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Makeover Your Newsletter

An E-Newsletter has a lot of moving parts. You have to manage your “opt-in” list, setup links, layout the images, and determine content each month. After all the work you put into a newsletter every month, you want subscribers to open it and be interested in your content.

So what are the keys to a successful newsletter? Am I doing my newsletter right or wrong?

Have the right mindset about your newsletter. Remember newsletters are not to sell. Newsletters build relationships, retention and loyalty. Prospects will come to you when they are ready to buy. Keep your newsletter educational focused rather than just promotional. A good balance is 85% educational and 15% promotional. Newsletters allow you to stay in contact with prospects until they are ready to buy.

Keep your newsletter from going to the Bulk Folder. The last thing you want is your newsletter going straight to someone’s spam folder and they don’t even see it. Make sure you determine your spam score before sending and ask subscribers to White List you (in other words adding you to their address book). Other things to avoid so your newsletter doesn’t go straight to the spam folder: the words sale or free, all capital letters, excessive punctuation, red text, excessive use of “click here” or excessive use of \$\$ and other symbols.

Make your newsletter recognizable. Give your newsletter a sense of familiarity. Are you sending it on a regular schedule (first Tuesday of every month), using a consistent from E-mail address, using a consistent title in the subject line, and using the most recognizable brand in the from name?

Send content they want to read. Improve your content by finding out what your reader’s value. Look at past click rates. Which were the most/least successful? What do they have in common? If you don’t want to do that kind of detective work – send a survey. Ask your readers what they want to hear about and how often they want to hear it.

Put promotional information in the right place. Layout is important for your newsletter. The best places to sell in your newsletter are the top left and right corners. Those corners generally have the highest click rates. After reading your valuable information in the newsletter, the bottom is a good place to feature more information about your company and products.

Ideas for getting good content. Running out of material is the number one reason cited by small business owners for not launching an e-newsletter or continuing it. Don’t let that happen to you! Use your expertise. Your know-how is something special. What did you do to help a customer? Link what you know with what they need to know. You can include polls and share results, let them ask you questions and then provide a

Q&A section. Get others in the industry involved. Have a guest columnist, interview industry experts/vendors, and sign up for news feeds. Remember, if you send valuable content your readership list will grow.

How much are you saying? Users spend 51 seconds reading the average newsletter (Nielsen Norman Group Reports). It is important to provide a layout that will assist them in scanning. The ideal number of articles is 3 to 5. Have a visual separation between topics. Use headlines, bolding and bullets. Just say enough to get the reader interested and then use links for the full article that will drive them back to your website.

Links are important. Are you including links with each section of your newsletter? Make sure your links stand out. Don't mix them into the text or put them just below a line of text. Give them white space to increase your click rates. Don't miss the opportunity to drive people to your website, always include links behind your images. Marketing Sherpa's did a newsletter test to see what words lead to a higher click rate.

Click to Continue was at 8.53%
Continue to Article was at 3.3%
Read More decreased by 1.8%

Provide links in your newsletters to access past newsletters. Most importantly, you need to have an effective landing page. Don't dump them on the homepage and make them search for the article. Put them right where you want them.

E-Mail Marketing lingo. So what does spam, opt outs, clicks, forwards all mean? Put simply:

Spam – measures your familiar look and feel, relevancy and frequency
Opt Outs – some is okay, but a spike is a sign your content is not relevant
Opens – measures effective subject lines, timing and frequency
Clicks – measures effective content, layout, link placement and wording
Forwards – sign you are giving subscribers what they want

The Opt Out Report Are you making full use of your unsubscribe page? Most newsletter service providers give people that unsubscribe a comment box? You can export these comments to see why people are unsubscribing. Are you reviewing this report and acting on it? Always identify where to make improvements to your newsletter program.