

TRUTH

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The impact of social media
on email

“Social media is killing email.”

“Email falls prey to Web 2.0.”

Maybe you’ve heard these sentiments or read articles about how email is being edged out by social media websites like MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn. It’s no doubt that these sites have gained tremendous popularity over recent years. But, if you’ve taken notice and are wondering, “What do I do now that email is dead?,” let’s take a step back from the hype and, hopefully, put your mind at ease.

I remember when really simple syndication (RSS) began to pick up speed and seemed to enter its tipping point in gaining widespread popularity. There was an uproar in the industry, and I saw similar headlines in the news. There were countless articles with titles like, “RSS Kills Email” or “Bye Bye Email.” But, in fact, email wasn’t replaced by RSS at all, and today we are facing a similar situation with social media.

Email marketing has been called the original social networking tool, and I could not agree more. If you think about social networks in general, email plays a large role in them. LinkedIn, as an example, relies heavily on email to keep its users connected. In fact, large portals (which provide email addresses to millions) are morphing into social networks, with email at their core.

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It’s no doubt that social media has picked up steam in capturing the attention of Internet users across the globe. However, there is a lesson to be learned here. Instead of thinking that email is out, try considering the role that email can play in these new marketing mediums. As new approaches and channels emerge, we should be thinking of new ways to incorporate and leverage email. Advancements will always crop up in marketing, and it is our job to change perspective on where email falls within them.

Research shows that younger generations indeed may prefer to communicate through social networking websites and might not use email as often as they once did. But, we all know from experience

that communication preferences change as you age, and it's likely that the younger generation will increase email use once they get real jobs. Think of it this way: Social networks are islands, requiring membership for access. Email is universal. Everyone you know has an email address, but not everyone you know has a Facebook account. That is email's huge advantage.

Either way, new methods of communication require us to evolve and think outside the box. In particular, try to learn which parts of your audience are more receptive to a social network strategy and focus accordingly, in the same way that you don't try to reach people who have no Internet access via email. With that being said, here are some ways you can embrace social media and weave email into it.

- If your company has a Facebook page, capture email addresses on it.
- Promote your newsletter and any benefits to your email offerings on your LinkedIn profile.
- Use these sites to communicate less urgent or regular news.
- Test your marketing messages, calls to action, and creative elements on social networking sites. I did when promoting this book and found it beneficial.
- Use email to drive traffic to new social network initiatives or to existing social network sites and features. (This will give you a chance to measure the effectiveness of the overall effort.)

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