

DMA Email Council and ISBA: Customer Engagement - Roundtable

2020

In partnership with



In collaboration with the **ISBA**, the DMA Email Council participated in a roundtable discussion to offer advice to the **National Trust** and **Sainsbury's Bank** on the challenges the companies face with their email campaigns as a result of the pandemic. A special thank you to our participants for bringing forth these important issues and offering their expert guidance.

DMA Email Council Attendees

Lili Boev, **Vuture**; Steve Henderson, **Emarsys**; Daniel Lack, **Growth Track**; Antony Humphreys, **RSPB**; Komal Helyer, **Pure360**; Suzanna Chaplin, **ESBConnect**; Guy Hanson, **Validity**; Gavin Laugenie, **dotdigital**; Josh Berkley, DMA; Rosie Atherfold, DMA; Marta Perez, DMA; Alia Barakzai, DMA.

Guests

Duncan Ogle-Skan, **National Trust**; Amy Collins, **Sainsbury's Bank**; Neelam Mistry Kotecha, **Assurant**; Chris Barnett, **1973 Ltd**; Nadja von Massow, **Nadworks**; Saravanan Subburam, **Investment & Pensions Europe**; Elliot Ross, **Taxi for Email**; Kelly Atkins, **Paragon**.

National Trust

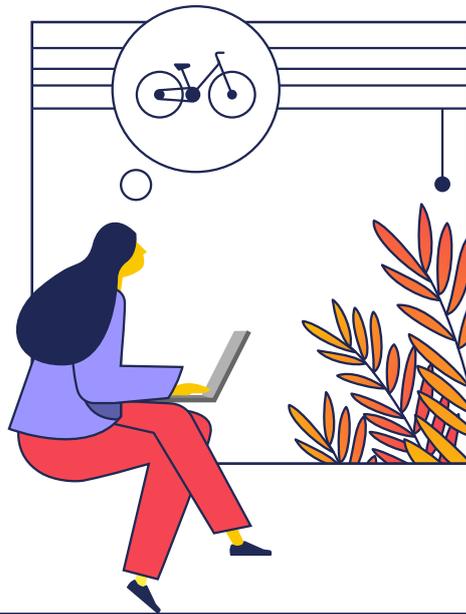
Lili Boev, Chair of the DMA Email Council, shared the **National Trust's** initial request:

"We're interested in understanding experiences of those trying to engage with audiences by email, not specifically transactional emails, but those trying to gain or maintain relevance with that audience."

She explained that, since people can't visit **National Trust** sites during this time, the charity is trying to provide users with activities to do at home. However, it's difficult to gauge success, as this hasn't been done before and there are no benchmarks.

Business Before the Pandemic

Previously, the **National Trust** would send a nation-wide monthly email to their subscriber base to inspire people to spend time outdoors or visit one of their sites in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland. They would send more regular emails focused on local conservation work or examples of days out to those around a 30-minute drive from their properties.



Challenges During the Lockdown

National Trust properties have now closed, putting the charity at huge risk of loss of income, as members may choose to take payment breaks on their membership or cancel altogether. In the first couple of weeks of lockdown, their main purpose of customer engagement was taken away; they lost around 50-60% of web traffic. The **National Trust** is working hard to rebuild, but it's predominantly driven by email pushes.

Changes to Survive

From gardening to cooking, the **National Trust** have changed their website to engage people with activities to do at home, instead of almost exclusively encouraging them to visit their sites. They also provide users access to places in nature that they can't visit. Both adaptations have been largely successful.

The group discussed content the **National Trust** is uniquely positioned to share in lockdown through alternative uses of social media. For example: live streaming gardeners looking after the sites. It was noted that for this kind of message, it's important to find the right audience. There's a broad spectrum of people who buy memberships: some see it as an entrance fee, and others as a donation to a charity they support.

A comparative organisation: the RSPB

The **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)** and the **National Trust** have many similarities:



- The National Trust has properties and the RSPB has reserves
- To keep revenue coming in as charities, their main priority is retaining members
- They have lots of employees and volunteers
- Both made the difficult decision to close their sites and then furlough most of the staff
- The main issue they face is keeping in touch with supporters and continuing to give them benefits
- Both had a monthly newsletter that went out to members and a local update that went out to people based on their proximity to their sites

Here's how the RSPB responded:

Initially, the **RSPB** paused all email activity to rethink their approach, except for their monthly flagship newsletter, which goes out to members, as well as supporters who've clicked in the last six months.

Early on, the **RSPB** sent out a message from the CEO to reach as many supporters as possible. The list of people they couldn't communicate with was huge, because of the six-month rule and those that had opted out of marketing communications.

So, they sent a service email, making sure it had no promotions of their aims or ideals, to over one million people – and they didn't receive any complaints. The negative engagement metrics were no different to the normal benchmark, which encouraged them to think it possible to reengage some of the people outside of their six-months rule cohort.

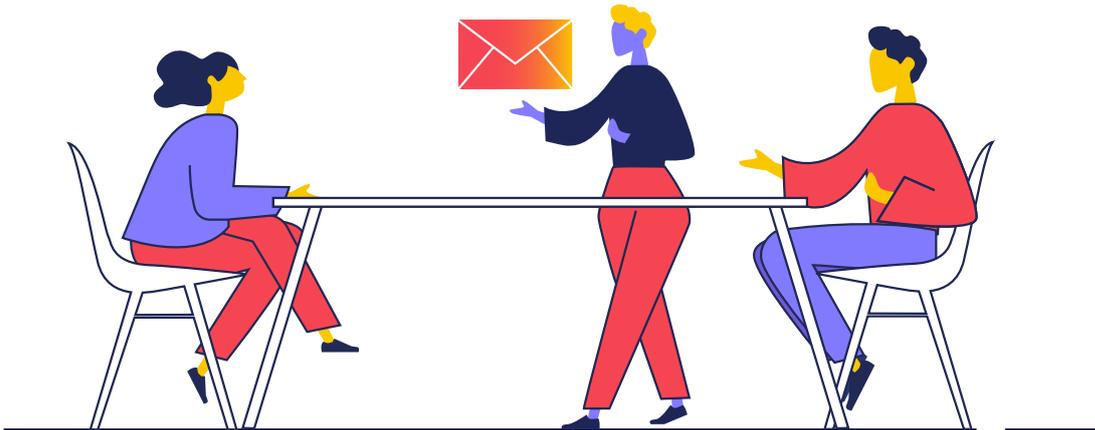
To help engage a previously disengaged audience, the **RSPB** scheduled a weekly update – branded as a sub brand of their flagship newsletter – and sent it to anyone who'd opened an email in the last two years.

Their monthly email has been kept as is, but to avoid saturating everyone's inbox, the weekly one isn't sent when it goes out. They've also been creating similar content to the **National Trust**, capturing places in nature.

Their negative engagement metric and spam complaints have remained exactly the same. The 'clicked-in-six-months' cohort has grown 20%, the unsubscribe rate has decreased by 0.01%, and memberships and web visits have increased.



Advice from others in the DMA Email Council



- **Nadworks** proposed that for each membership renewal, members can sponsor a key worker and get a free membership once everything opens. This idea isn't only for email, but email is one of the most powerful tools to communicate it.
- **Growth Track** mentioned that gated or member-exclusive content, especially focussed on education, is a good way to justify membership, and email could be used effectively to promote it.
- Part of the **National Trust's** brand is that they have to be for public benefit, even though they have a strong membership base, making it difficult to have exclusive member content.

ESBConnect suggested a strategy for long-term customer acquisition and short-term donations: some charities have been sharing free guides, such as a walking guide on plants, which can be downloaded if you sign up with an email.

This can then be promoted as lead generation through different channels and, at the point of capturing people's details, there could be the option of a suggested donation. This would allow immediate donations while building your CRM database.

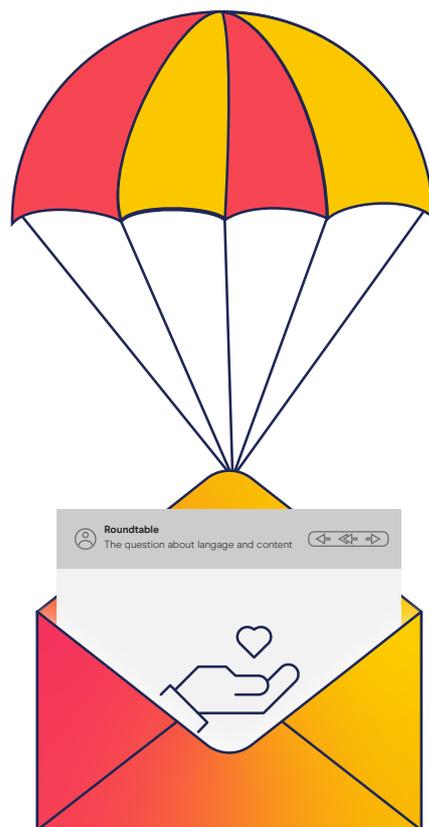
Sainsbury's Bank

The group moved on to discuss the challenges that Sainsbury's Bank were facing. Usually, the email activity of **Sainsbury's Bank** is split between acquisition and their current customer base.

For acquisition emails, they use data from the Nectar Loyalty scheme, aiming to encourage customers to take out a loan or get a credit card or insurance product that have layered-on incentives offering Nectar points.

Their current customer comms are a mix of cross sell and some content, but not nearly as much as before the crisis.

The Question Around Language and Content



Sainsbury's Bank have made a few changes, particularly using more emotive words for branding. Previously, life insurance was Hugs and travel insurance was Woohoo (because everyone's excited to go on holiday).

In the current situation, there's nervousness about how to speak to customers about products. The framing of communication is difficult, and there's a question of whether to be offer or content led.

ESBConnect, a company that works towards customer acquisition, focuses on offers. They shared findings from the last three to four months for brands in the insurance and loans space, revealing January is usually the month expected to see peaks of engagement, but the open rates and click-through rates have built from January up until April, with April currently having the highest engagement.

ESBConnect has also done testing around subject lines, such as the positive effect of puns, or using the coronavirus situation to make them more relevant and timelier.

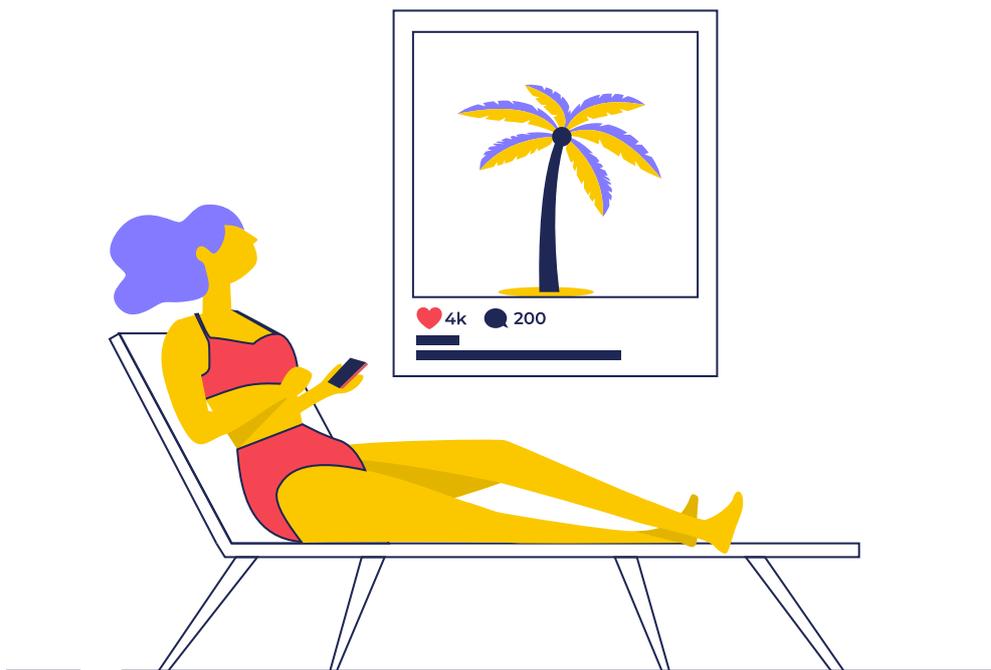
Nadworks pointed out that during the crisis, it's more important to consider what content and offers you've been sharing over the last 12 months still have value, and then rephrase them to show empathy to the current situation.

The behaviour of consumers is changing: the way they perceive brands and interact with them is more important than getting the cheapest deal. Consumers are very sensitive to feeling that brands are abusing the crisis to sell to someone who is desperate.



RSPB made the choice to stop all emails requesting donations. Then they slowly began reintroducing the topic more subtly within other communications. Additionally, where they would normally invite people to visit the reserves, instead they promoted content that could be done at home, such as bug hotels in the garden, thereby staying relevant and in touch with their consumers.

They promoted social sharing of activities before the crisis and plans after it, such as photos from your last holiday or places you want to visit once lockdown is lifted.



These kinds of more trivial matters are still relevant to **Sainsbury's Bank**, so they can stay front of mind for consumers.

Sainsbury's Bank shared that they've been working on an email along these lines, but some worry it may be insensitive, reminding people what they can't have during the crisis.

Vuture suggested that now is the time to experiment with content that you wouldn't otherwise create, because people are receptive to helpful content from all avenues possible. It's possible to put content out that goes beyond your product, while your brand is front of mind when the demand for the product returns.

Steve Henderson from **Emarsys** said, "you will never have content that's appropriate for everyone." He also asked if **Sainsbury's Bank** is looking at ways to micro segment, whether they have those capabilities, and if they have the capacity for testing. This would affect potential advice, since any hypothesis would need to be tested, reviewed, and refined as a continual process.

The Question Around Testing

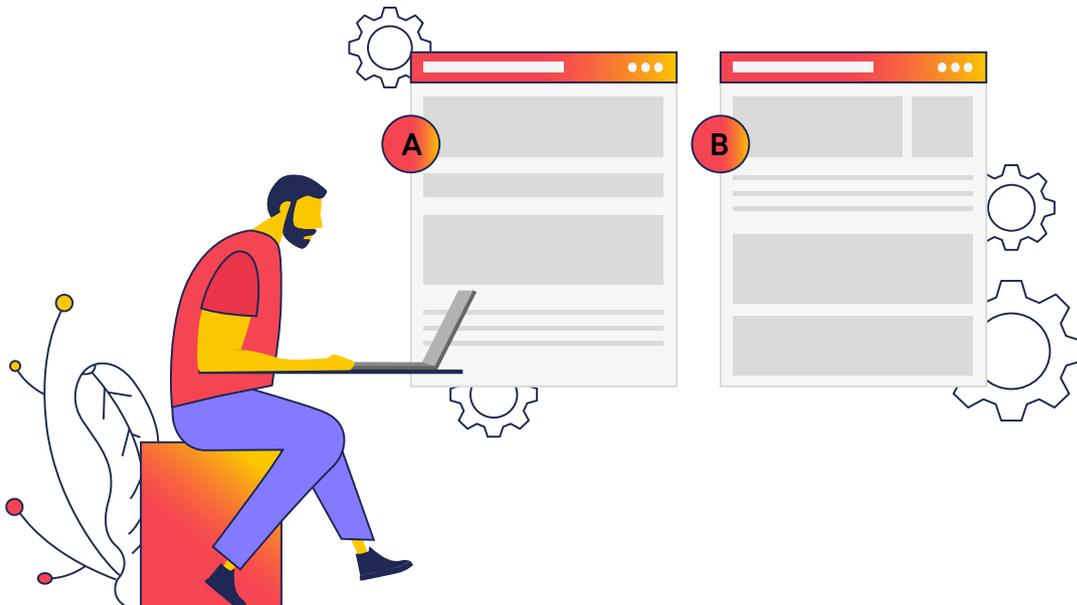
Sainsbury's Bank is struggling to test their data and existing segments, feeling the data they have wouldn't be efficient to use for segmentation, as it wouldn't accurately represent loyal customers.

Vuture uses behavioural data to look specifically at the people who've engaged in the last two months of the crisis, using it to segment. It's likely that those engaging with **Sainsbury Bank's** content may be interested in some of the products, whereas those not engaged during this period, may not necessarily be the right people to be contacting at the moment. Give subscribers an email holiday, where they can receive no emails for three months, rather than unsubscribe.

Emarsys said some feel that over-targeting and over-segmenting can upset people, as it might drive them down a behavioural path they don't want. Targeting is based on what the individual knows, rather than what they don't.

The major issue **Sainsbury's Bank** faces is the fear of saying the wrong thing to the wrong person. Since they're also struggling to test, a suggestion was to experiment with one multi-content email sent to everyone to understand people's interests, depending on which section of the email they click. Individuals are less likely to get upset by the entire email, if it includes only one topic they don't want to hear about.

Sainsbury's Bank agreed this could work well to communicate the company is still operating and sharing with consumers what they can offer.



Balancing DM vs Email

The group discussed insights around finding the balance between using email and direct mail. The assumptions they had were that email used to be for the younger demographic and DM for the older one, though this may have shifted, as older people have become more tech savvy and younger people aren't used to getting mail.

It was agreed that balancing DM and email depends on the content and audience. It's important to consider that, during this time, people are at home and more likely to see post. Though DM is more expensive and needs to be checked against relevance lists, it's advantageous in that it can reach more people, doing similar things without the same permissions or data sets.

The most important metric to determine whether to use email or DM is what the follow-on action is. If you're trying to send someone to a sign-up or more information, it's more fluid for them to click through from the original message in an email.

Testing to better understand how audiences interact with DM is most effective and important to justify its expense.



The DMA's Email Council is the home of email intelligence for the UK, leading the UK's marketing industry in innovative and cutting-edge email practices, breaking the mould and challenging the status quo. Learn more, [here](#).

/ About the Customer Engagement Campaign

We put the customer at the heart of everything we do – especially when it comes to our [Customer Engagement](#) campaign.

This campaign uses research and insight to help you maximise your engagement for the benefit of marketers and consumers alike.

If you build a rapport with your customers, and you have something they want, then they will buy from you again and again.

We want to know what builds this rapport. We know creativity, data and technology are factors, but we don't know how the interplay works.

This campaign aims to discover what makes brilliant engagement.

Check out our popular Marketer Email Tracker and Consumer Email Tracker, and explore our engaging infographics which are breaking down key ideas.

We also run events to encourage better Customer Engagement. Keep an eye on your emails, or visit our [events page](#) to book your spot.

Tap into DMA research, insights, thought leadership, and networking events on offer by visiting the DMA online and discover how you can get involved with and get the most out of our [Customer Engagement](#) campaign.

Better engagement means better business.

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The Data & Marketing Association (DMA) comprises the DMA, Institute of Data & Marketing (IDM), and DMA Talent.

We seek to guide and inspire industry leaders; to advance careers; and to nurture the next generation of aspiring marketers.

We champion the way things should be done, through a rich fusion of technology, diverse talent, creativity, and insight – underpinned by our customer-focused principles.

We set the standards marketers must meet in order to thrive, representing over 1,000 members drawn from the UK's data and marketing landscape.

By working responsibly, sustainably, and creatively, together we will drive the data and marketing industry forward to meet the needs of people today and tomorrow.

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