

E-Mail Marketing Strategies

Newsletters Need Good Content

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Most marketers these days have an e-mail-based program of some sort, whether it includes regularly scheduled promotions or newsletters.

The latter tactic, e-mailed newsletters, is approached differently by every marketer. Some see the "e-letter" as a self-contained tool that does nothing but pitch a company's products and services. Others see it as a value-add for their customers and prospects and therefore keep their newsletters almost pitch-free. However, I would argue that, aside from the advertising-based or paid content publications wherein recipients ultimately pay for the content, the most successful promotional e-mailed newsletters fall somewhere in between.

What constitutes success? In this case, I'm talking about satisfied subscribers who regularly spend money with you based on your newsletter offerings. There is a recipe to finding this happy medium, and it boils down to how you position your pitch as well as your content.

Content -- that is, information -- is why many people get online. And information is ultimately what started the chain that created the World Wide Web. For companies with the types of business models that justify bundling in a content-based set of offerings (such as true information-rich newsletters), that information will yield success if approached correctly. To make information work for you, keep the following in mind at the various stages of the process:

Collection. The surge of commercial e-mail has made people less inclined to give up their e-mail address. It's not that they won't give it up. They're just more particular about who they give it to. So information can boost your efforts here.

One of your main goals should be to develop compelling, content-based perks to entice your target audience to give up their e-mail addresses whether your core marketing efforts reach that audience on or offline. From a list building or lead generation standpoint, content can help you buy more e-mail addresses for your house list. Many consumer and business-to-business companies and even fundraisers dangle the information carrot on their Web sites to collect e-mail addresses more efficiently. This carrot can be in the form of the proverbial free e-letter, not to mention the industry report or white paper or case study.

Another enticement that is being used more frequently is the Webinar, or online seminar -- how to type of events that serve a dual purpose. In order to register, an e-mail address is required, and the Webinar itself serves as a promotional device.

In the investment arena, free reports are used frequently to drive targeted prospects to financial Web sites in an effort to build a house e-mail list for follow-up efforts. And offline companies are using enticements such as free guides and kits to drive traffic, as well as for list building to generate cross-selling and up-selling efforts. Vertical industries from banks and restaurants to high-end software solutions, retailers and resort communities are using direct mail, print and in-store events to showcase special offers and premiums in exchange for e-mail addresses. Make sure the perk makes sense, that it's both relevant to your audience's interest and holds at least some intrinsic value to them.

Fulfillment. This term can apply to a number of things. The content doesn't have to be relegated to the marketer's Web site for your audience's online reading pleasure. Your e-mailed newsletters and event announcements can drive recipients to things such as offline seminars (or lead generation events that ultimately lead to a sale of some sort).

And if you're deploying an e-mailed newsletter, and your list of subscribers signed on to it as a newsletter, make sure you're actually providing news. Subscribers may be made of prospects or existing customers, and it will be in your best interest to develop different messages for each.

One of the best e-mailed newsletters I've seen is sent by an international health and investment newsletter publisher. It is for one of its health newsletters and is a daily e-mail that goes to subscribers who receive the monthly paid print version. The content is rich, but also subtly embeds promotional messages within that content. And since it's a daily, brevity is key. The newsletter typically starts with one or two strong articles, with links to get more details on the site. It is followed up by what appear to be smaller articles. These small nuggets of information link to related landing pages on the site that, upon reading, become obvious as more promotional in nature.

Other effective e-letters pitch around the content in the form of buttons, vertical banners and the like. Others provide a pure-content newsletter, but send subscribers regularly scheduled stand-alone promotions on the side. However you provide content (and promotion), make sure you are following permission guidelines, which brings me to my next point.

Permission. Every outbound message, whether it's your newsletter or a promotion, should make it clear from the onset who you are and why you are sending the e-mail. Some publishers add a quick re-introduction at the top or bottom of the message (typically outside the actual design for the HTML versions) that acts as a quick reminder for subscribers.

Always include some sort of opt out or unsubscribe language in every message. Offer this no matter what type of deployment solution you use. Even if it means subscribers are given a legitimate reply-to address, include that address in every e-mail you send.

The recipe for a newsletter-based e-mail promotional program includes, but is not limited to, the following: Throw in a healthy carrot. Add a dash of permission. Stir in a pinch of a pitch. Serve plenty of good content. If that is the minimum set of tactics you employ, you should have a list of satisfied subscribers who will add to your bottom line by responding to the pitch portion of your content.

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