

[SALES & MARKETING]

E-newsletter marketing

MOST COMPANIES HAVE exciting news to share with their customers. Great deals, special pricing and informative articles can turn readers from casual customers to product evangelists. Finding the right method to deliver your message can make all of the difference. E-newsletters, if done correctly, can deliver the right message, to the right people, at the right time. If done incorrectly, they can ruin your business.

So hopefully, your traditional and online search marketing efforts have met some level of success — and you now find potential customers hitting your website to learn more about your services. What's the next step? Web traffic can be a fickle friend. You typically have a few fleeting moments to capture potential customers' interests and motivate them to action. First and foremost, that action should be to buy.

But what about customers who need more information or a higher comfort level before doing business with you? You can't count on them returning to your website, so motivating them to opt in to your e-mail marketing campaigns ensures you have several more chances to convert them into customers.

Just about every large online retailer offers e-newsletters of one sort or another. The online shoes and clothing retailer Zappos.com, known for its customer service, offers a weekly e-newsletter listing special deals and new products. But e-newsletters don't need to be strictly sales related to be useful. You may want to consider an e-newsletter with helpful "how-to" articles that are informative and help position your company as an expert in your industry. Building credibility can lead to great word-of-mouth advertising and sales.

The key to a good e-newsletter is consistency. Carefully describe what type of publication you are offering on the web signup page, and then stick to it.

Dos and Don'ts

When it comes to e-newsletters, there are a couple of rules to follow. I'm referring to the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003. The Federal Trade Commission has a great compliance guide (online at FTC.gov), which can result in penalties of up to \$16,000 if not followed. In essence, these guide-

Using the right technology, following the law and providing customers with relevant and engaging content can significantly improve your business and build great word-of-mouth advertising and sales.

BY TYLER WHITAKER

lines can be characterized by the ideas of not being deceptive, being forthcoming on who you are and your location, and allowing people to easily opt out of future e-mail — all things a normal company, looking to grow, would do by default. But it's surprising how often companies stumble by not paying attention.

The best way to handle the details involved with successful e-newsletter campaigns is to use the right technology. There are several online services that can turn your ideas and content into professional marketing pieces that conform to the law and deliver the results you want. Look for a solution that offers e-mail templates, signup forms, list management tools and, most importantly, reporting analytics for tracking who reads and clicks through to your website. Vendors such as VerticalResponse.com, ConstantContact.com and iContact.com have spent years perfecting the art of e-mail marketing. Pricing is typically based on the number of subscribers you have, which makes it easy to get started and test things out. Most have plans that start around \$10 to \$15 per month.

One tried-and-true method for reaching your customers on a regular basis is through e-newsletters. If your business doesn't have something to share, you've got other problems. But if you've been doing direct mail, consider making a small shift to e-newsletters — and start building your business. **LM**

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GROWTH GOALS

1. Use e-newsletters to reach your customers on a regular basis. 2. Use sharp and relevant content to keep customers interested and continually checking your website. 3. Once you start, be consistent.

