



IMN Makes News

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Marketers can't get enough of testing these days.

By David Berkowitz

When asking marketers which e-mail marketing tests are worthwhile (as MarketingSherpa did), the general consensus seems to be 'all of the above.' Landing page and subject line tests are the favorites, but the fifth-ranked choice, copy length, still appeals to nearly 60% of respondents.

E-Mail Marketing Tests that US Marketers Think Are Worthwhile, 2003 (as a % of respondents)

Landing page tests	74.0%
Subject line tests	73.5%
HTML vs. text tests	70.0%
Personalization with name testing	63.0%
Long copy vs. short copy testing	59.0%

Note: n=2,327

Source: MarketingSherpa, 2003; iMediaConnection, September 2003

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Fortunately for IMN's clients, testing is now much easier and more sophisticated. In fact, the whole company has matured, not just since its 1999 inception, but in the past year since eMarketer spoke with President and CEO Kathleen Goodwin. What's different? eMarketer checked in with Tom Simons, founder of advertising communications firm [PARTNERS+simons](#) and IMN chairman of the board.

eMarketer: Why did iMakeNews change its name to IMN?

eMarketer: What do the successful newsletters have in common?
IMN CEO Kathleen Goodwin: A publishing schedule, a consistency, they walk in their clients' shoes. It's understanding how people are using the content. It's using the analytics but not going overboard with it.

—Excerpt from Goodwin's [October 2002 interview](#) with eMarketer

Tom Simons: The name change is emblematic of the more profound change that's going on within the company. iMakeNews is an identity that was an apt moniker for a company whose product was outbound newsletters. The company has in fact moved well beyond that in the development of some very progressive serving and reporting solutions, and by moving to the acronym, we were communicating to our base of 800 customers that we were about something much greater than electronic newsletters.

eMarketer: With the name iMakeNews, you get more of a sense of personal publishing. Have your clients become more sophisticated? Are there larger types that are using it than, say, those who originally started with you?

TS: Yes. That's the short answer. The application is built out to such an extent that it is attracting a much higher value customer because it is a much higher value service. There is still a good deal of personal publishing, if you will, but it is not done by a single person. It is done by very sophisticated, very large clients, but they are publishing themselves.

eMarketer: I've been able to witness first-hand some of the ways in which you've changed. When I first started getting newsletters produced with iMakeNews, I knew very clearly when they were an iMakeNews newsletter.

TS: There are a couple of things that represent its evolution. Certainly one is in the templates and designs that are available. It's a much simpler matter now for one of the IMN clients to cloak the newsletter in their own brand clothing so it more fairly and authentically represents their own branded content. Of course, the other part of the evolution that is particularly exciting are the new reporting capabilities as well as the definition of e-marketing best practices and industry best practices. We now understand performance metrics for specific industries, and that allows IMN clients to gauge the performance of their e-marketing against other companies in that same industry sector, and that stuff is very exciting.

eMarketer: IMN VP of Sales Brian Cusack was telling me at [Ad:Tech](#) how that in turn helps you work with clients to improve their publications, and if a client is a couple of percentage points below the industry average for a given metric, IMN will sit down with them and figure out what's what. The advanced reporting can further help pinpoint things better.

TS: Absolutely. The inherent benefit to being able to understand the performance benchmarks by industry segment is in time it's going to enhance the whole industry's communication performance through this medium. As consumers of that content, we're going to be much better served.

eMarketer: With e-mail getting a bad rap these days, is e-mail an effective marketing medium, and if so, will it continue to stay that way?

TS: I think that there are some e-marketing strategies that are very effective, but I think that there is a lot of inept e-mail marketing going on right now, and it's giving something of a black eye to those people who are trying to use it responsibly. I happen to think that what we have in the case of IMN is something that is apart from e-mail marketing. What we have is a best practice, direct marketing vehicle. Frankly, it's also a CRM and communication feedback loop that is extraordinarily efficient and productive. I am encouraging the people at IMN to position their offering against e-mail marketing.

Another very interesting fact, for example, is in the month of October, IMN sent

out something on the order of 7.5 million e-mailings. Only 0.29% of those people who received e-mail decided to opt out. That suggests in the most compelling way that this is content that's coming to you via e-mail that people are really interested in reading. This is not the sort of stuff that we have to trash first thing in the morning. This is something very different.

eMarketer: Do you know how many of those actually were delivered?

TS: Those were delivered. The number of e-mails sent was 7,538,000, and the number of e-mails delivered was 7,369,000.

eMarketer: That still seems pretty remarkable. As much as the whole e-mail industry is making all these strides forward, we have to come back to these issues where we have to make sure the message even arrived.

TS: E-mail on the surface has all of the advantages that direct mail doesn't. You can tell that it's delivered, and you never could really do that with direct mail. You can tell that it's opened, which you never could do with direct mail. You can tell how long people spend reading it, which you certainly couldn't do with direct mail. You can tell in what order they've read the content, and that's an expression of reader preferences. It's an invaluable feedback tool, and so on and so forth.

When you compound that with the IMN reporting abilities to track over time and track against the industry, you have something that's a very, very compelling tool.

eMarketer: What's your role with IMN, and what attracted you to IMN in the first place?

TS: I have a new role as chair of the board. I've been on the board for a year and a half or so. I've known Kathleen Goodwin, the CEO, for some time, and I think I was recruited on the board for a couple of reasons in that I've grown my own marketing communications business, and we have experience with various electronic communications vehicles that we've used for our clients, whether they're the more traditional or the more innovative. The thinking was that I'd be able to offer some counsel or some perspectives on both the internal business side and the marketplace. We'll see if that turns out to be the case.

eMarketer: I noticed IMN has a [DirectBlog](#) business. How long has that been around?

TS: The blog product was beta'ed four or five months ago. IMN worked with Jupiter in order to put together the first blogging users conferences, and it was very successful. In that blogging is very much a self-published vehicle, it made a lot of sense for IMN to have a product that it could offer in that regard.

For more about IMN's involvement with blogs and RSS, read eMarketer's [interview with Chief Technology Officer Peter Mesnik](#).

I wanted to mention one other thing. It's tangentially related to something you were bringing up about the lack of favor that some people are finding in e-mail marketing. I think it's less about the application of e-mail and its effectiveness; I think it's more a movement to decide whether you're going to opt in or opt out. Opt-out can have to do with any number of different communications that happen to come into your sphere.

At this point, telemarketing is considered invasive enough that we now have the

ability to opt out by moving onto a Do Not Call list. There's discussion about how you can create opt-out mechanisms for direct mail, for example. What's happened with e-mail is that some people have found it so invasive, and understandably so, that the concept of being able to opt out so that your own personal space is private is catching on. I think what we have with IMN is a communications mechanism for which e-mail is just an enabler, frankly. It's a mechanism that's delivering content that people are genuinely interested in and have decided to embrace.

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