



E-mail Marketing: New Media Primer

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Keeping in touch with your customers can take many forms, the best being face-to-face. When customers are geographically spread out, keeping in touch can be a challenge for your account managers who must balance a frequency of visits that maintain strong ties to current customers while having time to build new relationships. Therefore, maintaining contact between personal engagements is important. One way to do so is through micro-bursts or larger newsletters issued via direct e-mail. Personally, I favor the micro-burst as it's much easier for the recipient to consume and, being concise, it is more likely to be shared. Outside of the obvious use to reach customers, targeted e-mail can be an excellent communication tool for reaching out to employees, supply partners, investors and others.

When starting out, research your delivery options. There are dozens of e-mail contact solutions; some web-enabled subscriptions, others server-based solutions and stand-alone software packages. For the most part, all offer a simple graphical interface for creating html-based e-mail, list management, launch scheduling, opt-in and opt-out list management and reporting capabilities.

With smaller lists (numbering less than 10,000 addresses) a web-based solution is a good candidate. Webware offerings tend to be very easy to use, inexpensive and platform independent (Mac or PC friendly)—an especially good choice if you're an e-mail novice with limited IT staff. The proliferation of online service providers, the competitiveness of their subscription models and depth of features offers a quick and simple starting point. For example,

web-based solutions such as Constant-Contact.com offers extensive tool sets that enable you to reach thousands of contacts for less than \$50 per month.

The immediacy and feedback of e-mail marketing are two of its key strengths as you can disseminate time-sensitive information in minutes and you can measure some of the results of your efforts almost instantly.

Factors that influence success or failure can be summarized into a few key points:

- **First and foremost, have permission**—Sound e-mail marketing is based on recipient permission. List rental through a legitimate provider such as your trade association, as a part of a trade event, is fine, but always avoid the use of bulk, purchased e-mail addresses. Companies offering the opportunity to purchase bulk lists may tempt you, and while bulk is cheap, consider why you would want to send e-mail to untargeted, unsuspecting, and most likely uninterested parties? Moreover, by taking a shotgun approach you risk legal repercussions, as well as jeopardize your organization's reputation. Your most reliable means of building an e-mail list is from existing customer contacts, where you have active relationships. If you're not using a customer relationship management tool, then pooling your sales, service, executive and other internal assembled contacts may be tedious but it is a good start.

- **Keep your messaging relevant**—With micro-bursts your primary objective is to make the recipient aware, interested, and offered a convenient means to link to your website, download details or contact you to learn more. So

consider how valuable the information is to your audience and what is motivating the push. Does the content generate meaningful engagements, foster significant dialogue, or bring together individuals and ideas. Also, segment accordingly; judge if a message is relevant to your entire list or only a select group of recipients.

• **Be concise and use visuals whenever possible and practical**—In preparing micro-burst e-mails strive to keep the copy down to fewer than 100 words, (about the length of the previous paragraph). Include your logotype and present photographs, diagrams, charts or other visual means to communicate ideas or to illustrate concepts.

• **Temper the frequency of your messages**—Once you're started be mindful that not everything going on in

your business is newsworthy, and just because you have the ability to blast e-mails out at any moment certainly doesn't mean that you should. Respect your customer's inbox and pace the frequency of your messages. Use the software's built-in reporting tools to gauge your relevancy and frequency and as you start out ask a handful of customers how valuable they find the material that you're sending and if it's coming too frequently or not frequent enough. But, generally speaking, two to three times per month is plenty. Conversely, communicating too infrequently can be just as bad as communicating too often. If you wait too long to reach out to your audience, then your list can become stale so reach out at least once per quarter.

When done right, e-mail marketing

can be a powerful tool, enabling you to quickly reach out and communicate in a way that can enhance relationships and spark new ones. Adding e-mail to your marketing mix requires fewer resources than traditional marketing vehicles (e.g. direct mail, PR or print advertising), it's ecological, immediate and convenient.

The return on investment (ROI) delivered through e-mail marketing is compelling. In 2009, the Direct Marketing Association reported that e-mail marketing delivers an ROI of more than \$35 on each dollar spent. While reaping this return isn't guaranteed, it is certainly attainable with a little homework. Excellent resources can be found online at the Direct Marketing Association (www.the-dma.org) and at Constant Contact's 'Learning Center' (www.constantcontact.com). **MF**



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