

Strategies for Direct Email Success

Email can be a highly effective medium for communicating with clients or prospects. At a fraction of the cost of direct mail, you can use email to acquire new customers, increase sales, notify customers of sales and promotions and—most importantly—to develop and nurture an ongoing dialogue and relationship with their customers.

Newsletters that provide interesting and relevant information may be a good way to grow your client base or increase current customer satisfaction. Email promotions may generate a substantial impact on a special offer.

Like any marketing tactic, direct email may or may not work by itself. Here are some guidelines for ensuring success in your direct mail efforts.

I. Invite people to opt-in.

There are different ways to build your email database. The worst way is putting emails on your list of people who don't know you or your business and don't have any interest in your material. If you are formally accused of spamming, you run the risk of having your business and your ISP blocked from sending emails.

The best way is always offer your email on an "opt-in" basis. Send your emails to people who request them. And then, create other opt-in opportunities.

- Add a place on your web site to opt-in with one click.
- At trade shows, conferences or special events, ask people you meet if they are interested in being on your email list.
- Provide incentives for people willing to subscribe including case studies or a white paper related to their industry
- Create an online poll either for market research or just for fun.

II. Make it easy to get off your list.

Make it just as easy to get off your list and it was to get on it. Without this reliability, you may completely alienate them. Make sure your opt-out process is easy and reliable. The basic steps include the following:

- Provide instructions on every email on how to remove a name from the list.
- After you receive the opt-in request, send an email confirming their subscription request.
- Provide an opt-out process that immediately provides feedback that their request was recognized.

III. Make sure the content is relevant to the person reading it.

Content is critical to the success of your direct emails. To have continuing access to the people on your list, provide them with content that is both interesting and relevant. No matter what the other email features you have capitalized on, people will unsubscribe if the content does not interest them.

IV. Target your emails by customizing your message.

Recognize that your database may be divided into a number of different audiences. You may have

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the need to send out press releases, product information or investor newsletters. Each may need to look and feel differently. You also may want to offer the information in various formats including HTML, plain text or as a URL link.

Personalize. Let me repeat that a few times: personalize, personalize and personalize. One size does not fit all. Messages that are personalized sell better than generic ones. Talk to the email reader as if they were in the room. It's not cost-effective to write a message to each person on your list. But there are a few things you can do to make the reader feel like the message is directed solely at them.

- Personalize the content: Add the reader's name to the message. Use the words "you" and "your" as well as "I" and "me" to help the reader feel like they have received an email from a caring person.
- Personalize the envelope: The envelope is the first thing an email recipient sees. So make sure the message is coming from a person not a company. For example, send the message from Bob Jones not Jones & Associates. Send the email to the person not the database list name. For example, send the message to Burt.Reynolds @moviestar.com not Hollywood Newsletter Recipients.
- Personalize feedback: Invite the recipient to respond to the email. Listen to what they say and, if appropriate, respond with a thoughtful reply.

V. Tweak the frequency of your emails.

If your emails do increase your business, you may be tempted to send out emails more frequently. And you may be right! But, in order to find out, you should probably survey your customers. You should also track the number of emails that are opened and the links that are opened.

VI. Follow up and use analytics.

Too many companies schedule email and utilize a "send and forget" strategy. You need follow up to nurture the link between the company and the customer. Make sure you have and use the analytical tools necessary to make the most of your direct email campaigns.

VII. Make sure the email system is efficient.

You may choose to handle the direct emails yourself, either internally or using a web-based service such as Constant Contact. Or you may use an enterprise email management system if you will be handling emails on a large scale. No matter what your size and expertise, don't forget to think about how the workload will be distributed throughout your organization.

VIII. Use direct email to create an impression and sustain your brand.

Don't just send out newsletters and promotional communications. The non-verbal impression of simply saying welcome when they opt-in, say goodbye when they opt-out and responding when appropriate tells the reader you are interested in them.

Assisting with your email marketing is just the beginning of what we do at Marketing On Demand. Call us today for an informed survey of your current marketing tactics and strategies.