

# 20 STEPS TO BETTER EMAIL MARKETING

With the constant flow of information that surges into customers' inboxes every day, it can be tough getting your email opened – let alone actually read.

BY NATHAN STATZ

There was once a golden period of electronic communication where email was shiny and new, and receiving an 'offer' from a company was the greatest thing since sliced bread. Concepts like 'conversion rates' and 'click-throughs' didn't exist, and consumers would happily wield their credit cards through any number of advertisements that arrived in their inbox.

That might be how some remember it, though the truth is that customers are rarely that naive, and over time they have become far more net-savvy and expect small businesses to evolve with them. This has naturally translated into higher expectations on email being sent to customers, and makes it all that much harder to have your commercially-driven message opened.

The good news is that as customer expectation has risen, so too has the understanding of the experts and the methods for having your voice heard. This is particularly important when your email newsletter is one of many in the customer's inbox – sandwiched between email forwards with links to humorous YouTube videos. No matter what form of email marketing you are preparing – be it a newsletter, a direct offer, a one-off promotion or something a little more unique, there is a lot to be learned by asking the experts.



## The 20 steps to success

### 1 **HOMEGROWN IS ALWAYS BETTER**

The old adage that if you want something done right, then you have to do it yourself really is true when it comes to your email database. Ideally the list of email addresses that you send your newsletter to will be sourced from customers or website visitors.

"The number one thing to do before anything else is develop a good list of email addresses that has other information attached to it – such as the name of the customers and their postcodes, so you can work out where they are from," says Todd Wright, a director at Threesides.

"The golden rule is to never buy a list – always build them. It's harder to build them but you should never buy or rent lists unless you've got zero customers."

### 2 **USE A HOSTED SOLUTION**

This may seem like an obvious choice to those already on board the hosted-email bandwagon, but many small businesses still use a customised program to send out newsletters. These were often purchased a decade ago, or worse, they are sending it themselves through Outlook or Mac Mail.

"Five years ago you might have considered sending it out from your own email and your own email software, but these days you 100% need to go with a hosted email product. There are plenty out there and some of the more popular ones can be pay-as-you-go, so you only pay for how many [emails] you send," adds Wright.

Signing up with a hosted email provider has several benefits, including the liberation of your internal email server from sending out thousands of newsletters each week. On top of this – depending on how much you want to spend – hosting providers will give you access to design templates as well as reporting and monitoring tools. Choosing the tools you need is an important part of the process.

nett.com.au

### 3 **GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TEMPLATE**

Whether you are just getting your feet wet in the email marketing pond or are well-versed in its treacherous depths, templates can be incredibly useful. Often they can be sourced for free, or will be provided with a hosting package. Whatever the case, it should be customised to suit your audience and raked over with a fine-tooth comb to get the most out of it.

Once you become a little more familiar with the process, it can really pay off to have your email marketing strongly reflect the look and feel of your business, according to Wright.

### 4 **MAKE SURE YOU HAVE YOUR TEXT-ONLY BASES COVERED**

Years ago, it was common practice to prepare an entirely separate 'text-only' version of your email newsletter. This has since been replaced by software that does it all for you, and automatically spits out a pure-text version of your newsletter for customers who are allergic to the bells and whistles of HTML emails.

"When you are shopping around for a hosted email system, make sure you get one that does both automatically. What it will do is send out the HTML version and people can pick their preferences and say whether they want text or HTML," adds Wright.

**"The number one thing to do before anything else is develop a good list of email addresses that has other information attached to it."**

### 5 **FIND THE PERFECT TIME TO SEND**

Not all email arrival times were created equal, so it is important to maximise the chances of your correspondence being double-clicked on. Typically, your standard office dweller will have a dozen or more emails waiting for them each morning, and newsletters will be the first thing to be culled from the pre-caffeinated brains of your audience. Similarly, there are benefits to sending it out before lunch or in the early afternoon. The golden rule here is to test it out and find what works best for your particular audience.

"We do a lot of work with tourism clients and we find that Wednesday mornings and Thursday mornings are the best time to send out travel-related information. People have got to Wednesday and they are already thinking about the weekend. They are sick of the daily grind at work and that last 48 to 72 hours before the weekend, we have seen, is the best time to hit people," says Wright.

### 6 **DON'T SPAM**

When you first start out in email marketing, it can be tempting to send more and more, particularly when they start generating sales leads. The correct path, however, is to resist temptation and only send your email newsletter as often as your audience expects to get it.

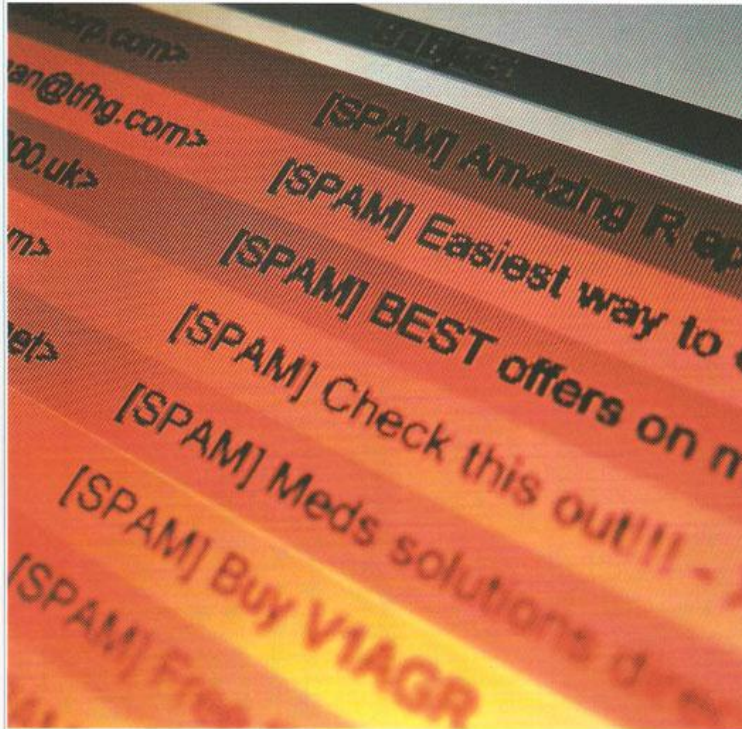
"You might see eBay send out three or four email newsletters a week, whereas most small businesses wouldn't be able to get away with that. People would unsubscribe instantly," adds Wright.

It's important to create a balance between action and rejection, according to Wright, because if you start annoying people and getting unsubscribes, you have defeated the purpose.

### 7 **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**

Much like every piece of marketing, the email version is all about the person you are pitching to. While nobody has ▶





“People are always looking for exclusive offers – they want to know that they are a valued customer.”

the time to go and meet the hundreds, if not thousands, of people on your email marketing list, there is plenty of room for understanding traits about them as a group.

Wright uses the example of a builder who may have built a list from people interested in home renovations. It's still a purchase people make once or twice a year, so the audience may get turned off if you start sending them weekly updates. In this scenario, less is definitely more, as a quarterly offer is going to hit home far better.

### 8 STRIKE A BALANCE

Thanks to the sheer volume of information that everyone with an

internet connection is exposed to on a daily basis, the all too obvious sales pitches will often be deleted without even a cursory glance. This is especially true in email marketing, where a delicate balance must be created between your sell and your content. If the copy screams 'buy, buy, buy' then the battle has already been lost and your target audience has now moved on to a forwarded picture of a domestic animal with a humorous headline.

“People are always looking for exclusive offers – they want to know that they are a valued customer – but at the same time, you need to balance that. The business needs to make sure it's not just a sell job,” warns Wright.

### 9 AVOID SPAM FILTERS

It's blatantly obvious that having your email tagged as spam and automatically moved to the junk email folder is to be avoided, and the simplest method of doing so is to avoid common spam keywords. This can be obvious subject-line headings such as 'advertisement', 'free' and symbols such as '\$' and '!'. As an absolute must, the email host you go with should have a spam check. If not, use the junk folder settings in Outlook or Mac Mail for reference.

### 10 PERSONALISE

Just as you are more likely to turn around if someone calls your name in the street than if they say 'hey you', so too is the personalised email going to draw far more attention than a stock-standard one.

“If you don't personalise the email, you greatly reduce the likelihood of it being opened at all,” explains Sarah McIntyre, a director at Tom Tom Communication.

“You've got to get the thing opened before you can actually communicate the message to the audience. By personalising, you increase the likelihood of it being opened by about 60%,” she adds.

### 11 DON'T BE A ROBOT

One of the first things everyone subconsciously glances at when an email lands in their lap is who it is from. There is a far greater chance that it will make an impression on your audience if it's from a real person, or even a company name, as opposed to the name of the email robot sending out the newsletters.

“If you have a personal relationship with me at my company, then you will probably open that email,” says McIntyre.

### 12 TEST, TEST, TEST AND THEN TEST SOME MORE

One of the great levellers in email marketing is the fact that you can keep experimenting and refining until you find exactly what is going to work for your business. This can be done by setting up 'test' lists, with a small

“If you have a personal relationship with me at my company, then you will probably open that email.”

segment of your database, and sending them a slightly different email, or at a slightly different time, or with any number of tweaks that you want to work into your material.

The beauty of this is that it will give you a reasonably accurate gauge of how your changes are going to be received, without sending them to your entire list.

### 13 CONTROL YOUR QUALITY

Whether you are a sole-trader or running an operation with a double-digit headcount, there will always be a

way to set up a quality control system. This means having a ‘test’ email list of your employees, yourself and other people who you think are relevant – such as marquee customers, business partners, advisors, etc.

Basically, anyone who can spare five minutes to manually eyeball your newsletter and look for obvious mistakes. The point of this is the fact that if you write the words, you are not able to proofread them as well as someone who is seeing them for the first time. This might not sound like a big deal, but it’s quite easy ▶

#### IN A NUTSHELL

- **Permission** – You absolutely need to get permission from whoever you are sending too.
- **Relevant, targeted copy** – Think about your customer. Make it easy for them to respond and also make it easy for them to unsubscribe.
- **Measure** – Measure your opens and clicks and then tweak based on those results.
- **Subject line** – Don’t spend hours making beautiful emails, but forget the subject line. If it is not compelling, it won’t be opened.


Source: Sarah McIntyre, director at Tom Tom Communication.



**PLAN YOUR  
SUCCESS**  
GROW BUSINESS ONLINE!  
VOTE **1** SMALL BUSINESS

### TIP #11 Use email marketing to build relationships with customers instead of just promoting products

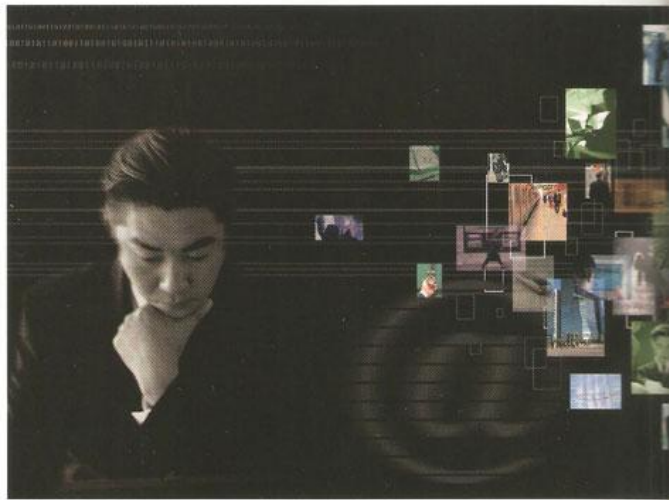
Email marketing is a powerful tool to build customer relationships. Via email, you can provide your customers with useful information and start a two-way communication. Build email campaigns from start to finish with the help of Netregistry.

Call 1300 197 466, go to [netregistry.com.au](http://netregistry.com.au) or follow us on  
 @netregistry for more top tips for small business

 **netregistry**  
Faster reliable websites  
Cloud hosting since 1999



“Don’t wait until the end of the email to communicate what it is exactly that you want them to do.”



for a massive spelling mistake to slip through your own once-over and look embarrassing in front of your entire customer base.

#### 14 DON'T BE WORDY

While it can be tempting to unleash your vocabulary and give the Oxford Dictionary gathering dust on the shelf a good workout, being concise is the order of the day in email marketing.

According to Chris Dale, managing director at Marketing HQ, this means making sure the copy is simple and jargon free. He advises making sure the message is getting through very quickly and to hit them with the offer early.

#### 15 CLARIFY YOUR CALL-TO-ACTION

It's no good hiding what you want your customers to do – they are unlikely to put the effort into finding it. By the same token, it's going to be disastrous if your readers have to scroll through long, intrusive, calls-to-action.

“Don't wait until the end of the email to communicate exactly what it is you want them to do. Be very clear with what you are actually offering them and make it clear how you want them to contact you,” adds Dale.

#### 16 BRANDING

Appearance is everything when it comes to your shopfront or website, and your email marketing is no different. It's common sense that you want your

customers to know the material comes from you and for it to be branded.

“You need to make sure that the look and feel is consistent with your website design, so that people can see that it's coming from the business,” says Dale.

#### 17 SEGMENT YOUR LIST

The simplest way to manage your list of email addresses is to bang it into one big database and then blast everyone inside it.

In reality this isn't actually best practice, as there is far more to be gained by splitting your list up into groups and tailoring the message slightly for each one.

By segmenting your database in such a way, you are able to send a slightly altered version of your newsletter or offer to different demographics. This might be by location, age, or one for customers and another for partners.

#### 18 DON'T BE DODGY

This is another common sense item, but can often be a trap many small businesses will fall into. As tempting as it is to capture email addresses through your website in any way possible, it's in your best interest to only send information to those that opt-in to do so.

The main reason behind this is that people will resent your branded material – and your business in general – if they start receiving unsolicited information from you on a regular basis.

#### 19 MAKE A PROMISE


It seems straightforward, but it's one of the most overlooked elements of an email marketing campaign.

The promise you give when someone checks the little box to say they want to receive your email newsletter or other marketing material is an important one.

“Many small businesses make the mistake of not making a promise at the opt-in. They just say 'here, register for our updates,'" says Dale.

#### 20 USE CLEAN AND PUNCHY HEADLINES

This is almost an extension of not being wordy, but headlines are so important they deserve extra attention. The difference between someone opening your email, marking it as 'read', and moving on can be a couple of words. The less time that is required for someone to read your headline, the more likely they are to become interested and open it – within reason.

Naturally this doesn't mean you should start having one-word subject lines, but if you can say something in nine words, often you can say it far more effectively in four or five. 

For a comprehensive hosted-email marketing solution, visit [netregistry.com.au/online-marketing/email-marketing/](http://netregistry.com.au/online-marketing/email-marketing/)