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# EMAIL MARKETING ESSENTIALS

Email marketing helps to build a personal, ongoing relationship with customers. A tailored email can be used to send newsletters, special offers or customer alerts. It is cost-effective and immediate. It is also easy to 'miss your mark' and lose customers in the process, so you need to understand the basics when developing your email marketing campaign.

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# Introduction to email marketing

## **What is it?**

Email marketing – also known as opt-in marketing – is an effective way of retaining existing customers through a well executed email communications plan that can include newsletters, special offers, product launches or customer alerts. Opt-in means that people actively sign up to hear from you, so you have their interest at the outset.

Sending an email to all customers asking them to reconfirm or update their details can deliver great results. Most customers will act on this if they believe the information they provide will help them get more relevant communication in the future.

## **What are the benefits?**

Email marketing is a very low cost form of marketing. Depending on the volumes of email you send in your campaign, each message costs well under the \$0.45 a basic letter costs to post or \$0.20c per message to SMS.

Email is fast. It takes less time to prepare, send, and receive responses than other forms marketing. It is also easier to track than traditional mail. Reports such as who opens your messages, who forwards them on, who clicks on any links and which email addresses bounce are easily available. It has the additional benefit of subscribers being able to immediately reply, subscribe, purchase, download, view, etc.

The design, layout and content of your email marketing campaign can be customised to suit the intention of the message, as well as the look and feel of your business.

## **When to use it**

Your email marketing may take the form of a weekly or monthly newsletter, intermittent special offers or personalised messages informing interested clients when certain products are available.

Identify the intention behind your email campaign and choose the delivery format that suits. Before you proceed, consider: why are you sending it? who will receive it? what will it look like? how will you manage it? who will manage it?

# Manage subscriber lists

## List management

The first step to email marketing is to build and maintain a list of contacts or subscribers. Your list will be stored in a database that contains information about each person, such as contact details, interests and demographics. Having a clean and fresh database ensures that you send the right information to the right person at the right time.

Managing your database can be very time consuming. Either select a dedicated person in your organisation to manage the list, or make sure you have clear procedures for everyone to follow.

## Guidelines

Email marketing should always be sent on the basis of consent. That is, people subscribe or ask to receive information from you. The Spam Act has strict guidelines all marketers must follow when it comes to email marketing.

For more information on the Spam Act, the Federal Government Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has produced a pdf document entitled Spam Act 2003: An overview for business.

The best way to ensure your subscriber list is populated accurately is through the 'double opt-in' process. This means when someone signs up, they are sent a subscription confirmation email which requires a response. This ensures that the person who owns the email address is the same person signing up.

## Checklist for your subscriber lists

- Choose a program with effective subscriber management
- Double opt-in subscriptions are preferable
- Familiarise yourself with the Spam Act

# Develop an email format

After building a subscriber list, the next step is to develop what your email will look like and when it will be delivered. Your email marketing strategy will dictate your style and you have the capacity to work in a range of formats and styles depending on the scope of your promotional program.

## **Be concise**

Avoid text heavy emails. Keep your content brief and provide links to a website for detailed information. Sending more frequent, concise emails tends to deliver better results. Note that studies show people tend to ignore graphical, print-ad style offers and deals, and are more likely to visit text-based links.

## **html vs plain text**

html presents information in a graphically rich format. It is both visually appealing and more interactive than plain text email.

Be aware that not all readers can view graphic email. Make sure your email marketing program sends messages in both html and plain text so the subscriber receives whichever format their email system supports.

## **Subject line**

The subject line is the first thing a subscriber sees in their inbox. It should entice recipients to open and read the email without looking like junk mail. Use descriptive words to tell recipients what they will get by reading your email e.g. '10 tips to increase your online business' rather than the uninteresting 'October newsletter'. Keep it brief as some email will not display any more than 30 characters.

## **'From' field**

Take special care in determining what appears in the 'from' field. It identifies the sender and is often used by recipients to determine whether or not the communication is relevant or important. Should the 'from' field have the company name, the name of the newsletter, the CEO or the marketing manager? This may depend on why you are sending the communication but the general rule is to keep it consistent.

## **When to send**

The key is to ensure that every email communication is relevant, timely and useful to recipients . As a general rule, communicate only when you have something to say . However, find a balance between sending email too infrequently customers forget you or sending email too often customers are bombarded and start unsubscribing.

For best results, avoid sending emails last thing Friday or first thing Monday; avoid lunch hours, late afternoons, evenings, weekends and public holidays. It is worth experimenting to find out which days and times yield higher response rates.

## Checklist for developing an email format

- Keep it brief
- Determine your email format and keep it consistent
- Use the subject line and 'from' field to encourage greater readership
- Communicate only when you have something to say but maintain a delivery cycle for top-of-mind awareness
- Test which days and times yield better response rates
- Alert staff that an email is going out before sending

# Make it personal

## Relevance

Personalisation and targeting of every message is only limited by your creative ability and database capabilities. The more detail you have about each customer, the greater your capacity to personalise your email with relevant information. Hence, the greater chances that your email will be received well. Do you have detailed information about your customer or subscriber beyond just their first name?

## Targeted messages

An email marketing program can help deliver targeted messages to different customer groups or segments based on a specific region, or on a registered interest or subject.

This personalisation can be taken even further – someone might want to be notified when a particular product goes on sale, or when a region-specific event is coming up. Personalised communications add real value to your customer relations. The goal of email marketing after all is to deliver the right information to the right person at the right time.

Be aware that you are not sending one email to many people using the BCC field. Your email marketing program automatically sends a message to each recipient and this gives you scope to dictate what each subscriber will receive.

## Checklist to make it personal

- Keep your database clean and up to date
- Only personalise if you can get it right
- Target different audiences with their interests
- Explore the scope for personalisation and targeting in your email package
- Keep it relevant

# Test before you send

## **Quality control**

Establish a checking process to ensure your email reaches the right people in the way you intended. A link that isn't working, spelling mistakes, lost images, or sending to the wrong people all detracts from the effectiveness of your campaign.

## **Is this campaign going to work?**

Before you hit the send button, take a minute to consider whether this email campaign is actually going to work. Ideally, it is best to send a test campaign to a small list of recipients. Then look at key measures like open rates and click thru rates. This usually indicates the results you can expect when you send to your full list. More importantly, testing allows you to make changes you deem necessary to help increase response rates before the campaign goes out to everyone.

Aspects that are worth testing include your recipient list (are they the right audience?), the message or offer (is it appealing?), the subject line (does it grab people's attention?) and timing (what days or times deliver a better response?).

## Checklist for testing

- Control the quality of your email through a checking process
- Find out what drives better responses through a testing process
- Learn from past campaigns

# Manage and track responses

## **Managing and tracking**

Once you have sent your email, you can begin tracking subscriber responses immediately. Your email marketing program provides information such as who opened their email, who clicked on any links (and which ones they were), which emails bounced, which were forwarded and who unsubscribed.

An immediate response to particular issues, offers and campaigns can direct your future email marketing strategies.

## **Open rates**

Some people will just read the subject line, others will scan your email in their preview pane – the ones who actually open it have a high level of interest in your message. Monitoring your open rates can help determine the right time to send, and what is appealing to your subscribers.

## **Click thrus**

A 'click thru' describes when someone follows a link you have provided in your email. It can be a link to a whitepaper download, a link back to a website or to an order or purchase page, or a form that captures contact details. The click thru rates on your email message can be used to determine the interest and relevance of the information you have provided and is often the measure of an effective email campaign. Your aim is to increase your click thru rate by monitoring these levels and adapting accordingly.

## **Bounces**

Messages bounce because an email address doesn't exist, because a virus program has blocked your email, or because your subscriber is temporarily 'out of office'. Understanding your bounces helps you to keep clean and fresh subscriber information.

## **Unsubscribes**

When people unsubscribe they need to be taken off your list immediately. This process should be made as easy as possible for your subscribers.

## **Forwards**

When a subscriber forwards your email to someone else, you can find out. This helps to understand what campaigns are the most effective.

## **Replies**

When you receive specific feedback it is important to make an effort to respond personally. It can be time consuming but adds to the relationship you are developing with your current and potential clients.

## Checklist for customer responses

- Monitor customer responses carefully
- Make sure your email marketing program automates as much as possible
- Answer specific enquiries personally

# Use the reports

## **Reporting services**

You have sent your email newsletter or special offer – how do you know how it went? Your email marketing program should provide reporting with statistics on opened emails, unsubscribes, click thrus, forwards and more. Reports can help you build up a picture of your success based on who, what, when and where. Contact statistics can be used to measure where your most active subscriber base is, and what appeals to them.

## **Timeliness**

The beauty of email marketing is that you needn't wait to find out the results of your campaign – you can receive real time reporting and act on the results immediately.

## **Effectiveness**

When assessing reports on your email promotions, irrelevant results can be worse than no results at all. Make sure you understand the reports you receive and use them to tailor your marketing messages accordingly.

## Checklist for using the reports

- Choose an email promotion service that offers specialist reporting
- Make sure you understand what the reports mean
- Use the information in future email marketing



# EMAIL MARKETING ESSENTIALS

Find out how you can start using email marketing to promote your business.

**Talk to a Melbourne IT eBusiness  
Consultant on 1300 769 784 or  
visit [www.melbourneit.com.au](http://www.melbourneit.com.au)**



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