

# Intergrating Pinterest into email marketing campaigns

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28 Feb 2012

Much to everyone's surprise, at the turn of 2012 the runaway-hit social networking site wasn't Twitter, LinkedIn or Google+. It was in fact Pinterest, the latest social media craze that seems to have captured everyone's attention.

Pinterest is essentially a graphic social bookmarking network. It has quickly shot into the top 10 most visited social networks of the past year - having already attracted more than 10 million registered users - and continues to gain popularity, even making *Time's* list of the 50 Best Websites of 2011.

## What is Pinterest?

The concept behind the image-based platform is simple enough: users create and name boards of anything they like and post relevant photos on corresponding boards, while sorting them under a number of defined categories. Pinterest allows you to pin various items onto your pinboard, where the "pins" are images and videos collected from anywhere on the web. For ease of use, you can download a browser extension which allows you to quickly pin anything you find online directly, sharing it to get the opinions of others and to get them to share it.

Users have the option to follow one another based on their interests, viewing photos that are displayed on a visually appealing pin board-type feed. The follow system works just like Twitter, so you can "unfollow" any friends, organisations or boards whenever you want. People can also share their finds with friends and are allowed to edit comments on others' images before saving them to their own pinboard.

While Pinterest has now been around for a while, marketers need to begin establishing a presence on this platform (if they haven't already) as it's really just starting to ignite.

## Time spent on Pinterest

According to [comScore](#), the average Pinterest user today spends 98 minutes per month on the site, compared to 2.5 hours on Tumblr, and 7 hours on Facebook. Furthermore, a recent Shareaholic report indicated that Pinterest accounted for more than 3.6% of all referral traffic in January 2012: which was more than Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube combined.

## How companies can use Pinterest

With yet another social network to keep track of, how can companies best use this platform in conjunction with email marketing campaigns to their advantage?

For starters, it's important to understand that Pinterest goes far beyond simply just sharing or liking things of interest; it allows users to collaborate on various topics. As soon as you add contributors to one of your pinboards, you can (with a little initiative) work together to plan an event or product release, or collect insights and information for a new project.

Some companies have already set up accounts on Pinterest and asked users to repin and like their images. If users like what you put out, the people who directly visit your boards will repin it. In turn, their friends will see your images and have the option to repin them, and so on down the line. While you can of course opt not to be registered on Pinterest, there is a huge benefit to setting up an account in that you can have more control over what comments people make about you and your products, just like on Facebook.

## Key factors to image sharing

Pinterest is based on image sharing, so the key factor to leverage it as a supporting advertising and communication channel is to pay attention to how these images are integrated with email sends.

The better the image; the more likely a user will want to click on it for further information and pin it. You can include a small description of an image you post or place it in your newsletter, for example, along with a link that leads users to the specific page on your website that hosts the image. Doing this gives you even more opportunity to tell users about your product, service, or company. So Pinterest certainly works very much in favor of a visually-pleasing email.

You can also offer a "pin it" button next to the products on your site. This gives users the option to share what they shopped for with their friends. All it really takes is one pin or repin to get your product noticed by many more people - fantastic if you are in the retail industry or sell products via your website.

Pinterest can help you get more out of your marketing and communication efforts in a number of other ways:

1. Using social media to promote blog entries and other content-based efforts has become a commonplace ingredient in the marketing mix and many bloggers have started using Pinterest to share the images in their latest posts. This works best if one uses an attractive picture to accompany new entries, largely for the express purpose of pinning, to help intrigue users and get more traffic to the blog via Pinterest shares.
2. Include Pinterest links with their other social media links in the header or footer of an email, with "Pinterest" text next to the icon. As Pinterest is still fairly new when it comes to social networks, some ESPs may not offer social widgets for it yet. In this case you can create your own icon to import and place anywhere on your template, linking it to your own image board. Ask subscribers to use the follow button for Pinterest to support the content of your weekly newsletter. As some readers may be unfamiliar with the platform, provide clear calls to action related to any Pinterest activities so that they do not end up on your image board unwittingly and become confused or disinterested.
3. Leverage popular pins in your email campaigns by letting your audience help you determine which images to use. Check which of your Pinterest-shared images resonate with people interested in your brand the most and then use these images in your email campaign. You can even integrate comments from anyone of your popular pins, which is a very easy way to get user-generated content.
4. It's also useful to try and determine how Pinterest boards support your current email marketing campaigns, and start to test how Pinterest can increase your email engagement levels and responses. Send out a Pinterest-optimized campaign to the socially engaged segment of your email list and see what the reaction is. Try tying specific Pinterest boards to your email calendar; such as holidays, big events, social media trends, special sales or any highly supported Pinterest category that you can establish relevancy to.
5. Because of its commenting facilities, it is an ideal platform on which to introduce a new product, gather initial reactions and firsthand opinions about an item's look and feel - kind of like a focus group. With Pinterest, marketers can easily get and analyse consumer sentiments. As users repin a photo, businesses can gather more intelligence and use it to decide whether their companies should move forward with production and distribution, to justify any necessary changes before they do or roll-out cancellations in the worst case scenario if they find that a new product has missed the mark (saving large amounts of potentially wasted venture capital). So experiment with this by calling out new product launches on your email newsletters linked to your Pinterest presence, and then wait for the feedback.

## A visual playground

Pinterest is a playground for the visually-attuned and the pictorially prone. Marketers will get a lot of value out of using the platform as long as they adhere to and make use of its very specific nature.

Furthermore, Pinterest and email have a lot in common once you think about it:

- It allows users to decide what aspects of the web are worth sharing, instead of randomly browsing via a search engine - so, like email, Pinterest is about targeted content sharing. It's a great way to make your creatives go the extra mile and do more for your company.
- Using the power of images, companies can create buzz around products and tailor make more personal and visually charming experiences for their audiences.
- Pinterest holds immense potential for brands to interact with their audiences and to visually entice current and potential customers. And as with all other social media channels, as it continues to grow we're likely to see more integration with hosted email marketing solutions everywhere.

Don't wait. Get pinning today.

## ABOUT WIKUS ENGELBRECHT

Wikus Engelbrecht is a marketing writer, journalist and media liaison at GraphicMail ([www.graphicmail.co.za](http://www.graphicmail.co.za); @GraphicMail), an international email and mobile marketing service provider. Since 2003, his professional career in language and media has spanned the film, print advertising, magazine publishing, web development and online content industries. Contact Wikus at [wikus@graphicmail.com](mailto:wikus@graphicmail.com) and follow @WKS\_Engelbrecht on Twitter.

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