



Synchronicity Marketing

The Six C's of Permission Email Marketing

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Permission Marketing

Beyond buzzword, it's the status quo for email marketing. Already legally mandated by laws in other countries, opt-in marketing may evolve into the preferred model within the US as well. With marketing channels of choice proliferating and messaging devices diversifying, it's not hard to imagine an opt-in vs. opt-out future where permissions are granted not only by marketing channel (email, postal mail, phone, mobile), but also by content, device, time and place. All the more reason to genuinely understand permission, which in the world of email marketing appears relegated to subjective definitions.

I'll help set the record straight by exploring several hallmarks of permission I call **The Six C's of Permission Email Marketing**. They may seem obvious, and they may sound simplistic, but you might be surprised how often the fundamentals are dismissed.

1. Conscious Consent

There are numerous ways individuals end up on email lists, and many of those ways are unknown even to them. Terms like "affirmative consent", "passive consent" and "third-party consent" abound.

But when it comes to genuine 100% permission marketing, the only consent that matters is **conscious consent**. Are your join and subscribe invitations structured in such a way that list members must voluntarily take action to receive your messages, and do they realize the action they are taking will result in email from your company, partners or affiliates? If you can't answer "yes" to these questions, your methods are not gathering conscious consent.

Sure, people are bombarded with messages and advertising impressions from a growing array of channels and yes, they forget what they've signed-up for. However, **conscious consent** ensures an opt-in process is clear and non-deceitful. Without a self-initiated action on the part of your list members, it is virtually impossible for them to join. Requiring such self-initiated, voluntary measures requires conscious action on the part of your recipients and increases the likelihood they remember having taken such action.

On the other hand, unconscious or *passive consent* assumes rather than requests permission. It takes true voluntary choice out of the equation by pre-checking boxes, using data gathered from publicly-available sources, or gathering information via some other opt-out collection model.

The Take-Away

While these methods are certainly not illegal and are often justifiable, they don't constitute conscious consent. If 100% permission marketing is what you aim for, nothing less than voluntary consent will do.

2. Choice

Choice and conscious consent go hand in hand since conscious consent assumes individual choice. Yet beyond the **choice** to join/subscribe in the first place should lay options which offer control (one of our upcoming C's). Which options will you - can you - offer in a permission marketing environment? These are just a few ideas:

- Communication Type (news, promotional, legal, transactional)
- Content Type (product information, reminders, sales offers)
- Preferred communication channel (email, postal mail, phone, fax)
- Frequency preferences
- Device-specific message formatting (mobile vs. desktop)
- Temporary suspension of messages
- Unsubscribe

For an expert example of how it's done, see United Airlines' customer preferences at www.united.com. If you're a United Mileage Plus program member, just log-in and select "My Profile". You'll be able to edit email preferences, flight notification preferences, and other options. Another excellent example can be found at www.hallmark.com. Create an account there if you don't already have one to see what I mean.

The Take-Away

When offering permission and communications choices you offer preferences, so present only the options you can successfully fulfill. And don't forget to note when certain types of content or communication are available only through a particular channel and not others. It's fine to restrict choices solely to what you can realistically manage; aim your sights on under-promising and over-delivering rather than vice versa and your customers will reward your efforts.

3. Clarity

As an aspect of permission, **clarity** alone has many dimensions. When requesting permission (an "opt-in"), first and foremost that very fact should be clear. There are numerous shades of gray here and, sadly, many online marketers seem to thrive in muddy waters.

Your first step to staying clear is to ensure your request is exactly that – an obvious yes-or-no choice rather than an assumption of permission. Too often, marketers asking for tolerance - or forgiveness - claim they are permission marketers. In today's world, forgiveness does not equal permission.

Opt-out is not opt-in, and no attempt at reframing it after the fact will make it so. Take the high road and if you're planning for 100% permission email, understand that a percentage of

your prospects and even your customers will decline your communications. Learn to accept rejection, and instead focus your efforts on those who have voluntarily said "yes".

The remaining dimensions of clarity in permission marketing have more to do with the data gathering process than with the request itself.

- Can you state in WIIFM (What's In It For Me?) terms why someone should provide the data you're asking for?
- Do you explain the clear benefit to your audience members when, for example, they provide their Company Size? ZIP Code? Annual Income?
- Is there a special perk or gift you offer when a member provides his/her birthday? Renewal date? Completes a survey?
- Scrutinize every data element you request within the permission process and if you can't justify it, leave it for later. Once you've gathered basic contact information, you can always go back for more.

Finally, is it clear what will be sent? Which types of email can people sign up for: alerts, sales offers, partner offers, e-newsletter? Can you provide examples (either via a link to an e-communication or photo of offline advertising; or through the mail) to each? It helps not only to tell, but also to show.

The Take-Away

Do your subscribers understand they're joining an email list, what will be sent, how often, and which choices they have? Your opt-in and registration processes pass the clarity test if they create *confidence, comfort and credibility*.

4. Confidence

The fourth dimension of permission email marketing is critical to ensuring it works, and hinges largely on your credibility. Whether someone will opt-in to your communications has a little to do with how much they trust you and a lot to do with how strongly they desire what you have.

But break or abuse that trust, or fail to live up to your promises, and no matter how badly they want or need your product your email list members will seek it elsewhere.

How are you handling permission practices to ensure your word is good? For starters, disclosing how data will be used and shared is essential. A comprehensive privacy policy typically has a Data Use or Data Security section that addresses such concerns. If you will

share or extend permission to a parent company, sister brand, or subsidiary clearly say so. Better yet, allow your list members to choose the extent to which their permission *and* data is shared.

What else can you do to inspire **confidence**? If you're gathering and storing highly sensitive or protected data such as credit card numbers, social security numbers, or health/ medical attributes, explain in plain English how you protect such information from being shared, stolen or abused.

Furthermore, explain why it is in your subscribers' best interests to provide it and/or allow you to store it (convenience?). They'll need to understand how they will personally benefit before they'll surrender security.

The Take-Away

Building confidence is a way of doing business, not a one-time job. Creating explanations, examples, and policies is a start; living up to them is what's ultimately important. No doubt, permission marketing involves considerable fore-thought and planning which is what makes it both more complex and infinitely higher performing than opt-out approaches.

5. Control

Control as an aspect of permission has everything to do with offering your audience members control and nothing to do with trying to control them. **Control** as a dimension of your email program means you put your list members in the driver's seat, allowing them control over their communication choices, access to and use of their data, and even the ultimate control to broaden, narrow, or end their relationship(s) with you.

Your subscribers will truly be in control if you not only present them options for selecting, but also allow them to change their preferences regarding:

1. The types of communications they receive from you (alerts, reminders, announcements, offers, news, legal, etc.)
2. The channels by which they receive different communications
3. The data they've provided about themselves
4. The extent to which marketing permission *as well as* data (especially the email address) is shared with parent companies, sister brands, partners and third-party advertisers
5. How their data is used

6. When and how they can leave a communication stream
7. When and how they can opt-out of previous choices

The Take-Away

Preventing control and access to choice is not only a hallmark of spam but also of poorly-run affiliate marketing programs. While many marketers may find it operationally difficult to allow all the points of control listed above, those who offer control where they can will find their subscribers and customers reward them not merely with appreciation but (more valuable) with loyalty.

6. Confirmation

The final step in any permission process is **confirmation**. Confirming that a voluntary join action has taken place as soon as possible after it occurs is an essential step in a solid opt-in process. Where a member joins a list via a Web site, this typically occurs via a return email confirmation message, immediately deployed to the email address owner, which does double or quadruple duty by:

- Verifying that the email address provided is correct and deliverable
- Restating log-in IDs and/or passwords if applicable
- Providing a link to a central preference or account management center, and an option for redress (unsubscribe) if the opt-in is invalid
- Including contact information for customer service or tech support
- And last but certainly not least, beginning the onboarding process with an initial offer.

The Take-Away

Confirmation beyond initial list sign-up should also be provided whenever a member modifies preferences, adds or deletes data, or unsubscribes. Since many marketers through their Web sites now offer significant preference and data control, returning a Web page confirmation in conjunction with an email confirmation is a best practice when changes are being made online.

With a growing trend toward opt-in rather than traditional opt-out marketing being driven by consumer overload and environmental concerns, if you keep the **Six C's of Permission** in mind at

each stage of your email marketing programs you'll be at least a few - if not six - steps ahead of the game.

About Synchronicity Marketing

Synchronicity Marketing is a leading provider of email marketing training, professional education, coaching, and consulting. The company is dedicated to enlightening brands, business owners and independent professionals on better use and alignment of email, social, and content marketing **to create improved customer engagement, more revenue and higher ROI.**

Founded and led by Karen Talavera, a 20-year email and direct response marketing expert, Synchronicity Marketing offers structured coaching and training programs for professionals who need support and direction implementing email marketing in their organizations. The company is a founding and current member of the Email Experience Council (EEC) of the DMA.

Talavera has worked with clients ranging from A&E, Kaiser Permanente, ServiceMaster, Texas Instruments, Applied Materials, and the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau to agencies, associations and solo-preneurs. Karen designed – and actively teaches – the email marketing training and certification programs for the Online Marketing Institute, the Direct Marketing Association, MarketingProfs, and the Association of National Advertisers. Prior to founding Synchronicity Marketing in 2003, Karen held senior marketing positions at YesMail, Acxiom Digital, and Experian.

Karen shares email and digital marketing insights on the **Enlightened Emarketing** blog (<http://www.synchronicitymarketing.com>) and welcomes connections there as well as on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Synchronicity Marketing was founded in 2003 and is located near Miami Florida.

For a free consult to learn more about the company's training, coaching or consulting services contact Synchronicity Marketing at 561.967.9665 or via info@synchronicitymarketing.com