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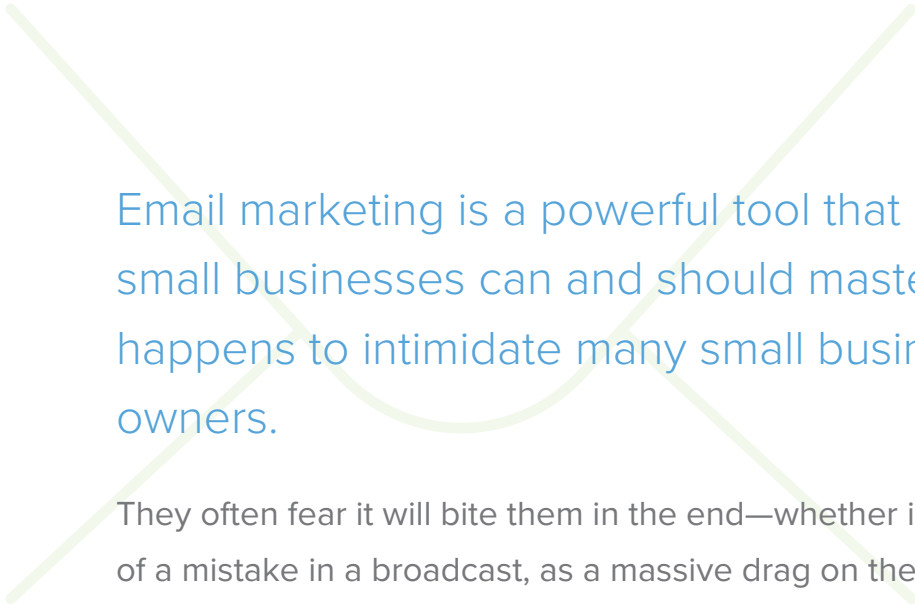
Email Marketing for the Rest of Us:

How Small Businesses can Find Big Success through Email Campaigns

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Email marketing is a powerful tool that small businesses can and should master. It also happens to intimidate many small business owners.

They often fear it will bite them in the end—whether in the form of a mistake in a broadcast, as a massive drag on their time, or some other horrible, imagined outcome.

We've heard it said a thousand times, many small business owners say, "Email marketing is dead; I don't need to do email." The truth is, email remains one of the most powerful tools in a marketer's tool box. But like any power tool, it must be used correctly, or it can present big problems. In the back of their heads, many small business owners know that if they let down their guard, bad email practice can jeoparodize their business, so, they justify their fear by saying that it doesn't work.

In a way, email marketing really is a lot like a table saw. Table saws are a must-have for carpenters. But when they see that blade spinning, they know that it could take a finger if used incorrectly. It takes a degree of bravery to step up and learn how to master it. But the challenge doesn't end with mastery: **Good carpenters never let down their guard when using the tool. The only way to be successful is to respect the tool.**

The reality is that if you do email marketing the right way, it works—and well. So well, in fact, that you can't afford not to do it.
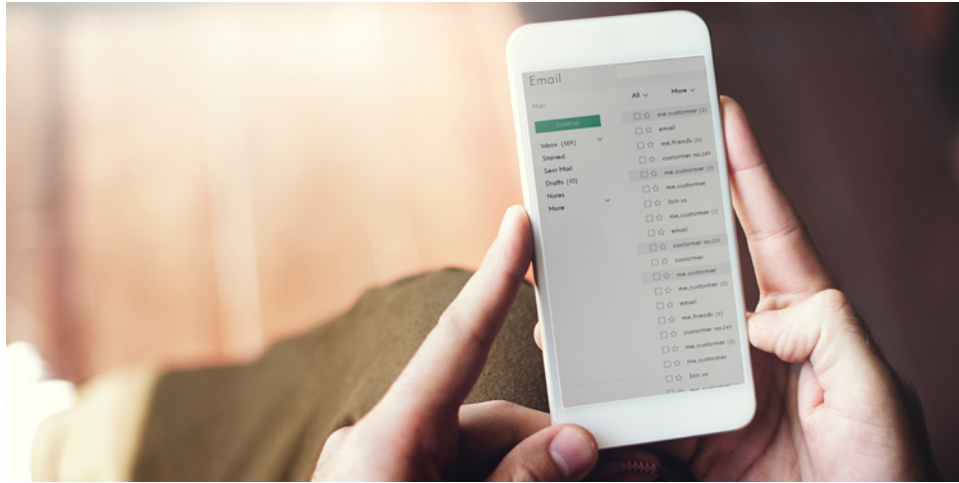
Email may look like an artifact beside digital advancements and trends like social media, text messaging and mobile applications, but the decades-old technology (yes, it's that old already!) remains a communications pivot-point for as many as 2.6 billion people worldwide.

A recent study concluded that email is almost 40 times better at acquiring new customers than Facebook and Twitter. (Capterra, 2014), and 60 percent of marketers say that email marketing is producing an ROI for their organization. (Capterra, 2014).

You can take advantage of this powerful marketing tool for your small business by taking note of the email marketing strategies and best practices we present in this e-book.

We're going to talk about some basics: what to do (i.e. what rocks), and what not to do with your email campaigns (i.e. what bites).

The good news is this: You can create effective email campaigns! We're going to show you how. So, let's pony up. Be brave, and look at what it really takes to be successful with email.

Chapter 1: Email Marketing Campaign Tricks for Small Businesses

The strongest use of email as a marketing tool comes in the form of campaigns: organized, targeted releases that follow a specific strategy. As you think about developing strategies for your email campaigns, keep these tricks in mind.

Create multiple opportunities to gather email addresses

An anemic email list is not worth the effort of your best email campaigns. Always look for more ways to grow your list.

Fortunately, there are multiple ways to persuade current customers and prospects to turn over their email addresses:

- Encourage (and sometimes require) visitors to the company website or store to register for every action, whether it's saving a shopping cart, buying a purchase, or just establishing an account
- Create contests and giveaways for which visitors must fill out a short form
- Post free downloads on the site
- Offer free seminars
- Offer enrollment in reward clubs or coupon clubs
- Have a forum
- Allow comments on the blog section of your website and require an email confirmation before the comment is posted
- Encourage people to email reviews, questions, or suggestions
- Have a **Newsletter sign-up box**

Use both bulk email promotions and transactional email promotions

Bulk emails are emails sent to a large list of recipients; the text of the email can have elements that are personalized (like specific name, day of the week, etc.), but the majority of the content is the same for all recipients. This includes general promotions, newsletters, new product alerts, and event announcements. Bulk email can be effective when targeted to the right audience at the right time. Be sure bulk email hits the

right recipient segment of your email lists to ensure that you have the best shot at having your content read. Nevertheless, even well targeted bulk email can go unopened or find its way to the spam folder.
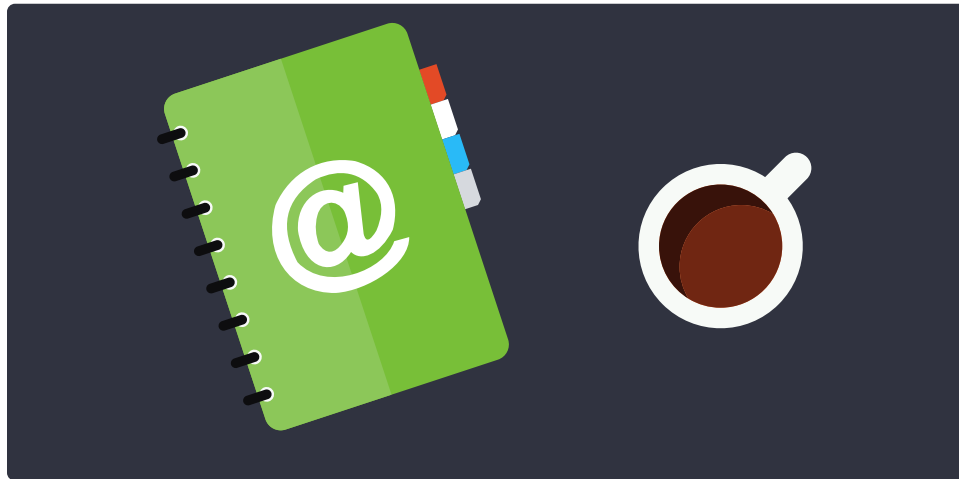
Small businesses have more success by supplementing their bulk mail campaigns with transactional emails that offer one-on-one pitching and custom promotions based on past customer behavior.

When sending emails like welcome notices, account approvals, and shipping confirmations, small businesses should recognize that these are opportunities to make personalized recommendations of related goods and services or to encourage participation in polls or social media. Infusionsoft, which combines sales and marketing automation with customer relationship management (CRM) into one software system, lets you manage these details automatically, which saves you time while also personalizing your emails. That translates as a big win for your business.

Test and assess your campaigns

Testing provides crucial information at every level of the email marketing campaign. Before finalizing the email prototype, use focus groups or surveys to test the appeal of the design, the subject line, the arrangement of branding elements, the configuration of ads, the strength of the promotion, and the overall tone of the message.

Before actually broadcasting your campaigns, send them first to employees and executives, or anyone that you can trust for reliable feedback. Have them open the messages using different email clients and different devices. Test whether or not all the features show up in different browsers and email programs.

Pro Tip*: Infusionsoft provides a variety of metrics to help you determine the success of your campaign after the send. You'll get data on open rates, and conversion rates, spam complaints, and click-through. With this data you can identify who's most engaged with your email, what works, and what doesn't. With that kind of information at your fingertips, it goes without saying that you should take the time to digest the data you collect. That way you can apply the knowledge gained and make improvements on your future broadcasts.*

Educate the recipients

List subscribers often get ad fatigue. They can become so accustomed to being sold something that they ignore emails.

To avoid this, rather than always promoting the company's offerings, mix it up: You can provide advice and link to a related company blog, or you can share details about community partnerships or the company's social responsibility. Suddenly, your business is humanized, which helps the company build deeper relationships.

Send out your Email Campaigns at the most opportune time

Experian Marketing Services, a leading provider of consumer measurement and analytical services, found that some times of day are better than others to send an email blast. Open rates vary by industry, but in general the highest opening rate for bulk mail—22 percent—occurs in the evening after people have left work and had dinner, such as between 8 p.m. and midnight. Not surprisingly, these times also had better conversion rates.

On the other hand, transactional emails are nearly always opened at any time of day.

Fresh email received at the right time of day has the best shot at engagement. Armed with this data, you can send your emails at the optimum time for your recipients to read them.

Chapter 2: Email Subject Lines that Can't Help but Get Opened

It's the quandary of everyone who sends marketing emails: How do you get people to actually open your emails? There's a lot that goes into creating a clickable, compelling email, but consider the first thing people see: The subject lines.

To make subject lines even more enticing, stop thinking of them as titles, headlines, or placeholders. Think of them as part of a long seduction, where mystery attracts, even tempts them to read—and of course the body of the email pays dividends.

News headlines have long been considered seductive, so let's draw that temptation and mystery into your subject lines, as well.

It's all about the relationships

As with most aspects of life and business, the key to seductive email subject lines that entice recipients to click is to have a relationship with your recipients. A relationship implies that they already trust you. This doesn't come about by just emailing people—it comes through identifying the right people in your target market and solving their problems.

For this reason, you should always make sure that your email looks like it's being sent by a person—the sender should not be "Company Name, " or "Department Name," but a person's first and last name. For example, "**marketing@smallbiz.com**" looks impersonal, and is likely to fall flat. Instead, have the sender be an actual person's email address.

Short and shocking

Another tip for good email subject lines is that sometimes brevity and a bit of mystery is the best way to draw someone in. So unsurprisingly, "Hey!", "Hey," and "hey" are very effective email subject lines, since they look like they're from a friend and curiosity stands a good chance of winning out.

Other short, intriguing bits include "This just in ..." and "Breaking news ... "

That being said, be aware that people respond to subject lines that directly address the nature of the email, so you can use the informal shocker subject line, but try to quickly point out the nature of the email: "Hey, check out [company name]'s newsletter!" or "Breaking news! [company name] is releasing [new product]!"

Long and provocative

People have been using email like text messaging: They've been putting the "text" in the subject line without any content in the body as a fast way to get a message out. As a result, people are used to longer message-like subject lines. On occasion, you can use this phenomenon to your advantage in your subject lines.

Put it all out there and tell people exactly what they're getting. That honesty and length can stand out in an inbox.

Three formulas to get you started:

How to + *[benefit]* + *[timeframe]*

Example: How to Generate 300 Leads in Under 10 Minutes

[Someone famous] + **Guide to** + **[Benefit]**

Example: The Grumpy Cat Guide to Viral Marketing Memes

X Things You Should Know about Y

Example: 713 Things You Should Know About Good Email Subject Lines

Stimulating punctuation

Dots, lines, and swirls can do a lot for an email open rate. Ellipses (...) add extra mystery because they create an information gap so that people want to know what comes next.

Believe it or not, even emoticons can help your open rate, but they should be used judiciously to avoid looking spammy. For example, "Hey! ;)" is probably not going to get your desired outcome because it looks like a spam email from an online dating service. However, "Hey thought you'd like this :)" could be very effective when sent to customers who trust you and with whom you have an existing positive relationship.

Don't, however, go so far as to put HTML emojis in your subject lines. Not only will it look like you're communicating like a 12-year-old, but it could very likely get your message sent to spam.

One word of caution: We recommend you nix the dollar sign and even money amounts. They have been known to increase your emails risk of being marked as spam.

Surprisingly, hyphens can help your open rate, since they aren't as commonly used in email subject lines, they can help visually set your email apart from the rest of an inbox.

Don't overuse your tactics

If something works for you, great! Count your wins, but be sure you mix up your strategy. Don't use those ellipses or emoticons in every email. Overusing your arsenal of effective email

subject line tools could begin to look canned, and will turn your audience off.

Just like in any good relationship, you have to keep things fresh.

Keep your tone consistent

Make sure that the tone of your email's subject line matches the tone in the body of your email. For example, sending an email with the subject line "Hey!" that contains formal or corporate content will be completely dissonant with your subject line, and people will feel baited; the converse is also true. So make sure that **your voice** is consistent in all aspects of your emails.

Look at your competitors

We'd like to believe that we're the **only ones in our recipients' world**, but this isn't a Disney movie; if you're going to keep your email list engaged, you've got to know what others are saying to woo them, too.

Sign up for your competitors' emails, and then look carefully at the subject lines they're using. Do you notice trends in their words or punctuation? Did they have a great zinger you wish you'd thought of? Use your observations to get more creative with your subject lines.

Of course you won't be privy to their open rates, but your judgment is valuable in assessing whether you're keeping up with the pack.

You can also subscribe to email lists that don't have anything to do with your industry, but that play the email game really well. We recommend you check out these awesome emailers: surfing clothing retailer **Swell**, **Jon Morrows** on Boost Blog Traffic, and **Jon Acuff**.

Aim out of your league

Final tip: Set your sights high.

Though the general open rate average is about 20 percent, aim for 30 percent. That way if you fall short, with say, 25 percent open rate, you'll still be ahead of the curve.

If your rates aren't quite that high, fret not. Remember, success comes through building relationships, and the better your relationship with email recipients gets, the higher your open rate will go. In the world of email marketing, the way to understand and improve this relationship is to learn what works and what doesn't, and adjust your approach accordingly. The way to learn is to test and measure. In Chapter 3, as we discuss best practices, we dig into measurement and testing.

Chapter 3: Proven Email Marketing Best Practices

In chapters one and two, we talked about strategies that can help you have more successful email campaigns and how to boost your open rate by having appealing subject lines. In this chapter, we want to leave you with some valuable best practices that the best email strategists keep in mind for their own email campaigns.

1 Get personal

If you have a customer's email address, you probably have their actual name, too. Use this to your advantage and catch their eye by addressing them directly.

A 2013 study by Experian Marketing Services found that personalized promotional mailings had 29 percent higher unique open rates and 41 percent higher unique click rates, compared to non-personalized mailings. This is strong evidence that personalization matters. Big time.

Let customers know they're more than a pair of eyes or a prospective sale. To you, they're a person with a name.

Pro Tip: *When you're dealing with hundreds, thousands, or hundreds of thousands of contacts, you won't have the time to customize each and every email in your list with personalized details. With Infusionsoft automation, you have all the details of your contact profiles at your fingertips, which means you can personalize your emails without spending a lot of time to do it.*

Connect the dots between first line and subject line

Aim for brevity in the subject line, but don't let that dissuade you from being descriptive. As we mentioned in Chapter 2, tease your recipient with a great subject line without being too cryptic (e.g. "You won't believe this!") or too general (e.g. "February Newsletter"). And then deliver on that tease, and do it quickly.

Small business owners should carry a sense of urgency into their email campaigns, always remembering that they have a limited amount of time to communicate value before the reader sends the email to the trash.

Remember, too, that first lines will appear in the preview text in the interfaces of most email platforms.

For example, say your organization has an upcoming event. You could craft your message in the following way:

Subject line:	Join us this Friday in Midtown
Salutation:	John,
First line:	We're partnering with Such and Such Organization for a stellar event this Friday at 7 p.m.
Following Lines:	[more detail about the events with registration instructions & link to website]

If John is interested, he'll keep reading about your stellar event. And if he's not, at least he got the message to him before he dumped it.

Keep it short and sweet

Like your subject line, your email should be concise. If you're like most marketers, your big picture strategy probably revolves around your website. Keep that in mind when making email content decisions. House the majority of your content on your site and link to it in emails to drive traffic to your hub.

With this strategy, think of your email as a menu that describes the meaty content available on your site. Be sure to get your key message across in the email, but don't serve it as a main course. If readers want to know more, they'll click through. Be sure that every word has a necessary function in communicating your message.

Be clear, personal, and non-salesy

If you're not careful to make sure your message is coherent and free of ambiguity, it doesn't matter how well-worded the subject line is, what time the message arrives, or how dazzling your layout is. It won't be understood.

When writing the message, too, be sure to make it more personal than general. Emailing is personal, after all. It's not a billboard; it's a doorstep conversation.

Believe in what you're selling, but be respectful. Use tact; don't diminish your brand's reputation by filling your

recipients' inboxes with something they may deem spam. It's a relationship, so it needs to be based on trust and respect.

Ask questions

Your email message is meant to generate a response—whether a click, a visit to your site, an R.S.V.P., a subscription, or otherwise. Keep this in mind as you craft your content.

One way to engage readers is a simple conversational tactic: Ask questions. Perhaps you're looking for real feedback on a new product, or maybe you're simply looking to tease a page on your website. Asking is a simple way to accomplish both.

Remember mobile users

Make links clickable and use a responsive sending program, which will cater to mobile users. Direct users to pages on your website, which work well for mobile browsing and keep the HTML in the message simple for fast loading.

A/B Test for real-deal analytics

Test. Study. Analyze. Repeat. The best marketers live and die by testing everything. As a small business owner, testing may feel like a pipe dream. Keep in mind that it is far less costly to expose a poor email in a test than it is to use that email long-term and miss out on potential revenue.

Use A/B testing as you hone email campaigns. See which

subject lines get the best open rates. Use alternate first lines to see how users respond to preview texts. Try capitalization variations to see how your readers respond. Everything in your campaign should be studied and refined through testing.

8 Measure engagement and tweak, tweak, tweak

As a follow up to A/B testing, metrics should mean everything to the modern marketer. In an age where measurement is only becoming easier, be sure you're taking advantage of the sign posts that can help you constantly improve.

Compile as much data about your readership as you can and hedge your bets. Measure all of the above against your subscription list. What subject lines get you the most opens? Do first person, conversational tones help you to get click-thrus?

9 Dress up sharing

Making it easy for readers to share your content—whether via email forwarding or social media—is an easy way to increase your customer base and number of subscriptions. But they're unlikely to do it of their own volition. They'll need some prodding and, more to the point, some kind of incentive.

Offer a promo code or a giveaway to new subscribers and to those who share. "Share" buttons are ubiquitous nowadays; simply dropping those at the bottom of a message won't do the trick. Make them more prominent than status quo would dictate. Dress them up. And if you have nothing to offer or give away but believe in your campaign, fine. Sell it. Don't be afraid to ask readers to help get the word out through forwarding and sharing. You'll be surprised at their receptiveness to light prompting.

Conclusion

The best marketers incorporate email as an integral part of their campaigns year after year while avoiding the temptation to ditch the practice altogether for greener, more dazzling pastures. In fact, a **2014 study by GigaOM Media**—a San Francisco-based technology research and analysis firm—found that professional marketers **depend on email marketing** more than any other practice, including social media, mobile and display advertising, paid search and search engine optimization, referrals, and several other applications.

The reason is that email is direct, showing up on the digital doorstep of customers: it can be personalized, not just generalized to a broad user base.

Combined with marketing automation software, like Infusionsoft, it can be one of the most efficient ways to reach out to, and engage with, your customers. And it's cheaper than most other commonly used marketing tactics.

As such a powerful tool, it's critical for small business marketers to understand more than just the basic function of email marketing; they must also recognize the potential power email can offer and seek to harness it for their business.

Ben Snedeker

Ben Snedeker joined Infusionsoft in 2015 to do full time that which he loves most: writing the stories that inspire action. He holds a MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College. In his prior life, he was a freelance writer working days at MIT as a grant manager. After a decade of paper pushing in academia, writing for a fast moving company like Infusionsoft is his dream come true. A perennial tinkerer, when he's not in the office, he can't help but tend his bonsai trees, edit other people's writing, and make sure his kids clear their plates before they leave the table.

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