

E-mail marketing industry is all about trust

Bellbrook company shows clients how to reach their target audiences with measurable success

By Kyle Nagel
B2B Staff Writer

Ajay Goel already was on the fast track to medical school when he arrived at Case Western Reserve University.

Out of Centerville High School, he had been pre-accepted into the medical program because of his academic achievements, and he went about pursuing his biochemistry major.

"I was doctor-bound," he said.

That was 1995, when stories on the Internet were on the cover of every magazine. Goel had the added background of a father and brother who worked in software development, so he changed his major to computer science at the beginning of his sophomore year.

"I guess," Goel said, "I got the fever."

In a mix of choosing a passion as his career and recognizing the burgeoning market of e-mail marketing, Goel has continued to grow his success with his company, Jangomail. The nine-employee operation headquartered in Bellbrook offers database management and measurements on effectiveness for companies looking to communicate with a large number of customers about deals, events and any other aspect of their business.

With Jangomail, a customer can upload a database of e-mails or create a new one, keep that database current, separate customers into groups and communicate to large quantities of contacts in one e-mail.

Jangomail's customers keep e-mail lists numbering from the hundreds to the millions, but the basic principle holds true: They want to reach many people simultaneously, and they want those e-mails to be read.

Tips on e-mail marketing

Optimal response time comes from e-mails sent after lunch on Tuesday through Thursday.

Keep images to a minimum.

Be direct in subject lines, don't make people guess.

Organize e-mail lists so you know what the customers want.

Use a real first and last name in "From" line to make e-mail more personal.

E-mail accounts are receiving more and more e-mail, so make sure you're sending something the contacts could care about to build their trust.

— Ajay Goel, Jangomail

Goel and Janogmail have faced increased competition since the company began in 2001, and there are more obstacles to delivering each e-mail past spam controls and other account protection. But his and his company's story underlines identifying opportunity as a company and, simultaneously, the importance of reaching a large number of customers with messages each will care about.

Jangomail's customer roster of about 2,500 grows by about 15 to 20 each week, Goel said, although some customers are lost as well. Their goal is to make sending these mass e-mails as easy as possible

Ajay Goel, president and CEO, JangoMail.

B2B Staff photo by Ty Greenlees



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Ajay Goel
founder of Jangomail

and telling the customers what day, time, subject and composition seems to work best with data.

“When I tell people what I do, they’re afraid to give me their e-mail addresses, like they’re going to start getting a bunch of e-mails,” Goel said. “People have to be comfortable with you, and know you’re giving them something they care about.”

A unique request

When Goel graduated from college, he already had established a website development company and started gathering customers. It mostly was odd jobs, with a few customers here, a few there.

About a year and a half into the company, an acquaintance helped connect him with a mutual fund company in Chicago that had a unique request. As part of its website, the company wanted to send a daily e-mail with the price of its mutual fund at the close of the market.

The company didn’t want to manually send the e-mail, but have it done automatically.

Goel went about researching the tools that would make that happen.

“I just couldn’t find anything exactly like what they wanted,” Goel said.

So, he created it. Goel wrote the code necessary to both pull e-mail addresses from a database and collect the mutual fund information from another location, slap them together and send it out at a set time each day.

With that, Goel found a niche that was not served by many existing companies. Instead of telling the customer what it was asking was not possible, he altered his operation to make it fit.

Soon after, that idea led to the birth of Jangomail.

That goal has changed. Now, customers are more interested in composing e-mail rather than sending out automatically generated communication. The difficult part is maintaining and organizing their databases of e-mails and knowing whether those e-mails are being opened, used or otherwise accepted.

“In the early days, we didn’t have the ability to send based on demographic, so we used what was called the ‘batch and blast’ technique,” Goel said. “That was sending the same thing, like a monthly newsletter, to

everybody. That’s considered old now.

“What people want is changing.”

No spammers allowed

As the industry of e-mail marketing has grown, so have the challenges of creating a successful campaign and reaching each customer.

Foremost in this area is the growing sophistication of anti-spam controls on e-mail accounts. Goel, in fact, has a full-time employee dedicated solely to building relationships with the large e-mail providers.

If enough addresses in the database are old, the e-mail could be flagged as spam. Or, if enough users click the “report spam” portion of the e-mail, the address more likely will be blocked. That means the challenges for Jangomail and its customers are keeping the address lists current and sending information that their receivers will care about, not look at as spam and report.

In response, companies are keeping more demographic- and interest-specific e-mail lists. A large company, like a cell phone provider, might keep hundreds of different e-mail lists, broken down by state, age, gender or other dividers.

For both current customers and potential customers, e-mail is increasing, so companies have to be more focused on what they communicate to make it useful and interesting, Goel said.

“It’s more difficult just to get the e-mail into the inbox,” Goel said. “Part of the challenge is just getting it delivered and getting it opened.”

Choosing the method

In the world of marketing, e-mail still is considered new enough to reach young and old audiences, but old enough that research exists on its effectiveness.

That research is an important aspect that makes e-mail marketing efforts useful to companies, said Irene Dickey, a lecturer of marketing at the University of Dayton for more than 20 years.

“So much more is known about what works,” Dickey said. “They know what days of the week and what times of day are most effective.”

But as the world of social media grows, companies could turn more attention in that direction for mar-

keting. It’s inexpensive and reaches a wide audience quickly, but judging its success is more difficult.

Plenty of campaigns still include direct mail, but that costs much more. E-mail marketing is cheaper and easier to judge, which makes it the middle ground between the old and new, Dickey said. Plus, companies know they’re sending the consumers information they want because of their response, she said.

“Companies can use it to build trust,” Dickey said. “It’s a more direct relationship.”

Future of e-mail

Likewise, Jangomail has to change.

More users are opening their e-mails on smart phones or mobile devices, which require design changes for a pleasant appearance on the different screen.

Some also have questioned whether e-mail use is decreased in favor of communication by social media. But Goel, like others in his business, feel that e-mail usage still is high, and often it even serves as a back-

bone to those social media outlets.

“It’s hard to think of e-mail going away anytime soon,” he said.

As consumers increasingly carry multiple e-mail addresses, another challenge is to gain the address to their primary account. To do that, the e-mail marketing business boils down to a common thread among all successful businesses: trust.

Customers are expected to continue opening only the e-mails they think are important, and they don’t want alerts to deals or events that they don’t care about, Goel said. The technology is different, but businesses still need to consider whether they’re giving each person on the e-mail list something they want and if the customer feels comfortable that the company isn’t selling their address elsewhere or otherwise violating an understood trust.

“It’s still about delivering something that people want,” Goel said. “You just have to make sure you have something they want.”

Contact this reporter at (937) 225-7389 or knagel@DaytonDailyNews.com

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