Chapter 10
Research Methodologies, Data Collection, and Analysis at MailChimp: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT
Research plays a crucial role in understanding and improving the user experience. In this case study, members of software company MailChimp’s Research team explain the company’s data collection, analysis, and communication methodologies. Using methods that include customer interviews, big data, reports, and short films, the team moves through the research process, beginning with research questions and concluding with actionable insights.

INTRODUCTION
MailChimp develops a web application that allows users to create, send, and track email newsletters (see Figure 1). Many different industries use MailChimp’s email platform to communicate to their particular audiences in a variety of ways: e-commerce and retail stores send messages promoting products or sales; non-profit organizations spread awareness of their causes; artists showcase their work; authors share their words; and entertainers promote their events. Though most often thought of as a marketing tool, MailChimp—at its most basic description—is a publishing platform from which its users can write and distribute information online.

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With millions of customers using MailChimp to share information, sell products, promote events, and more, knowing who these users are—and why and how they use MailChimp—is paramount. The MailChimp Research team plays a crucial role in gathering and sharing information that will help the company understand and improve the MailChimp user experience. Though this chapter focuses on software in general and MailChimp in detail, the methodologies and practices described herein apply to other industries and information services.

THE MAILCHIMP RESEARCH TEAM

The Research team at MailChimp is tasked with both synthesizing customer needs with the overarching goals of the company and then sharing those research findings among the company’s various teams. The work of the Research team informs product design, feature development, support offerings, marketing materials, and more. Though each project the Research team undertakes is unique—varying in focus, scope, and duration—the team has whittled their toolbox of research methodologies down to a workable few, which the authors describe in this case study.

The MailChimp Research team consists of five generalists, with backgrounds in design, computer science, rhetoric, neuroscience, and account management. Due to their diverse backgrounds, each researcher has a unique set of skills they can apply to any research project, such as interviewing...
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