

## How a Seasonal Business Increased Off-Season Sales With Five Simple Email Tactics

by Jennifer Nastu

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Company: Blooms Today

Location: Haymarket, Virginia

Contact: John Morley, Executive Vice-President, Marketing

Industry: Retail, B2C

Annual revenue: Confidential

Number of employees: 65

### Quick Read:

A floral delivery company, Blooms Today was a seasonal business. Business around Mother's Day and Valentine's Day was always booming-in fact, the company had just about as much business as it could handle around those two holidays-but it needed a way to drive sales during non-peak times.

The company, which considers itself to be in the relationship business, nevertheless had no email marketing strategy to improve relationships with customers. By creating an email strategy based on little-known "holidays," the company was able to spur gift-giving during the off-season.

A spike of as much as 10% in orders immediately followed email campaigns, with increased opens and clickthrough rates. The company also grew its email list more than 40% in just over a year.

### Challenges:

"In our industry, there's a lot of opportunity, because almost everyone buys flowers. But they maybe buy them only 1.6 to 1.8 times a year," said John Morley, executive vice-president of marketing for Blooms Today.

While the company had as much as it could handle, logistically, during the days leading up to Mother's Day and Valentines Day, Morley knew he could increase the number of times people ordered flowers throughout the year if he could just hit on the right strategy.

Customizing an email campaign geared toward raising awareness of special days beyond those two holidays made sense, but the existing email strategy was "a bad scene," Morley said. "We made the mistake of doing it in-house. We got in trouble with spam filters, we were in non-compliance with CAN-SPAM-all those problems."

He decided to overhaul the company's email communication strategy.

### Campaign:

Working with email provider Bronto, Morley completely restructured the email program, basing it on five simple tactics:

#### Tactic #1: Focus on nontraditional holidays

"If you see that Sept. 8 is Teacher's Day, and you got an email four days before Teacher's Day, you might think, 'My kids' teachers are really great. I want to acknowledge them,'" Morley explained.

He added, "There's Grandparents Day, Best Friends Day. It's amazing to see how many of these holidays there are."

Morley has a list of all the potential "holidays" and sends reminders several days in advance. The emails almost always include a promotion-anywhere from a 5% to a 15% discount.

**Tactic #2: Change wording when offering email registration**

Morley's team changed the wording on the registration page, from "Sign up for our newsletter" to "Sign up to be notified of special discount offers."

He also had representatives in the call center change what they asked consumers, from "Do you want to be on our mailing list?" to "Do you want to be notified of any special promotions?"

**Tactic #3: Email often (every 10 days)**

Users can sign up for a newsletter-which offers tips and tactics, such as "the etiquette of sending flowers"-and for email notifications of special offers. If they signed up for both, they generally received something from Blooms Today every 10 days or so.

Prior to the new strategy, users were emailed maybe every month.

**Tactic #4: Emphasize strengths**

One of the things that distinguishes Blooms Today from competitors is that it offers same-day delivery on most products. This was important because people see flowers as a commodity; a rose is just a rose, so consumers look for the best price and the service, noted Morley. The fact that BloomsToday could be trusted to deliver on the same day the order was placed was often emphasized in emails.

Morley pointed out, however, that when emphasizing same-day delivery, he had to be sure the promotion matched the promise. For example, if the promotion offered a basket of tea cookies, crackers, and jams-something time-consuming to prepare-"that would be a huge mistake to advertise in a same-day email."

**Tactic #5: Resend to unopened-email recipients**

Two or three days after an email was blasted, Morley's team re-blasted the email to any recipients who hadn't opened it the first time.

**Results:**

Email clickthrough rates have gone up 35% to 40%, on average, while the house file of clients and potential clients has grown more than 40% in just over a year.

Having call center reps change how they asked people to be on the mailing list increased positive responses by 50%.

Remailing to unopened-email recipients generally resulted in an increase in open rates of 30%.

"We had a substantial increase in ROI once we did all [these things]," said Morley.

**Lessons Learned:**

Morley couldn't say enough about the importance of working with an outside vendor—even for small companies that are used to doing it in-house. "It was one of the wisest things we did," he said. Bearing that in mind, he mentioned two valuable lessons when marketing with email:

**1. Put a weekly meeting with your email vendor on the calendar**

Morley found it invaluable to have weekly conference calls with Bronto. "We go over results, look at what worked, what didn't," he said. "If you don't formalize a regular time for it, it's one of the things that never happens."

**2. Be aware that a slight change in wording can work wonders for your business**

When Morley's team changed the invite on Blooms Today's email registration page from "Sign up for our newsletter" to "Sign up to be notified of discount offers," they noticed an immediate jump in registrations. This tactic also worked wonders when call center reps taking orders asked customers whether they wanted to be notified about future discounts rather than asking whether they wanted to be kept on the mailing list.

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