

# How Email Marketing Can Benefit Your Organization

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### Efficient and Targeted Business Communication

You need to be heard. Your organization needs to effectively communicate important messages to your target audience. And probably not just one audience. As a business, you undoubtedly need to communicate both inside and outside of your organization. Above the din of advertisements, promotions, and other messages competing for the time and attention of your audience, you need to speak in a way that is efficient, relevant, timely, and measurable.

Whether your message is going out to prospects, customers, employees, management, distributors, affiliates, or whomever, you need efficient and targeted ways to talk about your purpose, sell your benefits, explain your policies, differentiate yourself, build relationships, or just leave a positive impression.

In contemplating the ways to reach your audience, perhaps you've overlooked a relatively new communication channel with the power to deliver your messages with impact. Have you asked yourself if you are using the full power of email in ways that are most beneficial to your organization? Are you taking full advantage of its unique ability to communicate to your audience in direct, targeted, and measurable ways?

### But I Already Use Email

It's true that today, almost everyone uses email in one form or another. The advent of the Internet has, of course, brought with it email communication, along with its positive and negative features. Because of its ubiquity, it's easy to take email for granted. We just

plunk down a few words in Outlook, or whatever email software we might be using, “carbon copy” a group of people we need to talk to, and click “Send”. Nothing could be easier, right? Well, for sure, programs like Outlook have their place in much of our daily email communication. But for the important messages—those times when you need to stand out and make an impact, or those times when you need to most effectively communicate to your audience on a larger scale—an effective email marketing service is the answer.

### **What’s Email Marketing?**

Email marketing is a form of direct marketing which uses electronic mail as a means of communicating to an audience. Because the audiences for email marketing are as broad as the reasons for sending it, it has many purposes, including; enhancing relationships with prospects or customers, dissemination of product and service information, customer support, and promotional advertising, to name a few. Email marketing is an effective delivery channel for newsletters, promotions and advertisements, announcements, fund raisers, surveys, webinars, and postcards.

Email marketing allows for the ability to deliver messages that are more cost-effective, direct, targeted, and efficient. You can communicate in ways that separate you from your competition, make your message more effective and memorable, and deliver timely and relevant information to your audience.

### **The Benefits of Effective Email Marketing**

This report examines the ways that email marketing can benefit your organization. It explains why an effective email marketing service is needed to achieve these benefits, instead of relying on the computer email programs we use on a daily basis.

## Cost and Time Efficient

Email marketing is much more cost-efficient relative to media channels that deliver similar content. Email marketing doesn't require printing, paper, or postage for delivery. Many organizations print newsletters that they mail out to their customers. Replacing such a delivery channel with email marketing not only is greener and saves more trees, but is much less expensive—pennies compared to dollars. Such a significant difference in cost can allow you to communicate more often with your audience.

Also, relative to traditional mail, email marketing is delivered in seconds or minutes, as opposed to days. It provides for instantaneous feedback from your recipients; tracking in real-time who is opening your email, and how they are interacting with your messages.

## Attention Grabbing Visuals

Done effectively, email marketing allows you to send visually appealing, attention grabbing, targeted communications to your audience. Email marketing is "attention grabbing" because it allows for the delivery of attractively designed HTML layouts. A well-designed email message can tie-in with the rest of your company's branding efforts, displaying a consistent image by using your organization's colors, typefaces, and graphics to help your messages get noticed.

### Customize Your Designs to Match the Interests of Your Audience

With email marketing, you can design a unique look for each list you send out to, or for each special occasion. For example, a university might develop a visual identity that uses images of noteworthy alumni to send out a fundraising campaign to a list of graduates. The same university might use imagery touting the benefits of its programs and faculty, or emphasizing the social aspects of the school, when sending a campaign out to a list of high school students. The university could go a step further and send emails with different visual designs to students from different ethnic backgrounds. In this way, the school can use the appropriate identity that most appeals to the various segments of their student audience.

## **Branding Your Organization**

Although your organization's branding efforts can directly target different segments of your audience, you may want to establish a "family" look that represents your organization as a whole, and then "fine-tune" the family look to create visual designs that best tie-in with different segments of your audience. Such diversification is time efficient and cost effective relative to printing multiple postal mailings that need to be delivered to your audience.

All stages of your email communication should be branded with your organization's visual identity. Besides the visual layout of the email itself, the design and content of the entire sign up process can match your organizational brand. This can include such elements as the sign-up form, welcome and confirmation emails, thank you pages, and goodbye pages.

The ability to have a good email marketing service professionally customize the look and content of your campaigns—including source coding HTML, if necessary, is a great way to separate your organization from your competitors. If you use an email marketing service, remember that the best providers will not mark your company branded mail campaigns with their own logo. After all, if you're paying for a service to help establish your unique identity, you shouldn't need to compromise your visual identity by becoming an advertising vehicle for them. This devalues your email marketing by weakening your brand and the autonomy of your organization.

## Targeted, Personalized Content

If you need to speak to your customers and prospects in a manner that is direct and relevant, you can't beat email marketing. This efficient medium is more "targeted" than other communication devices for many reasons.

### Permission Marketing

First, email marketing is more targeted by the very nature of the way a legitimate email list is built. Through "permission marketing," your audience gives their consent to receive your emails. This usually takes the form of "opting-in" when they sign up. This way, rather than interrupting your audience with irrelevant messages, like commercials in television and radio often do, your email marketing is delivered to your recipients on their terms. Your audience is expecting to hear from you, and can read what interests them. Also, you can tailor your messages to be more relevant, and meet their specific interests.

Rather than blasting an email message out through your computer's email software, a well-managed email marketing program should obtain a list of interested parties through a "double opt-in" method. This is a sign-up method that first requires consent, and then confirmation from the interested party. This list-building method complies strongly with the directives of the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003.

People who receive your email communications should either be people you have already established communication with, or who chose to receive your messages because they're interested in what you have to say. This is a much better way to build your email list, compared to purchasing lists comprised of thousands of unknown names from a disreputable source. Building lists through "double opt-in" will lead to less abuse complaints, fewer members unsubscribing, and provide a more interested and targeted audience.

## Segment Your Audience With Lists

Another major reason email marketing is inherently more targeted than other communication channels has to do with the technology of the medium. A good email marketing provider will generally allow you to create as many separate lists as you desire for a single account. For example, a realtor might develop an email marketing program for prospective home owners, and segment this audience further by having a list for prospective home owners who are on a limited budget, a separate list for prospective home owners looking in a middle price range, and a third list for people interested in homes in a higher price range. Creating and segmenting lists in this way allows the realtor to deliver more relevant information to the different parties.

A doctor's office could send out an email campaign talking about child vaccinations just to parents with young children, and send out a different campaign about osteoporosis to elderly patients.

Your audience can be segmented based on many variables, including: demographic information, interest groups, database entries, date of enrollment, and other methods. This allows you to send out messages that are more pertinent to narrow groups within a client base.

Broader groups can also be targeted. For example, email campaigns sent to someone on a "prospect" list might be more introductory in nature, relative to how you might communicate to someone on your "top customers" list. Also, an organization could set up a list for a client newsletter, another list for an internal company newsletter, a list for members of the media, a list for promotional efforts, and so forth. Information can be taken out of a database, and relevant content for your subscribers based on that information can be dynamically inserted.

## **Building Relevancy**

One way to obtain relevant information about your audience is through your sign-up process. You can help personalize your communication by having your audience select interest groups they want to know more about when they go through the opt-in process. For example, if visitors to a website selling consumer electronics chose to sign up for the site's emails, the sign up process might ask the visitor for their main areas of interest. This way, the merchant can use the list-building process to determine if audience members want to receive email content about computers, televisions, DVD players, home audio, car audio, digital cameras, etc. This information can then be stored in a database and later retrieved as merged data to dynamically personalize campaigns based on these preferences. The ability to target such campaigns is very effective, especially when it comes to specific promotions and sales items.

The ability to implement surveys through campaigns also increases the opportunity to learn about the personal preferences of your audience. This helps you develop relevant content not only for email marketing, but for all of your organization's communication channels.

## **Automation**

Automation is a very important part of effective email marketing. Many potentially time-consuming aspects of email communication can be taken care of through computerized scripting.

### **Autoresponders**

An autoresponder is a computer program that automatically answers email sent to it. Autoresponders can be very simple or quite complex, allowing your recipient's interaction with your message to trigger the automatic delivery of other messages.

Many people use their computer email program to set up a basic autoresponder before they go on vacation. That way, if somebody sends them an email while they're out of the office, the sender will automatically receive a reply that tells them so. In the same way, the best email marketing services allow you to develop a series of pre-built messages to send out to your audience. The delivery of these autoresponders may be based on such variables as time, customer groups, interests, and subscription enrollment. This is a great way to deliver newsletters, tutorials, product and service information, subscription information, etc., with great efficiency after the initial investment in time.

### **Automatic List Organization**

By using a good email marketing service, much of the record keeping and other organizational aspects of your lists are automated for you. For example, a good service will automatically clean out hard bounces (email addresses that no longer exists), duplicate addresses, errors (improper syntax in email addresses), as well as unsubscribes (members who decide they want off your list). Recipients who label your email as "junk" in their email software are instantly removed from your email list.

Advanced features allow for email subscription integration with ecommerce shopping carts and blogs. By adding an email opt-in checkbox on an ecommerce site, whenever a customer completes a purchase, their email address can automatically be added to your list, along with a confirmation email to the new subscriber.

### **Automatic Format Delivery**

A good email marketing program will deliver email to your recipient in the most appropriate format. When you compose plain text email in addition to your HTML layouts, the appropriate version will automatically be delivered to each recipient. Each message is sent in a bundle consisting of an HTML version, and a regular text version (if prepared). When the message is delivered, the email is either received in the requested format (HTML or text), or in the most acceptable format for their computer email software. This automated format delivery helps your messages get delivered to your audience.

## **Automatic Archiving**

And finally, with email marketing you can create an automatic archive of your campaigns, such as on your web site. This helps your audience obtain any previously released information they may be interested in. It also helps with the search engines as it links to relevant content for your site.

## **Tracking and Measuring Effectiveness**

How well are you able to measure the effectiveness of a printed newsletter? How measurable is a TV commercial, a radio spot, or a billboard? Perhaps no delivery channel is more measurable than email marketing. Email campaigns have the ability to offer tracking reports on many variables, including: the number of people who opened your campaign, what individuals opened the message (and which didn't), how many times the message was opened by each recipient, the average number of times a message was opened, the links each recipient clicked on, who unsubscribed, who forwarded the message to friends and colleagues, who never received the message (and why), who reported your campaign as spam, the growth of your list over time, and open and click rate trends. Simply put, email marketing can track performance variables that other media can not.

## **Tracking Behavior**

Good email marketing services allow you to target your messages based on your recipient's behavior. For instance, you can send emails only to people who opened or clicked in specific campaigns, or send follow-up emails to people who didn't open certain campaigns.

Email tracking allows you to correlate sales with your marketing efforts. For example, with Google Analytics, you can track and measure open activity and sales conversions from email promotions to website purchases. By tracking the click and purchase path of your audience, an organization can obtain precise values to see if they're obtaining a positive return on their investment.

The ability to track such variables allows you to better tailor the content of your messages to segments of your audience. You can emphasize information that has a higher open rate, and change or remove information that garners a less enthusiastic response.

### **Split Testing**

One very effective measuring technique for email marketing that allows for fast feedback and reaction, is A/B split testing. With A/B split testing, you can more easily optimize your email campaigns. For example, you could send a message to a subset of your audience with one headline in the Subject field, run the exact same message to another subset of your audience with the only change being a different headline in the Subject field, and measure which message gets a better open rate. Then, you can run the version that retrieved the better response to the rest of your audience. That's a simple example of the ability to use tracking and measurement to improve the delivery of your message. You can run A/B split tests with different subject matter, headlines, promotions, coupons, delivery times, and other variables to increase the response from your audience.

### **Staying On Top of Your Results**

The better email marketing services provide visual charts and graphs to show you how you're doing with your email marketing efforts, and allow you to export your reports in different formats, such as Microsoft Excel. With such visual reports, it's often easier to spot trends in your marketing efforts over the long term.

You can more easily stay on top of your tracking efforts by having up-to-the-minute reports delivered to you through RSS feeds. RSS is a family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content in a standardized format (the source usually coming from resources such as blog entries, news headlines, and podcasts). That way, you could view your campaign reports on your Google home page, for instance (or with an RSS reader), to better keep an eye on the activity and response of your audience to your email marketing efforts.

## Protection Against Spamming

Simply put, spam is unsolicited bulk emailing. From the receiving end, it's the equivalent of getting "junk mail" from the post office. On the sending end, it can get you into serious trouble. "Trouble" can range from your organization getting blacklisted\*, to your organization's website getting removed from the Web, to severe fines.

(\*Blacklists help in the fight to keep the Internet clear of unsolicited email by listing perpetrators who spam, and blocking the delivery of their email.)

### CAN-SPAM

It's very important to comply with spam laws as outlined in the United States' CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 (Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act). An effective email marketing service will help keep your organization from being blacklisted or seen as spammers. Conversely, marketers who try to take matters into their own hands and send out a bunch of emails at one time from a program such as Outlook, are taking a great chance of being reported for spamming. This is because Internet service providers and spam filters are very suspicious when a bunch of messages go out at once. Why would this cause suspicion? Because it's exactly what spammers do when they blast out messages to their lists.

To stay clear of spamming, the general rule is to make sure your recipients know who they're getting email from. Ask yourself: "When my audience members get my email, are they going to recognize the sender? Will they know who I am?" If the answer is "no," or even "maybe," then you are at risk for spamming.

If your audience doesn't already have a relationship with you, make sure that they chose to receive your email marketing communications by opting-in to your list. That way, your emails will be anticipated, and your recipients will be more receptive. Opt-in email messages and advertisements are more personal and relevant to recipients than untargeted advertisements.

## Working for Compliance

A reputable email marketing service will not allow someone to send out email from purchased lists. This is not only to protect you, but also to protect them as well. Because the CAN-SPAM Act can potentially authorize an \$11,000 penalty (per individual violation) for serious spammers, good email marketing programs help to ensure compliance.

Through an effective email marketing service, your emails will be sent out across a range of reputable IP addresses so that you won't be blocked by ISPs for batch sending from one location. Also, email marketers must authenticate their return email address, include a valid physical address, provide a one-click unsubscribe feature, and be prohibited from importing lists of purchased addresses from contacts who may not have given permission. A good email marketing service will take care of these compliance requirements for you.

The best email marketing providers allow you to easily pre-check your email against all the major spam filters, firewalls, email filters, and server gateways. They will tell you of any potential delivery problems, exactly what is getting you filtered if your emails get blocked, and tell you what you can change so that you can adjust your content appropriately to maximize your deliveries. They can also show you how spam filters and email firewalls rank your campaign—telling you the likelihood of being blocked from delivery.

## Testing

With a good email marketing service, you'll have tools at your disposal to make sure your messages are delivered the way you intended.

The best services offer previews of your HTML emails before you send them. This can range from "pop-up" previews, to sending "test" emails, to the ability to actually preview what your messages will look like from the inbox of many different email programs.

You want to make sure your layouts are written and coded properly to work in all the major email programs. Good email marketing programs will notify you of errors in your HTML code before you send out your campaign. They will offer tips on how to write your copy so that you're not marked as a spammer. Some will even give you a "spam score," so that you know the chances of your campaign being seen as spam.

As noted earlier, A/B split testing allows you to learn what works and what doesn't work in your campaigns. You can test to see which headlines, subject lines, promotions, subject matter, etc. are most successful.

The best email marketing programs allow you to test and track all kinds of measurables, even things as seemingly insignificant as forward-to-friend links, where they can automatically track the aggregate number of forwards.

## A Final Word

Email marketing offers an attention grabbing, targeted, and efficient delivery channel for your organization's communication. It is a media channel that is measurable, can be automated in many areas, and provides an excellent return on investment. Delivering your campaigns with email marketing allows for relevant and timely contact with your audience and is flexible, efficient to implement, and relatively inexpensive. It allows you to bring your message to your audience, rather than waiting for your customers to drop by your website. If you're looking for a powerful way to stay at the top of your audience's mind, (and maybe even save a few trees), email marketing is a vehicle you should strongly consider.

### **Transforming Business Through Visual Marketing**

Imagine is a visual marketing company that blends custom design solutions with powerful marketing strategy to help you achieve your business communication goals.

Contact us for a free, no obligation consultation for your organization.

phone: 574.233.9903

email: [info@imaginevisualmarketing.com](mailto:info@imaginevisualmarketing.com)

web: <http://www.imaginevisualmarketing.com>

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