

Small Business Guide to Email Marketing

Although social media marketing has captured the small business marketing spotlight in recent years, it is much less effective in converting visitors into customers than the old work horse, email marketing. In fact, the average conversion rate for social media generated traffic is 0.71% compared to a hefty 3.19% for traffic generated through email marketing.

The reason is simple: people like to get emails from companies. A study from Marketing Sherpa found that 72% of US adults prefer email over postal mail, TV ads, text messages, social media and in person communication as a method of communication with companies. Nearly all (91%) said they like to receive promotional emails from companies with which they have a relationship and more than two-thirds (69%) made purchases influenced by promotional emails.

Use Email to Accomplish Multiple Business Objectives

When done correctly, email marketing can accomplish a variety of objectives in a very cost effective manner, including customer communication, prospect communication, building brand awareness, generating revenue and capturing data on subscribers.

However, many companies do not use email marketing to its greatest potential. Companies with stagnant or declining revenue tend to use their email for only one or two of the above objectives, rather than for all of them.

On the other hand, companies that report significant revenue growth in the last fiscal year were twice as likely to have “generate revenue” as an email objective as those with significantly declining revenue, showing that email is a major factor in boosting revenue. In fact, every dollar spent on email marketing generates an average of \$44 in revenue.

Building Your List

For truly successful email marketing, you must have the right list, consisting of people who have opted in to receive information from you, know who you are and what you do and have a genuine interest in your products and services.

There are multiple ways to build your list, most of which center on your website. Many successful websites have a list building form right on the home page, and often on multiple pages in addition to a longer form on the Contact Us page.

In order to incentive visitors to give you their email address, you can offer them something free such as an e-book or monthly e-newsletter on a topic related to your site’s content. These “freemiums” are also called lead magnets. The number of different types of products, markets or topics you are knowledgeable about will

determine how many lead magnets you will need. The more specific the lead magnet, the easier it will be to segment your list.

You can also put up a squeeze page. Unlike a landing page, which only hints at information the visitor will get after he gives you his email address, a squeeze page gives valuable information up front, frequently in video form, and then asks for the email address to get more information on a similar topic. Squeeze pages, if done right, can help you rapidly build your list.

Building a Relationship with Subscribers

Every small business should have a zero-delay auto responder. This is an automated email that immediately sends out whenever someone gives you her email address for the first time. Those signing up to get a newsletter or join your mailing list should get a welcome email right away, acknowledging that they signed up for the list, showing them that you appreciate them and giving them an idea of what to expect from you.

To really maximize goodwill with your subscribers, use auto responders for all online purchases and customer service inquiries/complaints too.

Since subscribers have trusted you with their email addresses, you should be respectful of the fact that they signed up with you primarily for useful content. The content/promotion ratio should be more or less 70:30. This can be with dedicated content-only emails mixed with promotion-only emails, or a blend like newsletters with ads or promotions included.

Improving Open Rates

Getting prospects to open emails is a major challenge. The average prospect open rate for 2017 was 16.8%. However, more than a third of marketers have open rates of 10% or lower. Companies that are successful at using email to generate revenue are 54% more likely to use A/B testing and 60% more likely to optimize email deliverability as those who are less successful.

Try out different subject lines and preview copy to see what works with your subscribers. In general, avoid “salesy” words like free, sale, limited time and the like. These are more likely to get immediately deleted, reported as spam or filtered as spam. Email subject lines that include the first name of the recipient typically get a higher click-through rate than those without a name, according to HubSpot. Emojis and videos can also improve open rates.

Analyze your stats from previous campaigns to see what day and time your subscribers tend to open emails. Various studies have found that Tuesday is the day that has the highest open rate and 11:00 AM is the best time to send emails, but your subscribers may be different.

Finally, keep your list clean by eliminating duplicates and hard bounces. This will give you a better handle on your email effectiveness.

Email Platforms

Unless you have your own email server, you will most likely want to use an email platform to send your bulk emails. They range from free (Mail Chimp) to over a thousand dollars per month (Infusionsoft), depending on the level of service and the size of your contact list.

You will upload your contact list (which must be opt-in) to the platform and then may have the ability to create additional lists or segment the list. More robust platforms like Infusionsoft can be set up to automatically add tags to individual contacts depending to what they did (open an email, click on an email, buy something, etc.). All of the platforms allow you to design emails from templates with your own images and content.

Here are some popular email marketing platforms for small businesses:

[Mail Chimp](#)

[Constant Contact](#)

[iContact](#)

[Infusionsoft](#)

[aWeber](#)

A Few More Thoughts

Make sure all of your email communication is done in the same voice. Since it's primarily a written medium, that just means in the same tone of writing, whether that is friendly and casual, more professional or humorous.

Be consistent in the frequency of your emails. If you have a monthly newsletter, send it around the same day of the month since subscribers will be expecting it then. It is also important not to skip any scheduled emails unless you send subscribers a notice to that effect (ex. "We'll be taking two weeks off for the holidays, so you won't get a newsletter in December. Have a wonderful holiday season!").

Remember, email is not just for selling (although that is a great way to use it!). It is also a highly effective way to keep top of mind, communicate with customers, get referrals, resolve complaints, poll your subscribers and establish your company as the go-to expert in your field.