Changing The Email Paradigm

The five H's to a successful business: Hungry, Happy, Honest, Humble, Healthy

By Jonathan Dean

If you work in a business environment where clear and constant communication is paramount to your success, then sending and receiving emails on time is a familiar sentiment. Too often we find ourselves frustrated with staring at a computer screen displaying "Sending…" for way too long, leaving us to wonder if the message was ever sent at all. For those unfamiliar with SendGrid, Co-Founder and President Isaac Saldana describes the company as "a cloud-based email service that increases email deliverability, provides scale metrics, and scalability."

Saldana claims that about 20 percent of all emails sent via major email providers tend to either get lost in the transaction or sent to the recipient's spam folder. Such an occurrence can be detrimental to companies whose success with customers is contingent upon the successful delivery of things like order confirmations, password resets, monetary transaction receipts, and changes in the status of a package being delivered. The co-founder describes SendGrid as "the FedEx of email services."

The goal of SendGrid is to give its clients the solace of knowing that their important communications will reach their destination without unnecessary interference. The company provides the infrastructure to store and send the clients' emails while providing analytics for the clients to view. A solution to the email problem began to obsess Saldana as a young man, beginning with an interest in math and science in high school.

After following the advice of a school counselor, Saldana became immersed in the world of computer science to hone his ambitions into what would become an international success. Saldana admits that he ironically did not use computers much before college because it was still an emerging technology in 1997. He also states that his most memorable moment in his early career was receiving a B- in his very first computer course because it caused him to transform his mode of thinking into computer terms and all the facets of the growing technologies.

During college, Saldana found his inspiration to become an entrepreneur after reading *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, a book about the value of financial independence and stability to

proper investment. For about five years, Saldana juggled two jobs, being a full-time student, and being a husband/father to his family. His perseverance through such hardship has definitely become a part of who he is as a person and as a leader. After his schooling, Saldana plunged feet-first into the entrepreneurial community by creating three smaller companies before SendGrid, but like most go-getters new to the business world, he experienced those all too familiar pitfalls.

Having three stumbles early in a career would be enough to convince most to pack it up and go home, but Saldana viewed these obstacles as learning experiences. He likens his early experience to that of an athlete taking the field for the first time in that one is not great at much in the beginning, but only through practice and perseverance can near perfection be achieved.

One of the major epiphanies Saldana had was the realization that having an idea is not enough to achieve success, but a plethora of things, including good networking skills, plenty of capital, and the right mentorship. One thing in particular trumps all in importance according to the founder: people. It is the individuals you trust with your resources and effort that make a company successful. Products and services may change over time, but hiring good people is the most valuable resource to procure when moving forward past start-up mode.

The inspiration to create SendGrid came from Saldana's obsession in trying to solve the email problem that he had experienced during his time with his previously created start-ups. After creating an initial prototype program for launch, he connected with his current partners to further develop the platform that eventually became SendGrid's main draw. After facing hard times with his other companies, Saldana and his partners sought the mentorship of the Tech Stars accelerator program in Boulder, Colorado where they learned the finer points of finding the focus of the company and building from there. Saldana recollects the hardship his family endured while moving to Boulder so he could participate in the accelerator program, but was thankful for their support in his endeavor to make his company take off.

When asked about what separates SendGrid from similar companies in the marketplace, Saldana stated that many people mistake the company as just another email marketing company who send out email blasts to promote a product or service, but nothing could be farther from the truth. If anything, SendGrid provides the means for these marketing companies to conduct their business by providing the infrastructure and analytics to do so.

However, SendGrid does separate itself from similar companies by maintaining a larger support system made up of committed partners and monetary resources to keep the cogs moving. Saldana adds that his service provides clients with an interface that is easy to integrate with other current systems as well as only changing three settings (SMTP server name, SMTP user name, and SMTP password) to be up and running instead of overhauling an entire system for synchronization between servers. Saldana hopes to use SendGrid as a means of transforming the way the world does email by changing the paradigm in not only functionality, but also in customer support. Evidently, over 100,000 businesses agree with the co-founder since they maintain their need for SendGrid's services.

In addition to understanding clients and their needs, Saldana states that founders and employees alike must understand themselves and their own needs as well. Maintaining a healthy balance between work and home life is essential to being productive in the workplace. Saldana suggests that allowing time to deflate from the stress of work has helped him immensely in keeping a good mental outlook and a creative mind centered on being productive. Saldana also mentions that he measures his success not necessarily on monetary gain, but on his level of overall happiness in life. He measures his happiness by making a difference in the lives of others, physical activity, and developing lasting positive relationships. These sentiments tie directly into SendGrid's values, which include being hungry, happy, honest, humble, and healthy.

Saldana ends with a paraphrased quote from the late Steve Jobs, who said, "Everything around you that you call life was created by someone no smarter than you, and so you have the power to change it and influence it." To him, the best piece of advice he has taken to heart is to just persevere, because though ideas will come and go, it is the execution of ideas that separate the true entrepreneurs from simple dreamers.

*Original article can be found at: http://www.impact.fm/changing-the-email-paradigm/