



## 10 Tips for Effective B2B Email Marketing

Email Marketing is fast becoming one of the leading forms of marketing. According to Jupiter Research, spending on email marketing will reach \$1.1 billion in 2010, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.5 percent. If your marketing plan does not include email marketing, it should. Even if you are already using email marketing, there may be ways to increase its effectiveness. This article covers 10 tips to help you implement an effective email marketing strategy.

### 1. Obtain Permission

Email marketing is permission-based marketing. Not only is it a good business practice to obtain permission from your customers to market to them via email, it is also the law. The CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 covers email whose primary purpose is advertising or promoting a commercial product or service, including content on a website. The law does not apply to emails regarding agreed-upon transaction, or one that updates a customer in an existing business relationship. It is this latter case where the lines may be fuzzy especially in regards to a newsletter or other informational email. Nearly all commercial email marketing programs require marketers to sign an agreement pledging to not violate CAN-SPAM. Some, but not all, require a double opt-in method be used for lists.

On the downside, marketers that simply add a sign-up box to their website and wait for the subscribers to opt-in may be waiting a long time. Without some sort of enticement, this method of sign-up typically has a very low (1-2%) success rate. Alternatively, many businesses beginning an email campaign build their initial list from existing and past customers, as well as prospects for which they have had previous contact. By following the CAN-SPAM rules and providing an easy method for subscribers to opt-out, this is generally acceptable. However, if you follow the remaining tips in this article you will maintain a very low unsubscribe rate.

### 2. Maintain Permission

Once you initially obtain permission to market to your customers and prospects via email, you need to maintain that permission. Logistically, this requires that you follow the CAN-SPAM rules, including allowing an easy method for subscribers to opt-out. Most commercial email marketing programs provide one-click unsubscribe links and automate the process for you. If you are not using a commercial program, you need to provide instructions (i.e., reply with "UNSUBSCRIBE") and promptly honor all requests.

Mechanics aside, maintaining permission requires that you give your readers something of value and honor their time when sending email marketing materials. While readers may allow you to send them occasional information of interest regarding your products and services, few are signing up to be "advertised to".

### 3. Give Something of Value

Although this is listed as tip #3, it is the most important ingredient in effective email marketing. If you are asking your customers and prospects to set aside time in their busy day to read your newsletter or email, make sure they get something out of it. Include informational articles that are not sales-y in nature. These may be directly related to the product or service you offer, or they may not be. For example, a printing company I know offers a monthly newsletter with several tips for increasing workplace effectiveness. The newsletter may offer tips on better time management, or efficiency processing email. Although not directly related to printing services, the articles are of interest to the demographics (office workers) of the printer's mailing list.



#### **4. Honor Your Customer's Time**

Like you, your customers and prospects are busy and generally get far more email than they can effectively process. To make sure your email doesn't immediately get sent to the trash folder, keep it short, easy-to-scan, and provide links to longer articles. If it takes longer than 5 minutes to read (with the exception of links to longer articles) there is a high probability that it will either get deleted immediately, or relegated to be read in the future – which may never happen. In addition to keeping individual emails short and sweet, don't bombard your subscribers on a daily basis unless they have specifically signed up for that. Generally, every 3-4 weeks is enough to keep your message in front of your subscribers without overloading them.

#### **5. Don't Try to Sell**

Successful salespeople don't try to sell their products over the phone, their goal in a phone call is to get a meeting. The same is generally true for B2B email marketing. Unless you are directing someone to a relatively low-cost purchase from your e-commerce site, don't use your email or newsletter as a high-pressure sales tactic. Rather, pique their interest enough that they will go to your website or call you to learn more.

#### **6. Have a Call To Action**

Although you should not use your email or newsletter as a high-pressure sales tactic, like any type of advertising, effective email marketing always contains a Call to Action. What that action is depends on the goals of your email or newsletter. Do you want them to visit your website for more information on your products? Do you want them to call you for a free consultation? Visit your booth at an upcoming tradeshow? Think about what you want your subscribers to do and clearly make that Call to Action, complete with web links, your phone number, etc.

#### **7. Use the Right Technology**

Unless you have a very small list, most email marketers opt to use one of the commercially available programs to manage lists, format and send HTML emails, and track open and click-through rates. Most of them provide the same basic set of functions, however a few have differentiating features such as allowing you to compose and send your message using Outlook or providing you with feedback on whether your email is likely to get flagged as SPAM before you send it. In addition to evaluating an email marketing program on usability features, you should also carefully investigate the provider's policies with regard to opt-in and SPAM checking. If you are not careful, your emails may be blocked and flagged as SPAM due to the actions of other users whose non-compliant emails are sent from the same IP address (i.e., that of the email program provider) as yours.

#### **8. Use Research to Increase Effectiveness**

Did you know that the effectiveness of your email campaign can be greatly affected by the date and time you choose to send your email? The size of the message, the length of the subject line, how a message renders in different email programs, and many more factors have been the subject of email marketing research over the last several years. Use this research to your advantage to up the probability that your email will reach the inbox of your reader, and get opened and read in a timely fashion.

In addition to industry research, you should do your own investigation. Use web analytics to determine what works and what doesn't. Don't be afraid to experiment to determine what most appeals to your readers.



#### **9. Be Consistent**

While sending emails too often can up the unsubscribe rate of your audience, being infrequent or inconsistent with your email marketing can result in poor performance. Email marketing, like any type of advertising, is kind of like going to the gym. You can't go one time and expect results. There is an old adage in advertising that says a prospect needs to see your message 6-7 times before it sinks in. And, half the time they aren't paying full attention so that number may be closer to 10 times.

#### **10. Use as Part of Integrated Campaign**

Email marketing works best when it is part of an integrated marketing campaign. Your website, direct mail pieces, online or print advertising, and email marketing should consistently send the same message. An integrated campaign is the best way to ensure your prospects get your message enough times to sink in, in the shortest possible time.

Email marketing should be a vital part of any marketing plan. If you lack the knowledge or resources to plan and execute a consistent e-marketing plan, consider outsourcing to an expert. Don't miss out on one of the most effective, and cost-effective, ways to reach your customers and prospects!

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