

# Data use: consent is the new battleground



Marketers must deploy their copywriting, analysis and creativity skills to convince sceptical consumers that brands can be trusted not to misuse their details, research shows. Meanwhile, looming EU opt-in laws are adding uncertainty to an already sensitive subject.

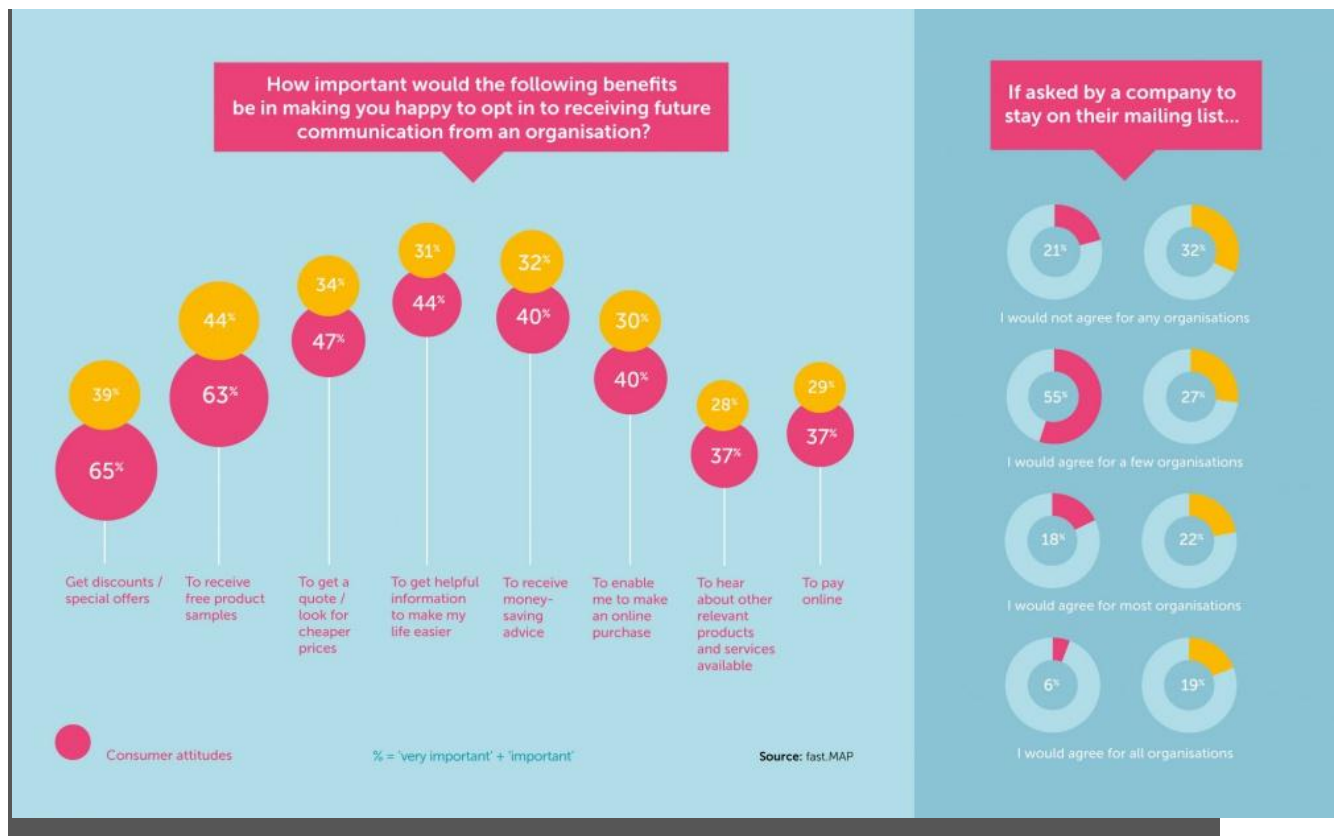
By **Mindi Chahal** on 13 Nov 2014



Marketers are underestimating consumers' concerns around data use and exaggerating their readiness to opt in to receiving marketing communications, according to research that suggests consent could be an increasingly intense battleground.

The 10th Marketing Gap study by fast.MAP shows a wide disparity between consumers' attitudes and what marketers believe they think. The annual report tracks the gap between the two through online surveys – one completed by 1,180 consumers and the other by a panel of 310 marketers.

The biggest concerns relate to companies keeping promises when seeking permission to use contact details. Two-thirds of consumers are very concerned and 17% fairly concerned that companies won't keep their promises. They also worry about companies passing on details, with 68% very concerned and 17% fairly concerned.



This adds up to 85% of consumers who are worried, yet marketers clearly are not aware the depth of feeling: only 45% are under the impression consumers see it as a problem.

The lowest levels of concern registered by consumers are on the volume and appropriateness of marketing materials, as 38% say they are very concerned about this and 29% say they are very concerned about irrelevant communications.

Earlier this year, fast.MAP released data revealing that next year's [changes to EU opt-in requirements for data gathering could hit brands hard](#). It means that unless consumers tick the opt-in box (as opposed to unticking to opt out) they are out of reach for marketers.

The Marketing Gap data shows that consumers' willingness to opt in to receive marketing communications differs according to the level of permission requested. Only 6% will opt in to all contact requests, while 19% of marketers believe they would do so.

If contacted by an organisation asking to keep them on a mailing list, 21% of people would refuse all requests, but 32% of marketers think this would be the case. However, 55% would only agree to a few of those organisations, while only 27% of marketers think this would happen.

"This is the new battleground of marketing," says fast.MAP managing director David Cole. "There will be a huge growth in compliance and helping marketers gain consent. Smart

marketers will start to deploy their expertise to gain consent so you have permission to market to people.”

Cole believes difficulties arise from the fact that consent involves a strange mix of legal and marketing messages. He says that “weak-willed marketers” delegate copywriting to lawyers and then sit back and see databases decimated.

“You only have a paragraph to convince someone to opt in,” he says. “Marketers need to use skills of analysis, copywriting and creativity to engage people on that new battleground.”

There is a divergence, too, between the reasons why consumers would opt in to receive marketing communications and what marketers believe to be the strongest motivations, suggesting a knowledge gap in key tactics for gaining permission from customers to send them communications. The study shows that marketers underestimate all the benefits that would make consumers happy to opt in. The biggest difference between consumer attitude and marketer perception is on the topic of discounts and offers. Only 39% of marketers believe consumers would opt in to qualify for these but 65% of consumers list them as a reason to do so.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of consumers would opt in for free product samples but only 44% of marketers believe they would. Almost half (47%) would agree to being contacted to get a quote or look for cheaper prices, whereas 34% of marketers are under the impression they would.

The research also shows that traditional marketing techniques are still the most successful. Most consumers (56%) are receptive to receiving email marketing from companies with which they have an existing relationship. This is up by three percentage points on 2013. Direct mail comes in second at 38% of respondents – also up three points compared with last year. However, this could all change with the new EU regulations.

Cole concludes: “No-one is clear at the moment about how the land will lie after the EU legislation, but it could be a bit of a car crash and we’re not sure which media will be successful.”