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The five types of email service providers every enterprise company should know about

An overview of the different types of ESPs in the Enterprise ESP landscape

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> *Remember, determining if your overall philosophy lines up with the vision of your potential platform providers is more important that simply shopping for specific features and functionality.* "
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What is an ESP?

An ESP is a company that helps you send email marketing messages by offering an email marketing platform or email tool.

Many companies offer the software as self-service. This means businesses can create and send the emails without help.

Introduction

The Enterprise Email Service Provider (ESP) landscape continues to evolve. Instead of going into the strengths and weaknesses of individual providers (enough buyers' guides address this in depth), this white paper presents a general overview and assessment of the different types of ESPs in the landscape. We believe this provides better context for those considering their platform options.

In general, the current landscape can be classified into the following five categories:

- Traditional Self-Service ESPs
- Traditional Full-Service ESPs
- 2nd Generation ESPs
- Expat ESPs
- Developer Focused ESPs

Traditional Self-Service Enterprise ESPs

These established ESPs now form the foundations of various "Marketing Clouds"—IBM Marketing Cloud (Silverpop), Oracle Marketing Cloud (Responsys, Eloqua), Salesforce Marketing Cloud (ExactTarget, Pardot), and Adobe Marketing Cloud (Neolane).

Strengths

These platforms have the broadest product offerings, including tools to coordinate marketing campaigns across digital channels.

They also have the most sophisticated training programs, and substantial financial and human resources to continue expanding their solution set.

Drawbacks

Their long track record of success means they serve many masters. Thus, they offer a variety of methods for accomplishing any task. This makes it difficult to determine the "best route." Professional service teams are often stretched thin, so getting their attention or any "special treatment" can also be a challenge.

(Fortunately for us, they play nice with partner agencies like Shift Paradigm that help navigate these complex systems.)

Traditional Full-Service Enterprise ESPs

Companies like Acxiom, Experian Cheetahmail, Epsilon, and Yesmail that have been around for years with strong legacies of running Enterprise programs.

Strengths

These companies have strong solution sets with highly attentive customer service teams.

These platforms specialize in running highly sophisticated email marketing programs and can turn out an amazing end-product.

Drawbacks

Complex programs mainly depend on leveraging their premium-priced professional services.

Be prepared to pay (and sometimes wait), even when your requests seem relatively straightforward. Moreover, if you are unfortunate and get the "B" service team, you could be screwed.

2nd-Generation ESPs

A group of relatively young companies—including Cordial, Maropost, and Sailthru—give the traditional ESPs trouble by taking note of how they operate and reimagining how to make improvements.

Strengths

Since they don't need to concern themselves with legacy clients or managing backward compatibility, these companies have the ability to develop and roll out new tools built on the latest cloud technologies—including some highly-compelling features.

Drawbacks

Some of these companies don't offer the same breadth of solutions as the traditional ESPs and don't have the same resources for things like training. Expect high touch, yet less polished service.

Expat ESPs

A number of non-US companies, such as Adestra, DotMailer, and Emarsys, opened US offices after the consolidation of the traditional enterprise ESPs.

Strengths

These platforms have proven themselves, and experienced users can generally be found in the marketplace.

These companies have compelling solution sets targeted to specific vertical or global markets where their solutions meet specific needs well.

Drawbacks

The drawback for these is that the US market has not proven its support. Moreover, these companies don't have the same deep pockets as traditional Enterprise ESPs, which means their solutions and development roadmaps tend to be narrower. Therefore, be sure to ensure their long-term development plans.

Developer-Focused ESPs

For companies looking to execute emails primarily triggered from their own platforms (e.g., app companies or high tech companies with lots of development resources), companies like Mailgun and Sendgrid provide platforms that are primarily accessed through APIs.

Strengths

These companies compete primarily on cost. Their solutions are substantially less expensive than other platforms suitable for Enterprise email programs.

Drawbacks

Marketers will need development resources any time they need help.

This is frustrating, especially when marketers only need simple creative changes or reporting. This, in turn, makes things like testing and optimization difficult.

In short, having dedicated IT support effectively moves an email program forward. We recommend organizations balance lost-opportunity costs with potential cost savings when pursuing this route.

Conclusion

Find the platform for your organization.

We see competition between service providers as a good thing. Competition forces everyone to improve. Start evaluations by identifying the type of platform company most likely to serve your needs in the long-term.

Remember to prioritize ensuring your overall philosophy lines up with the vision of the potential platform providers. This benefits your company more than shopping for specific features and functionality.

**ABOUT
SHIFT PARADIGM**

Shift Paradigm is an end-to-end shift in the way organizations align around growth. After pioneering the email marketing and marketing automation movements by helping thousands of organizations implement marketing technology platforms, we know that technology alone can't get your business growing. Usually, it takes a paradigm shift in the way we work.

We're built specifically to solve the invisible problems that hurt revenue performance and help organizations align from top-to-bottom around growth. By breaking down the typical siloes of technology and strategy, we collaborate with clients to increase revenues, align teams, and engage your best customers. As a result, we're shifting the traditional paradigms of sales and marketing, for the better. For more information, visit us at shiftparadigm.com or email us at go@shiftparadigm.com.

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