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MINUTE MARKETER

How to Use Automated Emails for Increased Conversion Rates

12 tactics for using triggered
emails efficiently

30-Minute Marketer: How to Use Automated Emails for Increased Conversion Rates

12 tactics for using triggered emails efficiently

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *30-Minute Marketer*—a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we focus on how you can use automated/triggered emails to increase conversion rates and keep recipients engaged.

It's easy to assume automated emails don't require a lot of work on your part because, well, they're automated. In reality, automated emails can require some time and effort because it's important to plan these messages carefully so as to best connect with your recipients (and, just as importantly, to keep them from sending your emails to their spam folder).

In this report, we'll show you:

- Why the initial email is so important
- How to guide prospects through a multi-step process
- Ways to use urgency and exclusivity to prompt reader action
- Tips for avoiding email overload

We know you're in a hurry, so we won't make you wait any longer. Enjoy these automated email tips.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *30-Minute Marketer*

About *30-Minute Marketer*

MarketingSherpa's *30-Minute Marketer* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We know you have a lot to do and not a lot of time in which to do it. You need quick, simple tips that you can put into action right away.

For each *30-Minute Marketer*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and benchmark reports, to MarketingExperiments optimization tests, and edit the research down into an actionable piece to help you improve your marketing performance right now...or at least by the time you're done with lunch.

Automated emails can be an effective tool to help move prospects through the conversion process. In theMarketingSherpa blog post, [“Email Marketing: How to sprinkle subscribers with a well-timed welcome in 5 steps,”](#) W. Jeffrey Rice points out that automated campaigns achieve higher open rates than traditional email messages, as a result of their timing and relevancy.

Rice says, “In the [MarketingSherpa2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report](#), we discovered 43% of marketers found emails sent based on triggers to be very effective, leading all other tactics including segmentation based on subscriber behavior and use of loyalty programs.”The research also found 80% of organizations sent automated emails, with automated messages making up an average 22% of the overall email volume.

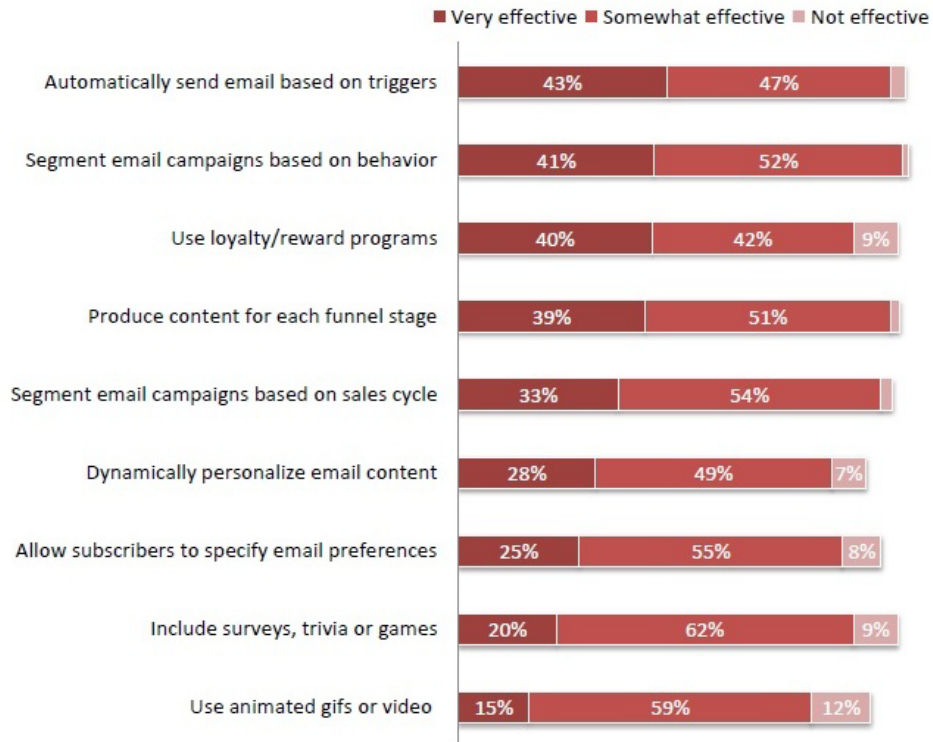
One big advantage of automated emails is that they can save you considerable time and effort, in that you don’t need to constantly brainstorm new ways of saying the same thing. In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Lead Nurturing: 3-part funnel campaign creates 70% increase in inbound calls to sales reps,”](#) the team at PostcardMania shows how they saved at least six man-hours every week by implementing a series of triggered emails.

CHART: EFFECTIVENESS OF TRIGGERED EMAILS

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RELEVANCY IMPROVEMENT TACTICS

Chart: Triggered emails top the list of most effective relevancy improvement tactics

Q. Please indicate the level of EFFECTIVENESS for each of the email engagement and relevancy tactics your organization employs.



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded July 2011, N=2,735

Tactic #1: Pay attention to the initial email

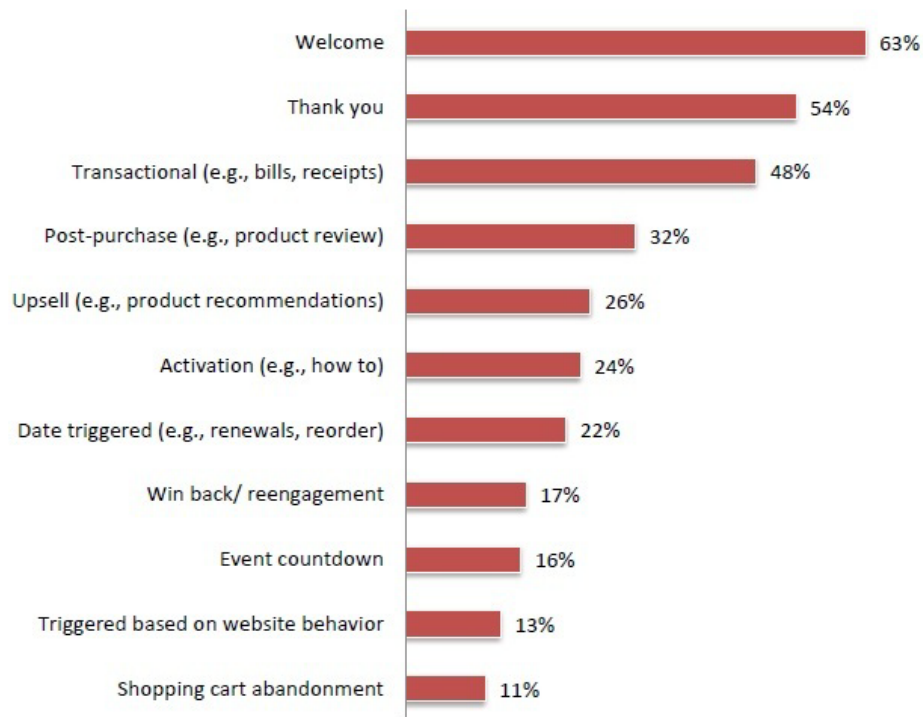
Welcome emails are among the most common automated messages. The [MarketingSherpa 2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report](#), research showed that six out of 10 marketers reported sending automated welcome campaigns.

CHART: MOST COMMON TYPE OF TRIGGERED EMAILS

MarketingSherpa 2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report

Chart: Manners matter most with automated email messages

Q. What type of automated, event-triggered, lifecycle email messages does your organization deploy?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded July 2011, N=2,735

Research from the [MarketingSherpa2012 Email Marketing Benchmark Report](#) showed that the most common type of automated email is the welcome message, with thank you messages coming in second.

Pay careful attention to this initial message. This is your chance to make a good first impression (or, on the other hand, possibly scare away the recipient). You want to establish a good connection while coaxing the recipient to take a desired action.

These initial emails have a secondary purpose, though. They help the recipient know what to expect. An effective welcome message reassures the reader in the requested content, and assists in recognizing future messages that will arrive in the subscriber's inbox.

Tactic #2: Establish goals for each email

Think about your most important goal(s) for the email. This will help you determine the best content to feature in your messages to help achieve those goals. For example, in the MarketingSherpa article, "[Remarketing Emails: How JetBlue's automated triggers get 1,640% more revenue-per-email than promotional emails](#)," the JetBlue Airways team wanted to target website visitors who started—but failed to complete—the flight booking process.

Danielle Compitello, Email Marketing Manager at JetBlue, decided it was important for visitors to know about the company's loyalty program. So, she designed a series of triggered emails that encouraged recipients to return to the site and finish booking, but also prominently promoted (and encouraged visitors to join) the company's loyalty program.

Tactic #3: Follow good email etiquette

This should be obvious, but it's essential that you observe the usual cardinal rules when creating and sending your automated emails. If your recipient doesn't want your initial email, you don't want to bombard them with several more. Opt-out and unsubscribe directions should be easy to spot. Make sure to immediately remove these contacts from your list, before they receive the next email in the series.

Tactic #4: Let user behavior serve as triggers

You can also let user behavior guide triggered emails. In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Email Marketing: How Microsoft used triggered email to increase open rates 800%](#)," Microsoft built a process into its email campaign that included a behavioral aspect: if the customer opened a specific email and visited the related landing page, they would receive additional email. If not, they did not receive another email until the next cycle at the start of the following month.

Tactic #5: Customize email design based on recipient groups

The JetBlue team identified two attributes of their email recipients: intended destination and loyalty membership status. If the visitor's destination was known, the email included custom details about that destination. Otherwise, general messaging was used.

The bottom half of the email focused on the loyalty program. If the recipient was already a member, the text included a bullet list of benefits and a link to learn more. Non-members saw the list of benefits, a link to join and a reminder that they could earn points on their next flight.

Compared to JetBlue's standard promotional emails, the triggered emails generate, on average, 150% higher open rates and 170% higher clickthrough rates.

Tactic #6: Guide prospects through pre-purchase steps to help them along

If your prospects must complete certain steps to make a purchase or use your product/service, a carefully planned series of emails can help walk them through the process so you are less likely to lose them along the way before they convert to paying customers.

The MarketingSherpa article, "[Email Marketing: Triggered emails that target the conversion funnel boost revenue](#)," featured GamersFirst, an online game company that sells digital items and premiums for its games. A key challenge for the company is that new users cannot consider a purchase before playing a game, and there are several steps they must take before playing. This includes registering, confirming the registration, logging into the account and trying a game—and then, ultimately, making a purchase.

Frank Cartwright, SVP, Product and Platform Development, GamersFirst, says his team created a system of triggered emails to encourage new users to start playing games and continue on the path to conversion. This helped reduce the site's "dropout" rate, and increased prospects' interest in the virtual items by providing a "sneak peek" at how they would be used.

Tip: Consider the personality of your target audience. The GamersFirst team realized the online gaming community is sensitive to blatant, heavy-handed marketing tactics. With that in mind, the team avoided common customization tactics (such as a personalized greeting) when designing their automated emails.

Tactic #7: Test each email in the series, and tweak accordingly

Cartwright's team followed a "test, analyze, repeat" strategy to develop their series of emails. They started by creating an email encouraging newly registered users to validate their accounts. Through testing, they discovered the best timing for this email was 24 hours after the initial registration.

After testing a variety of layouts and styles, they found a simple, text-based email received better response than image-based emails.

The next email in the series was directed toward users who had downloaded a game (or attempted to) but had not logged into their account. This reminder email contained two call-to-action buttons: one that directed users to download a game and log in, and one that led to a player's guide that would help them troubleshoot problems and get more information about the game.

In this case, a graphical email featuring images from the specific game the user was interested in fared better than a text-based message. Testing also revealed the best timing for this message was three days after the user had validated the account.

EXAMPLE: GAMERSFIRST LOGIN REMINDER EMAIL

Subject line: You're Missing All The Fun! Log In and Play Today

You are receiving this message because you are a valued member of War Rock. To unsubscribe, follow [here](#).



War Rock promotion emails provide information to our players about game offers, promotions, special events, and contests as well as information about new items and features. To ensure delivery, please add postmaster@warrock.gamersfirst.com to your address book. View our [Privacy Policy](#) or [Unsubscribe](#).

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Once users logged in and played a game, the final step was for them to purchase an item or upgrade for the game. The team crafted another email to encourage users to make a purchase. (The email offered a special bonus deal as added motivation.)

This email was sent within 30 days after the user's first login date. Through testing, the team found that these emails performed best when including:

- Imagery from the user's game
- Description of product
- Discount or "buy-one, get-one" offer
- Offer deadline

EXAMPLE: GAMERSFIRST FINAL STEP EMAIL

Subject line: Enjoy a Month of Silver Premium on Us! Ends 6/8

Buy a Month of Silver Premium, Get a Month Free! You are receiving this email because you are a valued member of War Rock. To unsubscribe, follow [here](#).



OFFICIAL WEBSITE | MARKETPLACE | FORUM



ENJOY A MONTH OF
SILVER PREMIUM
ON US!

Buy a Month, Get a Month Free! Now's your chance to score a 30 day Silver Premium absolutely free! Simply purchase a 30 day Silver Premium by midnight PST on 6/8/2011 and you'll receive a 30 day Silver Premium for free! Enjoy all the benefits of Silver Premium including; 30,000 Dinar, 5th Slot, 30% XP, and more.

Don't delay - take advantage of this limited time offer before it's too late! Complete your 30 day Silver Premium purchase by midnight PST on 6/8/2011 and we'll email you a promo code good for a 30 day Silver Premium on 6/10/2011.

**OFFER ENDS
6/8
MIDNIGHT
PST**

I Want My Free Premium!

War Rock promotional emails provide information to our players about game offers, promotions, special events, and contests as well as information about new items and features. To ensure delivery, please add postmaster@warrock.gamersfirst.com to your address book. View our [Privacy Policy](#) or [Unsubscribe](#)

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Although the team found the initial verification email could be generic and text-based, it found emails targeting the later steps performed best when featuring game-specific content that gave the recipient a glimpse of the game, helping them visualize how they might use items they would purchase. This meant the team needed to create several versions of each email in the program, as each step needed emails for multiple games.

Tactic #8: Offer VIP deals and “urgent offer” alerts

People love feeling like they’re part of an exclusive club. They are also more likely to act if they think they must hurry to not miss something good. By giving customers the chance to register for these alerts, you can connect with them in a way that will make them more likely to want to engage—and buy.

In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Email Marketing: Why Newegg’s daily deal alert email garners a 60% average open rate,”](#) the team from consumer electronics retailer Newegg discusses their Shell Shocker program, a daily deal email that informs recipients of five hot deals—each of which will be available at a specified time that day .

The Shell Shocker email links to a dedicated landing page, which spotlights all five deal items, along with links to similar items and offers for special bundle deals.

The emails are delivered when the first deal becomes available at midnight, which makes the message very relevant. The emails include:

- Subject Line: Today's Shell Shocker Deal Previews!
- Large banner image
- Product image, name and price for each offer
- Schedule for "unlocking" offers
- 5 Buttons: "See the current Shell Shocker Deal"

The email also includes a link to sign up for SMS alerts of the deals.

The team helps minimize effort by using an email template and an SMS platform that is directly integrated with its email system.

"We just key in those product numbers and product descriptions, and then it is going to populate an automatic email," says Daphne Chen, Senior Manager, Email Marketing, Newegg. "We are really quite automatic in this part, and we don't spend a lot of labor to do the Shell Shocker daily alert email every day."

Tactic #9: Offer increasing incentives

Sometimes you need to sweeten the deal to entice prospects to take action. In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Shopping Cart Recovery: Triggered emails recapture 29% of abandoned carts,”](#) the team at SmileyCookie.com shared their approach for reaching out to site visitors who didn’t complete a purchase.

The initial email includes customer service links and contact numbers, and a large button that takes the recipient back to their shopping cart. If that email fails to provoke a response, the recipient receives another email a day

later offering a 10% discount (which is announced in the subject line). If that doesn't work, a subsequent email sent a few days later offers a 20% discount.

On average, the triggered email series recaptures 29% of the abandoned shopping carts it targets, turning them into sales.

Tactic #10: Establish emails for non-ideal scenarios

Sure, it would be great if every one of your customers had a smooth, flawless experience each time they dealt with your company or visited your website. And in a perfect world, all of your email series would be for situations like the new customer who immediately places a big order and then becomes a lifelong, faithful brand ambassador.

Unfortunately, things sometimes don't go as we would like. Sometimes, you may need to go with Plan B or you may simply be unable to meet the immediate need of the prospect/customer. In this case, you need to have a strategy in which you can use emails to help smooth things over and establish or maintain a good relationship with that contact.

That's what the team at BirkenstockCentral.com had to do. In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Email Marketing: Back-in-stock alert emails achieve 22.45% conversion rate](#)," Jim Moore, President, The PSNE Group, the company that owns BirkenstockCentral.com, says they had to come up with a way to keep shoppers from abandoning their site when an item they wanted was out of stock.

Their solution was a system that allowed shoppers to receive an email alert when their desired item was back in stock. After clicking a "notify me" link, shoppers could either commit to buy the item when it was available, or choose to get an email alert when the item was in stock.

That notification email was designed to be sales-ready, with features such as:

- Large headline: "Back In Stock"
- Personal greeting
- Reminder of the customer's request
- Product image and title of the correct product and size
- Red "buy now" button

During one 30-day period, the "back in stock" notification emails saw an open rate of 36.5% and a clickthrough rate of 26%.

EXAMPLE: BIRKENSTOCKCENTRAL.COM BACK-IN-STOCK EMAIL



Tactic #11: Have a remarketing email triggered by abandonment

The point when a customer abandons your shopping cart can be a “make or break” time for you. It’s critical that you handle this situation correctly to recover that customer. As this [MarketingExperiments report on shopping cart abandonment](#) shows, a carefully planned email sequence can very effectively recover abandoned carts.

In the MarketingSherpa blog post, “[Email Marketing: Reclaim abandoned shopping carts with triggered ‘remarketing’ emails](#),” Adam T. Sutton shares tips from SeeWhy, a company that specializes in cart abandonment emails. Among the key takeaways: send the first email immediately, and make sure you provide a service and not a sales pitch.

Tactic #12: Avoid email overload

When sending automated emails, it's important to avoid bombarding recipients with too many messages—a big turnoff that can quickly land you in the “spammer” category.

In the MarketingSherpa article, “[Email Marketing: How a triggered alert program maintains 40% open rate, 60% click-to-open rate for millions of subscribers](#),” Paul Ramirez, VP, Operations, Eventful, says this was an important concern for his team, which sends out automated alerts notifying subscribers about upcoming local events and ticket sale dates. Since some subscribers—especially those in large cities where many events are scheduled—could potentially receive many different notifications, the Eventful team wants to avoid subscriber fatigue.

Ramirez's team avoids this issue by including these features:

- Consolidate multiple alerts

Subscribers who are scheduled to receive more than one alert on a given day will instead receive an email with the alerts consolidated into one message.

- Consider total email volume

Eventful uses a distribution engine that monitors the number of Eventful emails subscribers receive through this program and others. Send times can be adjusted based on the number of emails a subscriber recently received, the company's marketing objectives, or subscribers' behavioral patterns.

- Offer a preference center

Eventful maintains a preferences center where subscribers can change the alerts they receive. Subscribers who want to receive fewer emails can make adjustments on these pages.

Useful Links and Resources:

[Email Marketing: Triggered Email Nets 75% of Referral Program Signups](#)

[Email Marketing: Triggered Content for On-site Searches](#)

[Email Marketing: Anti-newsletter Strategy Nurtures \\$1.5 million in Leads in 4 Months at Citrix](#)

[How to Build an SMS Alert Campaign: 6 Steps and Lessons Learned](#)

About MarketingSherpa LLC

MarketingSherpa is a primary research facility, wholly-owned by MECLABS, dedicated to determining **what works in marketing** via exclusive case studies, surveys, and results data analysis. Then we publish what we learn so our community of marketers and weekly readers can improve their results and train their teams.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site and Entrepreneur.com, MarketingSherpa is distinguished by offering **practical, results-based marketing** information researched and written by a staff of in-house reporters.

MarketingSherpa features:

- **Best Practices:** 1,000+ brand-side marketer case studies and 3,500+ Creative Samples
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About MECLABS

MECLABS is a science lab that uses real-world research and training to **help business leaders get better use out of sales and marketing technology and resources**, including Internet marketing, website optimization, and lead management. We have been involved in direct research partnerships with companies throughout Europe and North America since 2001.

MECLABS deploys a rigorous methodology to conduct research. This research is compiled from:

- More than **10 years** of research partnership with our clients
- **1,300** experiments
- Over **1 billion** emails
- **10,000** landing pages tested
- **5 million** telephone call
- **500,000** decision maker conversations

MECLABS has consulted with companies like Cisco, Johnson & Johnson, *The New York Times*, 1-800-Flowers, and NetSuite to optimize sales and marketing processes and achieve triple-digit ROI gains.

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The screenshot shows the MarketingSherpa website interface. At the top right, there are links for "View with Images" and "View Mobile Version". The main header features the "Email Marketing" title and the MarketingSherpa logo. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for "New Case Studies", "Members' Library", "Research", "Events", and "Training". The main content area displays an article titled "Growing Email Lists with Social Media: KFC's Facebook tool adds subscribers". The article includes a summary, a paragraph of text, and a "Click to continue" button. To the right of the article is a sidebar with social media links (LinkedIn, Twitter, RSS, Facebook, YouTube) and a "Research:" section featuring a "Live" event titled "marketing sherpa Social Training" with a photo of a seminar and dates for Los Angeles (3/15) and Toronto (4/19).

Email Marketing

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