10 tips on how to do email marketing right

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Email marketing puts the ability to connect with potential and existing customers at the touch of a button. Despite this simplicity, however, deciding how to approach and manage the process of email marketing can still be a challenge for businesses looking to leverage the channel to communicate competently and achieve a high return on investment.

Here are 10 tip on how to do email marketing right

1. Choose the best ESP for your needs

An ESP (Email Service Provider) hosts email marketing software online, which is specifically optimized to do the heavy-lifting for bulk newsletter sending.

Before you start emailing, it's vital that you choose the best choose the best ESP for your business.

An effective service provider should offer both online and telephonic customer support/training, and provide all the tools and tutorials necessary to help you easily create a campaign. Your ESP should also offer a pricing plan that fits your budget, and have a reliable sending infrastructure with multiple high-speed connections and hardware redundancies, so you can send at any time or volume.

2. Build a relevant list of contacts

The mailing list is the most important element in the success of your email campaigns. Responsible email marketing is based on permission, and a permission-based list built by yourself always yields the best results since you're providing people with content that's relevant and interesting to them.

Permission provides a foundation for delivering value, because the people on your address list have raised a hand and said "I'm interested in the emails you send", so what you really want is the biggest possible list of individuals who have asked to hear about what you offer - and not just a lot of random email addresses.

3. Leverage contact data for better targeting

Sending irrelevant or generic emails can be risky, as these may provoke recipients to ignore your messages or mark them as spam.

Since subscribers have individual likes, as your list grows it becomes important to identify groups that share similar interests and use segmentation (the practice of clustering addresses) to improve your results, by sending appealing content targeted to their specific wants.

In addition to studying campaign reports to see what people tend to click-through on; consider using a service that gives you access to subscribers' social profile data - which lets send more relevant information. This in turn is likely to increase your open and click-through rates, improve website conversions and even sales derived from promotional mailers.

4. List improvement delivery rates

Internet service providers expect senders to keep their email lists "clean": clear of non-existent or defunct addresses and full of real, active email addresses. It's a sign of a "good" sender, since spammers typically don't trouble to update their lists.

The higher the proportion of emails you send to "dead" addresses, the more your sender reputation suffers.

Habitually remove bad or regularly bouncing email contacts. Eliminate duplicate addresses manually if your ESP does not do this automatically as well as fake accounts, addresses that were entered as a prank, or ones that look like bogus usernames. Also search for and correct simple data entry mistakes like misspelled domains (geemail.com or hotmole.com, for example).

5. Design newsletters with mobile in mind

With email inboxes more crowded than ever, at least half of the battle is in finding ways to stand out from the masses with the quality of your design. And with the growing number of people checking emails on mobile devices there is also an increasing need to optimize emails for the small screen.

Subscribers tend to connect visually with an email newsletter and size up whether they want to read and act it in a matter few seconds; so let simple, direct and to-the-point rule your design - with appropriate image use and balance and a few bold elements to help arouse more interest.

Accommodate mobile subscribers by having single column design layouts, tighter subject lines, bigger buttons for links and an overall narrower message width that allows for easy up-down scrolling. And, of course, test to make sure the email renders on popular mobile devices.

6. Write appealing subject lines and increase open rates

Writing the subject line is a mission-critical element of your communications strategy that you shouldn't leave until deadlines are looming. These first few characters are the doorstep to your emailing success; since it's all you have to entice readers to open your message.

Since a subject line should distill the essence of an email, consider writing it first, as this will help keep your content from straying off topic.

Think about what the objective of your email marketing programs is and clearly state what your reader can expect from your email. You need to create a sense of urgency with your subject lines, but without offering what you can't deliver.

7. Test, test and test again

Testing different subject lines or email content prior to bulk sending can help you increase your open and click rates.

Especially if you're dealing with a large list of contacts, it's advisable to run A/B split tests on a small group of recipients before sending to the full list, to see which variants will produce the best results.

Once you've figured out which one was more successful, you then send the top-performing newsletter to the remaining percentage of your mailing list.

Be sure to run your email through a checker to identify spam-like words, phrases or sentence construction and make any suggested changes to help it survive the journey to the inbox. And also check that your links are pointing to the right landing pages.

8. Time your email sending

Send the right message at the right time.

This means you have to listen, you have to educate and you have to guide subscribers on their conversion path - all at the right moment in the purchase cycle.

Many marketers try to bypass this by relying on urgent calls-to-action bound to everything they send, which can easily backfire.

With the timing data provided by an ESP you can group individuals who habitually open at specific times, and then accordingly optimize your sending schedule to that specific segment of subscribers.

9. Add a clear 'unsubscribe' link

Spam complaints can have a disastrous effect on your sender reputation. Unfortunately, even when people have explicitly signed up for an email they may still use the "report spam" button.

Some readers even use the report spam button instead of going through the proper unsubscribe process, since both tactics have the same outcome for them.

So, make it clear at the time of subscription how often you'll email subscribers. Include a name that subscribers will immediately recognize in the sender field of your emails, and most importantly, make it incredibly easy for them to unsubscribe.

10. Keep emailing

To keep your list current, make sure you send messages to your subscribers at least once every 90 days.

While it certainly does depend on your industry and what type of products or services you offer, if the waiting period between messages are too long your bounce-rate will increase due to people changing addresses or forgetting who you are - and maybe then assuming your email newsletters are spam.

Stay in front of your audience and retain their interest by giving them valuable, relevant content at a reasonable frequency. Add autoresponders and to your campaign mix to help nurture the conversation as and when your customer interacts with your communications.

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