

Making the Most Out of Your E-mail Campaigns

—OR—

Tips for Successful E-mail Marketing



You're Invited to Our HUGE Annual Blowout Sale!

Why Be Lonely? Mingle with People in Your Area Today!

You Have Been Chosen to Take a Bahamas Cruise!

Need Money? We Have a Check Waiting Just for You!

Do these sound familiar? They should! If you are like me, you have e-mails with these subjects sitting in your inbox every day. Sure, you have a spam filter but they always seem to get through. I am also going to venture a guess and say that you delete almost every single one of these promotional e-mails, whether they are legitimate or just simple spam.

E-mail marketing is still a very powerful medium to promote your company, but you need to make your message stand out in the crowd. I am here to tell you that all hope is not lost! You can develop and grow your e-mail marketing campaigns successfully, if you follow a few simple guidelines.

Getting Your Message Through

Get creative! You know your audience—so give them something that will make them laugh, make them think, or just pique their interest. If you are sent a promotion from another company that you like, write it down! If you are serious about generating a successful e-mail marketing program you will constantly be thinking about what caught your attention—and then take that idea and spin it for your own company and audience.

You want your customer to open the e-mail, and respond to it—or take action. Here are a few best practices you can follow to engage, entice and prompt your customer to act.

Create a Promotional Strategy. Sure, coupons and promotions are great, but e-mail can be used in many other ways that offer your customers a little bit of variety. Instead, use e-mail to share information, promote local events in your

community, enter contests or even participate in surveys. Basically, show them you are about more than just discounts and special offers. More importantly, be wary of how frequently you offer discounts to your customers. The last thing you want is to create a “monster” – or a customer who purchases only when you have a sale going on.

Make Your Call to Action Clear. You have a purpose when you send an e-mail to a customer. It could be anything from placing an order for your weekly sale item or encouraging them to check out your new Green Office Products Line. Whatever it is, make it clear, easy to find and place it within several areas of the e-mail.

continued on page 22

continued from page 15

Timing Is Everything. Monitor your opt-outs with every send. If you experience increasing opt-out rates, consider sending your E-mail less frequently, or take a more advanced approach and allow your customers to decide how often they want to receive emails by adjusting their profile settings on your Web site. Some users still want E-mails, just not as often.

Keep Relevancy in Mind. Start by marketing products to those customers who have an interest in them. You can base product promotions upon the customer's purchase history or even the industry they are in. I have found that industry-specific promotions (i.e., medical, legal, and financial) work better than a blanket e-mail blast. After all, you are giving the customer something they are specifically interested in.

Brand Your E-mail. Make it very clear in the subject line and the "From" field that this particular e-mail is coming from your company. Your customers will recognize your name and are more likely to open it. Use your company name and logo within the message to solidify your branding within the content of your message.

Design Appropriately. Keep in mind that customers usually get their first look at your e-mail within the preview pane of their e-mail program. Place your calls to action and your creative copy in the top of your message. Also be wary of images. Most e-mail clients require the user to download images. If your customer sees a bunch of red Xs where images should be, they are less likely to open the e-mail.

Single Sign-Ups. Make it easy for your customer's to sign up. Yes, you still need the check box during your checkout or registration processes on your Web site which allows them to opt in or out from receiving promotional emails. However, placing a small sign-up box in a static area of your site to collect email addresses is much more user-friendly.

CAN SPAM

The CAN SPAM Act of 2003 put regulations in place for those companies that actively participate in e-mail marketing. In other words, you have to follow the rules. If you don't, you could be reported as "deceptive" and subject to fines. For a complete run-down of the laws, visit www.ftc.gov/spam. Here are a few rules to follow, put forth by the CAN SPAM Act:

1. Do not place false or misleading information in your header: The "From," and "To," fields must

be accurate and identify the person who initiated the email and the person receiving it.

2. Subject lines cannot be deceptive: The subject line cannot mislead the recipient about the contents of the message.

3. Provide an opt-out method. Whether it be a link or an e-mail address the customer can use to opt out, you must have it within your e-mail. Keep in mind you have 10 days to stop sending e-mail to the customer's address.

So, with all these CAN SPAM requirements, how can you insure your message does not end up in a junk e-mail folder, or get reported as spam? Start by following these tips, which help content filters allow, or disallow, your message to get through:

- Avoid spelling errors—triple check your copy
- Font size—Keep it between 8 and 14 points
- Repetitive Use of "Spam-Friendly" keywords such as "Free," "Discount," or "Trial Offer"—one use won't hurt you, but 10 will
- Do not use light gray or red fonts
- Stop typing words in all capital letters—especially in the subject line
- Do not use Non-ASCII (nonstandard) characters
- Be careful with attachments—store attachments, like PDFs, on your Web site, and place a link within the e-mail to launch them

E-Mail Etiquette

Avoid these faux pas when sending out an e-mail campaign:

- Don't type in capital letters. It looks as though you are screaming to get your message across. Again, this is a content filter flag as well
- Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation. Proof-read everything!
- Avoid lengthy sentences, and repeating yourself too often
- Make it as personal as possible. E-mail marketing programs often give you the option of personalizing the e-mail with the recipient's first name.
- Don't tag your e-mail as high priority, unless it really is.
- Use a company that can send out e-mails for you, such as Constant Contact, where you can upload contact lists. If you simply must use a program like Outlook to send your emails, do not put everyone's e-mail address in the "TO" or "CC" lines. Put them in the "BCC" area. No one wants their e-mail shared with others unless they give permission, and the "BCC" field is for blind carbon copy, meaning the addresses remain hidden.

Measure-Track-Adjust

If you are using a reputable e-mail marketing company, they will provide you with robust reports. You want to know your open rates, and your click-through rates. This will help you gauge what messages, promotions, timings and lists may be working better than others. If a certain promotion works, try it again, maybe this time using a different list. If a campaign failed, adjust it and try again. Also be sure to keep track of your opt-outs and bounces so you can remove those e-mails from your lists.

There are many tips, techniques and strategies to consider, and a few you must follow when creating successful e-mail marketing campaigns. Just remember, planning and creativity is key! All in all, e-mail marketing is a crucial, yet cost-effective, method to include in your marketing mix. If done right conversions and sales are just one e-mail blast away!

Jennifer Rae Stine, Director of Marketing for FortuneWeb Marketing, is a seasoned Internet marketing professional, specializing in search engine marketing and optimization strategies. She will present techniques to drive traffic to dealer Web sites at ABC 2008 in San Diego.