



10 Steps to Effective E-Mail Marketing By Lois Carter Fay, APR

E-mail marketing is not easy; it is competitive and takes a special skill to be successful at it. If you are like most people who use e-mail today for business and personal reasons, you are seeing a huge increase in volume of unsolicited messages. E-mail programs provide filters that can automatically remove a substantial amount of unsolicited e-mail (also known as SPAM), and many people use the delete key quickly and efficiently to thwart a marketer's best efforts. So, how can you increase your chances of success with e-mail marketing?

Here are ten steps to success with e-mail marketing:

1. **Create a plan.**

In order to know if your e-mail campaign is successful, you have to know what you want to do and what results you expect. Typical conversion rates are .5 to 2 percent. Set a budget and a time frame for reaching the results you wish to achieve. Remember that your campaign will evolve and grow as results come in.

2. **Develop the list.**

Start with your in-house list of customers. These are your best prospects for increased revenue. Your customers already know you and it's likely they would welcome hearing from you. However, with every mailing you must give them the option to opt out (or ask you to stop sending) of future communications.

Your website can also help you gather names. When guests visit your website, ask them to opt in (request) for periodic mailings and provide their email address. This is a good time to gather other pertinent data, as well. Try to keep the list of questions short (no more than ten questions) or you will lose them before they sign in. Of course, when you gather this information, you will



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need to disclose how you plan to use it and whether you will share this information with anyone else.

If you don't have an in-house list, then you will have to purchase a list of prospects. Look only at permission-based, or opt-in, lists. There are several vendors, like Postmaster Direct, YesMail and 24/7, that gather opt-in names on their own sites, as well as collect them from smaller sites within their networks. It's best to use a double opt-in list if this is available. This type of vendor asks people to say, "Yes, I would like to receive mail from you," on the site, and then when a person signs up, the vendor sends a confirming e-mail that requires a response to make "double sure" the prospect wants to sign up.

There will be a certain percentage of "bad" e-mail addresses on every list, including your in-house list. People change e-mail addresses frequently. As you clean your list and become more sophisticated in your collection of historical data, it will become more valuable to you. Build and nurture that relationship. Once you have developed your list, it is a good time to ignore your mother's advice; don't share! The best privacy policy is to keep all of your list information confidential.

3. Craft your offer.

There are five parts to an e-mail message: (1) subject line; (2) from line; (3) introduction; (4) body copy and (5) call to action.

If you are known to the person receiving the message, the "from" line is probably the most critical. However, for everyone else, the "subject" line is of utmost importance. Be sure to write a clear and enticing subject line to encourage the recipient to open the message. This is probably the hardest part about writing the copy and there are many approaches that work—direct or straight-forward style, benefits-oriented approach, using a question, teaser style, using the person's name in the line, etc.

The introduction should generally be short and sweet, getting to the point in a sentence or two. You want to interest the reader enough that he will read on. And include a click-through opportunity right up front; make it easy for folks to respond.

The body copy goes into more detail, includes your unique selling proposition (main reason your customers buy your product), benefits, and the offer. Remember to focus on benefits, not features.

The call to action, of course, asks the recipient to respond to your offer. Putting a direct link to a special landing page on your website will often increase the



number of sales from the offer and it will also allow you to track responses efficiently.

Don't forget to include an option to automatically opt out or unsubscribe to your e-mail messages. Most of the distribution software you or your vendor will use automatically adds this to the bottom of your message. Check with your vendor to make sure.

Your e-mail campaign can be sent with pictures (HTML) or in a straight text version. Remember that HTML versions take longer to load and can be distorted by some e-mail systems. If your company's customers are primarily consumers, it would be best to use a text message because the number-one e-mail provider, AOL, distorts the HTML messages. On the other hand, if your customers are primarily large businesses, you might want to consider HTML e-mail messages because they are much more interesting and graphically pleasing.

If you are sending text-version messages, keep each line to 60 characters or less to avoid having a recipient's e-mail system wrap your text inappropriately. Keep the overall promotion short (250 words or less) and easy to read. Be sure to triple-check your e-mail for typos and grammar errors. Also, send the e-mail to yourself and to a few others with different e-mail systems to make sure that it transmits properly.

4. Hire a vendor.

If you are sending your e-mail campaign to more than 20 people (and one would hope you are!), you will either need special software to distribute it, or you will need to hire a firm to distribute your messages. Web design firms, Internet service providers and similar companies can point you to a vendor in your area. There are also national vendors, such as NetCreations. For a good list of software and list vendors see *Permission-Based E-Mail Marketing That Works!* by Kim MacPherson or *Internet Direct Mail, The Complete Guide to Successful E-mail Marketing Campaigns* by Stevan Roberts, Michelle Feit and Robert W. Bly. You can order any of these books through Amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/redirect-home/marketingidea-20> .

5. Test the offer.

There are several ways to test your offer. Try out different subject lines to see how your list responds. Change the offer. If you are purchasing or renting a list, you will want to test your offer on approximately ten percent of the list to discover the percentage of "bad" addresses, as well as find out if you need to change anything in the message before sending it out to the entire list.



6. Measure your test results.

How well did you do on the test? Did you receive the expected .5 to 2 percent response? If not, it's time to go back to the drawing board.

7. Distribute the message.

Now you are ready to send the message to the entire list. Ready, set, go!

8. Track and measure your results.

Your vendor should be able to help you track the click-throughs on the campaign. If you have a special landing page on your website with a coded form for ordering, you will know when people respond to your e-mail message. Even if you do not do this, you can compare sales for a similar time period the previous year, or the increase in sales over the previous month, to quantify your e-mail campaign results. If you have used direct mail or other marketing methods in the past, you will have statistics that can be compared to your e-mail campaign and you can quickly judge your success.

9. Consider special options.

One thing you might want to consider when sending out your e-mail is developing a "viral" campaign. If you create something that is truly fun, unique, useful or interesting, you can get your customers to do your selling for you. That's what happened with Napster, Hot Mail and Blue Mountain greeting cards. What can you do to encourage your customers to pass the word?

Other ideas are to run a limited-time contest, provide free whitepapers or business tools, offer a free gift for opting in, or let your customers download the first chapter of your book for free.

10. Follow up and start over.

Once you have made the sale, be sure to follow good customer service principles. Do what you say you will do, keep in touch, and keep sending out those e-mails!

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