**Motivation:**

As I grow with the company, I see myself becoming increasingly focused on improving value of our brand by giving our audience a good experience through content. The motivation for this is twofold. Long term returns of marginal time invested to develop our brand is significant and in my opinion not considered enough (successful companies have valuable intangible assets), and miscommunication of our message is highly costly given volume we have yet to convert + sensitivity of negative metrics in the e-mail business. My focus in 2016 will particularly be on user selection, product targeting, and data analysis. I designed a project plan by taking a tiered approach, starting high level with Equate’s goals and whittling down to how I can influence them.

**Questions considered:**

1. Equate’s goals for 2016:

* Think about goals in terms of traffic sources. Which could have best margins for us and are worthwhile to pursue?
  1. Equate Mail (3rd party, remarketing, abandoners)
  2. Paid campaigns (affiliates, click outs (Katch/MA), click feeds (e.g. Taboola, adMarketplace))
  3. Paid campaigns (SEM, GDN, social media)
* Think about goals in terms of partnerships:
  1. Networking with buyers who
  2. Moving away from brokers
* Think about how we can improve our brand equity across each of these sources:
  1. Good audience outreach for all traffic sources (relevant messaging, informational, targeted)
  2. Good site experience
  3. Generating quality leads
  4. Establishing good relationship with reliable brokers and agents.
  5. Offer all our products on one site to provide complementary goods.
* Equate mail smaller percentage of revenue (diversify traffic to reduce risk)
  1. Need monetization improvement across all sources
  2. Use remarketing as the base for revenue cultivation toward paid initiatives

1. Factors to consider in meeting goals stated above:

* Who do we hire so that we meet our goals and become profitable?
* What are key areas to focus on so that we meet our goals and maximize profit?
* What are our key risk areas and what do we do to mitigate those risks?
* What are our competitors doing?
* What should priority of efforts be so that we reduce our opportunity cost at stages throughout the year (assign projects based on loss in value per send at any time)?
* What do we want our product to be (lead generation vs. portal for people to shop and explore in a Kayak style)?
* Plan goals around key events throughout the year (e.g. health insurance is very seasonal - focus on it leading up to and during OE).
* When do we start shifting reliance on traffic sources?
* How do we keep people motivated to enjoy their work and stay focused on goals?
* How much do we believe in the quality of our product?

**My Initiatives:**

Based on some of the questions and considerations above, the following are a list of my initiatives for next year and justification for considering them. A big focus will be on having good revenue during off months when we rely on home and life. Suggestions below will be in the spirit of improving performance on these offers.

* Finish setting up A/B testing framework that is user friendly. Hypotheses on the content side can only be tested with a controlled environment. **[Q1 2016]**
  + *Merlin got us there, but it needs to be user friendly (design a front end for CMS).*
  + *Have a system that verifies all decision making algorithms for content selection make sense.*
  + *As we generate increasing traffic to our site and aim for better pricing with partnerships, the opportunity costs may be greater. Create a methodology that values a test in terms of dollars and cents and indicates if it is worth pursuing.*
  + *Learn what makes for effective creative, and increase transparency on performance amongst design team. In this case, another CMS front end for performance visualization (Looker).*
* Our mailing infrastructure has limitations from a content perspective. **[Q1 2016]**
  + *Have flexibility to turn on/off bandit for A/B testing to observe its effectiveness, as well as testing different banditing algorithms on similar audiences.*
  + *Create a cohort infrastructure which will be referenced below. This will allow us to test if targeting works.*
* Understand users by placing them into categories. If we don’t have information on users, how can we efficiently test them in a systematic way to infer certain things about them? What additional knowledge do we have that can be leveraged targeted experiences? **[Q2 2016]**
  + *Create content tests that expose traffic sources to base categories, and a methodology which can assess their likelihood to belong to a group. This is highly relevant when delving into AOL (untapped market for us).*
  + *Survey our audience. Know their interests and cultivate a user base in third party.*
  + *Work with Cogo to find data sources which can provide information about users (AIQ for Yahoo, None for AOL).*
  + *Identify sleeping engagers who may not have gotten a targeted experience.*
  + *Determine which user groups prefer funnel, click outs, click to call.*
* Think from audience’s perspective (psychology). What do competitors do that we are not? What messages do they put out there that we are lacking? Are there blogs/articles worthwhile for incorporation? Can we place that in our creative? **[Q2 2016]**
  + *Start creating corpus of content by date. Use an A/B testing framework and bandit to record what works and implement at certain times (trending topics).*
  + *Have a good portion of time invested in research, now that CMS can handle it.*
  + *The current process to use copy (subject lines, body copy, click out advertising, SEM) does not factor in current events/trends that would pique a user’s interest.*
  + *Currently the bandit suggests mailing to multiple brands. Other companies don’t have multiple brands representing them. Strategize a way to move toward 1 brand approach.*
* *Migrate existing content infrastructure for third-party to remarketing/abandoners, where applicable.* If framework exists, leverage it to its fullest.**[Q2/Q3 2016]**
* Need an organized schedule for what important events happen when. For example, interim Open Enrollment deadlines and countdowns for them have big boost in monetization. **[Q2/Q3 2016]**
  + *Create a calendar for CMS, which auto-runs content when approaching important times.*
  + *The calendar can be setup far in advance, so that we ensure we don’t forget about any critical events that are approaching.*
* Know what is going on in health/life/home markets. Kaiser Family Foundation had a survey, which said that 8 in 10 people are looking for information. **[All 2016]**
  + *Create tests that incorporate Healthcare.gov, syndicated content, and current events information with guidance on shopping for health insurance.*
  + *Measure long term value on our users – time before engagement metric based on different campaigns that cohorts were exposed to and our ability to avoid eroding user base.*
* *Optimize algorithms that determine best content to send at any time.* **[All 2016]**

**Resources**

Based on the initiatives above, in Q1 2016 I would like to hire an entry-level analyst who has a mathematics/statistics background and basic programming skills (Python and SQL). I prefer he/she have 1-2 years of work experience, since time management and project prioritization skills are important at our size. The mathematical skill set will be for working with a team to develop strategy around user targeting. The programming skills would be for implementation and infrastructure maintenance.

Additional reason for having an analyst - it is hard for me to review performance of our creatives (historical trends) and consider new ideas on user engagement, since my effort has been on building content infrastructure and underlying algorithms. The analyst would assist on this front as well. Here are specifics on an analyst’s responsibilities:

1. Enhance an already existing A/B testing framework that is grounded in statistics principles (Merlin) and its integration with content management. Communicate results with design team and propose content improvements.
2. Do ad-hoc analyses on past and current content tests.
3. Discuss various ways to improve testing and content targeting.
4. Drive competitor analysis to learn marketing tactics that we are not taking advantage of.
5. Find methods to identify ‘hot’ topics that are discussed in each offer space (health, life, home), and look into health information scraper to develop subject lines/body copy.
6. Handle day to day subject line and template management.

I designed these tasks so that there is variety to keep a new hire interested. I will still need engineering support for applications I am building. Until now, Ming, Chris, and Mohamed have been able to provide support where needed. Considering how much work Engineering takes on, I anticipate they may hire a junior engineer (early 2016) to take on routine tasks. If that’s the case, I would consult with anyone on Engineering who has the available time. I may need BD support for times I think I’d want to purchase data to support targeted campaigns. There are probably other reasons to use BD support, that I haven’t thought of.

**General Projects**

Here are additional projects for next year that I’ve thought about (for broader consideration when addressing Equate goals). They don’t necessarily pertain to me, but I wanted to share for overall planning:

* Continue to improve optimization algorithms on equate-email (3rd party, remarketing), and paid campaigns.
* Push for partnerships that are direct with agents. Better monetization (dependent on good quality leads) on traffic we generate. Start developing an agent portal using Everquote as a model. The agents rely on quality. Focus on quality.
* Think about strategies to cultivate interest in different offers amongst our first party records. The Fluent survey concept is an interesting thought.
* Have ads on high traffic sites: Taboola and adMarketplace’s ad feeds.
* How do we mitigate deliverability/complaint rate/deferral/IBR risks?
* Dynamic content on our website. Could we use articles from healthcare.gov for SEO purposes?