

You know that email marketing can bring great benefits to your business but you don't have the time to spend researching the possibilities. Well look no further as Online Connector provides all the tools to get the job done and makes the whole process easy. To help you get started here is a brief guide to the key things you need to know to make the most of email marketing.

Building Your Lists:

To begin with you need a list of people to contact. The key to a successful email marketing plan is obtaining permission from the people on your list for you to contact them; there can be no exceptions. Your list therefore should be composed of people you have an existing contact with: customers, people who have enquired about your products or company, or people who have explicitly requested to hear from you; for example by filling in a form on your website.

Remember:

- Never, ever send an email campaign to someone who you do not have consent to contact.
- Never purchase email lists.
- Make sure the people you are contacting have asked to be contacted.

Quick Ways to Build Your List:

- Place a subscription form prominently on your site.
- Ask everyone who contacts you if they would like to join your mailing list.
- Ensure that every form you use to collect data asks people if they would like to receive email updates from you.

Planning Your Campaign:

You should view your email marketing as developing an ongoing relationship with your contacts. Like any relationship it's a two-way thing; you have to give your contacts something in order to get back what you are looking for (be it sales, donations, referrals or loyalty).

Key Planning Pointers:

- Have a defined goal for your email program, so you know when you have achieved it.
- Plan a series of communications – regular, expected contact works best, so let your customers know how often you will be contacting them and make sure you keep your promise.
- Make sure each message has a real benefit for the recipients – useful information, discount vouchers, special offers all work well.
- Make sure your messages contain relevant, timely content that will make readers want to open your next email.
- If you have a number of different target audiences create different, targeted campaigns for each audience rather than one general campaign.

Building Your Campaign:

So now that you have a list and a plan, you are ready to send your first campaign. Here are a few key points to remember when you are building your message:

- Size is important – make sure the entire content of your message, images included, is less than 50Kb so it's quick and easy for people to download. Not everyone has broadband!
- Width is important too – most email clients will only display emails less than 550 pixels wide without scrolling.
- Check, and double-check your spelling and grammar. If possible get someone to proof read it for you.
- Never send out a campaign that is just an image. Many email clients won't load images by default, so recipients will just see a blank email. However, including relevant images that back up your text is a good idea.

- Check every link in your message to ensure they work.
- Include a clear call-to-action for your recipients.
- Make sure that the 'From Name' for all your campaigns is consistent, and includes your company or brand name.
- The subject line has a huge influence on getting people to read your message; make sure it's short (less than 40 characters including spaces) and gives people a specific reason (benefit) to open your message, now! Don't use all CAPS, exclamation marks and words like free as these will get picked up by anti-spam systems.
- Also make sure your subject line is truthful – this is a relationship we're talking about, if you lie you will get dumped!
- Test, test, test – send previews of your campaign to as many different email accounts (hotmail, yahoo, gmail, etc.) as you can to make sure everything appears as you expect.
- Always include your company name and an unsubscribe link – it's the law. (Online Connector does this automatically for you).
- If you are in the US or contacting customers in the US, ensure you include your physical mailing address in every message.

Sending Your Campaign:

Now your message is ready to go there are a final couple of points to remember:

- Timing is everything – if you have sent campaigns before check to see when people are actually reading them, you may find that altering the time you send your message can improve results. For example, aggregate data shows that late morning/mid afternoon is the best time to send a campaign, but results vary for each audience.
- Make sure you can measure results – however you send your campaign out, make sure you can gauge success. Statistics like opening rates, link clicks and unsubscription rates are invaluable.

Tracking & Learning:

Once you have sent a campaign things don't stop there, you need to make sure that you learn from every interaction with your audience. If you have got access to statistics you can ensure that every campaign you send is better than the last one.

Things to watch out for:

- Open Rate (how many people opened your message) – was this unusually high or low? Factors that can affect opening rates include the subject line (was it compelling enough?); the message contents (did you check it wouldn't be confused with spam?); the time you sent the message (had everyone gone home for the day?) and even the previous campaign you sent (if you didn't live up to people's expectations, you may have lost their trust for good.)
- Link clicks – are some links getting more clicks than others? This may be due to the call to action you are using or simply the placement of the link in the message.
- Unsubscription rate – if this is more than 1% you have got a problem, you may not be targeting the right people or your content simply might not be interesting enough.
- Opening time – when are people actually reading your message? If it's some time after you sent it then maybe adjusting your send time may increase your open rates.

Far from exhaustive, our brief guide should help you achieve more from your email marketing campaigns and bring tangible benefits to your business.