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MARKETING RESOURCES

Email Marketing



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Email is dead, right? In an age of social media, mobile browsing, and increased online fragmentation, surely email is on its last legs?

Not so fast. The reports of email's deaths have been greatly exaggerated, and will probably continue to be that way for some time. People have been heralding the death of email marketing for years, but email still has a [higher conversion rate than both social media and search](#), whether paid or organic.

In fact, due in part to its high conversion and in part to its low cost, [email marketing boasts a \\$40 ROI for every dollar spent](#) – can't argue with numbers like that. That doesn't mean that email is business as usual, of course. CRMs and analytics are far more advanced than they were ten years ago, so your email marketing strategy needs to adapt accordingly.

Chapter One: Getting Started

Building a List

The first step to email marketing is to build a list of email addresses. The easiest way to do that is to start collecting the email addresses of anyone who buys your product. Whether that's a mandatory field they fill out at checkout, along with their address and payment details, or a login they use for future purchases on your account, you should be able to get an email address from nearly everyone who purchases from you.

One crucial detail: make sure you tell them that you'll be using their email for marketing purposes. Lots of sites make it an opt-out option – either a box they check that says “don't send me marketing/news emails” or one that's checked by default that says “I agree to let my email be used for marketing purposes.” Make sure it's clear that you're not selling your lists to anyone else, just using them for your own purposes.

People are expecting their receipt for a purchase, renewal notices, shipping notices, and so on to come by email – what they're less thrilled about is getting emails that they didn't ask for. Don't be misled by pure numbers, though – if people are given a clear choice, the total people of your list will be

smaller, but they'll all be people who made a conscious decision to sign up. Engagement is preferable to sheer quantity.

A Note About General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

GDPR is the law that came into effect in the EU in May of 2018, which drastically changed the privacy and data collection rights of consumers in Europe. It has also changed the way email marketing is done — if you can be absolutely certain that you don't have any European customers, then it doesn't apply to you; otherwise, you need to know how to navigate it.

First of all, email marketing can only be conducted toward people who have given affirmative, informed consent. This means that customers have to opt into email marketing — if you have a checkbox at checkout that says “sign me up for email newsletters,” it has to be unchecked by default, and it has to clearly state what they're signing up for.

GDPR also means that consent requests have to be separate from other terms and conditions. You can't lump it in with agreeing to receive a receipt or agreeing to the terms of some software application. Requiring an email address to download a whitepaper or something similar is still allowed, but a customer who provides an email address to access a download is not inherently consenting to being put on your marketing list.

Finally, you need to be keeping evidence of consent — who gave it, when they gave it, and how they did it. Your CRM should be able to tell you that John Smith entered his email on the newsletter landing page on July 14, 2018. You should also keep track of what customers were told at the time they consented, including any changes you make to your messaging along the way. If they withdraw consent, track that too.

Segmenting Your Lists

The downside of all these rules is that your email lists will inevitably get smaller — no more emailing everyone who's ever shopped with you. The silver lining is that your lists will become much more effective. Everyone on your

email lists is someone who made a conscious decision to hear from you — they're loyal customers and they're interested in what you have to say. This kind of self-selecting audience is exactly what you want for your marketing efforts.

That said, it's still beneficial to segment your email lists. You really can't overdo the segmenting — the more data you have on the people on your list, the better you'll be able to tailor your emails to go to the people who will like them the most. Segmenting is also a great way to avoid spam filters — one email sent to 50,000 people is much more likely to be flagged than 10 different emails sent to 5,000 people each.

Segments can take a variety of forms. If your business has physical locations, you can segment by people who you know are nearby. If you make both men's and women's clothes, you can segment your list by men and women so that each person only gets the emails for the clothes they want. If you incorporate purchase history, you could even go further, sending a separate email to men who have bought clothes for women before, or vice versa. If you get a new shipment of premium goods from a particular brand, you can announce them only to people who have spent X amount of money on that brand before. The possibilities are endless.

Segmenting should also dictate who you don't send emails to. Don't send emails advertising your premium service to people who have already signed up for it. Don't send emails urging customers to download your new ebook to people who have already done so. Don't send emails about physical events to people who live too far away to attend. And so on. The more you customize the content you put in front of people, the better they'll respond to it.

Creating Email Templates

Obviously, more segmentation means more individual emails you have to create and send out, and that gets time-consuming — that's where templates come in.

The major benefits of email templates are obvious — less time spent building

each individual email means you can send more unique emails, which should convert to better open and clickthrough rates.

The other big plus is brand consistency — if all your emails come from roughly the same template, they'll all look and feel the same, which means that customers swiping through their emails on their phone will instantly recognize that it's from you before the words even register. That's a good thing for both you and your readers.

Keep it clean and neat. [The average email only gets about 11 seconds of attention](#), so you don't want to do too much. That's not to say that there's not a place for longer-form newsletters, but it's often better to put previews in the email that customers can click through if they want, rather than trying to send a 5000-word email. Customers are increasingly reading email on the go, so shorter is better.

Give your emails a good header, including your logo and a few menu options. Don't overthink it — the main purpose of the header is to make your emails instantly recognizable as your own, not to drive traffic.

Figure Out A Schedule And Strategy

How often should you send marketing emails? There's no easy answer, as it'll depend on who you're sending to, what you're sending, how long your emails are, and so on. The main thing is not to send too many — [according to Hubspot, 69% of US email users unsubscribe because they're getting too many emails](#).

Most marketers send two to three emails a month, with only nine percent of marketers sending six to eight per month. But surveys indicate that might not be enough. According to MarketingSherpa, [61% of users want to receive an email at least once a month, with a full 15% saying they wouldn't mind an email a day](#).

If you're not sure where to start, subscribe to your competitors' email lists. Take note of what they send and how often they send it, but don't copy them

too closely — they may be working with larger lists or have different business goals than you do.

What are your goals with these emails? Are you trying to drive a purchase directly? If so, you might want to send that type of email less often, so as not to seem too pushy. If you're simply announcing new products or providing news updates, you can send more often.

If you have the means, asking people what kind of emails they'd like to receive — and how often — is a great option. Lots of sites will offer consolidated emails so that instead of getting a few emails a week, customers will get a sort of "digest" at the end of the month that catches them up on everything. Let customers know that they might miss out on short-term promos this way, but giving them the choice will make them more likely to stay on your list and open your messages. Keep in mind that if you offer such an option, you'll have to be able to keep track of who's subscribed to what, so make sure you have the CRM to handle this kind of segmentation.

Finally, test everything. Keep an eye on conversions and how much traffic your emails are driving to your site, and experiment with email formats, templates, subject lines, and frequency. Your optimal email strategy will be a moving target, so keep tweaking things to see what works best.

Chapter Two: Make Email Part Of Your Overall Digital Marketing Efforts

Email isn't an island on its own, it's one touchpoint of the many that will have to occur between first meeting a stranger and turning that stranger into a paying customer. It will also have to stay with that person throughout their buying journey and beyond, keeping them satisfied and engaged enough to become a repeat customer.

To that end, your email marketing goals aren't separate goals — they're all tied into your broader marketing goals. If you have different teams working on blogging, social, and email, make sure they're in communication to push

the same message and coordinate their marketing efforts.

The goal is to think holistically to make sure that all your various marketing channels are pushing the same message about your brand, who you are, what you do, and what problems you can help solve.

To that end, make sure your messaging is aligned — not just what you're saying, but how you're saying it. Your voice, tone, and attitude should be consistent across everything you put out. The same goes for branding. Colors, logos, fonts, styles, and layouts should be unified across all your media channels so that they're unmistakably you.

It can't hurt to get a fresh set of eyes on everything that goes out, whether it's social, email, or somewhere else. Have someone look at it who wasn't originally involved in the piece of content so they can check it for consistency with the other materials you've been creating.

This stuff matters. Facebook's algorithms are constantly changing and there's more content out there every day, so it's harder and harder to get your organic posts in front of the people you want to show it to. Email is a uniquely captive audience, so a robust email strategy is important to nurture relationships with your customers rather than just shouting into a social media void.

Chapter Three: Email Marketing For All Stages Of The Buyer's Journey

It's easy to think that email marketing is mostly about the awareness stage of a buyer's journey — letting them know you exist and that they might be looking for a problem that you can solve. But email marketing, when applied and segmented properly, can benefit and delight users at every stage of the buyer's journey. Here's how.

Awareness Stage

The awareness stage of the buyer's journey is the earliest part of the process. At this point, your potential customer has noticed the symptoms of a problem — something that's been irritating them in their life — but can't state exactly what the problem is and, therefore, doesn't know how to go about solving it.

For buyers in the awareness stage, your job is not to sell to them right off the bat. Keep these emails light. You've never made contact with them before, so if you jump in with a hard sell, they'll be annoyed and send you straight to spam. As our CEO Aimee Meester likes to say, you wouldn't propose on the first date.

Awareness-stage emails are just about making potential customers aware that you exist and can answer questions. They should consist of a simple greeting, a valuable piece of content like a blog post or video, and an assurance that you're there to answer any questions the reader might have.

Consideration Stage

By the consideration stage, your potential customer has begun to educate themselves about the possible solutions to their problem. They've been doing research online and narrowed down their options — hopefully, you're one of them!

Now is the time to show potential customers that what you do is the best answer to their problem. These emails should be about checking in, see if they have any questions, and offer premium content like case studies to help nudge them toward a final decision. If they're ready, try to set up a phone call or meeting so you can address their questions and concerns on a more personal level.

Decision Stage

The decision stage is the end of the buyer's journey, where potential customers turn into customers. At this stage, the potential customer knows what their problem is, knows how to solve it, and they're ready to make a decision.

They're probably choosing between you and several of your close competitors. So how you tip the scales in your favor? This is the time to sweeten the deal: a lower price, a bonus audit, an extra feature or product thrown in for free. If your business offers a service, maybe offer to waive your consultation fee or give a free quote. What exactly you offer will depend on the type of business you run and what you can afford, but now's the time to offer your best deal.

Delight: The Bonus Stage

Lots of businesses make the mistake of neglecting their customers as soon as they've landed the sale. This is a huge error in judgment, and here's why: your existing customers are your best source of future customers.

All the trends are pointing toward the increasing importance of keeping your existing customers happy. Existing customers are more likely to spend again, spend more, and buy your newest products, so you want to stay in their good graces. New customers are more and more likely to ask their friends and trusted online acquaintances before making a purchase, so positive word-of-mouth recommendations from your existing customers are extremely helpful.

Recently, this mode of thinking has become known as the "flywheel," replacing the "funnel," which ends at purchase. In the flywheel model, customers are constantly circling back through these stages to make additional purchases — though obviously the importance of the awareness stage is diminished the second time around.

In email terms, it means that you should be paying as much attention to your customers after they make a purchase as you were before. Stay in touch with your customers — let them know you value their business. Solicit their input, whether it's a positive review or a suggestion for improvement. Thank them for being long-term customers and offer them exclusive benefits.

Some studies have shown that even a 5% boost in customer retention can lead to a 25–95% increase in revenue — those are numbers you can't pass up.

Chapter Four: Email Marketing Best Practices

You already know that your marketing efforts need to align — none of them works in a vacuum, and you need potential customers to be exposed to your brand in multiple ways before they make a decision.

To that end, your emails need to look and feel like the rest of your branding efforts — language, colors, logos, fonts, and photos should have the same tone and impression to them that your website, social, and physical marketing efforts have.

But looking like you and sounding like you isn't all that your emails need. Here are a few other best practices for email marketing to keep in mind.

Subject Line Is Crucial

Your emails are supposed to be a gateway — readers use them to click through to your website, respond to a CTA, or download an asset. And they can't do any of that unless they open the email.

Your subject line is what gets people to open your email in the first place, so it has to be catchy, free from typos, clear, succinct, and catchy. It's a tall order for a piece of writing that tops out at 60 characters or so, but it really is that important.

If you feel like your emails aren't getting the attention they deserve, try out some new things. Most mailing services will let you do A/B testing — send two different subject lines to half of your audience each, then see which one gets opened more. Experiment with exclamation marks, emojis, subject length, capitalization, whether you spell out numbers or use digits, etc. — anything that might help you write a more compelling subject in the future.

Modernize Your Content

Email should be personalized to some degree — this is where the segmentation we discussed earlier comes in. If a customer gets an email

offering a service or a download that they already have, it might annoy them into unsubscribing, so avoid that if at all possible.

Stay away from boring templates, clunky links, and old-school UX. Users get hundreds of emails a day, so yours will need to have a personal touch to stand out.

And of course, your content needs to be in tip-top shape. Emails shouldn't be too long — after all, the goal is to direct traffic somewhere else, not keep them in their email app for half an hour — so every sentence counts. Make your point clearly and succinctly, and send your emails in a timely fashion. Being late to a big news story might be worse than not showing up at all.

Optimize Everything

Today's laptops and phones have bright, crystal-clear displays, so text will have razor-sharp edges. If your photos are low-res, grainy, or have JPEG artifacts, they'll stick out like a sore thumb. That goes for any graphics you use as well, whether it's your CTA or a headline of text saved as an image.

Optimize your emails based on where people are reading them, too. You should be able to tell from your mailing software whether your emails are being opened on desktop or mobile, in apps or browsers. Set up your emails to match where your audience is, not where you wish they were.

Be Agile With Your CTAs

Speaking of CTAs, test them too! Check every link to make sure it's working properly, and craft CTAs that are relevant, clearly state what they're offering, and direct back to your website.

Do A/B testing on your CTAs as well. Just because you think something is a great offer doesn't mean it'll resonate with your customers, so experiment with both the offer itself and the way you phrase it to make sure that you're getting the best click rate you can.

Finally, Proofread Everything

Before you send the email out, send a test to several people who haven't seen it before at all. Have them open it in several different browsers or on several different devices. Have them click every link, load every image, and look for typos or unwitting errors in phrasing. A little testing can go a long way.

Some Final Thoughts

Email marketing is as strong as ever — and with better conversion and ROI than most forms of marketing, it's not something you can afford to ignore. But that doesn't mean that you can just send the same emails you've been sending for years.

Customers have changed, and the way they make buying decisions has changed too. Your marketing strategy — and your emails — have to change with them.