Transactional email - 14 best practices

By [Georgia Christian](#)   31 Jan 2011

CAN-Spam defines a transactional or 'relationship' message as any email that facilitates, completes or confirms a commercial transaction that a recipient agreed to enter into with the sender. It is said that no other message is as personal, relevant or anticipated and as a result, transactional emails generally see open rates of 47% click-through-rates (CTR's) of 20%.

Compared to commercial messages, which on average have open rates of 31% and CTR's of just 6%, it's easy to understand why marketers are including transactional emails in their overall e-marketing strategy - it provides an additional platform to create awareness for your company.

Traditionally, transactional emails are triggered by the following events:

- Purchase confirmations / customer order processes
- Shipping notices
- Product recall
- New accounts
- Expired subscriptions
- Membership
- Account balance information

A good transactional email will always describe the event in detail, use language that makes the customer feel good about the action they have taken, invite them back to the website for more information or to expand on the event, and provide contact information for any questions or concerns they might have.

There are however, further features and best practices that you can incorporate to help ensure that you maximise the potential of your transactional email.

1. **Always use a valid, existing email address and avoid having 'no-reply' in the 'from' line.** This makes it easier for the recipient to identify the sender and to reply immediately if they have any questions.

2. **Use the subject line to remind customers who you are and what the purpose of your email is.** An easy example could be: 'Oliver Bonas - Payment Confirmation'.

3. **Express your gratitude and thank your customer for their purchase, no matter how big or small the order.** It's quite common for this to be one of the first sentences of your email.

4. **Anticipate any questions that customers might have.** What different ways can they follow up on their purchase? Then, make it easy for them to do so.

5. **Keep the copy easy to read and scan through.** Sentences should be short and clear and don't be shy to use bullet points if need be.

6. **Remember a strong call to action.** What action does your customer have to perform next?

7. **A purchase is personal no matter what, so personalise your transactional email also.** This can be something simple, such as: 'Dear Ms Smith or Dear Susan'.

8. **Make sure your company logo is easy to see and recognise.** Many spammers use fake transactional emails as their weapon of choice and if your customer can't or doesn't recognise the email immediately, it may well get deleted.

9. **Include any data that the customer might require to complete the transaction.** This might include billing information, or details they would need if they want to change an order or update their profile or preferences.

10. **Include a privacy statement.** Make sure that it's detailed and inform your customer about what you intend to do with the details they have divulged to you (hint - keep them to yourself)

11. **Clearly state all terms and conditions of their purchase.** This should include any information regarding payment, exchanges, returns, shipping etc.

12. **An easily located link to your website,** in case they would like more information from you.

13. **Maintain an HTML format; nearly 60% of all transactional emails are created this way.** While you want your email to be easy on the eye, the copy is what's most important so keep that in mind. Include one or two relevant images but make sure the email still downloads quickly and is easy to read.

14. **You can include promotional content in your transactional email, as long as the latter is the most prominent and remains Above the Fold.** The transactional information is of course the objective of your email so don't lose focus and be tempted use it as a platform for a full on promotion. Having said that, according to Ecommerce Benchmark Guide, 57% of consumers have a positive view of marketing content in transactional emails as long as the transactional component is readily seen and the marketing content provides information that is relevant.

In conclusion, it's important to bear in mind that because transactional emails are so highly anticipated, they get opened more often. Therefore each one is an opportunity for you to create awareness, reinforce your brand and drive deeper customer relationships.

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