

Writing Email Newsletters

Sending emails to existing and potential customers is said to have a response rate of 3-5%, which towers over direct mail or press advertising. Why is it so successful – and how can you maximise your chances of success?

Questions to consider before starting an email campaign

Who makes up your customer base? What are their interests? Are they Sunday Times readers or Big Brother viewers? Would it be worth segmenting your database and sending out variants to improve the chances of a response?

What are your objectives? What are you aiming to achieve by sending this email? Web sales? Catalogue requests? More visits to your site? Brand recognition? Improved customer relations? Data gathering?

Should you outsource the work? Who will create, produce and distribute your email marketing? If you don't have in-house expertise, and if your budget allows, outsourcing is worth considering – as emails can take upwards of a day for one person to compile and produce.

How will the emails be distributed? Email distribution software can do much of the work for you – check out ConstantContact.com – this is a cheap option if your database is reasonably small. It's not a good idea to send out emails 'from' the MD's email address – think of all the returns and unsubscribe requests.

Creating the campaign – routes to success

Relevancy

Developing your customer profile is useful for all of your marketing activities, and emails are no different. Segmentation is a good idea – it won't cost a huge amount to produce two or three variations on your email campaign, using factors such as order value, geographic location and response to incentives. Figleaves, for instance, knows which customers respond to sales and which ones buy at full price (and campaigns to these groups accordingly). This would be a

useful way to divide your database, if you have that kind of information available.

As with all copywriting, the lifestyle of your target customer should define your style. Buzzwords, used sparingly and appropriately, can demonstrate your knowledge of the customer base – but be careful; there's nothing more cringeworthy than using out-of-date slang!

Incentives & Click-through links

This is a great opportunity to test special offers and incentives – you can send one offer to half the database and one to the other, or send different deals to different geographical areas; the options are endless. If you can create special landing sites to make the click traceable, so much the better. A time-limited offer is a good idea, as it encourages an immediate or fast response.

Written Style

- Clear. Edit, edit, edit; avoid jargon and multiple adjectives. Like web copy, email copy should be digestible and quick.
- Humorous. A dash of personality can only improve your chances of identifying with the reader.
- Scannable. Subheadings are good; bold or highlighted keywords are great for the reader with little time and patience.
- Short. There is some debate on the desirable length of email copy; some people like to read, but others just want a short message. The safest bet is to put the key messages at the top for the impatient, and then develop them further down for those who like to read details.
- Conversational. Think about the emails we are used to receiving from friends and family – written in an informal style. If you write the way you speak, there will be less jargon and less formality.
- Knowledgeable. Demonstrate a knowledge of the customer and market. As discussed above, some buzzwords can be effective. Lastminute's style is satirical, with a finger firmly on the pulse of its readership. Achieving this is difficult, but it pays to understand your customer culture – and will improve all of your communication output.

- Use active verbs. Get rid of 'visit' and 'view' in favour of 'go' and 'look at' – make your copy compelling and it will send customers straight to the site.
- Use 'You' not 'We'. As with any written material, count the 'you's and the 'we's, prioritising the former. The customer doesn't care about you.

Call to Action

Consider what reaction you want to your campaign. Put yourself in your customer's shoes and ask yourself whether the email inspires you to take that action. Put the 'call' at the top AND bottom of your email, to catch the skimmers as well as the long-readers.

Text-only option

If you're sending HTML emails (with graphics and fonts), offer a text-only option or direct readers to the site (place this link at the top of your email so that if the pictures aren't showing they can click immediately).

Subject line

Give some thought to the subject line before firing off the campaign. It should be meaningful and interesting but not too clever – and avoid words like Free and Offers, as these emails sometimes get blocked by spam filters.

The law

It's now illegal to send individuals unsolicited emails, unless they have signed up to your list or you have paid for an opt-in list from elsewhere. It's also a requirement to include your company info (and the more you include, the more credibility you will get). And need we mention an unsubscribe link?

More questions? Get in touch.

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About the Author

Anna Hollisey is an award-winning catalogue and web copywriter. Her work for the mail order brochure for Bees jewellery won her the title of 'Editorial Freelancer of the Year 2008'. Find out more at www.copyqueen.co.uk.