Brooklinen’s Email Marketing Relies on Transparency and Triggered Sends

When Brooklinen launched in 2014, the DTC bedding and home essentials brand had a pretty scrappy email strategy: Co-founders Rich and Vicki Fulop crafted and sent emails themselves in hopes of gaining new customers.

Fast-forward six years, and the Brooklyn-based company has a full-fledged team that leverages AI algorithms and triggered, targeted sends to ensure it’s sending messages tailored to a customer’s previous search and purchase journey.

Allie Donovan, Brooklinen’s director of retention and email, said the brand’s email strategy is akin to its customer experience strategy. “Our CX team has a one-to-one relationship with our customers when they write in,” she said. “We’re essentially trying to do the same thing, but it’s one to thousands of people.”

In conversation with Adweek, Donovan discussed how the ecommerce company has leaned into its comfort-first marketing during the pandemic, how it might adapt messaging heading into the holidays and her team’s strategy for measuring performance.

Brand identity became more relevant in 2020

Brooklinen’s overall marketing focuses on the comfort its products offer, which was more relevant than ever when U.S. stay-at-home orders were mandated at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. While quarantined consumers might be more interested in buying new sheets, pillows or loungewear, the brand wanted to avoid tone-deaf selling points during a scary time.

“At first, we didn’t know what to say or when to say it. Life changed so much, so we really wanted to think about the way we were talking to people and change that, too,” Donovan said. “Instead of being sensational about offers we were running at the time, we thought about how to use our language to tell people: ‘We know our products may not be the most important thing for you right now, but we’re here for you if you need to find comfort.’”

Heading into Q4 of 2020, Donovan said the uncertainty of the pandemic—and how a majority of Americans plan to celebrate the holidays this year—has the brand over-preparing its messaging to nimbly pivot when necessary.

“We’re planning for every eventuality short of Godzilla. Maybe we’ll have to stay inside again much more than before, or maybe less people will be visiting family,” she said. “Our messaging might need to be less about visiting your family and more about spending money on gifts [to send]. We’re planning messaging for everything we can think of, both good and bad.”

Examples of Brooklinen’s recent targeted emails.Brooklinen

Transparency is key for an ongoing customer relationship

Donovan said the “guiding light” of her team is to always offer brand transparency.

Recently, the brand used email to inform customers about potential pandemic-related shipping delays as well as warehouse safety measures that include employees packing products while remaining socially distant.

“What we’ve found this year is if we’re transparent with our customers, they’re more responsive to us,” she said. “If we

tell them, before they even think about it, that we're having shipping delays, they're more likely to actually engage with us and purchase our products."

How email can retain customers

In measuring email performance, Donovan said the brand focuses on how its emails contribute to overall customer retention. This year, the brand moved away from sending batch-and-blast campaigns to focus on triggered, targeted sends for more personalized emails; the brand has increased its output of triggered sends by 90% in 2020.

Donovan declined to reveal specific year-over-year growth metrics—she noted the brand is showing "strong growth"—but noted her team considers a number of metrics when measuring success.

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