

Email marketing, success by design

Email marketing is a cost-effective and powerful way to communicate with your contacts and increase potential leads and sales.

To beat the competition, it is vital you know as much as possible about your customers and target them with relevant messages. Relating to your recipients' individual interests is instrumental to the success of your campaign.

Design is crucial. Having a professionally-tailored email template will reinforce your business's image. Using a template that directly links to and maintains aesthetic continuity with your website will greatly aid in search engine optimisation and enhance your business's brand recognition.

The advantages

With the fast pace of technology, email marketing is now widely accepted as an unobtrusive and efficient form of communication, by both potential and existing customers alike. Nearly all businesses are able to benefit from this method of contact.

When done properly, a targeted email campaign can truly strengthen your business-to-customer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) relationships.

Cost

Email marketing is very inexpensive compared with other direct marketing techniques. Compared to direct mail marketing, marketing by email can save you hundreds of dollars that would otherwise be spent on postage and stationery.

Being paper free, email marketing is also greener.

Easy and immediate

With a pre-built template, all you need to do is add the content and press send. You can reach people within seconds, no matter where they are in the world. This is the most efficient way to keep your customers informed of all your latest offers, literally at the drop of a hat.

Faster response times

Compared with paper marketing techniques, response times to marketing emails are considerably quicker. On average, most emails are opened and responded to within 72 hours of receipt. The minimum response time to a direct mail campaign is normally over a week.

Beneficial to SEO

Direct links to your website will not only give your customers an opportunity to find out more about your business, it will greatly improve your search engine optimisation and subsequently your website's search engine ranking.

Better targeted to your customers

By giving recipients the option to opt in or unsubscribe to your campaign, you can shortlist the potential customers who are genuinely interested in what you have to offer. Email marketing is an excellent way to assist your contacts with the decision process to help them buy your product or service.

Increase of sales conversions

Many customers don't buy at first glance. Typically a buyer will research a number of different options and varying costs before making a final decision.

This decision process can often take a considerable amount of time. If you are able to obtain your prospect's email address in the interim, you have added ammunition.

By staying in contact with your potential customers and keeping them clearly informed of exactly what you have to offer, you can ultimately increase your sales.

Measurable results

The effectiveness of your campaign can be tracked and reported in terms of emails delivered, opened, forwarded and links clicked. By seeing who clicked what, where and when, you can tailor your email campaigns accordingly.

The dos and don'ts - Making it work

There are a few rules and practices to make your campaign work. With a flood of online information, it is important that you don't send spam emails and make sure that your messages are always relevant, by finding out as much about your customers as possible.

Always have consent

Any unsolicited commercial email is classified as spam. Spam emails are not only annoying, but illegal. You need to have the recipient's consent before adding them to a permanent mailing list.

As people become increasingly desensitised to spam, the capability of many email programs to detect and thwart potential spam emails continues to increase, either relegating these messages to a junk folder or blocking them entirely.

You don't want your emails to be filtered as spam. The use of exaggerative or exclamatory language in the subject line or body of the text is likely to get your email sent to the junk folder immediately. Symbols like '\$\$\$' and lines like 'best products ever' are a definite no-no.

Get people to subscribe or 'opt in'

Offering a useful incentive, such as a discount or exclusive benefits will motivate customers to sign up for email updates. By making special offers exclusively available via email you will encourage customers to check your latest messages.

You can build up your email list by putting opt-in tick boxes on your paper marketing material or via your website. By highlighting the benefits of subscribing to your email service and asking for the minimum of information, customers will be more inclined to sign up.

Familiarity and trust

A familiar preview is critical. The majority of people will only open an email based on a decision about the sender's email address and subject line. If your sender name isn't clearly recognised, there is a good chance your email will remain unopened or be deleted.

Whenever possible, address recipients by their name. A personal greeting will make them feel individual and welcome.

Use a catchy subject line and write an engaging message

Subject lines are very important when it comes to getting noticed. In fact, many people choose whether to read an email based on the subject line alone.

If you use a carefully thought out subject title, you will attract the attention of your readers.

Newsletters can be a great way to keep customers regularly informed about things they may be interested in, such as a new product or service you are offering that may be specific to their needs, or an exclusive discount.

Whatever your message, always get straight to the point. People generally aren't interested in reading long stories. The use of succinct, concise language will encourage readers to click onto your website to find out more.

Keep it relevant and get the frequency right

Focus on people who are interested in what you're offering. Untargeted or irrelevant emails can be irritating and may reflect badly on your business.

Recipients must always be given the option to unsubscribe or opt out of receiving further messages. Only send messages when you have something new or interesting to say.

Don't flood people's inboxes, emails sent too frequently are pretty much equal to spam.

HTML emails, plain text emails, or both?

Different email formats have their own benefits. A professionally-crafted HTML email template can incorporate your business's logos, pictures and graphics and will make your email look more like a web page.

A small number of email programs are not able to read HTML emails correctly, so one option is to ask recipients to choose a preferred format when opting in for your email marketing.

Plain text is readable on any email platform. If you are intending to exclusively email people who only use devices with text only capabilities to check their emails (such as mobile phones), plain text may be the way to go.

Alternatively, you can send HTML emails with plain text, so even if the images can't be seen, the text is clear. In this instance, written references for all images should be included, so customers who are unable to view the pictures can be assured they're getting the whole message.

Monitor your campaign

You should record the number of responses and pinpoint the types of customers who are replying to your messages. This is a good way to assess the sort of people who are responsive to this marketing approach.

You can log emails that have been delivered, opened, forwarded and links clicked. Look for similarities between the people who have responded to your emails.

By gathering as much information as possible about these customers, you can modify and increase the effectiveness of your campaign.

Handle your responses

Response rates to email marketing campaigns are normally around three percent. If you have a response rate well below this, you may need to check that you're focusing on the right type of customers and addressing their needs.

If your campaign is successful, you will need to ensure that you have enough manpower and / or production capacity to accommodate your customers' requirements and deliver what you have promised.

Legal issues

It is your responsibility to make sure your marketing emails are compliant with the law. The Australian government Spam Act identifies three main criteria for any form of e-marketing:

Consent - You must have the recipient's consent and be able to prove how you obtained it.

Identification - Include accurate information that identifies yourself or your organisation as the authorised sender.

The option to unsubscribe - Ensure you have a functional facility for recipients to unsubscribe from your messages at any time.

Planning for results

A directed and professional email marketing campaign can work superbly as an integral part of your marketing strategy. Using a template that incorporates your company logos and reflects your business image will enable recipients to associate your emails with your other marketing methods (such as a website and paper marketing materials).

With careful thought and planning, you can create an exceptional campaign that will represent the best your business has to offer and increase sales.

An unplanned, reckless or undirected campaign can do the opposite.