

Marketing Via E-Mail

The mere mention of marketing via e-mail conjures up images of unsolicited e-mails offering penile enlargement pills, Viagra, various stocks offerings, and breast augmentation. Derogatorily referred to as “spam”, these emails have made it all but impossible to discuss the legitimate use of email as a marketing tool. Yet e-mail can be a powerful tool when sent to people who have either opted-in (indicated an interest in receiving e-mail from a specific sender) or have a direct interest in the information being sent. To exclude e-mail from your online marketing tactical basket is silly. You simply have to make sure you conduct yourself in a manner consistent with the accepted rules of the game – meaning you don’t engage in the blind mass sending of e-mails to databases you have not either developed on your own, or purchased from reputable opt-in list brokers.

The successful use of email as a marketing tool can be broken down into 5 components. They are:

1. Database

Once you have determined that you wish to engage in e-mail marketing, you need to decide to whom you wish to send your messages. The selection of a list to purchase should be based on your knowledge of your targeted market and who comprises your most likely customer. Many list brokers have lists they can accumulate based on a variety of demographic information, and some can also provide names based on a history of responding to offers sent via e-mail. The more you can narrow down who it is you want to send the e-mails to, the higher the response rate will be. Another excellent way to gather a viable e-mail list is to build your own. Over time you can gather a list of customer e-mail addresses that will prove to be a tremendous marketing asset, as it is comprised of people who have bought from you already and presumably have an interest in what you sell. You can gather your own list at your place of business and via your website, by offering people an opportunity to sign up to get your emails (which feature special offers and new product announcements).

2. Content

The content of your e-mails should be designed to meet the needs of your audience. As mentioned above, you can use your e-mails to announce new products or make special offers. You can also inform your customer base about new developments in your market, announce special events, or provide opinions (based on the type of relationship you have with customers and the type of business you have). The e-mail content needs to be precise, well written, and engaging. You should make an effort to drive the reader to your website, where the information either continues, or the offer you are making can be purchased.

3. Format

There are two different ways e-mails can be sent and the selection of either is based on the content of the e-mail and how you wish for it to be presented. E-mails sent in HTML format look like web pages and can feature graphics. These are more effective for sales promotions, but some people do not have their e-mail programs set to receive HTML e-

mails, meaning that the content will come in without the graphics. Text e-mail messages are useful when you want to relay information and are able to keep your message short and to the point. You can use a link in a text e-mail to send the reader to your website where he/she can view more information in HTML format.

4. Testing

Prior to launching a broad and ambitious e-mail marketing program it is recommended that you test your message with a series of smaller groups to make certain that what you are saying is being well received and that the response rates you anticipate are being met. The tests enable you to make adjustments before you go live in a big way. Not only can this help you sharpen what you want to say, but it will also avoid any large scale errors. Testing should be done to representative groups by taking random selections out of the lists you intend to use.

5. Tracking

The beauty of e-mail marketing is that it allows for the tracking of your marketing program in ways traditional marketing cannot do. The information provided can include how many people opened your message and how many of them responded to whatever offer you included. This tracking not only allows you to judge the worthiness of the program, but also gives you clues into how to improve it.

E-mail marketing is inexpensive and flexible, but should not be overused so that recipients don't become overwhelmed by the volume of e-mails you are sending (and therefore ignoring what you send).

Sort of like direct mail, but with an automatic immediate response mechanism – your website – e-mail marketing is a viable tool that can be leveraged as part of your overall integrated marketing program.