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How To #HOW548:

[Special Report: Email Marketing to BlackBerrys - Usage, Formatting & Rendering Tips](#)

SUMMARY: Ready to hear the horrible truth? 64% of key decision makers are viewing your carefully crafted email on their BlackBerrys and other mobile devices, according to new MarketingSherpa data. And, chances are, your email looks downright awful.

What do you do? First, find a BlackBerry and see for yourself. Then, call for an immediate meeting with your email design team. To help, we've put together a list of tactics and creative samples so you can see just how truly bad it is. Plus, hotlinks to two cool simulators.

BlackBerrys are the device of choice for the business users over Treos and Palm Pilots. And while reviews on Apple's iPhone are that it's an incredibly wonderful Web tool, it's not yet as mission-critical as the BlackBerry for email -- especially when it comes to enterprise email applications.

Most marketers we talked to echoed Overamerica Media Group CEO Jon Levy, who says, "We believe that a significant percentage of our subscribers read their email in mobiles as the first point of contact. We are starting to commit ourselves to optimizing our email to work better in mobile because of it."

You don't have to send in just text-only email to reach BlackBerry users. If you're truly dedicated to gaining an edge in this the-time-is-now niche through testing techniques and researching your database, there are ways of delivering richer media experiences to the BlackBerry crowd. Although more B-to-B people use BlackBerrys at the moment, that's changing. The good thing is that our roundup of tips work for consumer marketers, too.

Demographics & Usage

Young adults are the primary users of mobile devices. According to new research from ExactTarget, which surveyed 4,202 mobile phone users, 7% of whom identified themselves as mobile email users:

- o 38% are ages 18-44 vs 12% for ages 45-64
- o 80% access their mobile email at home
- o 39% admit to checking email while driving their cars

Users are also a wealthier demographic -- 19% of mobile phone users with an annual household income of more than \$100,000 regularly use their mobile devices to access email. For households earning \$200,000+, that number doubles to 38%.

Another key point -- people use mobile email differently. Primarily, it's to stay on top of matters that users deem as urgent. 87% access the same email accounts from both their mobile device and through a computer at home or work, says Morgan Stewart, Director Research & Strategy, ExactTarget. Rendering, screen resolution and hard-to-use keyboards make mobile less desirable than desktops or laptops for accessing email.

Mobile email users scan their email for important one-to-one messages, leaving the rest for perusal on their PC later. Sales reps and road warriors are the main mobile email users, but this is going to change in the next six months, ExactTarget predicts, because of lowering prices on mobile devices. This means more consumers will be accessing email this way. And let's not forget the iPhone.

If mobile marketing is important to serving your demographic, Stewart urges you to join an advocacy trade organization, such as the W3C, post-haste. Trying to work with the device manufacturers and service carriers on achieving standards is the only way the marketing community will decrease their frustrations.

"This market is a moving target because everyone is trying to beat everyone else in terms of putting out the next cool device," he says. "There's very little consideration out there for mobile standards. We need to start figuring out how to standardize this stuff from a coding perspective."

-> Strategy #1. Text-only vs HTML vs multipart MIME

Because no standards exist regarding how an email is displayed on a mobile device, Overamerica's Levy and others say to send email as text-only so it renders better for BlackBerry users. Why text-only emails? If they look good on a BlackBerry, they'll also be readable on a PC. "For all of our campaigns, text-only clickthroughs are usually 30% higher than HTML," Levy says. "We keep the message short, sweet and to the point."

When sending time-sensitive alerts, consider designing the entire campaign for mobiles, using short messages and allowing recipients to react to the message quickly.

But many marketers simply cannot abandon HTML that easily, which is why multipart MIME comes into play, says Stewart. Multipart MIME is an email format that includes both an HTML and a text-only version in the same message and displays the version that the user's system is set to show. Systems that can't show HTML should show the text version instead, assuming your email client understands MIME format.

Here's an example from Stewart why B-to-B marketers should use multipart MIME: If you have a white paper offer that is only available for a few days, of course, your subscribers aren't going to download it onto their mobiles. So, encourage them to flag the email so that when they get back to the office, they'll remember to download it. "This way you get the text to them and also all the benefits of HTML."

Still, multipart MIME isn't the end-all answer. According to Stewart, the text version will be displayed on mobile devices only 60% of the time. Some systems will attempt to display HTML -- it depends on the email client.

-> Strategy #2. Type size, call to action and hotlinks

Getting the right type size for BlackBerry emails can be tricky because people set up their defaults differently. The current situation is similar to a few years ago with the Internet, where you couldn't assume that everyone had high-speed access or a wide-screen monitor.

"Based on what we've seen, using 8-point fonts seems to work," says mobileStorm CEO Jared Reitzin. "In the end, you want to make the body text a small but viewable size."

Seven more tips:

- Character space is limited, so make sure that your company name is immediately recognizable and that the subject line includes a compelling call to action in the first 15-25 characters.

- No matter how you approach the issue, you need to realize that busy people don't read their BlackBerry email -- they scan it. Subscribers aren't likely to scroll through your full message. This is why the subject line and first screen (100 total characters, or 20-25 words) need to really grab your subscribers' attention so they'll mark it and follow it up later when they're back on a PC.

- Keep permission in mind. Subscribers are more likely to delete your message without reading it if you sent it to them unsolicited, too frequently or it's irrelevant.

- Don't hotlink names of people or places if you want your BlackBerry readers to be able to see the words that are laying over the code. If you want to include a link, use the full address, such as <http://www.marketingsherpa.com>

- If a user opens an email on their wireless, the same message will typically appear opened (and no longer bolded) on their email system back at the office, so it's very important to get them to flag it so they remember it later.

- Use a text-only header and a sentence or two that places the *hook* of the offer at the very top. "Attention spans for mobile users are even shorter than they are for people on computers, so the hook should be the first thing they read," Levy says.

- Levy and Reitzin both suggest placing logos and images below the text, perhaps on the second or third BlackBerry screen. This way, your PC audience gets a more dynamic message but your BlackBerry users still get the message right away. Reitzin calls it a "blog-style" design.

-> Strategy #3. Writing subject lines

Because of the scanning habits of BlackBerry users, subject lines will make up a significant portion of the text that they read. Email copywriter Karen Gedney suggests spending equal time writing and rewriting subject lines as you do on the rest of the copy. You may end up writing 10-15 different versions before settling on one.

Other tips:

- o Keep subject lines short, using only key words, such as "Action Item" and "Reminder," and for time-sensitive events such as webinars, "Filling Fast"
- o Put the *subject* first in the subject line. For instance, if your email is for an SEO white paper, "SEO" should be the first thing they read in the subject line

"It's like the saying, 'Be brief, be brilliant and be gone,'" Gedney says. "I've had about 15 clients adopt this philosophy with their subject lines, and they've all seen response rates increase."

-> Strategy #4. Survey your house file

Since far too many email directors wear hats for creative, list, reputation management, etc. -- they haven't had time to determine how many members in their database are mobile readers. Of course, the best way is to ask.

If you are a new company with an empty database, querying people about if they plan on reading the email in a BlackBerry/mobile during the signup process may do the trick. Then, segment them with a dedicated file or send your email using multipart MIME.

Longstanding companies will also want to research the names they already have. To get started in that direction, some marketers are testing text-only *identifier* campaigns, using subject lines that are specifically designed to get the attention of BlackBerry users.

For the copy, the idea is to create a one- to three-sentence message explaining that you would like to know if they normally read your email on a mobile device or on a PC. Create a link for them to react to either possibility.

If you find that your BlackBerry audience is too big to ignore, you can begin targeting that segment to participate in a short study on how they want to see email in their BlackBerrys.

"Even if it's only a few people, they'll probably be able to inform you about surprisingly egregious errors that you would have overlooked," says Jon Cline, CEO & Marketing Director, Enthusiast Inc. "The relationships can be powerful because you will no longer be a slick salesperson trying to make a buck. You are including them behind the scenes."

After you have recruited your mini-focus group, get people with BlackBerrys in your office to participate. Their face-to-face feedback will make your overall findings more dynamic. If no one has a BlackBerry, get one added to your budget immediately so you have a clear idea of what your readers see. While you're at it, you'd better ask for a Motorola Q and iPhone, too. (See below for hotlinks to two BlackBerry simulators.)

-> Strategy #5. Special BlackBerry landing page

Another option several marketers are testing is a separate landing page for BlackBerrys, where they provide a link at the top of the email that immediately alerts the reader of the opportunity to click on it ("BlackBerry readers, click here"). Before you commit to this, make sure the demand for such a feature truly exists.

"Creating parallel HTML universes for mobile and Web browsers may be a very difficult proposition," Cline says. "It could take a lot of extra preparation and work. But for the right company, it may also really, really prove to be beneficial."

The links would make tracking easy in order to:

- o Gauge the concept's vitality
- o Perform necessary design tweaks

Basically, you need your email design and IT people to build a truncated HTML page

before testing it like crazy. The two common screen sizes for BlackBerry models are:

- o 320x240 pixels for the newer versions (8700/8800 series and 8300/"the Curve")
- o 240x260 pixels for 8100 (also called the Pearl) and 7100 series

If you decide to create a mobile landing page, Stewart suggests putting the link for the mobile landing page link below the text message, so users read the message first and foremost. It's worth a test. Having the link above the text might influence users to click on the link more or it might distract them so that it would be better after the message.

Four Technical Tips

Figuring out the technical aspects to regular email can be a tasking experience, much less dealing with BlackBerrys, too. Reitzin offers four tips to take straight to your IT department once you're ready to test BlackBerry initiatives:

Tip #1. Keep the header to 50 pixels high and 320 pixels wide so you can put as much text on the opening of your screen and grab the reader's attention.

Tip #2. On your mobile-specific email, use H1 and H2 tags (H1 to H6 tags define headers, with the former being the largest header and the latter being the smallest). This will allow your headline to stand out (see creative samples).

Tip #3. Don't use any sort of scripts within the HTML page since Javascript is not supported by mobile environments.

Tip #4. Always limit the size of your HTML page to 200K or under. BlackBerrys have tight restrictions in terms of the cache, and your message might not get completely displayed.

Useful links related to this article

Creative samples from BlackBerry emails:

<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/cs/blackberry/study.html>

Past Sherpa articles on mobile marketing --

The Horrible Truth About Mobile Email:

<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/article.html?ident=30037>

Mobile Marketing: Quick Overview of Options:

<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/article.html?ident=28540>

(Note: This is Members-only. Membership trials are free.)

BlackBerry simulators:

<http://na.blackberry.com/eng/developers/downloads/simulators.jsp>

http://support.vzw.com/swf/blackberry8703/blackberry_873e_simulator.htm

ExactTarget's White Paper: Email Marketing for the Third Screen:

http://email.exacttarget.com/ETWeb/whitepaper_form_new.spx?id=1952

MIT Sloan's article on BlackBerry users' behavior:

<http://mitsloan.mit.edu/newsroom/2006-blackberry.php>

Microsoft article on making your Web site wireless-friendly:

http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/resources/marketing/online_marketing/5_tips_for_making_your_web_site_wireless_friendly.mspx

World Wide Web Consortium's best practices for delivering Web content to mobile devices:

<http://www.w3.org/TR/mobile-bp/>

Video demonstration on what email looks like on a BlackBerry 8700:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1n7clhSzGM>

Video demonstration on what email looks like on a BlackBerry Pearl:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM2YFwoJrog>

Enthusiast Inc. Web Solutions:

<http://enthusiastinc.com/>

ExactTarget:

<http://www.exacttarget.com>

Karen Gedney Communications:

<http://www.karengedney.com/>

mobileStorm:

<http://mobilestorm.com/>

Overamerica Media Group:

<http://overamerica.com/>

See Also:

- [Alternatives: RSS feeds, desktop applications, wireless](#)

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