SHIFT PARADIGM

Driving email marketing innovation

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INTRODUCTION

"Innovation" has become a trite word in the email marketing industry. Henry Ford, one of the greatest modern innovators, never used that word to describe work that changes the world.

Still, innovation remains a priority for many email marketers. Real-time data, use of Machine Learning, Interactive Content (AMP), and enhanced Automation & Personalization are just some of the innovations at the top of the list for marketing and development teams.

Sounds great! But there's a hitch. Innovation might be important to these marketers, but in our experience most marketing teams don't have an adequate plan to execute on them. To truly unlock these innovations, marketing strategies need to incorporate the proper methodology for testing and implementing new and innovative email tactics. But it is not just about the methodology, marketing teams need to change the way they think about innovation to successfully execute on it.

The 3 Steps to Delivering Email Innovation:

01 Understanding and overcoming the barriers to innovation.

02 Fostering an atmosphere of trust that encourages employees to offer ideas and freely evaluate them.

03 Creating an organizational framework that facilitates, tests, evaluates and measures innovation effectively.

Hurdle #1:
TIME

Focus on innovation as a means to buy time through efficiency.

Focus on innovation as a means to buy time through efficiency.This requires a reframing of how people typically think about innovation. Instead of thinking up ways to sell management on the latest new shiny tool, shift the focus and ask yourself:

"How can I use it to compress time or create better outcomes for my email program?"

That's what leads to the idea of thinking about innovation and what it can bring to your company: a way to buy more time for your organization through the efficiencies that can result from using it.

After all, you need time to research, test and implement an innovative new process or tactic. But you still need to get emails out the door and accomplish the myriad other jobs (testing, reporting, research, development) that go along with the email process. You must buy that time somewhere, and it likely won't happen because your boss is not going to appear at your door or your cubicle to say, "Let me give you more resources and add more people to your team so you can innovate for your program."

Efficiency helps you buy back time from things that don't drive your email program forward and redirect it into time you can spend on improving your program.

A classic example is email message optimization. We like to talk about it, but almost always it's wishful thinking—something we dream about but don't have time to implement. Identifying efficiencies in your email process will give you that time.

Efficiency is the key to enabling innovation.

First, you establish a foundational approach based on operational excellence.Then, you use testing and innovation to drive email program and business growth. You can hit these foundational items to help drive operational excellence, such as data management, systems integration, the right email triggers and templates, and all the other things that take up your time.

You also can tackle the more strategic and more complex items that help you grow your email marketing program. These include optimizing messages, contacts, creative, subject line testing, data segmentation, channel integration, advanced reporting, and accelerated insights.

Discipline is the key to efficiency.

Being efficient in your email processes does not mean being boring, having your creativity constricted or delivering low-quality products. But, you do need three things to be truly efficient:

EMAIL MASTER TEMPLATES.

Starting the email planning process with a blank slate every time consumes time, money and other resources. A tested and proven template builds in efficiencies and boosts your branding efforts through design and layout consistency.

PLANNING

Running your email campaigns on the fly can lead to waste and baddecisions.

CHALLENGING THE NEED FOR NOVELTY IN EVERY MESSAGE.

The Venn diagram below shows you the consequences when you prioritize originality over speed and error reduction:
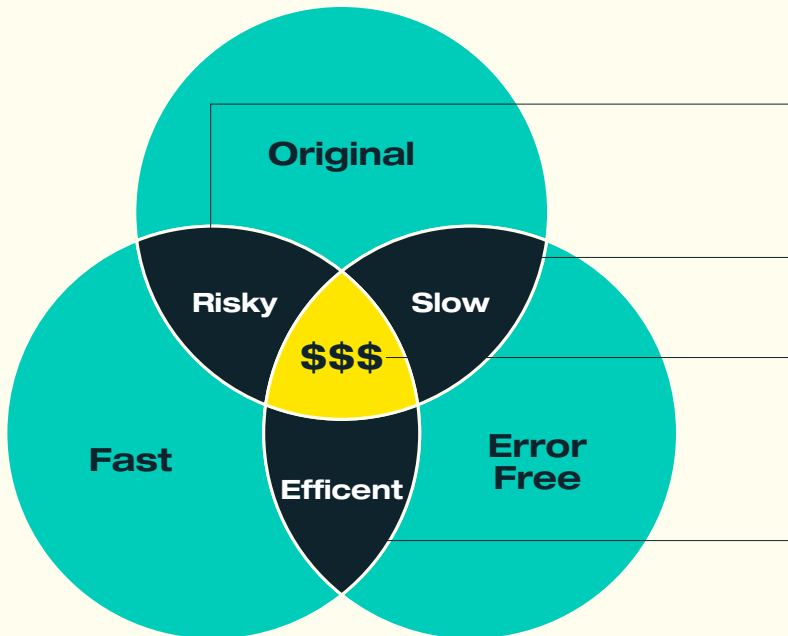
RISKY
Favoring original and fast solutions. In contrast, insisting on original and error-free solutions adds time to the Creative and QA processes.
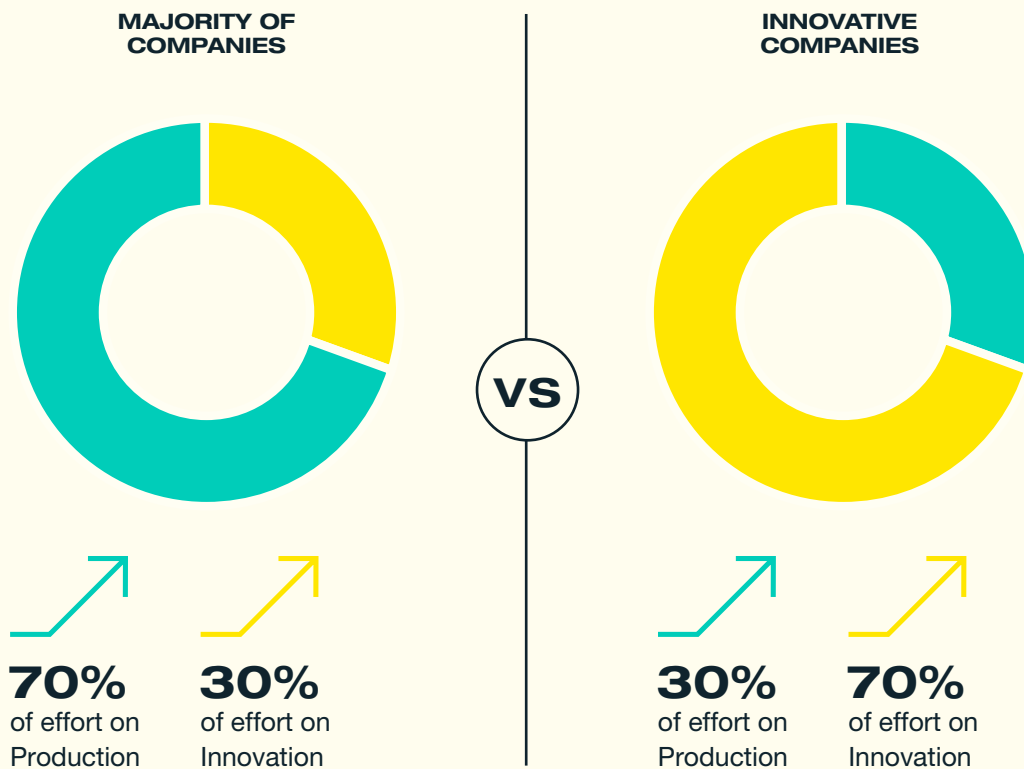
SLOW
Insisting on original and error-free solutions.

PRICEY
Insisting on content that's original, fast and error-free will cost a lot of money. You'll need a small army of creatives and techs on call to respond to your requests, which is highly inefficient.

EFFICIENT
Focusing on processes that are both fast and error-free. Automation and templates help you buy time to think bigger.

MAJORITY OF COMPANIES

INNOVATIVE COMPANIES

VS

70%
of effort on
Production

30%
of effort on
Innovation

30%
of effort on
Production

70%
of effort on
Innovation

How automation buys time

If we broaden our definitions of automated emails, we can find even more efficiencies. One typically thinks of automation as "set and forget" triggers (which you never really forget about, btw). But, if you move beyond that narrow definition, you can look for efficiencies that will buy you time to think bigger.

Email innovators flip the script on production vs. innovation

At Trendline we have found that most companies will spend 70% of their time on email production – just getting emails out the door – and 30% on email innovation.

That percentage reverses when you talk to marketers at companies that prioritize innovation.
These marketers have figured out how to reduce their production time to just 30% so they can spend 70% of their time on improving their email programs.

Hurdle #2:
MONEY

Saving money is great, but time savings do not equal ROI.

If I can buy time, I can drive efficiencies in my email marketing program and use the time I saved to invest in innovation. But, I still need to make more money than I have now to invest in new tools and processes. Time efficiency also leads to an interesting disconnect between employees and their bosses.

WHAT EMPLOYEES HEAR:

"Hey boss! I just figured out a way to cut the time it takes me to do my job in half!"

WHAT BOSSES HEAR:

"Hey boss! I've been reading the 4-hour Workweek! I'll check in about this time next week."

There's always the fear that if you save money through efficiencies that management will take it away. For that, I love this quote from Marlies Roberts, senior vice president for marketing operations for Grand Circle Corporation:

"You need to convert time into money. After changing my story from 'We saved X hours per month' to 'The efficiencies we have put in place have allowed us to create and send X more targeted campaigns per month with an average revenue of $Y per email,' I got management's attention."

Hurdle #3:
FEAR

Comfort is the great enemy of creativity.

If you go to enough graduation ceremonies or motivational speeches, you're going to hear someone utter this deathless phrase: "Don't be afraid to fail." Nonsense! Organizational fear is more insidious than that.

It paralyzes us. It disguises itself as "good values." It trains to rely on someone else, on the outside expert, under the mistaken notion that somebody else has all the insights and answers. If we just follow the leader, we'll be okay.

For email marketers. the No. 1 factor that determines how they approach or invest in innovation is "[reliance] on industry analyst research." The No. 2 option? "Build ROI models that provide a likely return scenario."
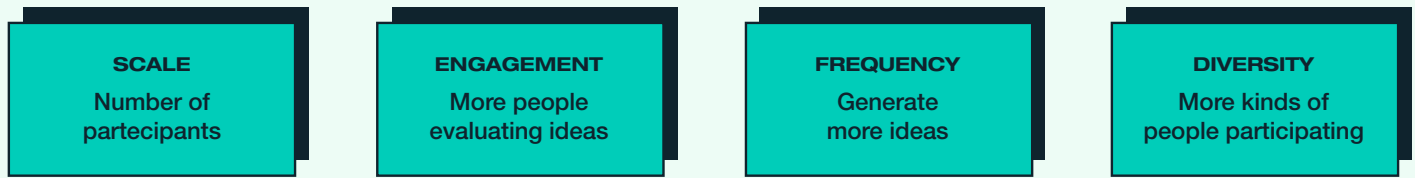
Marketers who just dream about innovation are the ones who rely on experts, regardless of whether the tools they recommend make sense in the organization or the marketing program. They're saying, "I'm afraid to make that decision myself, to look at the pain points I need to resolve to save time and improve my outcomes."

Organizational fear limits innovative thinking.

A Gallup study, **"State of the American Workplace,"** found that only 30% of workers strongly believe their opinions count in the company, while 70% say they hold back sharing ideas because they don't believe their leaders will listen.

This can restrict the rise of innovative thinking because the 30% who are convinced that their opinions count in the company are probably the farthest away in their organizations from what's happening on the front lines. They aren't the ones who know how to make things better.

The best innovators treat innovations like a lead funnel: It's all about the number of ideas. The more participants you have, the more ideas there are that get generated and the more people there are to evaluate them. That's the greatest factor in determining the innovation level of an organization and the level of profit from innovations. They figure out how to expand the idea funnel and then select and process through ideas. A Harvard Business Review study lists four essential elements of organization:

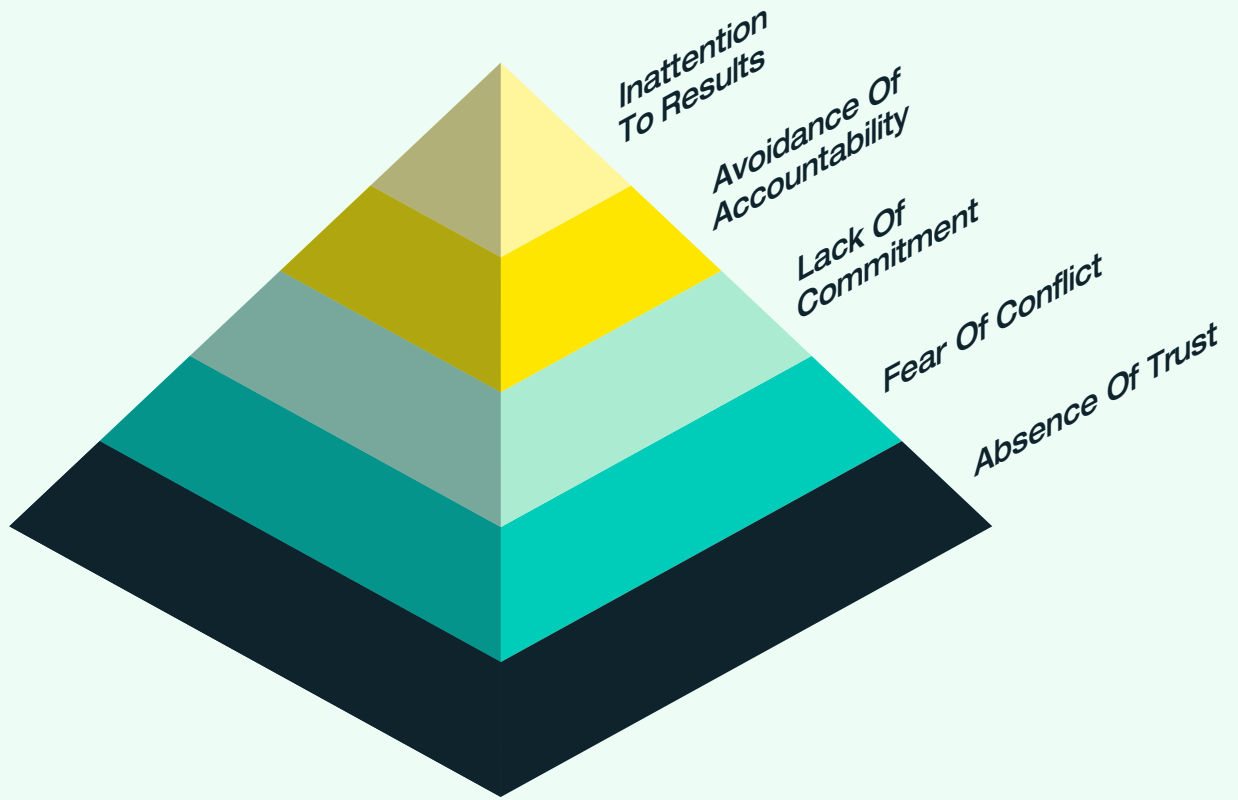| **SCALE**	**ENGAGEMENT**	**FREQUENCY**	**DIVERSITY**
Number of partecipants	More people evaluating ideas	Generate more ideas	More kinds of people participating

Avoiding conflict can lead to failure.

Having many diverse participants in the innovation process can generate conflict, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Remember the PalmPilot? In the pre-iPhone environment at the dawn of the 21st century it was the handheld organizer everybody wanted. Where is Palm now? How could an innovation-driven company fail the way Palm did? From the outside, Palm appeared to have a great culture. Everybody hung out together, the company was a great place to work ... but all that bonhomie came at a price. Inside the company, people didn't want to rock the boat, so they avoided talking about problems like technical issues with the Palm's operating system. Those issues never got resolved, and other companies leapfrogged over Palm.

Trust is essential for innovation.

The innovation-generation process needs a foundation of trust to thrive. The pyramid below shows how team dysfunction can grow out of an absence of trust, creating an environment where innovation can't thrive.

Embrace conflict, but with respect.

You can surround yourself with like-minded friends who share a common viewpoint, or you can seek out the smartest people in your field, the ones who will question you, argue with you, push you to prove you're right. You might engage in a few shouting matches, but if you trust each other and have each other's backs, you'll end up much further ahead.

Inattention To Results

Avoidance Of Accountability

Lack Of Commitment

Fear Of Conflict

Absence Of Trust

4 Key Parts of an Innovation Framework

01.

VISION
You need to iterate to innovate and foster a culture of perpetual innovation. Start working on the next innovation before the previous innovation has peaked.

02.

OWNERSHIP
Prioritize innovations that can generate big wins. This will help you sift through ideas and decide how to measure success.

03.

IMPLEMENTATION
Test big to limit your risk. Begin small, but if you see something working, run a larger test and move on to adoption. If it doesn't pan out in testing, move on quickly to the next idea.

04.

MEASURE
Evaluate the performance of your innovations against the KPIs that make sense for your organization. We know companies are doing innovative things, but how do they sift through all the tools and ideas to find the right ones?

NOTE:
You must be careful about which KPIs to choose. We at Shift Paradigm have seen what happens when a company adopts a new vendor, which then provides its own set of results to measure how well it's doing. That's like the fox guarding the henhouse.

Time to get started.

Is innovation a priority for you and your marketing team, but you come up short on developing and implementing new ideas that help you achieve your goals?

"You don't have to spin your wheels or keep doing things the same old way."

Overcoming barriers involving time, money and fear are your first steps. Creating an environment that assures a diverse population of employees are welcome to participate in the innovation process is the next step. Finally, you need a framework that supports innovation from development through measurement and adoption. It's work, but it's worth the effort to realize all the great results that come from pushing your email program forward.

Ready to start, but not sure how to take the first step? Just get in touch. We'd love to help you map out a plan.

Contact us at info@shiftparadigm.com or visit our website at shiftparadigm.com.

**ABOUT
SHIFT PARADIGM**

Built from email marketing, Shift Paradigm is an agency and consultancy that inspires brands to create meaningful engagement through cross-channel communications. Our passion is that every single message sent is not only meaningful to the audience, but drives success for our clients.

Our team of nearly 200 marketing professionals consists of strategists, creatives and technologists. With full-service capability we deploy the best mix of consulting, agency and analytic services to complement our clients' needs and exceed expectations.

Shift Paradigm serves clients across North America with headquarters in Austin, TX, and offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Portland, OR and Guelph, ON, Canada.

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