MessageGears

Rethinking RFPs for ESPs

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Introduction

The request for proposal (RFP) has been a staple of big business vendor selection since the 1960s. When done well, it can make the vendor-selection process more efficient and increase the likelihood of making the right — often critical — choice. For many companies, the RFP is necessary when choosing a new email service provider (ESP) because it allows them to understand how vendors can serve the many interests involved in email at a large company.

But the process is often flawed, with email and data technology outpacing companies' ability to adjust their requirements to the new reality of the industry. Many of today's RFPs reflect outdated understandings of ESP technology, rather than the current reality that direct data access is of paramount importance. If the RFP's questions don't address this need and, in turn, ask questions that end up being biased against modern technology in the interest of expediency, the RFP has failed.

And failure really isn't an option when it comes to RFPs. Not only are too many resources devoted to writing, sending, and evaluating them to be able to afford a major miss, but a failed RFP process ends up having an outsized impact on your ability to keep up with the competition for years to come. An RFP that is outdated in its assumptions and generic in its composition will inevitably lead to a selection that isn't what your organization needs.

Yes, RFPs can be useful. But, when it comes to choosing a new ESP, we found in a recent survey that companies are making mistakes that are reducing the RFP's effectiveness at showing they need the direct data access that MessageGears provides.

67%

of companies say they require an RFP process

90%

think the RFP process is very valuable

36% of Mid-Level Marketers

Who finds the RFP process most valuable when it comes to deciding on an ESP?

48% of Directors or Above

70% of C-Suite

RFPs Aren't Being Built Efficiently

While RFPs' popularity may be high among those who decide on a company's ESP, what's less clear is whether that popularity comes more by merit or convenience for the key decision makers. An RFP process can be quite useful for making difficult decisions among a crowded field, but that's only if the RFP is designed thoughtfully and meticulously with the company's current needs in mind. And if that process ultimately excludes unique solutions like MessageGears that may be the best fit for those needs, it needs to be rethought from the ground up.

That requires a lot of work, though, and can often require stripping the RFP down to the bone each time, but our research found that 62% of marketers said their company modifies less than half of the RFP before they send. Meanwhile, more than two-thirds said their company requires an RFP when seeking a new ESP, and that internal knowledge is the main driver of the candidate selections; this means that, instead of putting the time and effort into examining the current landscape of ESPs with an eye toward solutions that address company-specific needs, they're primarily going back to the old standbys for little reason other than their names are known.

50%
of C-Suite expects migration to take less than 6 months.

30%
of Managers expect it to take more than a year

Lightly edited RFPs, forcing an RFP even if it hasn't been proven effective, and relying on internal recommendations rather than seeking a variety of knowledge and experiences isn't the recipe for a consistently worthwhile RFP process. These are the signs of companies trying to let the RFP guide them instead of the other way around. And that can very easily lead to results where the ESP they wind up with is better suited for their needs from five years ago than for their needs that they have today.

Nearly 40%
of marketers think all ESPs are the same

Unsound RFPs Make ESPs Look Alike

The tendency of companies to build RFPs around convenience and outdated — or unrealistic — standards impacts how key decision makers view the ESP landscape. Because the RFPs many companies require generate similar answers from a slate of familiar, internally sourced candidates, it's hard to find meaningful space among the responses. That leads to decisions based upon cost or personal connections, rather than the option whose features best fit the company's needs today. And for many consumer-facing enterprises, a customer marketing platform like MessageGears that connects directly to their data is the solution they need, but their RFP process isn't set up in a way that allows them to make that determination.

In our survey, 73% of respondents gave a 3 or higher (on a scale of 1 to 5) when asked their level of agreement with the statement "All ESPs are the same." Among key decision makers, nearly one-third gave it a 5, but only 6% of non-decision makers who work primarily in email did the same. Because key decision makers are leaning heavily on skewed RFPs, they see few differences between ESPs, while those with their hands in email daily have the on-the-ground experience to know the differences can be vast.

And that leads to assuming a decision before the data is collected. Among respondents who said their company entered an RFP with a preferred vendor in mind, 81% said the RFP tells them everything they need to know, compared to 19% of those who didn't have a preferred vendor.

When you enter an RFP ready to select a particular vendor, it's easy to focus on the good from them and the bad from everyone else. And this is especially a problem when your biggest issue that needs to be solved — in many cases for enterprise organizations, it's data access — can only truly be addressed by MessageGears. If you don't even know MessageGears or their unique solution for data access exists, you'll continue making the same mistakes in your RFP process, blinded to the solution that could be right there in front of you if you'd build the RFP in a way to identify it.

63%
of I.T.

Who has the most say when it comes to writing RFP requirements?

55%
of Email Marketing Teams

What Needs to Change about the RFP?

If your company is entering an RFP process, how can you avoid falling into the "All ESPs are the same" trap? The most important point to keep in mind is that they aren't. There's a large, disparate landscape of ESPs, and data-focused enterprises may find that one like MessageGears is strong in your particular areas of need.

Once your decision makers understand that, the next step is to make sure you've harnessed resources from Marketing and I.T. to fully outline your company's unique needs on the email front so you can find the ESP that best addresses them. Figure out who your stakeholders are, and dig deep into the obstacles standing between the current state of your cross-channel messaging program and the aspirations for where your team would like it to be. Don't be afraid to dream of what you'd like to do if all impediments were lifted. In what ways does your current ESP setup not only *not* empower your team to do its best, but actively hinders them in their work?

Don't let yourself get caught up in what you think is possible, or what exists in the current landscape, because companies like MessageGears are constantly evolving, adding features that we can see the market demands. What was true about ESPs three years ago when you last went out to RFP may not be true at all today, and the problems

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> "

you had that weren't addressed then might have a perfect-fit solution this time, if you structure your RFP in a way that allows you to find it.

RFPs can be a terrific resource for streamlining what can be a long, arduous, and important process of picking a new ESP. Go into it with eyes wide open, knowing the ultimate needs for your email program to succeed, write the questions with those at top of mind, and you'll come out the other side with a more informed and confident decision.

Now is the Time to Switch to MessageGears

So, if you've made it this far, you're likely committed to going through the RFP process and have hopefully gained a greater understanding of how to structure it so you get the most out of it. And maybe you're curious what it is about MessageGears that could possibly make us so unique in how we approach cross-channel messaging.

The fact is, the time has never been better for Super Senders to switch to MessageGears. Consumers are more demanding than ever, and personalizing your marketing campaigns is the only way to deliver the sort of ROI you expect. Doing that consistently at an enterprise scale requires real-time data access. Here are the biggest reasons MessageGears should be on your vendor list for your next RFP:

MessageGears' core tenet is that it connects directly to my data. Is this solution going to drive up my data costs?

Most remote messaging providers consume time and money understanding how to get your data into their platform. These hidden costs that are inherent to these solutions drive a lot of spend for enterprises due to the manpower and time that it takes to solve these problems.

MessageGears drastically reduces data costs for our users by cutting out inherent spend due to:

- The sheer volume of data no longer being shipped back and forth to an ESP

- The dedicated I.T. resources inherent to supporting this volume

- The reduction in issues that arise when constantly shipping data back and forth

By focusing your resources on your own data environment, MessageGears reduces money and I.T. costs by up to 50%.

Is It OK with connecting directly to data? Does I.T. like you?

Most marketing organizations are used to getting the cold shoulder from I.T. teams. After all, most requests take time and add to the long backlog typically present for technology orgs.

However, I.T. Teams love MessageGears because we reduce these requests and headaches, allowing them to directly control what happens in their environment.

Now is the Time to Switch to MessageGears cont.

Does my team assume more responsibility with a solution that relies solely on our data/ infrastructure?

Similar to concerns with data access and usage, MessageGears actually reduces the amount of involvement needed from I.T. teams and infrastructure by skipping the need to transport large amounts of data.

But in addition to that, we typically see that I.T. teams love that they're able to have control over the key pieces of hardware and infrastructure you need to get critical messages out. With no more relying on third parties to ensure that services don't fail at peak volumes, I.T. is now in the driver's seat to be the "good guy" for marketing in a more collaborative environment.

Our data isn't in a good spot right now. We're going to have to change way too much about our data setup to work with MessageGears

Investing in a modern data platform is [one of the best ROI and cost-positive investments you can make](#), both in marketing and across the organization. That's why MessageGears has teamed up with our partner, [Snowflake](#), to make your data usable throughout your enterprise. Using MessageGears in conjunction with a Snowflake data warehouse will both save you money and allow you to communicate with your users by analyzing and understanding who they are and what they want.

We have too much custom reporting and configuration with our current vendor to be able to move to anyone else

Switching messaging systems is daunting — the amount of custom reporting and data movement that needs to be replicated and re-done can make it feel impossible. That's why MessageGears has put an emphasis on delivering data to you in real time. The ability to consume all audience and engagement data without a prescribed schema allows you to satisfy any of your reporting or analytics needs.

Now is the Time to Switch to MessageGears cont.

MessageGears won't be able to scale to our needs, which are massive and frequently changing

The most common bottlenecks for other ESPs are MTA capacity and rigid, multi-tenant data structures. The MessageGears system architecture breaks through these bottlenecks by offering a schema-less customer data integration and an elastic personalization and delivery service layer.

Connecting directly to client data sources enables marketers to personalize content based upon their internal structure. MessageGears processing a schema-less structure allows for large, heavy sends to be broken into smaller batches of data and elastically distributed across our infrastructure.
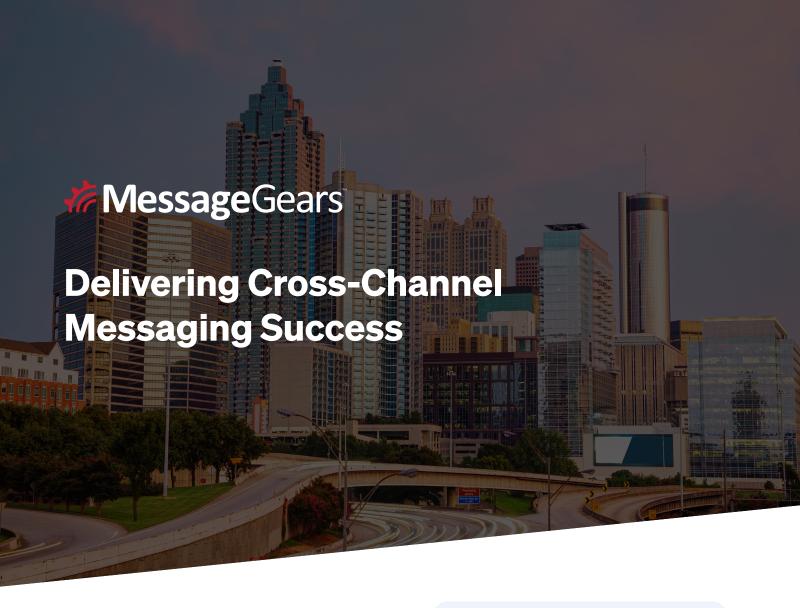
[Find out more](#) about how MessageGears scales to meet demand.

Why wouldn't I just trust an all-in-one marketing cloud?

Although they are big names that you are likely familiar with, many of the large campaign management systems aren't as all together as they appear.

To understand how these [Everychannel Service Providers evolved](#), consider that for many of them, message sending wasn't their original core competency. Instead, these software giants acquired different messaging providers throughout the years to cobble together a disconnected solution that attempts to do everything. In fact, time to implement or integrate these systems with large enterprises can take up to 5 years!

Which is not to say these solutions don't do some things well. Indeed, they can be great messaging tools. But even at their best, they aren't designed to be the only system of record for messaging and often need users to utilize their system to do absolutely everything marketing related. Super Senders have massive data needs and the ability to massively scale across every channel, breaking the all-in-one model and needing a tool built to cater to their needs.

MessageGears

Delivering Cross-Channel Messaging Success

MessageGears is the only customer marketing platform built for today's enterprise. We empower marketers to deliver more relevant, personalized messages. Our unique technology connects directly with a company's database, enabling marketers to maximize the value of their customer data in real time. Join sophisticated marketers at WebMD, Rakuten Rewards, and Expedia who rely on MessageGears to deliver more personalized cross-channel messaging campaigns.

For more information, please visit
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MessageGears Segment

MessageGears Segment provides a powerful segmentation engine designed for marketers who want to understand their users and deliver seamless, relevant experiences across any touchpoint.

MessageGears Message

MessageGears Message is a one-of-a-kind cross-channel orchestration product that connects to your customer data and helps you build personalized messaging campaigns that deliver results.

MessageGears Engage

Utilizing MessageGears Engage provides you with an always-accessible segment of your live data to connect to any third party in order to build highly personalized campaigns in real time.