



7 steps to email marketing success

act!™

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Executive Summary

Email is proven to be one of the most cost-effective ways to reach customers and prospects. So a well-thought-out and executed email marketing campaign will not only help you target the specific needs of your customers, but also nurture your relationship with them. This in turn will enable you to recruit 'brand evangelists' whose loyalty towards your products or services will contribute to your long-term profits.

This guide outlines the seven practical steps necessary for creating a highly effective email marketing campaign.

“Three-quarters of companies think the ROI email offers is either excellent or good.”

[Econsultancy](#)

Introduction

Marketing guru Seth Godin has called email ‘the most personal advertising medium in history’.

And given its undoubted ability to connect at a one-to-one level, it has long been an integral part of the marketer’s mix. In fact, [Econsultancy’s latest Email Marketing Census¹](#) reveals email to be the most effective digital marketing tactic, ahead of SEO and PPC.

Not surprisingly, [80% of marketers see email as being ‘core to their business’²](#).

[Unfortunately, nearly half of small business owners aren’t getting the most from their email marketing³](#) because they simply don’t know how to use email marketing data to inform or improve their campaigns.

However, by following these seven practical steps, marketers can maximize the potential of email marketing for their business.

1 Create an effective subject line

Given that **69% of us check emails while watching tv or a movie⁴**, it's obvious that any subject line has to cut through other distractions to capture attention and interest immediately. If it fails to do that, even the best-crafted email will remain unopened and unread.

When it comes to writing the 'perfect' subject line, there are eight questions you should ask yourself.

1. Will it get delivered? If a subject line triggers spam filters, your email won't be seen by the intended recipient. If you don't want that to happen, stay away from words and phrases such as 'Free' and 'Act now', omit unnecessary punctuation like exclamation marks (!) and never, ever use CAPITALS.

2. Will it engage? Including your company's name with the email is a key point and generally increases email open rates, as does using keywords that create engagement with the reader, but put these at the beginning of a line so they don't get lost.

3. Is it actionable? Will the recipient know what they are meant to do with the email once they get it? Include an 'action verb' like Buy, See, Read or Meet in your call to action so the reader knows exactly what to do next.

"The overall all-industry average email open rate is 16.97%."
Sign-up.To

4. Is it personal? The more relevant the subject line is to the recipient, the more likely they will be to open your email. **Emails with personalized subject lines are 26% more likely to be opened⁵**, while **those that use the first name of the recipient achieve higher click-through rates than emails that don't⁶**.

5. Is it relevant? An email with the subject line 'Buy the latest Harry Potter' sent to those who buy natural history books may not get a great open rate. However, you can prevent such disconnection by using insights from a CRM program like Act! to create a properly segmented email list that lets you target specific groups of buyers. For example, if you know what a customer has previously purchased, you can use this knowledge to write a personalized subject line.

6. Is it the right length? Increasingly, emails are being read on mobile devices, which typically show fewer characters of a subject line than a desktop machine. That means you need to keep subject lines short ... but not too short. According to deliverability experts Return Path, **subject lines 61-70 characters in length tend to get read, with 65 characters about the perfect length⁷**. However, this is 15 more than the 41 to 50 characters of most email subject lines.

7. Is it clear? Don't try to be too clever or funny. It's not that such lines don't work, just that you have to work harder to get them right. If you don't, the recipient won't click through. If you want to know which subject line words work best, **Adestra** and **Smart Insights** are among some of the companies to have done some research.

8. Is it accurately reflecting your offer? If the promise of the subject line isn't matched by the content of your email, recipients will feel cheated and your reputation will take a hit. Even if not intentionally done, any such 'bait and switch' is likely to hit your click-through rates and lead to higher unsubscribes.

In other words, successful subject lines are brief, branded and truthful. Stick to this formula and you won't go far wrong.



2 Write impactful email content

When **59% of people say marketing emails influence their purchase decisions, and just over 50% buy because of a marketing email at least once a month⁸**, it's obvious that saying the right things in the right way in your emails is crucial.

So you need to think about the three components of content - the offer, the message and the visuals.

- Know why you are sending an email. If you aren't clear about what you want to do - sell a discounted product, offer a new service, or re-engage with a lapsed customers for instance - your message will be confused.
- Don't try to do too much in one email. Once you know what you want your email to achieve, make sure the content concentrates on this, so your message is focused.
- And don't make recipients jump through hoops to take advantage of any offer in your email. If you attach too many conditions to accessing your deal they will simply click away.
- Decide whether you are going to send a rich text email with images or a purely text-based one. According to Hubspot's Science of Email report, **64% of people prefer rich text emails⁹**. However, analysis of data from Google suggests that **images aren't seen in 43% of emails¹⁰** because of corporate firewalls, Outlook® settings and offline reading on mobile devices. Signposting what's inside an image with an ALT tag can help make it clear why it's worth downloading.
- Keep images relevant and proportionate. Avoid large images at the top of your email that push content down the page.
- Create a consistent visual look to your emails using templates. This is important not only from a branding point of view - recipients get to recognize your look – but it also makes it easier to produce your emails each time.
- Reflect the look of the landing page in your emails. You want readers to go on a seamless online journey with you, so don't shock by sending them to a landing page that clashes with the look of your email. Both should work together.
- Keep improving your own emails by learning from the good ones sent to you. Why did you find them engaging? What made you click through? Also take on board what customers have said about your products and services on social media or in their comments, to help create personalized emails that are better angled to their interests. You can then monitor and measure the response to the changes you make through testing.

3 Test, then test some more

Testing an email campaign falls into two parts. The first is technical. This involves checking emails to see if links work, content sits well in the reading pane, images download properly and that it can be read by different email clients (Outlook®, Gmail®, Windows Live® and the like) without triggering spam filters. It's also now vital to test emails for readability on smartphones and other mobile devices, because if they aren't properly optimized, **over 40% of recipients will simply delete them¹¹**.

The second component of email testing involves comparing different versions of your email to see which performs better. This is called A/B testing and you can 'split test' pretty much every element so that you continually optimize your emails to get the best results.

“Email subject lines that include the words ‘thank you’ have above-average engagement levels”.
Adestra

Subject lines, layout and images are all obvious email elements to test, as is your 'offer' itself. For example, are certain topics in your emails more popular than others? Is the opportunity to attend a webinar preferred to downloading a White Paper? Are longer emails better received than short ones? Does a free 'guide' get more clicks than a free 'ebook' even though it's the same thing? Do testimonials from happy users get more click-throughs?

Since it provides a golden opportunity to gain insight into your customers' turn-ons and turn-offs, testing such specifics can really make a difference to your email marketing results.

For instance, it's been found that **having a call to action ‘button’ rather than a call to action ‘text link’ can increase conversion rates by nearly 30%¹²**.

Never skip testing because it's 'obvious' what will work and what doesn't. According to research by Yes Lifecycle Marketing, who analyzed the incentives offered in nearly 8 billion emails, **mentioning a special offer in your subject line is likely to lead to lower open rates**¹³. Go figure.

Since your email is likely to be pushing recipients to your landing page, remember to test that too. If it's not properly optimized, then all your hard work creating the perfect subject line, content and subsequent testing will have been wasted.

“The overall all-industry average click-through rate is 10.29%.” Sign-up.To

4 Build a segmented email list

Given that the average email address is worth \$117.30 according to information services company Experian, and could be as much as \$328 for a travel company¹⁴, it's obvious that not knowing how to extract this value will have a significant impact on sales revenue and profits.

One way of doing this is to ensure that you are sending properly targeted emails to your audience – **something that 42% of marketers don't do**¹⁵ – **yet targeted emails sent to properly segmented lists generate 58% of revenue from email marketing campaigns**¹⁶.

So how do you make sure that you are getting the very most from your email list?

- Send your emails regularly and at a predictable rate so recipients learn to expect them.
- There's no point having a list filled with those who don't want to receive your emails, so make sure that opting out is easy. This is not just a nicety but also a legal requirement. Then make sure your unsubscribe list is reflected in your email lists. Your CRM software should help you do this.
- Build your list organically using incentives like discounts for signing up, adding options such as 'forward to a friend' and making sure company literature has specific links to encourage email opt-ins.
- Before adding any email to your list, check whether that person has had contact from you within the last 12 months - if they haven't, leave them out.



5 Design an effective email template

Keeping your emails visually consistent means your customers get used to their structure and branding. Email templates let you do this, as well as making it easier to personalize emails you send to different segments of your list.

Once set up, templates also make editing easier, since you can refresh the content without changing your 'email look'. With a good email template all you have to do is drop in some copy, images and links, and away you go.

In setting up an email template you need to bear in mind a few things.

- Keep visuals clean and simple. If there is too much going on, your email may not read properly or, worse still, trigger spam filters and so never be read.
- Remember to include an unsubscribe link along with your company name and full contact details to show you are a legitimate organization.
- Choose image formats that are appropriate. For instance, JPEGs are good for photos, GIFs for animations and PNGs when transparency is required. [Each has its pros and cons](#)¹⁷.
- Think about using video in your email marketing. Business magazine Forbes, points to the fact that [65% of executives say they have visited a vendor's site after watching a video, while 51% of them made a purchase decision after doing so](#)¹⁸.
- Link shorteners may have a place on Twitter® and Facebook® where space can be at a premium, but [using them in your emails could hit their deliverability](#)¹⁹. One advantage of using HTML over plain-text emails is that you can link to text and images without having to display a full URL. (But have a plain-text option for those readers who can't or don't want to render emails in HTML).
- When you do link elsewhere, tell your reader why they should go there, and what they will find when they get there. [Emails that contain more hyperlinks by the way, tend to get higher click rates, even if they are for the same URL](#)²⁰. Each would seem to be a gentle reminder of where to go next.

6 Use metrics and measurements

The goal of any email marketing campaign is to entice customers and prospects to move from their inbox to your website or landing page. You can see how well you are doing this by carefully studying the metrics of your campaign.

Open and click-through rates are particularly important and, together with those for spam percentages, bounce and unsubscribe rates, provide invaluable information that you and your sales team can use to determine the most qualified leads, as well as those customers who require more intensive nurturing.

Using these metrics, you will be able to segment your lists more accurately because you get to understand buyer behaviour by seeing their response when you test alternative components. Each tiny nugget of information you gather helps to build an ever more complete picture of your marketplace, which you can then use to refine your email marketing campaigns.

You will also be able to provide more innovative, interesting and relevant content that appeals to your customers. Do this and you will build trust in your brand as they come to increasingly value the content you're sending to their inbox.

7 Integrate your systems

For an even more powerful marketing strategy integrate your email marketing platform with your CRM. By doing so, you will be able to create even more effective campaigns by using the insights you have about your customers and their behaviors.

Act! and Act! Marketing Automation, for instance, seamlessly interconnect to create a co-ordinated 'ecosystem' you can use to communicate with specific groups of buyers with ever more tailored messaging. For any smaller business looking to grow cost effectively that makes it the perfect partnership.

"51% of executives made a purchase decision after watching a video".
Forbes

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