

Email Marketing

Email marketing is one of the most powerful, effective ways to market your company and its products, but it's often overlooked. My colleague Scott Clark (Atilus' director of Sales and Marketing) and I were recently asked to speak before local business owners on the subject of email marketing. Our presentation involved some very simple information on how to perform email marketing – start-to-finish – no matter what size company you are or what your technological skill level. Unfortunately, that speaking engagement was cancelled, but we thought we would compile our notes and information online so that those who didn't have a chance to attend could review at their leisure and hopefully implement and help grow their business.

This article is organized in 9 major sections, feel free to click on a link to jump around:

- Email – What is Email?
- Why Email Marketing?
- Acquiring Emails
- Creating Emails
- Sending Emails
- Tracking Your Emails

- Legalities

Email – What is Email?

Well, unless you've been hiding for a generation, email or electronic mail, has become the #1 form of communication in modern society. According to recent estimates, the number is around 60 Billion.

Email is popular. Friends and family use it to stay in touch across long distances. Co-workers use it when it's more convenient than getting up and walking over or picking up the phone. Email is used to verify who you are (on various websites)... email is everywhere.

Knowing that email use is so prevalent it brings us to our next section – why email marketing?

Why Email Marketing?

In preparing for the seminar and this article I was able to come up with 5 major reasons why a company or entity should do email marketing. These 6 reasons really ignore email marketing's statistics – low cost, high effectiveness, etc. and really just concentrate on the benefits to your business after you've implemented:

- The Amazing Return On Investment

- Sales & Discounts
- News
- Surveys
- Saying in Front! (of your competition, of your clients, of vendors)

Return on Investment –

According to Direct Marketing Association, email marketing generated an ROI of \$51.58 for every dollar spent on it in 2006. The expected figure for 2007 is \$48.56, and the prediction for 2008 is \$45.65. As such, it outperforms all the other direct marketing channels examined, such as print catalogs. (See reference.)

Send Information – there’s always stuff going on at your business. You have updates, you have changes, you have information that your customers would appreciate having, and would appreciate knowing. Email marketing allows you to get out this information in an *extremely efficient* manner. Compose one email regarding a recent change at your business – target an appropriate group of clients (more to come regarding targeting) – and suddenly thousands of people you do business with every day know exactly what is going on. Sending information – the real heart of email – is probably one of the biggest (and simplest) reasons why you should be doing email marketing.

Sales & Discounts – Are you holding a special sale or offering long-time clients a special discount? Let your customers know and you could be bringing in many more times the business you are now. They say it’s most effective to sell to an existing client. Email marketing is a prime way to efficiently (but personally) communicate sales, deals or discounts to your audience of potential and existing customers.

News – Communicate your good news! In business people like to know they are working with growing, prosperous companies. It rubs off! I met Colin Quinn a few years ago and contribute that awkward meeting in the Newark airport to my success today.

Just kidding, but if you have been mentioned in the paper or have had a ribbon cutting, let people know. Broadcast your good news, attain celebrity – even local celebrity, and continue to prosper.

Surveys – Your customers, vendors, employees – everyone you work with – deserve a voice. A quick email newsletter along with a survey can help you gain insight into all aspects of your business and associates.

Staying in Front – I saved the best for last. In my experience in setting up and creating email marketing, the biggest thing I would like to communicate is *Staying in Front!*

People only have a limited memory. If you performed a service – a great service – someone will probably tell a friend or two – or refer a business associate. But, as time goes by, as they get farther away from the date of the service, they may forget about you.

The detailing job you performed on your client's car was fantastic, but as time goes by – as situations in your client's life arise that warrant a referral (a friend of your clients buys a used car for example) – the transaction is so far away that they forget that you are available with a service that will benefit them.

Email marketing destroys this time barrier. Clients you performed services on years ago when properly informed on your latest information, sales, news, surveys, etc. are getting an inbox full of you and can't forget about you. Even if they don't read every email the constant small reminders are a great tool to help your business stay in front. Email marketing allows you to stay in front of all of those clients and vendors you worked so hard to get, but may not be working with or helping at this exact moment.

Additionally, an email newsletter helps you stay in front of your competition. I've talked with many companies recently unsatisfied with their vendors or other services they've hired out, but they can't even remember the company's name! People are busy, they will forget. But, if your client does get targeted by a competitor an email newsletter – one that has helped keep your company in your client's mind – is a great tool to retain your client.

Acquiring Emails

There are a number of ways to acquire the email addresses of individuals to which you will send your email newsletter. The ONLY way in which you should acquire emails are via free methods.

Existing Associates:

Tap your existing clients for emails. If you already have some kind of excel spreadsheet with all of your clients and vendors or if you are using more advanced CRM software start there. Compile your list from people you work with every day.

Networking Events usability

If you go to networking event ask everyone you meet if they would mind receiving your email newsletters. More often than not your list will grow incredibly fast once you start concentrating on it. Most of these suggestions involve events and people you attend and see every day.

Trade Show

Offer a free gift, guide, or consulting session to everyone who is willing to be added to your list. You're at the trade show to network and market your products or services, acquiring a real qualified email address allows you to do that for a lifetime.

Targeting – Different emails will have different audiences. A message you have for your vendors might not apply to your customers – in fact it might be imperative that you don't send that message as it will send mixed signals or tarnish relationships. That is why as you begin to acquire your list make sure to break it up. This process will vary depending on who you work with, generally you will have clients/customers, vendors, leads, friends & family, etc. As your list grows and you continue to hone in on your email marketing skills the more targeted your list is the better.

DO NOT USE PAID LISTS – Paid lists or compiling randomly found email addresses from websites throughout the net - although allowed – will lead to nothing but trouble in all but the most lucky or extreme of cases. Simply put, do not solicit to anyone that you haven't physically met or asked to a part of the newsletter – email marketing, when done right will take more time, but in the long run it will be more effective, have a higher return, and will keep you out of trouble.

Marketing to people who have not asked or given you permission can get your account banned from different services (if you are using a paid email newsletter service) destroying any hard work you put into the design or creation of your targeted lists.

Marketing to people who have not given you permission can also lead to the server where you send out the messages becoming black listed – hurting anyone else on that same server and leading to overall mail problems for your business and the other businesses on the server.

Creating Your Email Newsletter

You're ready to go, you've decided you want to do an email newsletter. You've spent sometime gathering some addresses what do you do next?

Service: - Create your email. There are a number of ways to do this. If you are on a very small budget or just starting out you can simply use your own email, outlook, hotmail, or yahoo will all work fine. Paste your contact emails, draft a short message and hit send.

Outlook users can also do what's called a mail merge - and if you've setup your email list through an excel document you can merge appropriate fields for a more personalized message.

If you're looking for something more advanced, maybe something that is designed to look like a newsletter with your logo, you can play around with the tools the above services offer or move to a complete email newsletter service.

Personally, I am a proponent of Constant Contact. We've been working with the service for years. It is very easy to use and customize and you pay per contacts - not per number of emails sent. That might not work for all companies, but if you have a 5000+ list of contacts and you send a message out twice a week, the number of emails sent quickly adds up.

If you are looking to create a more advanced look, with accurate tracking I highly recommend investing in one of these services.

Etiquette - Your email should be polite, but laid back. Speak to your audience in the 2nd person, it takes a while, but the affect is tremendous. In the end you know you're audience best - write your email for them. What works for a crazy online tee shirt company might not work for a financial advisor.

Subject Line - Make sure your subject line pertains to the body of your email but, be creative and inventive. Experiment with different ways to say what it is you've created. You need people to see your name, see your subject line, and want to click.

Design - Whether you use one of the above email newsletter services or just your plain email keep design in mind. You might not need a logo, fancy colors, or cool effects, but direct your audiences eye with bold text, bullet points, colors, etc. And make it as simple as possible. Email inboxes are getting more and more cluttered and people have little or no time to actually read. Quickly direct them to the most important points.

Content - Much like design, make your content short. Typically a paragraph works, but a few sentences is better. Time and time again in doing usability and optimization tests with clients emails that are short and simple perform the best. Additionally your email needs to include a call to action. Whether its drop dead simple - a big button asking your audience to donate - or included in the body of the text give your readers a next step. Do you want them to click, to call, etc. and whatever that goal is, make sure they can reach it quickly and simply.

Sending Email

When sending your emails there are two primary things to remember, send at the right time, and send to the right audience.

We discussed divvying your list up into different groups or lists. As you acquire the emails, break them out as best you can. That way, when sending emails you can send specific, targeted messages, to those particular groups. We've even gone so far as to create groups for certain events we've attended. That way we can send a message just to those people we've met – or perhaps a special promotion.

Timing is everything and email newsletters are no different. A message sent at 5:30 pm on a Friday will not usually be as effective as a one sent on a Wednesday at 2pm. Much like the crafting of your content, keep your audience's habits in mind. Do they check their email at 5am in the morning? Do they have

busy work days involving lots of email? Overall we've found that email send in the middle of the week has last chance of getting bundled in with the end of the work week mess or the overflow that seems to pour in on Mondays. Time of day is also important. All audiences are different but if you are seeking professionals we've found mid afternoon is great. Most people have already sifted through their inbox mess and when your email pops up in the lower right hand corner of their screen it is a wonderful distraction.

Tracking Your Emails

Depending on what service you use to send your email tracking may be difficult or simple. This is another reason why we love the email newsletter services as they allow for easy, almost creepy, tracking. You can view email-over-email who clicked on what and when. As you continue to send out emails you may start to notice that a certain time works better or certain words in your subject line leads to better open rates.

As you do track your emails begin to experiment and refine. Overtime with slow tweaks you can have a highly opened email that almost everyone reads.

Legalities

Inspired by my recent trip to the Entrepreneurs Law School at FGCU I decided to throw in a little bit about the legalities surrounding email. Basically you can send email to anyone, at any address, no matter where or how you got that address as long as these basic requirements are met:

- Use a non-elusive subjectline
- Allow people to unsubscribe
- Feature your company information (name, address, phone, etc.)

Whew... that was a lot. But, once you get started I am positive you'll be excited at the results. If you have any questions regarding email newsletters or would like to learn more please feel free to contact me or leave your comments!