

# Learn The Fundamentals Of Email Marketing

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Email is the most widely used tool on the Internet, over 93% of Internet users identify email as their top online activity (Jupiter Research, September 2002). In addition, opt-in emails hitting consumers inboxes increased to 24 percent in 2005 (from 16 percent in 2003). (Jupiter Research, Automotive E-Mail Marketing, Driving Open and Response Rates)

These statistics demonstrate 2 points.

- The number of companies using email as an advertising channel is steadily increasing.
- The competition for getting the consumer's attention via email is steadily increasing.

This means that you need to understand how email can help you increase revenue, and how to get a successful open rate for your email campaigns. Below are 3 fundamental steps to accomplish this.

Lesson 1: Only include Opt-In emails in your email marketing list.

Only send emails to people who have opted in for them. The term "opt-in" means that a customer has indicated to you that he or she would like to receive emails from you.

It does not mean, that if a customer has supplied you with an email address, that you can add them to your email campaign list. For example, if John Doe, fills out a form by your cash register and checks a box stating please send me the weekly special's email. This is considered an opt in. However, if John Doe were to send you an email asking you what the store hours are, this does not mean that you should add John's email to your email marketing campaign list.

There are several reasons for this, the most important is showing respect for your customers. In addition, you don't want your customer to add your email address to it's spam list, because then your emails will never get through, and you risk being added to a spam blocking list (depending on the type of spam filter your customer has).

Another benefit of using opt-in email addresses, is that you can collect additional information. Don't go crazy asking for information, if a sign up form (whether on a website or on paper) looks long, many people won't fill it out at all, even if the fields are optional. A good rule of thumb is to keep it under 5 fields. Things to ask for are name, age range and gender. This is helpful data if you want to do some testing. Who knows maybe women who's age is between 30 and 45 are your best customers. If you don't collect the data you will never know.

Now that you have their permission (the "opt in") and their name, make sure to use their name in the body of the email. In my email testing, this has always increased the conversion rates of emails. As a side note, using their name in the email headline does not necessarily help, in some tests the open rate was lower. So make sure to test a couple of variations to know what works best with your customer set. Lesson 2: Providing An Opt-out Creates Successful Email Campaigns

Always provide your customers with a clear and easy way to opt out (AKA to unsubscribe). Many newcomers to email marketing make the mistake of trying to "hide" the opt out (or not even offer it at all). The thought is if it is hard to find, then they will give up and I can keep on sending them emails.

If a customer doesn't want your emails, there is little chance that they will want to order from you. It is far better to treat the customer with respect and keep their opinion of you high, than to sacrifice that for the chance of a sale that most likely will not happen. Plus, there are benefits to offering an opt out.

When providing an opt out, always ask the customer if they want to change the frequency of their email. Here is an example from my personal experience.. A very well known e-commerce store sends out an email almost every day. This drove me nuts, at first I started deleting them, and then I just got annoyed. I decided to opt out, and unsubscribed. Now the truth is, I really only wanted an email once a week, but they never offered me that option. Now, I don't get their emails, and because I was so annoyed by the daily email, I haven't made any purchases from them in several years.

So what do you learn from this? Offer frequency options. Offer a weekly email, every other week email, monthly email or quarterly email. If you provide these options, you will find that you keep a large percentage of the people that go to unsubscribe. By the way, offer the different frequencies when they sign up too!

Once they hit that unsubscribe button, present them with a customer survey and ask for their opinion. Keep the survey short and sweet, don't ask more than 5 questions. Focus on finding out why they have unsubscribed. Many won't fill out the survey, but some folks will. You don't want to risk future customers if there is something that you can easily fix.

Lesson 3: Test, Test and Test

Always test your email campaigns. At minimum, create 2 slightly different variations and find out which emails get the best response rates. Play with the look and feel of your call to action. Don't test for the world, test only 1 or 2 variables. Such as using your customer's name in the subject line (like the example I described above). I found out that for one particular client, using a short and sweet text link (with large, emphasized text in a contrasting color) achieved a higher click thru rate than the fancy graphic that they had spent a lot of money on.

Use the demographic information you collected. When doing your test, try breaking your test groups up by gender. Send the exact same email and see if there is a difference in conversion rates by gender. If so, this is valuable information (especially with search engine marketing's demographic targeting).

Figure out what testing pattern works best for you. Maybe you divide your list into 2, and send 2 different emails to the first half. Then based on the email that got the best response, send that email to the remaining subscribers. Play with it a little; you will soon see what testing pattern works best for you without disrupting your revenue.

These are just a few fundamentals of email marketing. Learn what goes into successful email marketing campaigns, and test the techniques in your own emails. If you make a habit of learning new techniques and testing them, you are almost certain to have a successful email marketing campaign, that provides increased revenue for your business.