

E-NEWSLETTERS: MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

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With all the newer forms of communication like Facebook, Twitter and RSS feeds, it's easy to overlook one of the most effective means of communicating with your clients and customers: the e-newsletter. Email is still considered the most popular marketing tactic through which marketers and ad agencies worldwide create personalized customer experiences. According to a 2010 survey by Alterian, 72% of the respondents indicated that email was a tactic they used for personalized customer experiences.



Source: Alterian, "2010 Annual Survey," as published in eMarketer, January 19, 2011.

While *email marketing* generally includes any type of direct marketing that uses electronic mail as a means of communicating commercial messages, our focus here is on the e-newsletter, electronic newsletters sent to a select group of subscribers.

WHY E-NEWSLETTERS?

There are several reasons to make e-newsletters a predominant part of your marketing mix. Well written, informative e-newsletters build brand recognition, loyalty and trust for your company. They are among the most cost-effective means to inform your subscribers of new developments at your company and new products and service you are offering. Plus, e-newsletters provide the ability to measure the results of your efforts.

Create Brand Preference

When your subscribers value the information your e-newsletters provide, they will associate your brand with a trusted and valuable resource. To help create brand preference, the look of your e-newsletter should be consistent and reflect your branded image. With a glance at their email inbox, subscribers should recognize your brand and welcome the valuable information you send.

If you sell a retail product, newsletters provide a great way to announce a new product or a development. E-newsletters from healthcare organizations, medical equipment manufacturers and other companies often focus almost exclusively on educating subscribers. For example, one version can go to prospects considering a therapy. Another version can go to patients who have already had a particular therapy.

Build Loyalty and Trust

E-newsletters help build loyalty while they drive subscribers to your website. Receiving useful content in a well-designed e-newsletter on a consistent basis helps to build both trust and loyalty. It also keeps your business top of mind when subscribers need further information or need to purchase the products or services you offer.

Save Costs

E-newsletters are one of the most cost-effective methods of reaching your target audience with your message. According to research conducted by the [Direct Marketing Association](#), email marketing generated an estimated ROI of \$42.08 for every dollar spent on it in 2010. E-newsletters are also an economical means to drive traffic to your website where you can provide information in the level of detail your subscribers are looking for.

Measure Results

One of the benefits of e-newsletters is the information they can bring to you. While you are providing valuable information to your subscribers, you are learning valuable information about them. With the information provided by most e-newsletter vendors, not only is it possible to see how many of your e-newsletters were opened, you can see who opened them and what hyperlinks they clicked on for further information. In effect, the reports provided by most vendors can tell you who read your e-newsletter, what they were interested in, and which topics they would like further information on. All this insight on your audience's interests is usually provided at a very reasonable cost.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD E-NEWSLETTER?

Content

Good content makes a good e-newsletter. E-newsletters must be relevant with the interesting, well-researched, up-to-date content that your subscribers are looking for.

People seeking information about a particular therapy, for example, are often eager recipients of newsletters related to their conditions. They are likely to share the information with their friends and families – advancing your brand's reach.

Five Tips for Effective E-Newsletters

1. Keep it short and concise
2. Keep it relevant
3. Don't stray from your purpose
4. Personalize
5. Always ask for permission

Quality content is an investment. Anytime you create quality articles for your e-newsletters, it will involve research and professional writing. The good news is once you make the investment in quality content, that content can be repurposed. The concise, informative article in your e-newsletter can become the detailed informative article residing on your website. It can be shortened to a quick paragraph for your Facebook page or a tweet to draw your Twitter followers to your website for further information. Well-researched articles written for your e-newsletters can also be used within your company as a valuable resource.

Relevance

Good newsletters are relevant and engaging; this is only possible if you know who your subscribers are and what interests them. While your subscribers no doubt appreciate hearing all about your company and your latest products, they should also be able to turn to you for the latest news that concerns them. Put yourself in your subscribers' shoes. What interests them? What do they want to read about? Create content that provides value. A good rule of thumb: no more than 40% of your content should be sales-related.

Purpose – The Editorial Calendar

Creating an editorial calendar will help you focus on your purpose and provide relevant content in a timely manner. It will also help you with internal planning and make the task seem less daunting each issue. A good editorial calendar will list your topics and subtopics for each of your upcoming issues for the year (or a shorter time period of desired). Be sure to give your topics some real thought and get input from everyone concerned.

It is important to create a good editorial calendar then stick to your schedule, but remember to always leave room for flexibility. No one can predict all the unexpected events or changes that may occur in your industry in the future. Some topics will have to be addressed as they happen to keep your e-newsletter relevant

Personalization

One of the benefits of e-newsletters that sets them apart from other forms of communication is the ability to personalize your message.

Unlike other forms of communication, you know who will be reading your e-newsletters and you can personalize the content to match the subscriber. There are several different ways to segment your e-newsletter mailing list. Your segmentation will depend on your subscribers and your message. You may want to segment by past customers, current customers and potential customers – tailoring the message as necessary. You may also want to segment by interest. If you are sending a healthcare e-newsletter you may want to send information about particular medical conditions and medical products to segmented audiences.

Permission

Make sure that whoever is in charge of your e-newsletter list is familiar with and abides by the Can-Spam Act that applies to all commercial email. This act applies to all commercial emails and each separate email in violation of the CAN-SPAM Act is subject to penalties of up to \$16,000, so it's important that everyone concerned is familiar with the law.

Also very important: you don't want to alienate your subscribers or potential subscribers by giving them information they don't want. Make it easy for your subscribers to unsubscribe and your potential subscribers to sign up.

TRENDS

Go Mobile

Smartphone use is growing exponentially in the United States. It is predicted that in 2011, more than 73 million individuals will be using a smartphone at least once per month (eMarketer, December 2010). If you want your e-newsletter to be read by your subscribers, you must provide a mobile-friendly format. To make your e-newsletter easy to read on a mobile device, keep your graphics small and keep your articles short and easy to navigate.

Complement Social Media

Social media is very important but it won't be replacing e-newsletters anytime soon. In fact, in several ways the two types of communication can complement each other. According to MarketingSherpa's Email Marketing Benchmark Survey, 81% of the respondents indicate that social media extends the reach of email content to new markets. 47% of the respondents indicated that social media accelerates the growth of their email lists. Good content is always important; the e-newsletter is still an effective means for delivering that content.

If you are trying to decide how much to budget for your e-newsletter campaigns for the upcoming year, keep in mind there's a good chance your competition will be increasing their email campaign budgets. According to BtoB Magazine's 2011 Marketing Outlook, 68% of the marketing professionals surveyed indicated that they would be increasing their email budgets for 2011.

Dovetail Your e-Newsletter with Social Media

- Provide opportunities to subscribe to your e-newsletter on Facebook
- Provide links to your Facebook page from your e-newsletter
- Share content of important articles
- Promote your e-newsletter and provide subscription information via Twitter
- Promote your e-newsletter and provide subscription information on your blog