

Wetpaint Case Study

Wetpaint engages members and drives page views with highly personalized transactional messages



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Kimberly Bower
Director of Email Marketing
Wetpaint, Inc.



Wetpaint, Inc.
Seattle, WA
www.wetpaint.com

Industry
Online Services / Wiki Platform

Network of Social Sites
1,000,000+

Return on Investment
> Email effectiveness improved by 67%
> Cut production time by 75%
> Increased page views by 30%
> Raised deliverability to 95%

Key Benefits
> Real-time visibility into transactional email performance
> Better inbox deliverability
> Improved customer service
> Easy integration and optimization of cross-promotions
> Reduced IT/developer resources
> Email deliverability services and expertise
> Scalability to accommodate 4X business growth

Products & Services
> StrongMail® Message Studio
> StrongMail Transactional Email Platform
> StrongDelivery Tools

Integrated Business Assets
> Omniture
> MySQL
> Proprietary wiki platform

An innovative Web 2.0 company, Wetpaint has developed a consumer-friendly Wiki platform that enables anyone to create a community on any topic from their desktop, or engage in dialogue with other interested fans as part of an existing community. Wetpaint has grown exponentially since its founding in 2005, and today the company powers more than one million user-created community sites for prominent consumer brands such as Dell, The Discovery Channel, Fox, HP, New York Giants, Showtime and T-Mobile.

With the world's largest network of over one million social sites, Wetpaint relies heavily on event-triggered email to keep members informed of content changes to their favorite wikis. Email traffic quadrupled in 2008, and now Wetpaint delivers more than four million email notifications each month. And that's on top of its monthly marketing newsletters. As Wetpaint members use embedded tools to discover wikis that they wish to follow, they can choose to be notified of any changes, and this activity provides a steady stream of transactional email around the clock.

Wetpaint initially relied on a custom-built solution to send 12 different triggered emails directly from their wiki platform, but the system had no way of tracking delivery or measuring performance.

"We had no idea how many emails we were sending, and we didn't have the internal resources to build something that would be more robust and provide us with the visibility to see how the emails were doing," said Kimberly Bower, director of email marketing at Wetpaint. "We also didn't have any way to throttle email volumes or retry attempts. It was very obvious that we needed a more sophisticated platform that would give us the functionality we needed without involving programming resources."

Why StrongMail?

As Wetpaint began evaluating available email solutions, it created an extensive list of factors that needed to be considered, including cost, deliverability and the ability to control content on the fly, integrate ads into email, and view email performance. Scalability was also a key concern, as Wetpaint anticipated strong, rapid member growth. Wetpaint initially looked at hosted email service providers, but the associated CPM fees didn't support their growth plans.

"Because we hoped to grow aggressively, the cost per email charged by ESPs didn't make sense for our business model," said Bower. "Ultimately, we wanted to find a solution that could scale exponentially, without a significant impact on cost."

Given Wetpaint's strict requirements, they quickly zeroed in on StrongMail's on-premise solutions for marketing and transactional email. StrongMail offered them a powerful and scalable solution for delivering both their event-triggered email and promotional newsletters. With StrongMail, they gained real-time visibility into all of their email streams, which allowed them to fine-tune their programs for maximum impact.

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Director of Email Marketing
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Driving Maximum Value from Transactional Email

As the company has grown, Wetpaint has expanded from the original 12 event-triggered emails, and it now uses StrongMail to deliver 28 different kinds of service-based messages. Because these emails are so core to its business, Wetpaint is fully leveraging StrongMail's transactional email functionality and reporting to deliver relevant messages that enhance the member experience and drive readership of related member wiki sites.

Wetpaint also integrates Omniture web analytics tracking links into its emails, which allows it to properly assess the effectiveness of its event-triggered alerts. Knowing what happens after the member clicks is critical, as page views are a key driver of advertising revenue. By analyzing this data, Wetpaint has been able to optimize its transactional emails to drive multiple page views.

"Together, Omniture and StrongMail allow us to see what kind of page views our emails are generating, and if one type of email isn't generating enough, we'll kill it," said Bower. "We never want to send an email that isn't interesting to our members, and that's why StrongMail is such a big asset."

StrongMail's extensive, real-time reporting has played a key role in increasing the effectiveness of Wetpaint's event-triggered email. By looking at variables like subject line and frequency, they are able to make changes that have a big impact on performance.

"Since switching to StrongMail, email has gone from driving 12% of our network traffic to over 20%, and that's because we're now able to look at what works and what doesn't, and then make changes based on results instead of instinct," said Bower. "In just six months of using StrongMail, we saw our page views increase by 30%."

Streamlined Processes and New-Found Efficiencies

StrongMail's flexibility, ease of use and dynamic content engine have been instrumental in streamlining Wetpaint's processes for assessing and optimizing its transactional and promotional messages. Generating new event-triggered email from its wiki platform is particularly easy thanks to StrongMail's powerful integration capabilities, and making changes to existing templates has been greatly simplified through the use of dynamic content blocks.

"As a marketer, StrongMail allows me to have complete control over my campaigns, both newsletters and transactional emails," said Bower. "I can pause mailings when I need to and edit the content on the fly, all without involving our developer team."

Instead of updating an entire template, Wetpaint can now update a content block without ever touching the email template. For example, Wetpaint updates its welcome email each week by simply changing one content block. As a result, this critical email looks more fresh, relevant and timely. Content blocks make it very easy for them to change content immediately to take advantage of hot topics, popular wikis or other time-sensitive information.

"By integrating our wiki platform with StrongMail, any changes to the email template can be done by the marketer, instead of a huge release cycle," said Bower. "Because changes used to eat up so much developer resource time, we didn't make a lot of them. Now, with StrongMail, it takes 75% fewer resources to manage our email, which frees us up to make the changes that improve the performance of our emails."

As an added benefit, by allowing customer support emails to be sent from a different "From" address, StrongMail enables these critical emails to be directly routed to a support representative, which has led to improved customer service..

Integrating Cross Promotions and User-Generated Content

Content blocks make it very easy for Wetpaint to insert cross-network promotions. By featuring other relevant wikis that might interest the recipient, Wetpaint is able to increase user activity and page views across the network. The more wikis that members visit and sign up to receive updates, the more traffic that Wetpaint ultimately generates. Before StrongMail, cross-promotions were too time-intensive to even be considered.

StrongMail has also enabled Wetpaint to leverage the enormous amounts of user-generated content created across its network of sites every day. When content is added or deleted from a wiki that a member follows, they will automatically receive an email showing the words affected. Similarly, when a photo is updated, StrongMail creates and sends an email that integrates a thumbnail of the photo. Wetpaint also uses StrongMail to dynamically customize the email template for each event-triggered email based on the site's CSS style information contained in a central database.

"StrongMail enables us to deliver alert emails that are uniquely branded to look like the member's site," said Bower. "That level of personalization is key for keeping members engaged and active."

Maximizing Deliverability

With the important role that email plays in driving user engagement, page views and ad revenue, email deliverability is business-critical. By migrating to StrongMail, Wetpaint now has real-time visibility into deliverability results, including the ability to drill down into individual failures and review recommended fixes.

Wetpaint uses StrongMail's self-help StrongDelivery Tools to actively monitor which emails generate higher complaints and then make adjustments accordingly. Additionally, Wetpaint also leverages StrongMail's deliverability services to maximize deliverability through strategy, optimization and ISP relations.

"Event-triggered emails can generate a lot of emails, which can drive complaint rates if members don't manage their notification settings properly, which is why the reputation monitoring and blacklist alerts offered through StrongDelivery Tools are so important," said Bower. "Thanks to StrongMail, our email delivery rate is consistently in the mid nineties."

StrongMail's high-performance email delivery engine also improves deliverability with optimized technology that leverages recommended domain/MX throttle configurations that are kept current through its Live Updates service. StrongMail's bounce management technology has also led to improved resend attempts, and the faster delivery of messages has led to increased page views.

"StrongMail's smart bounce management technology ensures that we never make multiple attempts to deliver an invalid email address, which helps our email reputation at the top ISPs," said Bower.

"By accurately handling our bounces, StrongMail has enabled us to dramatically increase our inbox delivery rates."

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About StrongMail Systems, Inc.

StrongMail's online marketing solutions for email and social media enable businesses to reach, engage and influence their target audience using the most powerful channels available to marketers today.

StrongMail gives email marketers the control and support they need to improve campaign performance, boost deliverability and lower costs, while also leveraging the power of social media to extend the reach of their campaigns and brand to new audiences. Combining an easy-to-use email marketing application, high-performance delivery system, viral-marketing tool, social media integration, and a wide range of deliverability, strategic and supporting services, StrongMail makes it possible for companies with all levels of resources and expertise to take advantage of its proven solutions.

Headquartered in Redwood City, CA, StrongMail's clients include global leaders across virtually every industry.

To learn more about StrongMail, please visit www.strongmail.com.

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StrongMail Systems: Email Marketing Without Limits

StrongMail's marketing and transactional email solutions eliminate the limitations of traditional email service providers and custom-built solutions, enabling businesses to deliver more relevant, timely and cost-effective messages.

Whether you're an email marketer looking to improve your email marketing performance, boost deliverability and lower your costs, or an IT professional looking for a reliable system that incorporates the latest email delivery, authentication and bounce processing technologies, StrongMail has a solution to meet your needs.

Email Marketing Solutions

StrongMail's email marketing solutions empower marketers to drive the highest value from their email marketing programs. Our wide range of solutions combine StrongMail's industry-leading platform with the strategic and deliverability expertise to drive conversions, increase brand awareness and improve customer satisfaction.

Transactional Email Solutions

StrongMail's transactional email solutions enable marketers to take control of branding, content and promotional elements of event-triggered email. Tight integration with backend systems allows StrongMail to efficiently assemble and immediately deliver fully branded and personalized messages that properly reflect the customer relationship.

Email Deliverability Solutions

StrongMail's advanced email delivery systems were built from the ground-up to maximize deliverability in today's challenging sending environment. These advanced systems are complemented by StrongMail's team of in-house deliverability experts who provide proactive deliverability and reputation management services to ensure maximum inbox delivery.

Email Strategy and Optimization

StrongMail complements its email marketing solutions with a wide range of strategic services to provide the best practices, guidance and hands-on services that will enable you to optimize your email programs for greater returns.

High-Performance Email Technology

StrongMail overcomes the challenges of high-volume email delivery with a highly scalable, reliable and manageable system that can easily replace and consolidate underperforming commercial or open source MTAs.

