

Marketing in Mayhem:

10 Strategies for
Enterprise Email Leaders



Didn't we just do this?

If you're wondering about how to market during economic disruption, you are not alone.

After navigating through COVID upheavals, we thought we had achieved breathing room to apply what we learned and improve our marketing programs. But now we find ourselves in a full tariff economy, with recession fears looming, and it feels like it's March 2020 all over again.

Before we panic, let's remember one thing: Throughout email's long history, we have faced similar challenges and won.

Email survived the economic contractions of 2024, the recession and housing market crash of 2008, and even the chilling effect of 9/11, which marked the first great reckoning for email and the wider digital marketing world. Each time, email emerged stronger and smarter.

Companies that put email at the center of their communications plan in good times and bad can pivot quickly to respond to changing market conditions. Through email and its direct connection to end users, they can pick up sentiment signals and adapt messaging plans swiftly to respond.

Coming back to today, we face more uncertainty as tariffs are introduced, rescinded, reduced, increased, or paused. If there's anything the general markets hate, it's uncertainty.

What we need now is a plan! That's exactly what you are reading now.

What you'll find in this guide

This Top 10 list of strategic actions will show you how to use email to manage through current events and map out a plan for the next time uncertainty strikes.

This guide has a long-term value, too. Use it to check yourself regularly, to be sure you have optimized and diversified your investment in your email resources to handle any economic changes that affect your customers and your market.

If you get stuck, we're always here to lend a hand. Our team here at RPE Origin has seen it all, done it all, and we're still standing. You will be, too!

Step 1. Audit your email program with 5 key questions

This is the first step RPE Origin takes with all of its clients – large and small, Fortune 50 to Fortune 1000. We check the foundations of email marketing acquisition, promotion, attrition, and automation.

For this guide, we boiled the process down to five questions that assess the state of your email program:

1.

Are you asking customers and users for their primary email addresses?

The primary address is a unique identifier. It links to customer information in your CRM and beyond. Your customers check these inboxes the most. So, they're more likely to see, open, and act on emails that show up there.

Does your acquisition program ask for the primary email address? Check the wording of your email invitation. Be sure your invitation is clear about what value they'll get in exchange for that precious bit of data.

2.

How well do your transactional emails make money for your email program?

We'll talk more about automations later in this guide. But for now, look at whether your transactional emails help customers buy more or simply confirm an action.

Print out a representative selection of your transactional emails. Are they clear, concise, on-brand, and easy to read? Do you include an opt-in invitation, cross-sell or upsell options, mention your loyalty program, or offer other ways to deepen the connection?

3.

How do you promote your email successes throughout your company?

People beyond the email team won't know or care how well email does unless you make them see your success. Now is not the time to be humble. Share your good news with your team leaders and executives in terms they value: sales, conversions, acquisitions, cost reductions, retention, and revenue.

Step 1. Audit your email program with **5 key questions** (continued)

4.

How long does it take you to get an email campaign out the door?

Write down the steps you take before you can hit "Send." What holds it up or speeds it along? Look for these time-wasters:

- Strategic indecision
- Unclear or incomplete creative briefs
- Creative assets delivered late
- Tardy approvals

If you uncover any of these conditions, find ways to fix them. Don't sacrifice speed for strategy or accuracy, but the sooner you can send a campaign, the sooner it will achieve its goal, especially if you have to move fast to announce a price increase, policy change, sales disruption, and the like.

5.

What do you need to accomplish first?

By now, you should have a good-sized to-do list. Narrow your list to two or three quick-change items that would have the greatest impact and potentially pave the way for more changes when conditions settle down.

Put all your skills as a marketer to work on this one. What is your goal? What is your strategy for accomplishing this goal, and which tactics will help you put your strategy into action?

Step 2. Assess your email automations.

Email journeys, automations, triggers, even transactional emails, can be free money sources for every email marketer. They run reliably in the background, making money for you while you tend to other business. But supply-chain problems could once again make products scarce or drive up prices. That puts your out-of-stock, abandoned-cart, and back-in-stock emails on the front lines now.

Out of stock:



Does your out-of-stock email reflect this uncertainty in language that aligns with your company's communications plan about how it will talk about tariffs and their impact?

Abandoned cart:



FOMO (fear of missing out) is more compelling than usual now, because the message might have to be "If you don't buy it now, it might not be here when you want it, or the price might go up."

Back in stock:



This might be your most sensitive message of the three. Is your data qualified enough to allow accurate, real-time messaging? Your customer will be angry if they receive a back-in-stock email on a product they want, only to click through to your site and find you're out of stock again. That erodes trust and brand equity.

Consider your welcome email, too. Do you need to address economic conditions and possible changes in your message? The language you use here will come from your C-level or comms team.

Remember:

Automations make money. Be sure you don't lose revenue because you did not update your automations and messaging while you're in the middle of a challenging situation.

Step 3. Adapt your messaging to capitalize on email strengths.

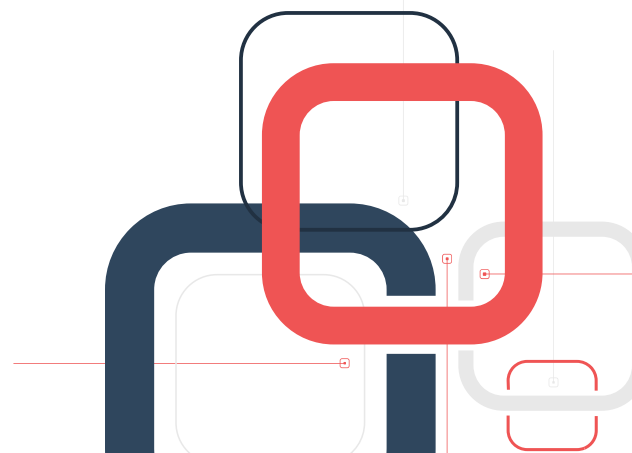


Email isn't direct mail, social media, or print ads. It's your company's closest link to your market, a channel you personalize right down to the individual recipient. Use the advantages this intimate connection offers instead of taking the easiest way out.

Marketers made that mistake early in COVID when they sent letters from the CEO that focused more on what the company wanted to say than on what customers needed to hear. Email teams also took ill-fated shortcuts, like sending all-image emails instead of the usual careful balance of text and images, to keep up with fast-changing conditions.

Call on email's strengths instead. Don't send the same message to every file in your database (recipe for deliverability disaster!). Use your data and segmentation plans to craft messages that will resonate with different groups, from your highest-value customers to the ones who are on the verge of churning.

If you smooth out the bumps in your email workflow (see Page 3), you'll buy yourself time to think about factors that influence your messaging, like segmentation, end users, files, speed to market, and deliverability risk. Maybe you need one message. Maybe you need a continuing series. That's what email can do for you.



Step 4. Take your email team out for drinks (or other team-builders)

We're going to stop for just a minute for a reminder that we need to give ourselves and our team members a break.

Even in the best of times, email can be a high-pressure job. We have to do a lot, not always with enough resources to do it right, and we seldom get credit for all the good things we do.

When the going gets tough, every day becomes crunch time. You can't sustain that pace without a breather. We're firm believers in this mantra: The team that socializes together achieves together. If your team is under one roof together, take them out for lunch, happy hour, or some other low-stress event that lets everyone blow off steam.

For remote teams, set up a virtual happy hour and send out treats ahead of time to enjoy together. Even closing up shop early can boost morale, especially for harried workers who have extra home or family obligations.



Email success takes more than strategic and tactical execution. It also depends on the people helping you get there. Make sure they feel rewarded. You don't have to break the bank. Just switching up the routine can help. Be the one who drives them to a drink, not the one driving them to drink!

Step 5. Keep on testing

Don't abandon testing just because you have more pressing jobs to do. Back in the COVID days, we tested everything because nobody knew how to communicate in the chaos of those early days. It was just like the earliest days of the internet. In challenging times, testing can show you which message styles, which creative content like text and images, will resonate.

Your testing plan must be comprehensive and have clear goals. That will help you build and run tests that will deliver valid results you can use to improve your messaging.

Maybe you need to test pricing placement in the email – higher up versus farther down. Other key areas are subject lines, call-to-action copy, message tone, and frequency.

Embrace testing even in challenging times. Everything you learn will help you make your next messages more successful.

Step 6. Stay current with national news.

It can be tough these days. But you need to know what your customers are hearing and how changing conditions could affect your business. Beyond just what's happening today with tariffs or supply chain or recessions or inflation, what else is going on in the world that could stress out your consumer?

Just 30 minutes a day can be enough, whether you watch commercial or business TV news, read newspapers or trade publications, or listen to the radio.

Also, key in on news sites that consolidate and analyze the news to help you find insights and put news in context, like the [Zeta Economic Index](#). It blends consumer sentiment with activity to show you what people are thinking and doing, all in one easy-to-grasp graphic. It also charts trends and predicts what could happen next based on its signal data. For us at RPE Origin, it's an invaluable tool.



Step 7. Talk with Customer Service

Customer Service is probably the only department that gets as close to your customers as the email team does. When was the last time you talked with your CS team? It can be an excellent partner – CS keeps you on top of customer sentiment and activity, and you can use email to help solve problems for CS.

Talking with Customer Service puts you in touch with customers directly. Email is a great outbound channel that reaches personal inboxes. Customer Service does the opposite. It's a one-on-one gig where the customer talks to the company.

Ask your CS contact what customers are doing and saying. Request recent reports that show customers' common problems or frustrations with your company or its products and services. Find out how CS resolves those issues.

At many bigger companies, CS circulates those reports to different departments. Get your name on the distribution list, and study those reports to learn what's going on. Find ways to incorporate what you learned into your email program. You might need to change subject lines, add more explanatory copy, adjust your templates, or change your copy style.



Step 8. Review your segmentation strategy

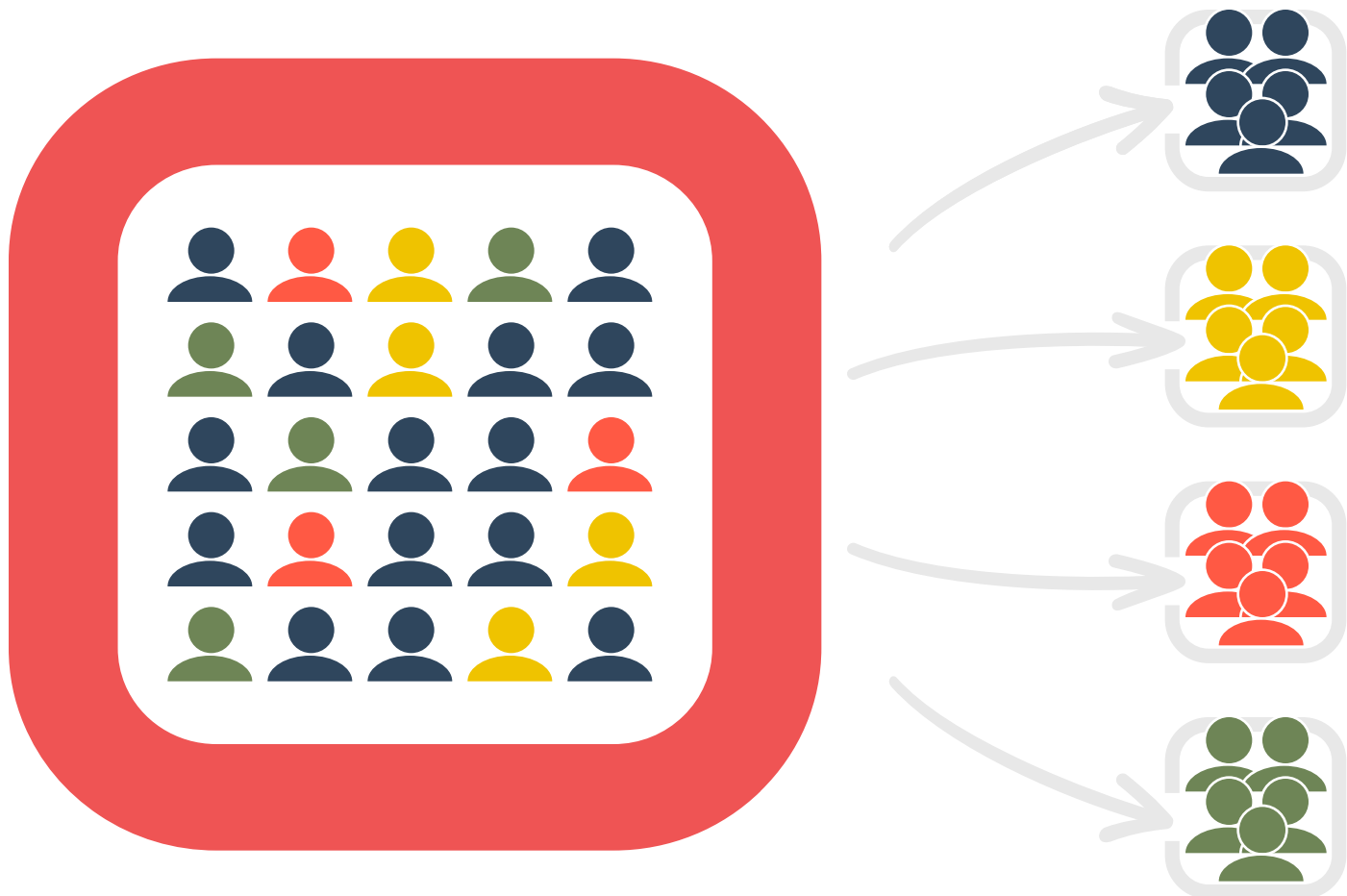
Resist the temptation to revert to a holiday mindset where you throw everything you have at all of your customers to persuade them to buy now before you run out of product or raise prices. That's a race to the bottom.

Instead, run a cohort analysis to identify macro and micro shifts among segments and highlight ways to adjust your segmentation strategy. Identify customers who could handle higher frequency and those on the cusp of churning or have simply stopped responding.

Also, rethink reactivation and loyalty. Customers will keep their wallets closed more often as prices go up, especially on luxury or nonessential items. Consider creating a reactivation strategy for high-value customers who change their shopping or engagement patterns abruptly. That's a near-term solution you can adapt for other segments as time passes.

Your loyalty program is probably based on purchases. What else could you do to reward loyal customers and prompt them to shop more? Shipping rewards, tier upgrades, and the like could bring customers back to shop your available inventory and get over the price-increase barrier.

If you don't have a segmentation plan or the foggiest idea about how to start one, let us know. We'll help you start the process.





Step 9. Adapt. Don't change

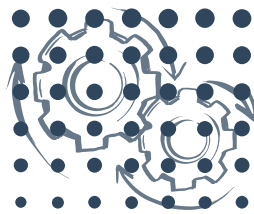
During COVID, we threw away our 2020 marketing plans and improvised new ones that accommodated conditions that changed from day to day and sometimes from hour to hour.

Today, we know we don't have to scrap the plan. Rather, we'll adapt it for current conditions depending on how severely they will affect the company:

Tariffs, potential trade wars, and changing customer sources make up a big wrinkle in our planning. Yes, it's a bad wrinkle. But it's a wrinkle, not the Grand Canyon.

Those of us who made it through the COVID marketing era emerged tougher and more flexible. We can embrace reality and find ways to make it work with the plans we've already drawn up.

Some companies have been saying on their earnings calls that they can't predict revenue right now. They're pulling back on guidance. They aren't starting over – they're going to see what happens. But in the meantime, they're going to stick with the plan.



In your company, you might need to book time with your boss or your C-level contact and ask some tough questions. Do you need to change your goals? Is the company adjusting its goals or guidance? This will trickle down to email marketing, which historically has the highest return on investment of all marketing channels.

If the company predicts lower revenue, you need straight talk on how that will affect the email outlook. Will you face a budget cut? That will force a change in your plan, too.

In the meantime, keep on keeping on.

Step 10. Authenticity and humanity still matter

Now is not the time to go hard on selling. We need to regain the authentic human perspective that puts customers first. What are they going through? How can we serve them best through our email program?

That's what customers expect these days. They want you to be honest. They will sniff out double-talk and insincerity. You want them to think, "They get me!"

What can we do to help our customers, to educate or reassure them? To make it easy and pleasurable to do business with us when their anxiety levels might be skyrocketing? When you put your customers first, it informs everything you do.



Wrapping up

We'll end on this key step to take as you make your way through the next few months.

Be creative. Yet another era is challenging us as marketers to think outside the box. You probably didn't learn that in your college marketing classes. This skill comes from finding ways to succeed no matter what life throws at you. Every time you overcome an obstacle, you learn something that makes you a better marketer.

We hope this guide helps you find the right place to start, to ask questions you didn't know to ask, to look at your email program and find ways to adapt, pivot, and achieve. If you need more help, we are just a [call or click](#) away.

One final comment: Keep your head up. Watch the news. Buy your team a round of drinks or a basket of wings. Let your boss know whenever you score a big win.

Stick together, and you won't let the zombies win.

About RPE Origin

We are the industry's only vendor-agnostic, email-centric agency serving enterprise companies throughout their digital journey. We aim to be an indispensable partner for enterprise and agency clients who rely on email for success. Whether you need help choosing a new ESP, enhancing automated B2C or B2B customer journeys, or connecting data points across your tech stack, we help you move from simple to sophisticated to drive more revenue through email marketing.

Our team lives email every day, and that includes both email marketing and maximizing the connective tissue across all digital channels. With our customized approach and flexible services, we can do everything from one piece of the puzzle to the entire picture.

Need help with your enterprise email strategy and systems?

Contact our team to get the conversation started.

