

How Email Marketing Helps Businesses Succeed

By Lee Starshine

Businesses can choose from many marketing channels. One channel that stands out is email marketing. Email marketing means sending emails to an opt-in list. What is the difference between spam and email marketing? Which tools are best for sending emails? And how can a business tell whether email marketing is effective?

How to Build an Email List

Email marketing turns into spam when:

- The recipient did not agree to receive the email
- The business bought an email list
- The business scraped the email addresses off web pages
- The email addresses are uploaded from an address book, without permission, or
- The email addresses are typed or scanned directly from business cards, without a business relationship

In the US, the CAN-SPAM Act attempts to protect people from spammers. A typical business is not likely to be prosecuted. However, sending unwanted emails could damage the business's reputation. People may avoid buying from businesses that send unwanted emails.

Building an opt-in email list means getting permission. This can be as simple as asking. For business: "Thanks for your business card. Do you mind if I add you to our email list? We send out industry news and offers." For consumers, a reward program encourages future purchases -- most require an email opt-in. Medical offices, real estate agents, non-profits, and even auto dealerships want permission to send emails.

Businesses can add current customers and inquiries to their email list. However, each email needs to say it is an advertisement or marketing solicitation.

Email Marketing Tools

Mass emails should never be sent from Gmail, Outlook, or a similar system. Standard email programs are designed for two-way communication between a small number of people. Using BCC and CC is unprofessional. The list may be accidentally revealed, causing immeasurable harm. These types of emails are more likely to be filtered as spam. And the emails are unlikely to be compliant with the CAN-SPAM law.

The law requires easy unsubscribe, accurate "from" lines, physical address, and much more. Email marketing systems help ensure compliance. Constant Contact and MailChimp

are two examples. They both offer free trials. Basic MailChimp is free under 2,000 subscribers. These are legitimate ways to send professional emails.

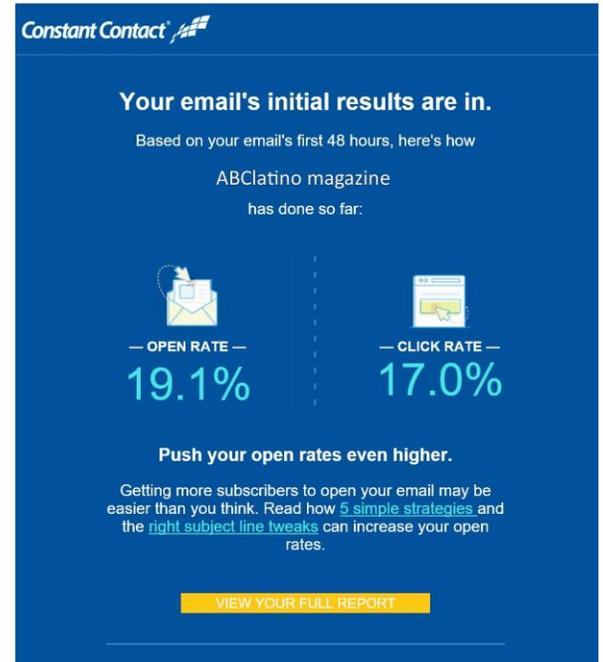
Did you know that about half of all emails are opened first on a mobile device? Email marketing systems offer mobile-friendly, responsive templates. The email is legible on all screen sizes. They even offer a preview on different screen sizes.

Measuring Effectiveness

Email marketing systems provide metrics. These measurements include:

1. Open rate. How many people opened the email and turned on the images?
2. Click rate. Of the openers, how many clicked on any link in the email? Which links were most popular?
3. Bounce rate. Which emails did not go through? Why?
4. Unsubscribe rate. How many unsubscribed after getting that email?

Clearly, any business can analyze these metrics to improve their marketing. If links to articles about pet care are popular, run those articles more often. Metrics can also help segment the list. People who click on pet care articles probably have pets. They can be put on a "Pet Owner" list, and receive additional pet-related emails.



Product-based businesses might send relevant articles, products, and sales. Service-based businesses would benefit from related information, special offers, and new service announcements. Non-profits can send event invites, appeals, and links to photos and videos.

What Works?

The growth of online marketing means businesses have more marketing choices than ever. Like many online channels, email marketing effectiveness can be measured. Watch for surges in sales, increased inquiries, more website visits, and additional event signups after an email goes out. Companies with an ineffective email marketing program can seek additional training and a fresh email marketing plan. Putting company resources into email marketing can pay for itself many times over.

Note: Most email content can be recycled on the company's website and social media channels. Cross-linking channels strengthens the company's overall marketing. Read more about this in the next issue.

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