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# E-mail marketing – Create a fan, not Spam

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## Introduction

### E-MAIL MARKETING.....

'Creating a demand for yourself and your business by delivering value to others, via email, with lists that you give to the marketplace to opt-into'. There it is in a nutshell.

No business idea is worth undertaking until the benefits to you and your customers are fully understood. And of course you want to get a good return on your marketing investment. This document talks about how to make the most of e-mail when used as part of your marketing strategy.

We also address the benefits of implementing fully integrated marketing campaigns that are supported by surveys, the Internet, traditional direct marketing and phone follow-up. We also drum home that it's not the quantity, but quality of your mailing list that determines the success of your activity. If you're simply talking to people that just don't want to listen... then you'll be going nowhere fast.

In addition, it's a certain 'business animal' that harnesses the power of e-mail. '*Strike while the iron is hot*', '*he who hesitates is lost*' and '*why put off till tomorrow what can always be done today*' is the mindset of the people that get the most out of e-mail. They deal with things as they happen TODAY which means they will be the best at responding to YOUR e-mail as it happens.

However, we also talk about the common pitfalls when using email and how to avoid them, plus the difference between Spam and e-mail marketing.

*Did you know that e-mail marketing is not Spam or unsolicited junk mail, but it's about sending regular e-mail to people who want to receive it. It's about asking people to 'opt-in' (permission marketing).*

How do you get these e-mail addresses in the first place? Good question. This is the hard bit. There are many different ways, including an invitation for people to subscribe to your free newsletter, in which you give tips and information to the recipient, aimed at making their life easier. This should never be a selling exercise; you can do the sales pitch in a later communication, and if you are giving free information it is more likely to be kept and passed on to colleagues.



## 1. The benefits

### Why is e-mail marketing so effective?

- Quick
- Cost effective
- Direct communication
- WANTED (by the recipient)

Although we are behind the USA in our understanding and use of e-mail, it has in its short life become an integral business communication tool. The small distribution costs, speed and connection back to the vendor mean that large-scale campaigns can be distributed by anyone. Many people also enjoy the fact that e-mail tends to be shorter and quicker to digest than more traditional communication methods, (no time to miss the point – people's attention span is short).

It's also the best way of reaching potential customers and keeping the ones you've already got. You can also use it in conjunction with your website by introducing forums, surveys and newsletter subscriptions. In addition, many companies include 'private customer areas' on their sites, which you should consider.

The beauty of the Internet is that many things are free and easily accessible. So, another great thing about e-mail is that it's the perfect way to quickly sign-post people to more useful information associated with your business. Use this ability to include embedded links to other sites as yet another way of offering your customers that added value service – freedom of information.



## 2. What's the difference?

### Spam vs. e-mail marketing

It's simple – Spam is illegal because it is sent without the recipient's permission. It's an unwelcome pest, a nuisance, an annoyance and above all bad for your corporate image. And if your ISP gets complaints from people you are 'spamming' you could get expelled from using their service and even black listed.

Unsolicited bulk e-mail (Spam) is a huge problem for businesses around the world, which is why many people are hesitant and wary of taking part in e-mail promotion. With so many companies screening incoming mail and switching off to this method (and even one borough council in the UK banning e-mail for a day a week) how can this medium be useful to you? Here we show you the positives and the pitfalls and how to avoid them when planning your e-mail campaign.

Your e-mail message should aim to give the recipient free information on subjects you know they are interested in; information they have previously agreed to receive. Don't sell to the recipient, instead give free information that builds trust and credibility – build a relationship. Be a mentor, aim to be the place for people to come for information about *their* industry.

E-mail marketing is familiar, requested and subscribed to. It's about your customers and audience 'opting-in'. With e-mail prolifically becoming the newest, fastest and most universal communication tool, people's attitude to using and receiving e-mail is changing. They are beginning to tune into the familiar.

### 3. The ideas

#### The key to success

Permission marketing:

In short the key is ***permission***. By asking for the right to talk to someone via e-mail you can avoid the backlash currently sweeping through e-mail marketing. In many ways it's a bit like going on a date with your client.

Forget the 'blanket and scatter gun' approach:

Traditional advertising uses this 'blanket and scatter gun' approach much like if you were to go into a crowded bar, stand on a table and shout out your vital statistics, hobbies and good qualities. You probably wouldn't get many takers. If you were to do this every night at a different bar you may find some success but the percentages are very low and you would soon gain a rather unwanted reputation.

Be more considerate about how you talk to people:

Permission is basically utilising the way that we normally find partners. Introduce yourself but more importantly - listen. Find out what it is they need and ask the right questions. Once you have enough data, offer them what they've told you they want. Cater for them so they feel that you have listened and are giving them a personal service.

Also, once you have their permission, take the time to send a courteous thank you – this could be in the form of a personalised automatic response. This in turn will go a long way to remind them they have actually asked to be e-mailed, and will reduce complaints about Spam.

...It sounds very simple when put like this, but just as in the dating game you need to put in time, effort and consideration before it reaps any rewards.

It's all in the prep work:

The preparation is vital to any good marketing campaign. You need to look at your existing client base – your 'list'. These people are the most valuable because they most likely have already given you permission to sell to them. This gives you the opportunity to talk to these people as 'friends', ask them how they see you, what else they want from you, what they think you do best and why they buy from you. You will learn a great deal and e-mail is the perfect way to do it. Quick and two-way. Also, by choosing the right 'From' wording 'Friends at your company' for example, people will learn to look out for your email, not overlook or disregard them.

## Just rewards

By asking questions you will find that your audience has thought about your company for a few minutes more that they would have normally. Good promotion in itself, but more importantly, you have demonstrated that you care about their needs and you want to give them a better service. However, when you get back to them with considered and creative ideas (based on the information they gave you) your relationship will grow and grant you even more permission to speak with them. In short, you'll be able to offer an even better service. 'The Customer is King' – it's all about good customer relationship management (CRM).

This process may take a while for you to plan, deliver and action, but the value of the business that returns will undoubtedly be higher and pay for this extra effort. This is really just the start of your direct marketing activity.

*People do business with people.  
Get to know your clients.  
Find out what they want.  
Deliver it, (with a smile!)*

## 'Frequency' and integrated campaigns

Above all don't assume that everyone saw your first 'blast', instead focus on building relationships with regular dialogue. Follow a planned and specifically timed campaign and ensure you 'follow-up' whether it be more email, telephone or hard copy mailings. This gently breeds familiarity and you will gain peoples confidence and trust. People will be less likely to delete your mail if they are both expecting it and feel unthreatened by it. You should appeal as an associate and information service, not a hindrance.

*'It takes multiple impressions supported by traditional follow-up to convert a prospect, and never forget you are always battling for 'inbox' space'.*

You should also consider the seasons associated with your business and important dates in the calendar. All these factors can affect response.

A recent report showed that: -

81% of major sales are closed on the 5<sup>th</sup> contact.

80% of people who inquire about a product or service will buy it within a year.

HOWEVER, 90% of the time they don't buy it from the same company they made the initial contact with.

This may not necessarily pertain specifically to your industry, but it does show the potential importance of building relationships, and following up on all initial contacts, and keep following them up.



## Auto response

E-mail auto responders will send a message to an e-mail address when it has received from that address a message with certain criteria within it, like a certain word contained in the title. For instance the word 'SUBSCRIBE' in the title might trigger an e-mail, which thanks the recipient for subscribing to the newsletter.

Sequential e-mail auto responders allow you to set up a sequence of outgoing messages in 2 days, 5 days, 10 days, and whenever you want them to go out. If however you want to stop sending these messages (they have unsubscribed, or they have already bought this promotion) their address comes out of a particular database and into another.

All of this can be done automatically from one computer.

## Regular newsletters

What better way to build your community? This is your opportunity to give your customer's free information about your industry that they will be interested in. It is NOT a selling tool (well not directly). The features within the newsletter should focus on benefits rather than cost and availability of your services.

The most important thing is that you 'give' and they feel more and more comfortable about receiving information from you. You are building trust.

The subscription email should be TEXT based with links to your website which is where the newsletter should sit. This means that they get a 'skinny' e-mail because it's only text (therefore wholly compatible) and they have the opportunity if to go to the site if they want to. A bit like reading the headlines of a newspaper.

There is software that can help you to send e-mail messages that will detect what platform the recipient is using and will be able to give them an HTML e-mail with colours and pictures if they can accept it, but the evidence is still not conclusive as to whether this type of message gets a better response than plain text.

And finally, it's yet another way of getting them to your website (sub conscious selling).

## Trading on-line – E-commerce

At the end of the day, your business is all about sales and your website and e-mail are just another sales tool. While the Internet continues to become more secure, so does e-mail. People's confidence in using this medium is growing. A longer-term goal should be to offer a totally automated online purchasing service, and use e-mail to build relationships strong enough for the visitor to trust you.



## 4. The pitfalls

### What could possibly go wrong?

E-mail format and compatibility (HTML vs. TEXT)

Attachments

Automatic response rejection

If you're careful about how you plan your campaign, most of the pitfalls can be avoided. Research and seek advice from people in the know.

On the whole you can never be quite sure which system or web browser your audience is using. Although your e-mail may look fantastic with its Flash and HTML elements, it may not be the most compatible format for your recipient. However, in a couple of years technology will have caught up and we will all be able to handle HTML. Keep it simple... well-written TEXT e-mail is just as effective as that with bangs and whistles. Also, TEXT e-mail with a link to your website will encourage them to go there.

*Remember, don't be too 'flash'... it's not about you... it's about the recipient – they may not be as up to date with IT as you and your e-mail could take forever to download.*

Similarly, many companies operate file size restrictions. You may find your e-mail is blocked if it has a large attachment. Always be considerate to the end user. Some e-mail servers are also set-up to recognise certain 'loop' e-mail (automatic responses). This is really designed at recognising junk, so consider this as an effecting factor when planning your campaign.

## 5. The process

### So how can this be done?

#### Step 1.) Ask for Permission

Naturally this is a great way to start the process. But first, as we are using e-mail and all the baggage that comes with it, *we need to ask permission.*

As your clients are used to receiving your printed marketing material, this is a good way to make an initial approach and outline what you would like to do; personalise it if you can. The most important aspects of this contact is that you:

1. Outline your plans to give them better products and services
2. Assure them you won't hound them or abuse their permission
3. Build a relationship that breeds familiarity and avoids your e-mail going in the 'trash can'

The open and honest approach will gain a similar response from the client, and if they don't want to take part, fine, we can deal with this section of your audience later.

#### Step 2.) What do you need to know?

Once you have received a response from your client base, you then need to consider what you need to know to generate more business opportunities. This is sometimes the hardest part. We can help you create a survey that is short and introduces the concept of what you are trying to achieve. We will ask for advice from your clients, but more importantly we'll help you open the channel of communication. Even if they don't respond, you may still have got your point across.

#### Step 3.) Action

The results will highlight a number of immediate issues that you can resolve. However, the real work is highlighting the individual's problems and building a longer lasting and more solid relationship by offering solutions.

#### Step 4.) Report

It would be good to take stock at this point and assess what the process has achieved so far. The next step is to plan how this method can be built into the fabric of your company's marketing strategy. Once the initial flurry of activity has provided some results, a more structured and manageable system needs to be put in place. This will allow you to keep on benefiting from an on going process of asking questions, listening and action on the response.

## **How could we structure this for you?**

Utilising our skills, we can help you deliver a considered and successful campaign that provides you with the knowledge to open out to new audiences. We'll help you ask the simple questions of your existing customers that will give you insight about how they feel about your company and its service.

## **What would be provided?**

This process has a certain degree of set-up with consultancy on how to take it further over time.

## **The Actual Process (our 5-point plan)**

### **1.) Gathering e-mail addresses**

Develop an open and honest piece of print communication (direct marketing).

It should have a simple and clear reply mechanism, which encourages the giving of e-mail addresses. It should clearly state the permission marketing disclaimer and could offer an incentive for replying. This could be in the form of a discount on orders within a certain timeframe, or exclusivity to information before 'the general public' (up and coming offers, services or business solutions for example).

### **2.) Organise and develop contact database system**

Whether handled in-house or by us, we can help you structure the way you manage the newly invigorated contacts. We can make sure the process of personalisation and communication runs smoothly.

We can send an email on your behalf to the whole database or for any one region independently. The email will look like its come from you and will have your links.

### **3.) Plan**

We can help you write newsletters, marketing campaigns, product & service updates, questionnaires and surveys when appropriate. We will help you send the right messages and ask the right questions to ensure the maximum response from the audience.

### **4.) Action!**

Where do we go with the data we have collated and updated?

We can help plan what future response or dialogue is prudent, and helps highlight what might be most effective if implemented straight away. One immediate

requirement we recommend is a digital company newsletter with links to your website for example.

## **5.) The future**

Once the immediate issues have been resolved a more considered and long-term plan can be put together. This will be based on the responses and how you feel that you would like to move on.

We are interested in building relationships, not closing deals.

## **6. Cost**

This will depend on the level of service required.

Let's discuss your issues first of all, to see how we can help you.