

E-Mail Marketing: A Retailer's Dream Come True

**A VIEWPOINT article
by Peter Parrish**

The Internet has already established itself as a superlative medium in one marketing activity: Communicating to established customers, one-to-one. Using e-mail, the Internet-integrated retailer has the ability to provide product information details, product use details, pricing, promotion, availability and other timely information to customers who are looking forward to receiving this information. Used wisely, e-mail is a retail marketing specialist's dream come true.

Begin your e-mailing program by first determining what information you wish to share with your customers; what format you intend to use – direct messaging, newsletter attachment or website page referral; and how often you will commit to providing updated and/or new information. You need to e-mail an invitation to enroll to every established customer for whom you have an e-mail address. In this introductory e-mail message, you want to concisely describe your planned e-mail marketing program. Include information about content, format and frequency. If possible, a sample copy of your planned information mailer should be included.

Present your invitation to receive information as a positive option offer. If the customer wants to receive your information, he or she must return an acceptance message to you. Store these acceptance messages for future reference. No reply from a customer must be considered to be a decline of your offer. Customers returning an acceptance join your e-mailing list.

You need to begin proactively collecting e-mail addresses from your customers. For customers visiting your bricks 'n' mortar store, a handy sign-up sheet will be sufficient to manage enrollment. For customers visiting your webstore, place brief messages throughout the webstore directing customers to an information page, which will provide a description of your e-mailing program. An enrollment e-mail message prompt will permit a speedy 3-click enrollment.

Your initial e-mailing program should be modest in scope. If you are already producing printed information material, this would be a good content source to send electronically to your e-mailing audience. If you do not have existing material, start with a single page, bi-monthly or quarterly communication. The communication can be delivered in the body of the distributed e-mail message or as an attachment to the message. Don't forget, whatever the size and format of your communication piece, it should also be installed in an information page of your webstore.

The following are a few reminders and suggestions to get you started on your own productive, and profitable, e-mail marketing program:

- Be brief and to the point. Your customers are busy people; don't waste their time with superfluous information.
- Double check spelling, grammar and punctuation. Your message will be lost if badly stated.
- Use an easily read typeface.
- Keep graphics simple and easy to download. Studies show that a 15-second download can create sufficient frustration to lose the viewer.
- Include a call to action. You want some business; you need to ask for it.
- Include reminder mentions of both your bricks 'n' mortar store and your webstore.
- Include some entertainment value. Maybe a thought of the day or a brief humorous story.
- Let your retail personality show through. This is a one-to-one medium and a one-to-one message; a little warm and fuzzy is OK.

The specific content and presentation style of your communication piece is your choice. The Internet is still a developing medium. Be inventive, be clear, be concise, have some fun, do some experimentation. But always remember - your first and foremost objective in every e-mail marketing program is to better serve your valued and trusting customers.

Happy retailing,

Peter

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