



infocus

Get Started with Email Newsletters



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Introduction

Email newsletters are now the preferred online mode of communicating to customers and prospects alike. The key challenge for email marketers is keeping to the job at hand week after week-- driving interest. Whether it's sparking interest in a product that ultimately leads to a sale or piquing the reader's curiosity so they click, go to the website and drive up those precious page views, the email newsletter is the "interest starting point" for your customers. Driving these interest starting points edition after edition is all a matter of staying focused.

Here are five ways to do just that.

Step #1: Do you need a newsletter?

That is the question and, in my opinion, it isn't asked often enough. If you're having difficulty coming up with content for each new edition, it just may be that you shouldn't have a newsletter in the first place!

Today it seems most companies feel obligated to have an email newsletter, as if it goes hand in hand with having a website. I couldn't disagree more. In fact, I feel that only about 10 to 20 percent of companies fall into the newsletter-worthy category, and the vast majority of the others fall into either the "alerts" (one-offs that announce a special situation or event) or "limited run" (an in-depth, numbered series on a defined subject) category. If you are not a publisher in the traditional sense (meaning creating or aggregating content), chances are you shouldn't be in the online sense either!

Step #2: Set expectations

Make no mistake, the widely used phrase "Sign up for our free newsletter" sets just one expectation-- the newsletter is free! The future recipient is left to guess the frequency, as well as the content. Don't be surprised when you see a high unsubscribe rate with the first drop.

Be extremely clear about what it is that you'll be sending and how often you'll be sending it. How about "Sign up for our free Daily Basket Weaving Tip"? Not only are the reader's expectations clear, your editorial mission is clearly defined as well. No more internal brainstorming sessions on what your next newsletter should be about! Best of all, you'll have a more devoted following from the get go.

Step #3: Consider frequency

I'm often asked, "How often should I send out my letter?" In the past, my response was a cavalier, "How much do you have to say?"

Not anymore. Frequency has become a very real and important piece of the newsletter strategy. Consider that the goal of most corporations is to migrate their customers to 100 percent online interaction. Sending statements, alerts, confirmations and marketing via email saves corporations millions of dollars, but the downside is that's an awful lot of email for the customer to absorb. When the consumer has finally had enough, the easiest thing for them to unsubscribe from is -- yes, you guessed it -- your newsletter!

My advice is simple: put someone in charge of corporate email communication to coordinate all email efforts. Ideally, this person can also coordinate the look and feel of all communications so your brand strategy is cohesive without bombarding the consumers.

Step #4: Message before graphics

There is so much newsletter over-design out there and I just don't get it. Not only are more and more people reading newsletters on Treos and Blackberries, it just doesn't pay to load up with graphics! Consumers are subscribing to your content not your art department (or your advertisers)!

Furthermore, I'll bet you anything these same designers used a simple PowerPoint presentation with simple text and bullets to sell their concept to management. This should be the same approach you take to selling your content to consumers. You've heard the mantra Test, Test, Test? Now practice the newsletter mantra-- Text, Text, Text!

Concentrate on compelling ways to phrase content rather than what color your border should be.

Most importantly, remember newsletters don't have one subject line: they have several. Each boldface text headline represents a different interest starting point. Spend your time and energy on the headlines, and you'll be rewarded with clicks and loyalty.

Case in point: I bet at least half of you are reading this article because you clicked the bolded text headline, "Get Started with Email Newsletters" in today's iMedia Connection newsletter!

Text works. Don't be afraid of it. Get good at writing it!

Step #5: Reduce unsubscribes

If the first rule of email newsletters is "Drive Interest," the second rule is "Interests Change." Despite all your efforts to write compelling and focused newsletters, there will come a time when most readers will move the cursor over "Click here to unsubscribe." Be prepared for such a move by giving them other options on the unsubscribe page. Options can include a reduced frequency -- perhaps a monthly compilation is easier for them to cope with -- or a choice of your other newsletters. In addition, always place relevant offers on that page. It might just be your last opportunity to monetize that customer!

Bonus step

Get help from the pros! One nice thing about email marketing is the "we are all in this together" spirit that has prevailed from the very beginning. Help in this channel is never too far away-- iMedia Connection, of course, being the perfect example.

Another terrific resource is the newly created [Email Experience Council](#), which is made up of the industry's best and brightest. I encourage you to get to know them better. They do wonderful work such as helping the email efforts of The Ryan Andrew Kaiser Memorial Foundation (which gives financial aid to families with critically ill children). And, yes, by all means sign up for their newsletter!

Additional resources:

Read the iMedia Connection review of Michael Mayor's book: "[Sign Me Up: A Marketer's Guide To Creating Email Newsletters That Build Relationships & Boost Sales.](#)"

More iMedia Connection email essentials:

- [Get More from Your Email List](#)
- [Fine Tuning Your Email Strategy](#)

Author Notes:

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