Personalization: The Real Deal

It has been mentioned time and time again that newsletters should be well personalized. Personalization, however, is more than meets the eye: It is not just about "calling subscribers by their first name" as some people may have led you to believe. To prove this, take a look at the following lines that do use the said method:

"Nigel, Get Your Own Limited Edition of Kebab™ Cookware Now and Receive a FREE cooking secrets DVD!"

"Nigel, We Help People Gain More Weight. Try Our New Weightgain Program!"

"Nigel, Want to Make Some Extra Cash $200+ Daily?"

Um, yeah *cough* there you go - personalized subject lines and greetings. Does anyone believe that this crude personalization gimmick effectively hides the fact that these emails are actually spam? Heck, even some of these junk emails have an unconvincing "Dear Nigel" line on it. I didn't fall for it. You didn't fall for it. My spam filter took a nasty bite on it. That is only how far fake, uninspired personalization goes. Bad news for the spamming camp: The same trick won't work twice in a row.

Now as you can see from the examples above, even spammers got my first name right. There is no way you can call that personalization. Real personalization involves a lot of knowledge about your customers. You have to somehow know what they want and what they need. You don't want to send a newsletter that deals with some alcoholic drink to a six-months-pregnant subscriber. That would be horrible.

Unfortunately for us email marketers we know little about our customers. Alas we only have their names and their email addresses on our list which won't do much really. How will we be able to bond with our customers? The solution: monitor their transactions - the products they inquire and buy from you. List them down and make connections with other products they might be interested in investing with. How to do it? Here's a good example:

Suppose you are a video game retailer and for each subscriber in your list you know what their last purchases are. Based on that data you can then create an email that'll inform them about new games under that same genre or a sequel to the game they had puchased. The content should look like this:

Hey Nigel,

We hope you are enjoying the games Bomberman Wars and Radiant Silvergun that you purchased from us. We would like to inform you that there are new games in stock with the same or similar gameplay that you may be interested on:

Ikaruga

Gradius V
Pacman World
Super Mario Galaxy

There is also an upcoming sequel to Bomberman Wars coming out this year: Bomberman Wars 2: The Return of the Dark Force Bombers. Hudson Software handed out a special limited preorder deal that you might want to avail.

Have a great summer playing your favourite games!

Gamers' Haven Ltd.

You don't even have to call them by their first name to be personalized. What makes it personalized is that the retailer took the time and effort to suggest a few games based on the customers purchase history. This will increase the likelihood for the customer to purchase the new games. Plus all they have to do is to click on the embedded link to take them to the respective pages.

Here's a step-by-step process on how to do the entire thing:

1. Look for stocked games, upcoming games, and game sequels falling under the same genre.

2. Query the database of all customers who purchased a game of that genre.

3. Update the profile for each customer to run the merge.

4. Create an email with the relevant merge fields ([developer], [genre], etc.)

5. Set "New and Upcoming [genre] Games from [developer]" as the subject line.

6. Process the merge and send

With a little hard-work, you can come up with perfectly personalized emails. Moreover, you get to enjoy the following benefits:

1. Less emails will be sent because sending usually involves only a subset of the entire list.

2. Less spam complaints (which also means less customer frustration).

3. Less negative impact to your brand and more with the goodness.

4. More sales for your company

Patience and hard-work can go a long way. Now throw all the laziness out the window and

enjoy your newfound strategy. Cheers!