



Ready, Set, Send: Marketing Automation & the Customer Lifecycle

PART II: SHOPPING CART-IO

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After reading “*Part I: The Pre-Purchase Workout*,” you should be warmed up and ready to kick things up a notch with “*Part II: Shopping Cart-io*.” Any good cardio workout consists of increasing and maintaining a heart rate that, over time, helps people to meet their fitness goals. With “*Shopping Cart-io*,” we want to help shoppers stay focused and maintain their shopping momentum when they start to lose steam and abandon the shopping cart.

By this stage of the workout, the consumer has already been motivated to start shopping. Whether sparked from an email, display ad, search or by directly visiting your site, the consumer has shown enough motivation to get off the sofa and start moving along the path to purchase. Well, they could still be on the couch and using their tablet, but you get the idea. After visiting a product page, the consumer has turned into a full-blown shopper. They have selected the size, color and style that they want to buy and have added it to the cart. The level of commitment has increased. The consumer must decide whether they are going to push through the burn or step off the shopping treadmill and call it a day.

This crossroad is where you must step in as the personal trainer and use your marketing skills to find out how far the shopper wants to go. Perhaps a little motivation is all they need to complete their order. Each triggered message campaign in this white paper series is divided into three sections (*Ready, Set and Send*) to help you get warmed up, feel the burn and then cool down. Like any good trainer, we don’t want to push our shopper too far but we do want them to understand the benefits of pushing through the rest of the workout and submitting their order. Let’s get ready to sweat!



Shopping Cart Abandonment Reminder Emails

While cart abandonment occurs really far down the purchase path, it's important to remember the shopper may be experiencing a wide range of heightened emotions. *Indecision, sticker shock, frustration, excitement.* This high-impact moment when the shopper is really feeling the burn can lead to shopping cart abandonment and must be factored into your abandonment reminder email coaching.

This view alone, however, can be too myopic. Many consumers will cart items to view on a different device, in a store or just at a later time. This abandonment behavior does not mean that the purchase decision has started to wane. The consumer may simply want to temporarily pause the shopping experience and knows that their cart will be there when they are ready to continue. They may even anticipate that you will send them a reminder email and possibly even a discount offer to complete the order.

Ready

As the personal trainer coaching your shopper's workout, you need to be able to see the signs of shopping fatigue that lead to abandonment on your site. This will help you tailor the workout to your shopper's needs. Analyze bounce rates for the various pages of your checkout process to determine if there are specific pages that lead to high abandonment rates. Perhaps you are not showing a running order total throughout the process or shipping costs are not revealed until the final page in the checkout process. Decreasing abandonment should be a primary objective. You want your customer to enjoy the shopping process and not become a sweaty, exhausted mess. Showing order savings, order totals, shipping costs and easily accessible customer service options can help decrease abandonment for many customers.

Analyzing existing cart usage behavior will give you insight into how your customers are revisiting their carts. For some customers, the cart may be seen more as part of the shopping experience rather than part of the checkout process. Determine how many times a cart is viewed before an order is completed or totally abandoned. Some shoppers may just need to take a break and catch their breath. If possible, determine which devices your shoppers use to view the cart. Are items carted on a smartphone, revisited on a tablet and then purchased on a traditional PC? Perhaps your shoppers start browsing on a PC and purchase on a tablet. Understanding this behavior will not only help you to optimize your mobile shopping cart but will also help you determine how to time your abandoned cart reminder emails.



During this analysis process, take the time to add an additional layer to the data. If your customers are split between males and females, see if the cart is being used in different ways. If you are struggling to find ways to speak to both repeat customers and potential first-time buyers, see if they behave differently during the carting process. Perhaps prospects leave the cart more frequently when the order total is revealed and loyal customers exhibit device-hopping behavior, which could signal they are comparing prices in a store or on your competitor's web site.

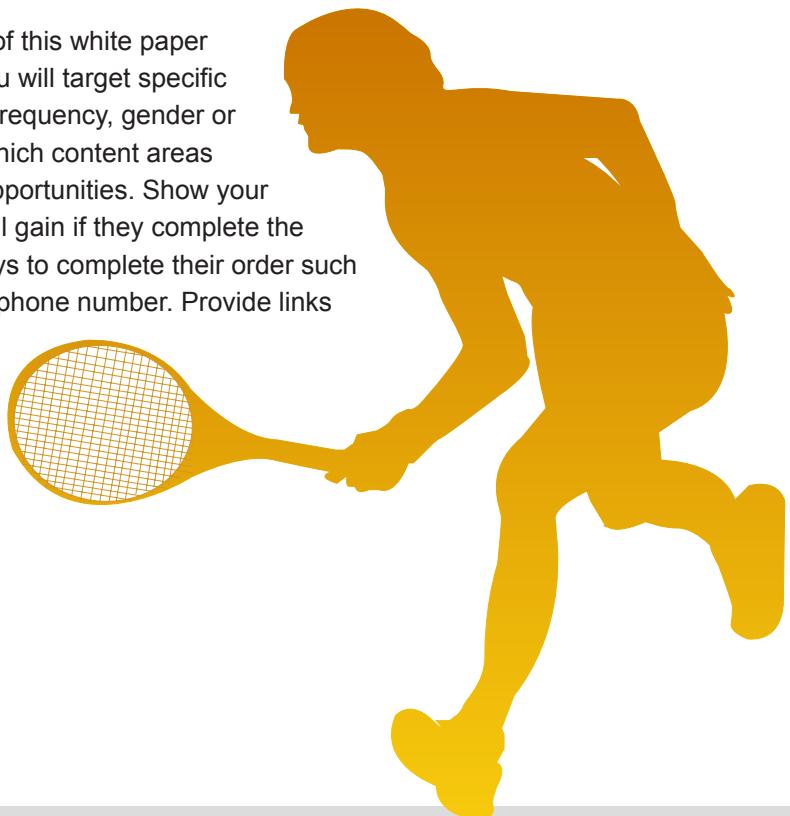
If you already send an abandoned cart reminder email, review engagement data to determine what's working and what could be improved. Start with conversion rates to see who is actually buying after receiving the reminder email. Do these purchasers share any common traits? This analysis will show you the kind of customer who is most likely to respond and help you to coach shoppers into similar behaviors before abandonment even occurs. Perhaps these purchasers are part of your loyalty program, have completed their profile or have engaged with your customer service's live chat feature. These additional touch points could be the key to getting your customers to feel the extra burn on their own without needing the nudge of your abandoned cart reminders.

Next, examine the click areas within the email. Are there certain areas that consistently receive clicks or go ignored? Ask yourself if the email is too mechanical or promotional. Contrarily, a heavily customer service themed email may not be enough to get your shoppers back to your site. Certain segments of abandoners may have different needs. Frequent shoppers may just want the facts. Order totals, shipping durations and pictures of the carted items could go a long way. Those who do not frequently buy online may see the inclusion of this content as intrusive. A simple incentive and a customer service themed email could resonate the most with this less tech-savvy population.

Set

Now that you know more about the stress points of your shoppers, you can customize an abandoned cart reminder routine to enhance the shopping experience. Start with the pivotal moment of the first reminder email. This is the key stage that can either keep the momentum going or cause your shopper to just give up.

Leverage the data discussed in the *Ready* portion of this white paper as the foundation for the first email. Decide how you will target specific abandoners based on variables such as shopping frequency, gender or past-purchase data. This will help you determine which content areas of the email should be the primary focus for click opportunities. Show your loyalty program members how many points they will gain if they complete the order. Give potential first-time buyers alternate ways to complete their order such as buying in store or calling your customer service phone number. Provide links based on demographic or profile information, such as gender-specific product categories in the email's navigation.



This first breath of motivation should be enthusiastic enough to keep the recipient interested but also put a fork in the road that will help you customize additional emails in your abandoned cart reminder email series. For non-openers of the first email, shift the tone of the subject line to encourage the open. This could mean going from fun and playful to more direct and promotional. For example, perhaps you change a “friendly reminder” subject line to a more urgent cart expiration notice. If you have a significant population of shoppers who use the cart to transition their shopping between devices or store locations, dedicate real estate in the email that is more focused on the shopping process rather than submitting an order. Feature products that relate to the product category of the carted items, other products from the brand or even items that are the same color. A reminder email that pushes the purchase could be seen as too aggressive for these customers who merely want to shop.

A similar approach can be taken for openers who did not click and clickers who did not purchase. Focus on the point where the shopper gives up after receiving the reminder email and use that engagement information to customize the next message in the series.

If you have shoppers who engage with the first two reminder emails but have yet to purchase, it could be worth adding a third email to the series giving the shopper one more chance to complete the order. This is the equivalent of counting down the final reps left in the workout. You want to give the shopper some motivation, but you know that things are about to end.

When expanding your abandoned cart reminder email campaigns, you should closely monitor abuse complaints, unsubscription rates and any customer feedback. While extremely effective at generating revenue, cart abandonment messages should not be the cause of a negative impact on your primary promotional email messages or long-term subscriber engagement. One key to not saturating your shoppers with this triggered email is to limit how many times a shopper qualifies to receive the message. Since many shoppers will utilize the cart to simply store items to view later, receiving these emails each time items are left in the cart could result in a flurry of reminder messages. Based on the frequency of abandonment and historical engagement with the series, set constraints so that abandoners will receive reminders, for example, only once within a 30-day period. This duration will vary significantly based on your shoppers’ buying habits but should be considered before you launch the initiative.

If this branching of reminder emails and frequency of sends seems too complex, draw out a storyboard for the series where each scenario is considered. The flow of emails based on abandonment causes and your shoppers’ engagement with your messages will likely seem less complex once you are able to map out the possible paths an abandoner can follow.

One other wildcard to consider for your abandoned cart series is seasonality. Whether it’s the holidays or another busy time of the year when you see a spike in first-time buyers or givers, you should adjust your cart reminder series to speak more directly to these kinds of shoppers. Many of these shoppers may be new to your brand, so the reminder messages should shift to speak to the value proposition of buying from your brand. Keeping the same abandoned cart strategy during these peak seasons could result in a disconnect with the uninformed shopper and a loss in sales.



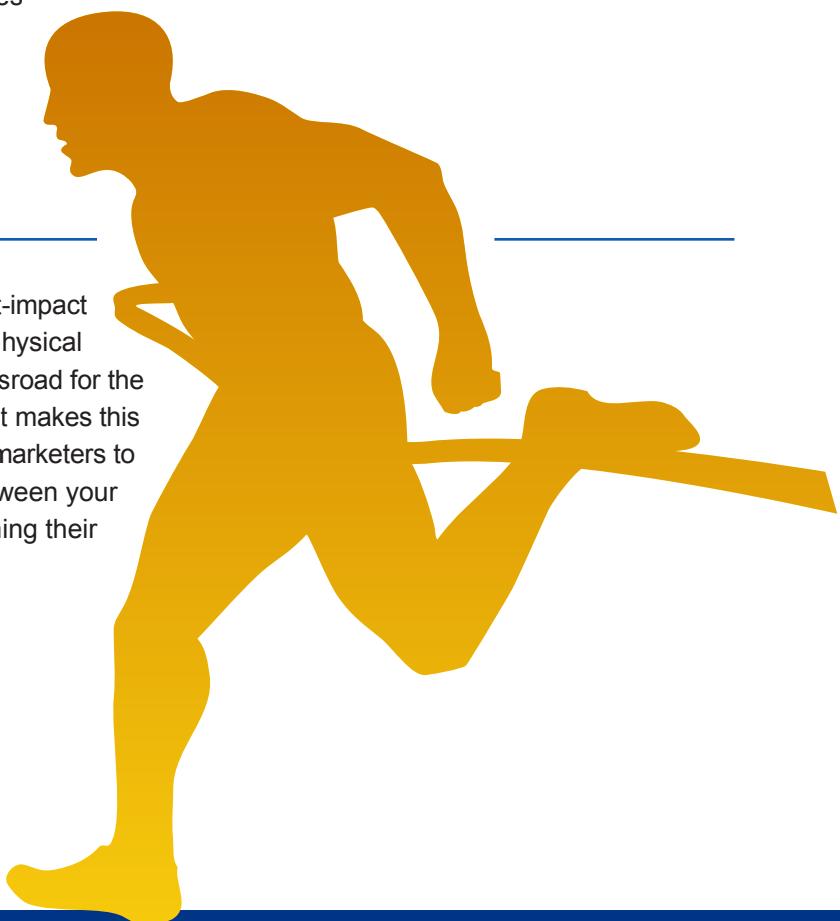


Similar to other email messages, there is no silver bullet approach to timing the sending of the cart reminder emails, though many retailers have found that results are better if sent shortly after abandonment. The trouble is “shortly after” means different things to different brands. Try testing ranges from 45 minutes to 12 hours to see if there is a sweet spot with your abandoners. Your overly loyal shoppers may respond better to a very short space between the abandonment and the email, while shoppers simply pausing the shopping experience may want more time.

Don’t get too comfortable once you test your way through timing options. Factors such as seasonality, product launches or the holidays could cause these sweet spots to shift. Revisit your triggering times throughout the year to determine if you need to make modifications.

Many retailers will simply ignore their abandoned cart emails once they have launched. This can lead to outdated content that disconnects the abandoners from the shopping experience. I have seen beachy abandoned cart emails sent in early December and scarves and gloves promoted in mid-summer. You should frequently visit your site as if you were a shopper and abandon your cart. Analyze the carting process, email content and timing to determine if there are areas that could be further optimized.

The abandoned cart email trigger is one of the highest-impact messages in your workout and needs to be in peak physical condition. Remember that cart abandonment is a crossroad for the consumer. The wide range of causes for abandonment makes this key stage of the purchase path a challenge for many marketers to navigate. Getting it right can make the difference between your shopper returning to complete their order or abandoning their order for good.



About Bronto

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