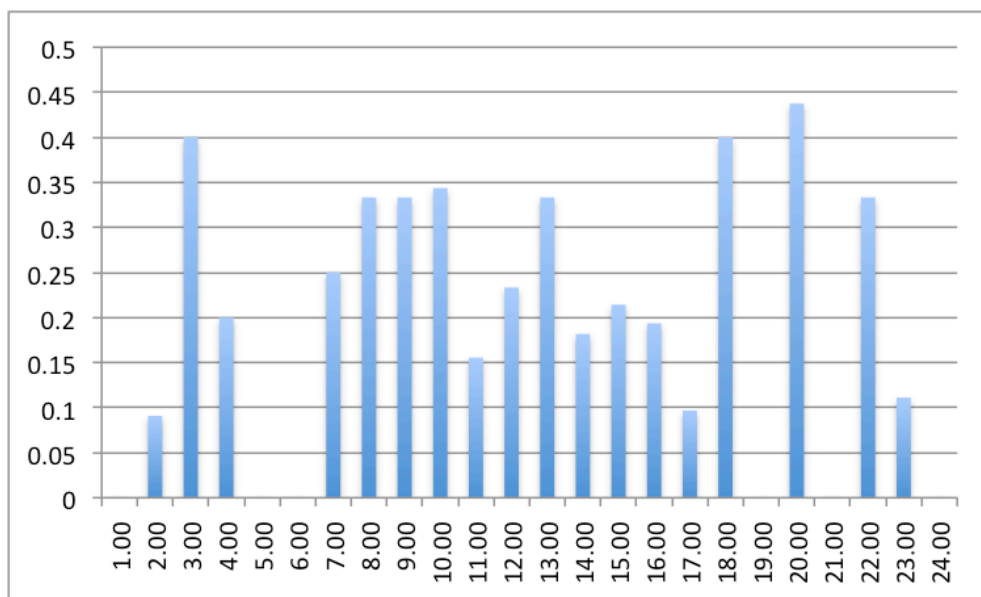


Figure 6 Clicking / Opening Rate in Every Hour a Day

From the result, it was seen three peaks at the time of 2:00~3:00, 8:00~10:00 and 19:00 ~20:00 in Swedish time zone. The opening rate from 2:00 to 3:00 was too low, which might cause high errors with the measurements. Thus, the timing experiment was constructed by an experiment launched on 9:00 am in Swedish time zone, and one on 19:00.

	IntroA8	IntroB8
Open Rate	27.1%	28.2%
Clicks per Unique Opens	13.0%	29.2%
Un- subscribe No.	1	1

Table 7 Timing A/B Split Test Result

4.3 Results and Discussion

The data analysis started two weeks after launching the Email marketing campaigns, because it takes days for recipients to respond to the Email marketing information. The average opening rate of the total marketing Emails was 24.6%, and the average clicking rate was 5.1%, updated until 18th Nov 2014. The response rate was considered positive comparing to the industry level of 18.3% opening rate and 2.7% clicking rate. The majority of recipients (57.4%) are from the US, and the others are from the rest of the world such as European contraries, Australia, Myanmar, Canada, and China.

Experiment 1 Subject line expression

According to the research from Mailchimp.com (2014), the average opening rate in the education and training industry was 18.3%. As all the results were around or above the average level, the results are considered to be satisfactory to some extent.

Experiment 1.1 The tone of Subject line

The subject line of IntroA1 was a question, and IntroB1 was an imperative sentence. As was seen, IntroB1 had higher opening rate and lower un-subscription rate. An imperative sentence exposes what the Email content was asking recipients to do, which was simple and straightforward and eliminated recipients' feeling of being cheated. A question shows stronger marketing tendency compared to an imperative sentence. When reading a question in the subject line, recipients are feeling that are being marketed, which causes them the feeling of under pressure. The imperative subject line built a believable relationship with recipients in the initial relevance judgment, and became the winner in Email marketing campaign Intro1.

Experiment 1.2 The content of subject line

The content of the subject line is suggested to be thought-provoking and intriguing according to the literature review. What's more, to increase the opening rate, the subject line is also suggested to be relevant to recipients. The two statements above are concluded into two conditions of a good subject line: relevance and thought-provoking. The subject line content showing the "call-to-action" (IntroA2) was relevant to the recipients, as it directly forecasts the action that recipients were going to take. However, the "Call-to-action" was designed in purpose of the marketers, recipients is possible to find not that attractive. The content containing the suggestions from the community were also tested. People in the same community shared interests. For Sharplet AB, the customers identified with flashcard studying methodology. The course promoted by the community (CrPrmA2) was of high possibility to meet the

requirement of other member. However, the length of the subject line is limited. To express the meaning of community promotion, there is not enough space to describe what the Email promotes, which provides less evidence for recipients to judge the relevance. After all the A/B Split Tests for subject line, it was found that the subject line content directly showing the benefit for customers (IntroB2) had high opening rate. The benefit of one product or service is expressed from the perspective of customers. It is a way to provoke recipients to consider about explore more in the Email, and provide the evidence of relevance in customers' initial judgments.

Experiment 2 Illustrations

The rate of 'clicks per unique opens' for group CrPrmB3 was slightly higher, but one person unsubscribed from that Email. Thus, it was concluded that whether using images or not did not have a strong relevance to sustain recipients, who would probably click. All recipients in the group CrPrmB3 belong in two different types. One type of recipients disabled the function of showing pictures in the Email. The process of marketing content visualization has failed and their experience of attention sustaining was worse compared to the group CrPrmA3. The other type of recipients in the group CrPrmB3 allowed images in Email to be received. With the help of images, it was possible to judge the relevance of Emails more efficiently. As the result of CrPrmB3 was similar to CrPrmA3, the image does not matter a lot to sustain recipients' attention.

Experiment 3 Length of Email Message

Theoretically speaking, the longer the Email message, the lower the response rate of "Call-to-action", which was proven by the result of the two Email marketing campaigns on length of Email. No matter if the extra content will be placed above or below the "Call-to-action", the 'clicks per unique opens' was lower than the Email without the extra content. Precisely, after opening the Email, recipients put effort on judging the relevance of the content of Email. If the Email is too long, recipients' attention was dispersed to different parts of the content and the attention on "Call-to-action" was decentralized, which was considered as the main reason of low click rate.

Experiment 4 Hyperlinks

According to the result, the feature of full hyperlink attracted more people to click after reading the Email, compared to the button and won in the A/B Split test. From the full hyperlink, recipients were possible to clearly know where they are leading. In terms of a button, recipients knew what they were going to do thanks to the explaining words on the button, but had no idea which page they were going to reach. In their opinion, they were under a risk of leading to a dangerous page. The full hyperlink was information transparent to the external destination of a marketing Email, which was more believable when

recipients were about to make the behavioral response. However, the result was limited to the “Call-to-action” of “learn more” through the following link. For interactive features, it is necessary to provide the summary of action as a guide clearly showing what marketers ask recipients to do in order to eliminate confusion.

Experiment 5 Interactive Features

The report showed the result of interactive features in two aspects: the number of interactive features and the content of interactive feature.

Experiment 5.1 Number of Interactive Features

The test of IntroA7 & IntroB7 displayed how the number of interactive features influences recipients’ engagement to a single “Call-to-action”. As was seen, the result of IntroB7 with only one interactive feature for a “Call-to-action” succeeded in attracting higher number of ‘Clicks’, compared to IntroA7 with two interactive features for the website landing page. Too many interactive features directing to the same “Call-to-action” webpage put recipients under pressure, increasing the risk to annoy recipients. One “Call-to-action” achieved by only one interactive feature made it easier for recipients to recognize and to concentrate checking the relevance of where they were leading to with their interest. The Email of CrPrmA4 contained three interactive features directing to three different webpages, and the Email of CrPrmB4 contained six interactive features directing to six different webpages. The test of CrPrmA4 & CrPrmB4 displayed how the number of interactive features influenced recipients to choose one or more “call-to-action” to take. Accordingly, the Email with three interactive features attracted more people to click than the one with six. The more interactive features, the more time devoted by recipients to think about the relevance, in which process recipients were engaged under heavier pressure. That caused the loss of attention. What’s more, if many interactive features put together, the one on the left top attracted more clicks.

Experiment 5.2 Content of Interactive Features

The result of this Email marketing campaign showed a huge disadvantage of the category approach in interactive features. Precisely, when deciding the action to the interactive features, recipients require enough evidence for relevance checking. The course name showed exactly what recipients would get after taking the “Call-to-action”, but the category name is vague. Although the broadness of category is of higher possibility to arouse recipients’ interests, they had no idea what are included in the categories. The uncertainty obstructed recipients’ decision to react to the interactive feature. In short, the content of interactive features is suggested to be clear and straightforward.

Experiment 6 Timing

From the testing result, it was seen a great improvement of click per unique

rate for the time of 19:00 every day compared to the Email sent at 9:00 am Swedish time zone. It was impossible to satisfy everyone on timing in the global market. As was stated, the majority of openings were from the US. Thus, the busy hour of Emails in the US was impossible to be the same as the one in Sweden. 19:00 in Sweden is around 13:00 in the US, when people there would like to explore the links in the Emails they are receiving. The higher click / open rate shows the overlap of busy hours in the global market.

After all the A/B Split Test, the two Emails, introduction of platform and the course content promotion, have been optimized. The optimized Email of introduction of platform reached 28.2% opening rate and 29.2% 'clicks per unique opens' rate. The optimized Email of course promotion reached 22.6% opening rate and 15.8% 'clicks per unique opens' rate.

The optimized marketing Emails for platform introduction and course promotion are shown in Appendix 2.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The practical methodology of how to design an Email marketing plan will be summarized, and results of executional tactics will be recommended in this chapter.

This master thesis shows the process of designing an Email marketing plan and iteratively optimizing it in detail.

Before the practice of making an Email marketing plan, a literature study is done as the preparation to theoretically answer the sub-questions. The literature study clarifies the definition of Email marketing, as the marketing activity that adopts Email as the medium to discover, create, arouse and satisfy customer's requirement. With the help of Email marketing, a company is possible to deliver marketing information to a wide range of people at a lower cost. At the same time, customers' data is collected. The communication between recipients and marketers is interactive and is more targeted, which makes Email marketing easier to go viral. The Email marketing applications and other digital marketing campaigns such as social media marketing are possible to be integrated with Email marketing campaigns to attract wider attention and improve the effectiveness of Email marketing plan. However, the weaknesses of Email marketing include the risk of Spam and distrust problems, which lower the profitability of Email marketing campaigns. Delivering marketing information through Emails is also under intensive competition with other forms of marketing information. Then, to better achieve the benefit of Email marketing, recipients' attention flow is learnt from the initial attention attraction to the engagement on "Call-to-action". Based on the recipients' attention flow, tactics of how to design marketing Emails are concluded among many executional tactic researches. At last, the positive and negative recipients' responses, which mean the success or failure of Email marketing plan, are translated into recipients' behaviors.

The case study of Sharplet AB started with the business model analysis with the help of a business model canvas. The customer segment block and the customers relationship block in the canvas inform marketers about which group of people the Email marketing information is delivering to. The value proposition block shows the benefit to customers, which is the most attractive point to concentrate when designing marketing Emails. The featured parts or the updates in the blocks of channels, key activities, key resources and key partners are what needs to be promoted in marketing Emails. Before designing the Email marketing plan, the second analysis is the business environmental one to show the competition in the industry. It helps a company to predict the trend of the industry in long run, and distinguish the opportunity to win customers in the competition.

When making the Email marketing plan in practice, there are six steps, activities of design, build, test, track, report and analysis, to take until finding the optimized marketing Emails in the Email marketing plan. The design activity is based on the business model analysis and business environmental analysis to decide how the Email marketing can help a company win in the industry competition, what the Email marketing plan is going to achieve, who the marketing Emails is going to be delivered to, and what to promote in the marketing Emails. After making sure what the marketing goal in design activity is, the process of composing marketing Emails and constructing the Email system is going to be considered. All the Email accounts are necessary to be listed in a document after a check of validation, and buying an Email list is not recommended. Marketers are required to select an application to make the marketing Emails and monitoring recipients' attention. To test how to make the marketing Emails, the methodology of A/B Split Test is recommended. Firstly, marketers are asked to randomize all the Email accounts and separate all accounts into groups of the same number. Two groups are put in one A/B Split Test. Secondly, two similar marketing Emails are going to be made with only a unique design of feature in difference. The feature with more positive responses will be kept for next A/B Split Test. The tracking activity started right after sending out Emails to the Control and Treatment group. Key Performance Indicator (KPI) needs to be decided in advance and recorded. The Email opening rates decide the success of initial attention attraction. The measurement of degree of engagement varies based on the tested features. The negative responses are shown by the bounce rate, un-subscription rate and the reason of un-subscription. At last, the data need to be recorded in an understandable way, and the way to optimize features in a marketing Email can be analyzed and learnt through discussion.

The lessons of executional tactics for marketing Emails are illustrated below. To attract the initial attention, the subject line is suggested to be an imperative sentence showing the benefit to recipients in a straightforward way. When sustain recipients' attention, whether to use images or not does not have a strong relevance to sustain recipients and lead them to click, but the length of an Email message is suggested to be kept short and refined. To finally lead recipients to click on a link, the full hyperlink is suggested to be directly posted in a marketing Email, instead of attaching it to a picture or a button, for improving its reliability. In terms of the interactive features, the "Call-to-action" feature achieving the same effect is suggested to appear only once, and the increasing number of different interactive features shows the decreasing trend in clicking rate. What's more, the result of promoting a category of product is not as effective as a specific product. The interactive feature on the left top is the most attractive one. There are no recommendations on when is the best time to send marketing Emails, because the different region of recipients all over the world makes it complex to find the most suitable timing for everyone. The comparably most suitable timing is estimated in two steps. First of all, it is suggested to evaluate the period of time,

when two peaks of click / open rate are appearing daily. Then, the A/B Split Test is launched on the two timings.

6 Future Work

As the research time of the thesis is limited, there are experiments that need to be completed later.

6.1 Executional tactics experiment

In the thesis research period, there are some experiments that did not get the analyzable result. Precisely, the immature website construction make it difficult to make personalized Emails. The experiment on Animation, Headline, and personalization will be designed to further optimize the marketing Emails in the plan.

6.2 Integration strategy

Some studies mentioned that other digital marketing activities are possible to integrate with Email marketing. Social media marketing is integrating with Email marketing in many cases, such as KFC and Amazon, and many email marketers claimed that email better grows with the help of social or as a part of multichannel marketing in the future (Christopher, 2011). It was found that the most engaged social media users are engaged heavily in Email as well. Marketing activities on social media are adopted to create trust from customers, and collect data, which further reinforces customer foundation (Maeve, 2011). With the help of social media marketing, company is able to achieve growth of sign-up Emails (Malone, 2013). The socialized response is required to be highly taken into consideration.

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Appendix 1

Interactive Features

General Interactive Features	Information Interaction	Pre-purchase Interaction	Incentive Interaction	Purchase Mechanism Interactive Features	Post-purchase Interactive Support
Unsubscribe	Search for specific information	Web landing page	Contest	Order online	Interactive customer
Send an Email to the company	Find out what is on in the store	Store locator	Collect voucher	Interactive catalogue	Web/advice chat line
Find out what's on in store		Order a catalogue	Collect reward points	Gift ordering service	Leave feedback
Send the Email to a friend		Book an appointment or event	Complete a quiz		
Join the club		Check availability of stock			
Send a card		Register for price alert/get a quote			
Complete a survey		Create a shopping list			
Contribute to a blog					

Appendix 2

Optimized Emails in Email Marketing Plan for Sharplet AB

The optimized marketing Email about platform promotion is shown as below:

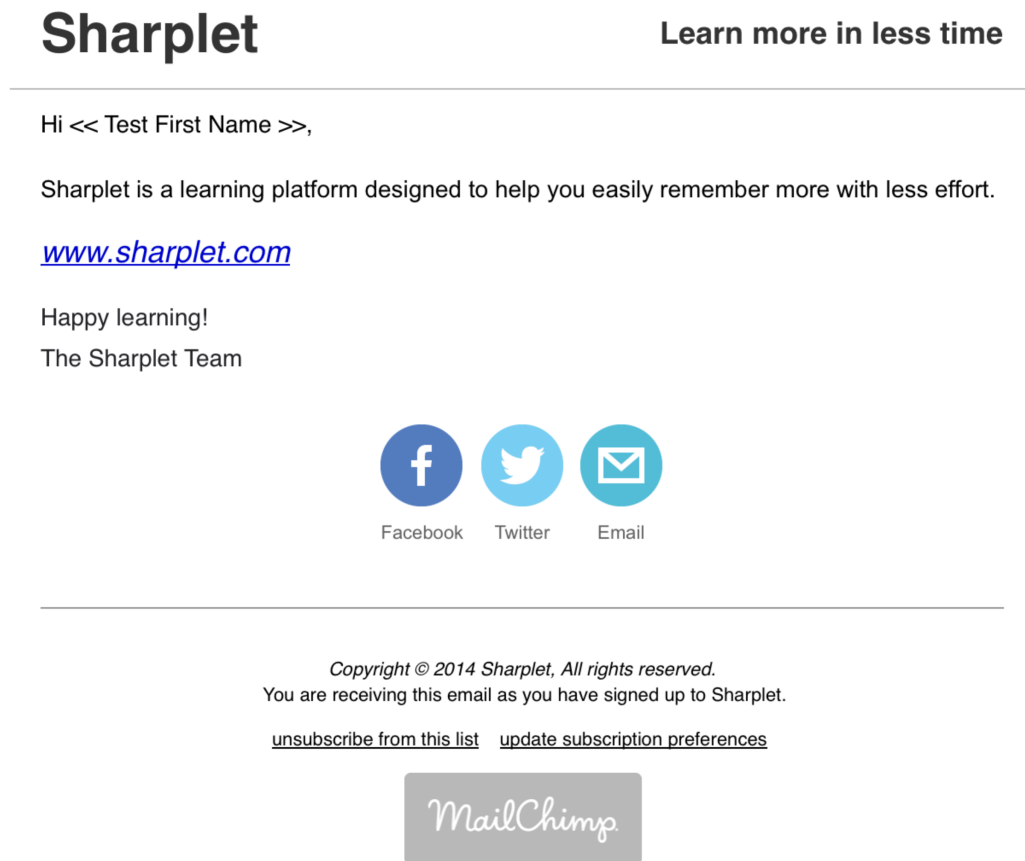


Figure 7 Optimized Platform Introduction Marketing Email

* The subject line: Learn more in less time with Sharplet

*The sender: info@sharplet.com

*Timing: Fri, Sep 12, 2014 07:00 pm

The optimized marketing Email about course content promotion is shown as below:

Sharplet

Learn more in less time

Hi << Test First Name >>,

We are really happy you chose Sharplet. If you like you can try one of our most popular flashcard courses this month.

Master Advanced
English Vocab

Countries and
Capitals

Master 5000+
SAT Vocabulary

Happy learning!
The Sharplet team



Facebook



Twitter



Website

Copyright © 2014 Sharplet, All rights reserved.
You are receiving this email as you have signed up to Sharplet.

[unsubscribe from this list](#)

[update subscription preferences](#)

MailChimp

Figure 8 Optimized Course Promotion Marketing Email

* The subject line: This months trending courses on Sharplet

*The sender: info@sharplet.com

*Timing: Tue, Oct 28, 2014 07:00 pm