

Features

6/1/2018

Own Your Message

Katie Elzer-Peters



In the May issue, we covered the basics of getting an email marketing program off the ground (if you missed that, [check out the May issue](#), page 32). Once an email program is up and running, certain questions always pop up.

How to Build the List

The over-arching commandment for building your list is this:

You only want to email people who want to hear from you.

If you're emailing to people who don't want to hear from you they will: 1) Mark your emails as spam, which will affect your ability to email people who do want to hear from you; and 2) you'll annoy them. Maybe they like being a customer, but hate email. Don't make them be on your email list!

Don't try to trick people into being on your list. Wherever you have a place to sign up, (whether in person, on a piece of paper or online) clearly state that they're signing up for your list, you email with about XX frequency and they can unsubscribe at any time. At the register just ask, "Would you like to get coupons via email?" or something similar, so you're asking if they

actually want what you're sending.

Pictured: I love this email from Homestead Gardens. It hits all of the high points without being overbearing, including fun, Pinterest-y content that gets people thinking, promos of the week and upcoming events.

If you do a "drop a business card, win a gift certificate," they're not technically opted in to your email list unless you state on the sign, "Drop a card, enter a drawing and sign up for our e-newsletter all at one time." The problem with this, though, is you run the risk of having people on your list who don't want to be there.

Here's how to physically capture email addresses of people who are truly opted in to your list.

- Collect at the register: verbally. Make sure they ask if the person wants to receive coupons and the newsletter, not just ask for an email address.
- Collect at the register: sign-in sheet. Collect with a clipboard and be sure you state what they're signing up for. (You could also put this at customer service.)

- Collect via website signup form. You can embed form code on your website from any email service provider. Put this in a prominent place and include language about the frequency of emails and link to a privacy policy.
- Collect via social media form. Most Email Service Providers (ESPs) have a way to integrate with Facebook, so people can sign up for your email list from Facebook. You can also link to a landing page via your Instagram account. Need more than one link in your Instagram profile? Use <https://linktr.ee>. It's a free service and simple to set up.
- Collect at the register or customer service: iPad or tablet. Amy Draiss, Marketing Manager for Dayton Nurseries, Inc. says, "We are in the process of installing an iPad for customers to use on their own to sign up for our email newsletter. We saw this idea at a local hardware store and thought it would work great for us as well. This will be the only purpose of the unit."

What About Incentives?

Should you incentivize people to join your list? Some say yes, some say no. In the online space, it's almost always yes, but for brick and mortar, it's really up to you. You don't want to train your customers to always expect discounts. In the long run, the list will, again, be strongest if it's filled with people who want to hear from you and they'll want to hear from you because of your content.

Content: What to Send

Any template provided by an ESP will be mobile-optimized. Your job is to make sure that if you create graphics, the text is still large enough to be read on a small phone. That's one reason I'm not a huge fan of all graphics emails. They don't scale well between devices.

Aside from mobile considerations, think about content. The voice or tone of the email should match your company communications, whether playful, serious or a mixture.

Tone established, send something useful. This can be a mixture of the following:

- Promotions of the week
- Monthly garden checklist
- Style or design tips
- Event notices
- Plant care tips—particularly for popular plants or plants in season

The key is to solve problems for your customers:

- Help them save money (promos)
- Help them have a prettier garden (design, style, care tips)
- Help them have fun (events)

Three to four content blocks are enough. Most people won't read that much. Pick the heavy-hitting news and drive people to your website for longer content. Terri Vetter, Marketing Director for Krueger-Maddux Greenhouses/ Delhi Flower & Garden Center, says, "Driving your customers to your website is the most beneficial way to connect with your customers. You house your information on the site (articles, blogs, services, etc.), which establishes you as the expert in their minds. That's how you make yourself stand out over and above the big box stores. We have found it to be very effective, especially for those signing up for our workshops. It's just habit for our customers to go there

now rather than call.”

Timing & Frequency

Thursdays are the sweet spot, usually, for weekend sales/projects. Fridays aren’t traditionally great days for email opens, but they might work for you. You can train your list to always expect your email on a specific day, though, and your open rate will be better.

To avoid the first morning inbox cleanout, send between 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. or 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Also, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. can work, when people check email after dinner.

Everyone worries about frequency! Nobody wants to overwhelm their customers. Once per week is pretty safe during busy growing seasons. Every other week or event-driven email only during the holidays and winter will work. Never completely stop emailing for six months because that will un-train your customers to expect your emails and they’re more likely to unsubscribe or mark you as spam when you increase frequency again. You can play with frequency. If unsubscribes go up, cut back.

Testing: Answers to the Big Questions

To really know the answers to the big questions for your business, you’ll need to test. Most email service providers offer a/b split testing so that you can compare different variables. Test each variable (one per campaign) across several campaigns. However, before you test, you’ll want to determine a baseline for what percentage of your audience opens your email normally. Then you can see how changing aspects like day of send or time of day impacts that open rate.

Things to test:

- Open rate: Day of the week
- Open rate: Time of day
- Content: Short vs. long
- Open rate: Subject line (emojis vs. no emojis, short subject line vs. long, promo vs. content related)

What’s a “win” for your business? Depends on your goal. If you want people see your info and come in to shop, optimizing for opens is a safe bet (shoot for around 30% to 35% open rate). If you’re hoping for event registrations, you’ll want good click numbers. If you’re taking pre-orders, then sales are the key metric. **GP**

GDPR

By the time you read this, GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) will have become enforceable in Europe. This has to do primarily with data handling, primarily for the EU. To explain this set of regulations is an entirely separate column. If you’re not collecting data and email of EU customers, you don’t have to worry—yet. But you should read up on it and work towards compliance.
