



## More Merchants Rely on Email to Minimize Cart Abandonment

[the e-tailing group](#)

March 16, 2010

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# commentary

In the current tight economy more merchants, selling more product categories, are relying on email to save the sale when shoppers abandon carts where they have placed merchandise before completing the purchase. This e-tail detail examines how merchants are messaging to these customers based on mystery shopping of 100 websites in 4Q '09.

This marks the third year that we have conducted research by signing on to each of the EG100 sites, adding an item to the cart (with a retail value over \$99 introduced this year), going through the entire checkout process then stopping just before completion and leaving the site. Subsequently we track all email correspondence regarding items left in the cart, respective strategies, and incentives to provide measurable benchmarking.

We are also in the process of tallying results from our annual Merchant Survey and feedback from 150 e-commerce executives reveals that although abandonment rates are on the rise, there is still no clear policy regarding merchandise left in the cart. However, many more are now leveraging analytics to deal with these issues and nearly half are sending email reminders.

Following are noteworthy year-over-year findings of how merchants responded to our actions along with best-in-class examples worthy of emulation - as long as they respect consumers' privacy.

# results

a look at the numbers

### **Are these emails an intelligent policy or intrusive ploy?**

The fact that 20% of the e-tailing group EG100 merchants sent abandonment emails during our tracking period, a 6% increase over last year, suggests that this is an effective tactic to capture sales that might otherwise be lost. This appears to be the case regardless of product category as out of the 14 product categories included in our study

86% participated versus 43% last year.

### What are the essential elements that make these emails work?

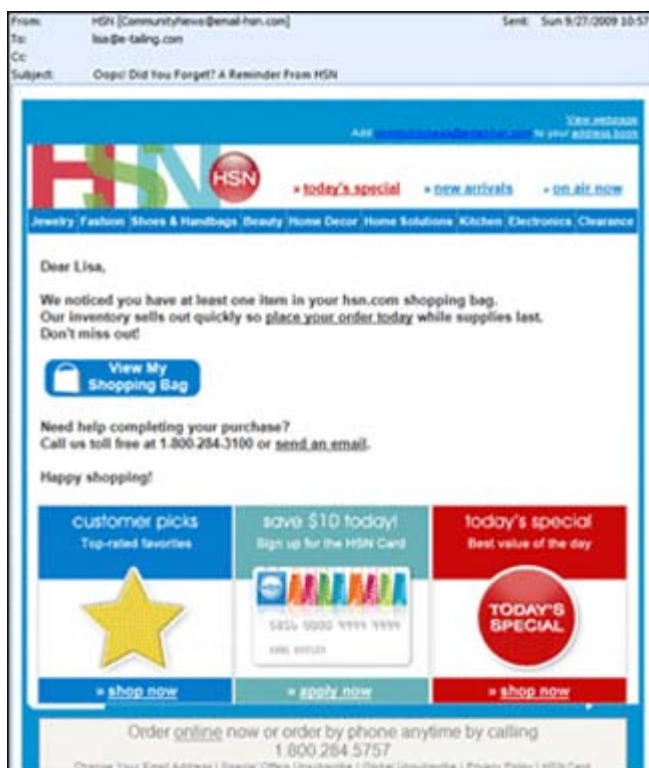
Relevant merchandising and customer service **messaging** should position each communiqué as a benefit to the customer. With this caveat in mind it was interesting that just 40% of the emails received had **personalized salutations**, down 17% from last year. Perhaps this is a result of sensitivity to privacy and not wanting to appear too familiar.

Emails should be sent at a **timely interval** after abandonment to avoid appearing intrusive. Consistent with last year, the average **number of days** from when we left goods in a cart until we received an email was 6.15.

Visual appeal is also an important factor and accordingly **HTML formatting** was favored by 95%, up from 86% last year. This enabled 40% of these merchants to include an **image** of the abandoned product reminding shoppers of their selection - almost double what we saw in 2008.

Considering the promotional mindset in the marketplace we were surprised that only 15% included **incentives** in their emails - almost half the number that did so in 2008. The range of tactics ran from a percentage-off to discounted shipping to daily specials.

Feature or Functionality	2009	2008	2007
Personalized salutation	40%	57%	44%
Average # of days to receive from date shopped	6.15	7.0	4.0
HTML format	95%	86%	89%
Text format	5%	14%	11%
Image of item displayed in email	40%	21%	11%
Incentivized	15%	29%	22%



This **well merchandised** email sent from HSN 5 days post-abandonment has many of the essential elements described above starting with the friendly subject line: "Oops! Did You Forget? A reminder from HSN."

- Personalized salutation
- Body copy call to action with a hot link to buy: "Our inventory sells out quickly so place your order today while supplies last."
- Bold View my Shopping Bag button to access cart
- Merchandised with top-rated items
- Proprietary credit card promotional offer
- Limited time special for that day only
- Floor-line link to order online and 800# to order by phone

**Office Depot** uses this email, sent 15 days post-abandonment, as a **branding** opportunity to position their brand as **helpful**. The subject line is a straightforward "Forget



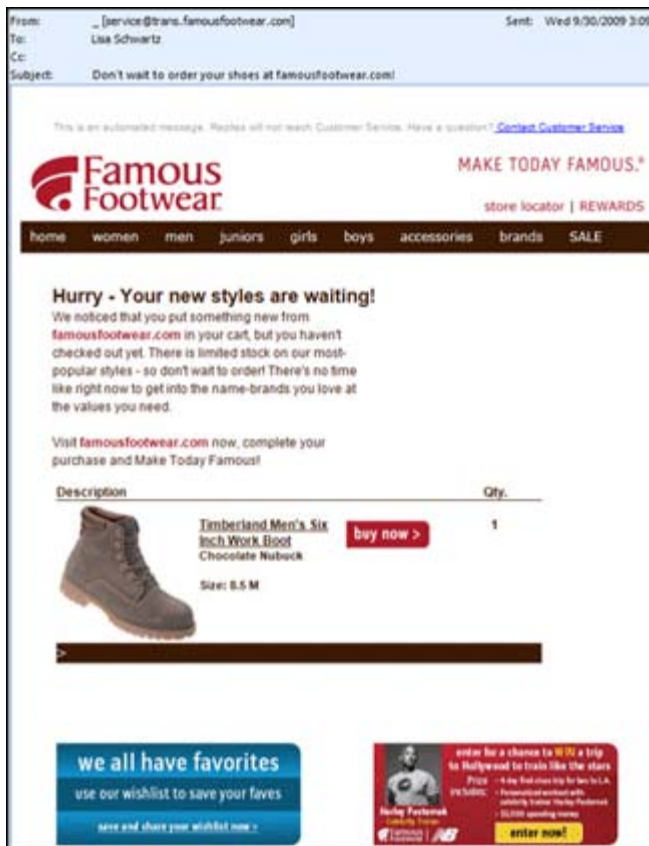
something at Office Depot?"

- Lifestyle photography depicts undecided shopper with thought bubbles holding representative products sold by the merchant
- The text advises the **number of days items will be held** in the cart (15) and assures customer that "we want to provide you with an unforgettable shopping experience every time you shop!"
- Prominent button to view cart



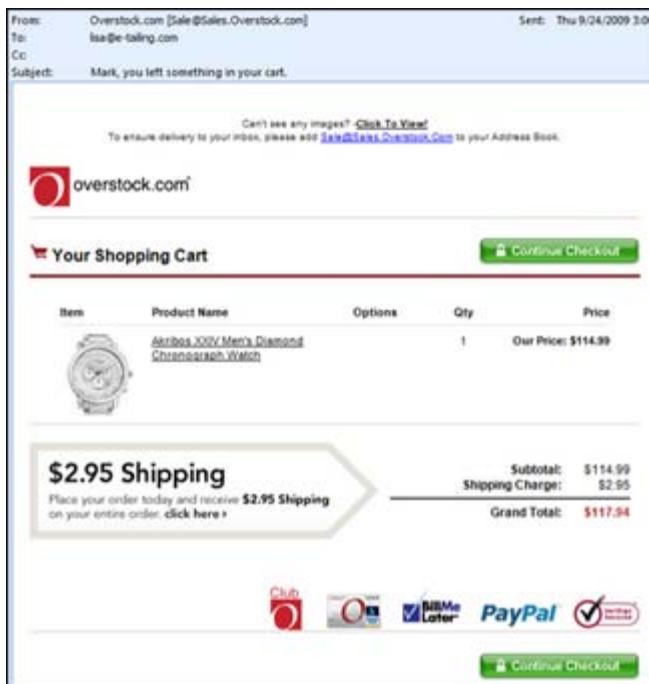
**Clinique** supports their claim of being helpful by focusing on their **expertise** in this email sent just 2 days post-abandonment. Accordingly the subject line reads: "Get Clinique expertise! We're always here to help."

- Prominent contact information to reach **accredited experts** via live chat, email and phone
- Extensive product **recommendations**
- Floor-line reinforces messaging: contact us anytime with questions. We've got all the answers you need."



days post-abandonment relays a bit more **urgency** with the subject line: "Don't wait to order your shoes at famousfootwear.com!"

- Header emulates website with category menu, link to store locator, and rewards
- Body copy follows through: "Hurry - Your new styles are waiting!" and also speaks of limited stock on most popular styles
- A **photo** of the abandoned item is featured along with the short description hot-linked to the product page
- The size and quantity selected are also provided
- Merchandising option to add the item to a **wish list**
- Contest includes recognized brand logo



**Overstock.com's** email sent 2 days post-abandonment is personalized, visualized and incentivized right from the subject line: "Mark, you left something in your cart."

- The email visually depicts the actual shopping cart with item photo and hot-linked short description
- Navigational prompt to continue checkout is repeated twice for impact
- A **one-day incentive** offers \$2.95 shipping
- **Payment** and privacy options complete the page

### If one reminder is good, are two better?

Only one of the 20 merchants who sent an initial abandonment email sent a second reminder, down from two last year and three the year prior so the answer is: second emails are not required as part of your abandonment strategy.

**Harry & David** was the one merchant that sent a second email and both messages with similar formatting and personalized salutations contained several noteworthy tactics.

1st Reminder sent 1 day post-abandonment    2nd reminder sent 5 days post-abandonment  
 Subject line: "Lisa, A Friendly Reminder..."

- Items are saved for 7 days or until they sell out
- **Deferred shipping**
- Bulleted "why buy from us" points: quality, appropriateness and **guarantee**
- Merchandising store favorites and seasonal product feature

Subject line: "Reminder! There's still time to purchase the gifts left in your cart."

- Saving for 2 more days or until items sell out
- Benefits reinforced
- Merchandising store favorites and what's new



# checklist

## CHECKLIST FOR SHOPPING CART ABANDONMENT STRATEGY

1. Establish a strategy for saving items in your cart
2. Ensure that real-time inventory messaging is found on the product page and in the shopping cart
3. Message cart strategy to ensure customers know when and if their cart will be cleared
4. Utilize HTML and photos to visually enhance abandonment emails
5. Review abandonment opportunities from branding to customer service
6. Include merchandising tactics to foster the customer relationship and encourage purchasing beyond the abandoned item
7. Use promotional incentives to save the sale
8. Consider ability to move an item to one's wish list as an alternative to lost sales
9. Understand current technology's ability to trigger abandonment email
10. If abandonment is due to out-of-stocks, consider a stock alert capability sent via email

# who we are

The e-tailing group, inc. serves as the multi-channel merchant's eye, bringing a merchant's sensibility to evolving the multi-channel shopping experience.

A Chicago-based consultancy, we provide practical strategic perspectives and actionable merchandising solutions

to merchants selling online as well as to enabling technology firms.

For more background about our research studies, including merchants surveyed or for additional information on the e-tailing group, inc. please contact Lauren Freedman at LF@e-tailing.com

or visit the e-tailing group website [www.e-tailing.com](http://www.e-tailing.com)

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