

The Rising Popularity of Handheld Email Devices - How Are Email Marketers Affected?

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Whilst visiting our clients in France, Australia and the USA recently, I observed the differences in usage of handheld email devices (such as Blackberry) in these countries in comparison to the UK. I was struck by not just in the actual rates of usage, but in the types of usage. It seemed to be that every man and his dog had a Blackberry in the USA! Unlike the UK, where handheld email devices are used primarily as a business tool, it appears that the USA consumers have embraced it heartily. This could possibly be explained by the fact that the uptake of texting/SMS in Australia and the UK was significant, as they were both early adopters of this technology, the uptake in the USA was minimal, hence there was a gap to fill.

Nevertheless, with devices such as the Blackberry becoming more and more affordable and the fact that you can call, text, email and surf on the one device is sure to very appealing to everyone, regardless whether they have a business need for it or not.

So, you're asking-how does this affect me? Well, it shows that the market for handheld email devices is growing and it doesn't look as though only B2B campaigns need to be aware of readability on these devices, but that B2C campaigns here in the UK may also be affected in the near future. The two main areas that we, as email marketers are affected are:

1. Statistics
2. Readability

Statistics:

Most handheld email devices take a copy of the email from the server, however as there are no images within the email (only a link to the image), the openings are not recorded and are therefore treated as text emails. Generally handheld email devices are used to keep in contact whilst out of the office, and are not considered as or used as replacements for regular email clients, therefore only the following circumstances should affect your campaigns statistics:

- Some of these devices (such as Blackberry) have an option 'delete message from server'. If they choose this, then the email will be unable to be downloaded by their regular email client.

- If the recipient is out of the office for the day or even days, then your opening stats may be delayed, as they may not actually download the email into their regular HTML reading email client until days later

Readability:

Bottom line is whether we're sending email to businesses or consumers; we need to be aware of how our emails appear in these devices. Judging by what appears in my Blackberry's inbox; I would say that only a minority of email marketers actually test their messages on handheld devices!

Before you jump into an immediate and total redesign of your template, consider how important it is for your email to be readable on these devices. Producing a 'handheld device readable' email doesn't necessarily mean a total redesign of your email, but if readability on handheld devices is important to you, then you may need to make a couple of changes, and so be prepared to compromise on design - particularly if your email is time sensitive, meaning that you can't wait for them to get back to the office to read the information.

If however, it is not imperative that the email be totally 'handheld friendly', then often significant improvements can be achieved with a few minor tweaks; such as using one header image rather than multiple images in the header space and moving your horizontal menu (if you have one) to the bottom of the email. Basically, the aim is to remove as many images and links as possible from the top of the email, so the reader doesn't have to troll through all the image links and other links and so is able to get to the good stuff immediately upon opening the email. General rule of thumb is: the simpler the HTML, the easier to read on a handheld.

So, add testing your e-mail on a handheld email device to your testing checklist, if you have not already done so and while you're at it, start thinking of some savvy marketing ideas to utilise the fact that your emails are being read whilst out and about!

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The Email Experience Council

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The eec is committed to regularly conducting a broad series of email initiatives for a variety of organizations that highlight the positive impact and importance of email as a marketing tool, communications vehicle and branding device. eec members are representative of other trade organizations and the leading agencies, advertisers, technology partners, service providers and brands focused on the potential of email and digital marketing.

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