

A person is shown from the chest up, sitting at a desk and working on a laptop. They are wearing a dark blazer over a striped shirt. On the desk, there is a white mug, a pair of glasses, and some papers. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a window with blinds. The overall lighting is warm and professional.

Email Marketing Best Practices for Small Businesses

act!

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Executive Summary

Email marketing remains one of the most effective ways to grow your business. So, if it isn't part of your overall marketing strategy, you are missing out on a huge business opportunity.

This guide will show how using best practice and powerful email marketing software can increase lead generation and sales quickly; leading to new customers for your business.



“Email marketing is the strongest performing channel generating \$44 for every \$1 spent.”

McKinsey & Company

Introduction

Some headlines today will lead you to believe that the days of email are numbered and that it will be made irrelevant by social media and other new startup technologies.

Don't believe them. While the death of email has long been buzzed about, the reality is that it's stronger and more effective than ever. In fact, **over 294 billion of them sent daily**^[1].

More than **three-quarters of consumers**^[2] also consider email to be the most trusted form of communication, one reason why the number of people using it is forecast to rise to 2.9 billion by 2019.

Businesses like it too – email marketing is the strongest performing channel generating **\$44 for every \$1 spent**^[3]. And when it comes to acquiring new customers, email is also 40 times more effective than social media.

Given this, it's perhaps no surprise that email marketing is now a significant component of emarketing – the use of the internet, mobile and electronic media to sell products and services. In fact, in 2017 many small businesses are looking to make it one of their top marketing channels along with social media and website development.

This means that if email marketing isn't part of your overall marketing strategy, you are missing out on a huge business opportunity.

Unfortunately, many businesses, smaller ones in particular, don't capitalize on all that email marketing has to offer because they think it is too expensive to consider, too complicated to do, or they simply don't know how to choose the best email marketing service.

However, thanks to powerful email marketing platforms like Act! emarketing, creating a highly targeted email marketing campaign has never been easier.

This guide outlines how small businesses can use email marketing to benefit from using email marketing best practices, a smaller business can benefit from what marketing guru Seth Godin has called “the most personal advertising medium in history”.

[Let's begin with the basics.](#)

1 What is email marketing?

Think of email marketing as an online version of traditional direct mail.

The difference is that it's not only faster and more cost-effective to send emails, it's also infinitely easier to target and personalize the content, so you know you are reaching the right people at the right time with the message most applicable to them.

To be most effective, your email marketing efforts should be tied to specific business objectives, such as:

- **Brand building** – every marketing email you send is an opportunity to familiarize the market with the logo, tagline, colors and graphics that make up your brand image.
- **Encouraging repeat business** – sending your customers a regular 'nudge email' with a tempting offer, or news of your latest products, can overcome 'buying inertia' and entice them to order from you again.
- **Creating customer engagement** – if you don't stay in the eye-line of customers, you create a vacuum competitors can fill. On the other hand, marketing emails keep you top of mind until your customers are ready to buy.

“54% of marketers say increasing engagement rate is their top email marketing priority.”
Ascend2

- **Drive revenue** – all of the above lead to higher revenues that add to the bottom line. And once your database is big enough, you can even create further revenue streams by allowing others to sell products and services to your list.

A precision marketing tool

Whether you use email marketing to send post-purchase follow-up emails, newsletters, promotions, or surveys, email marketing is highly versatile, affordable and easy to use. This makes it particularly appealing to smaller businesses that typically don't have large marketing budgets or in-house technical expertise.

It's for these very reasons however that emarketing is used by some as a blunt instrument to promote their message at little cost. However, emails sent randomly and in high volume don't work. Turning email marketing into a simple 'numbers game' is just 'spamming', a counter-productive tactic that can damage a business's reputation.

“Three-quarters of companies agree that email offers 'excellent' to 'good' ROI.”
Econsultancy

In fact, email marketing is actually a precision technique that enables you to adjust and fine tune campaigns down to the smallest detail, thanks to the ability to see which emails have been received, opened, clicked or deleted.



2 Creating an email marketing campaign

To create an effective email marketing campaign, there are two key metrics to focus on. **Open rates** (the percentage of people who open your email) and **click-through rates** (the percentage of openers who click on a link within that email). The click-through rate is totally dependent on the open rate – if someone doesn't open your email, they can't click on it!

The average open rate for an email marketing campaign is around 24%^[4]. This figure has remained largely consistent over the last decade and **may actually be on the rise**^[5]. However, it still means that three-quarters of those who are sent a marketing email will never read it. If you want to improve on these numbers you must:

- **Know why you are emailing** – your emails need to be strategically directed towards a defined goal such as re-engaging with lapsed customers, launching a new product, or promoting a sale.
- **Meet your customers' expectations** – there is nothing worse than receiving undesired emails. Ensure you are emailing to customers who have given you permission and have agreed to receive the type of content you are sending.
- **Send to a segmented list** – use the smallest nugget of information to qualify and divide your customers by their purchasing and viewing behaviors. This will help you create more effective, targeted campaigns.
- **Have a compelling subject line** – this, along with your name, is the first thing anyone receiving your email sees. According to consultants Convince & Convert, **35% of email recipients open email based solely on the subject line**^[6].
- **Make the best offer possible** – without a good reason why would anyone want to click through?
- **Personalize your message** – Brands that personalize promotional marketing emails **experience 27% higher unique click rates and 11% higher open rates than those that do not personalize**^[7].
- **Write 'killer' copy** – the best offer in the world is of little use if no one knows how good it is. The copy you use has to truly resonate with the reader by giving them both emotional and rational reasons to act. The customer feedback that comes through comments, questions and social media can help shape future content.
- **Design a better email** – this not only helps with brand recognition, but also creates an instantaneous impression of you as a business, hopefully one of competence, trust and reassurance.

“47% of email recipients open an email based solely on the subject line.”

SuperOffice

Improving results through testing

As every business is different, the only way you can find out what works for you is to test and test again – by changing a component of your email marketing campaign and measuring what happens.

You can't presume that what works for another business will work for you. There's no better example of this than the debate over when best to send marketing emails.

Conventional wisdom, based on analysis of billions of email open rates across industries, concludes that it's Tuesday. Others believe it's Saturdays and Sundays. **MailerMailer thinks it's a Tuesday or Wednesday, with weekends the worst. MailChimp on the other hand, considers the best day for sending emails is a Thursday^[8].** With no optimal day, it's just a matter of what works best for your business.

Emailing frequency – how often you send emails – is also a hot topic. **Receiving too many is the number one reason people unsubscribe from a list^[9].**

However, this doesn't necessarily mean 'often' is bad, just that subscribers want to receive relevant, appropriate emails at a rate that suits them. In fact, **86% of consumers are happy to receive marketing emails from companies they do business with at least monthly, while 15% would like them daily^[10].**

“Sending one more email a month to a list of 5 million subscribers could result in \$2.9 million additional revenue.”
Marketing Charts

3 Choosing your email marketing software

To get the very most from emarketing, you must think beyond Excel[®] spreadsheets and programs like Outlook[®] for managing lists and campaigns. These simply don't have the capacity to handle the range and depth of data, nor do they provide a detailed and comprehensive picture of what works and what doesn't.

That's why **over three-quarters of companies opt to handle email campaigns in-house^[11]**, using an email marketing platform to make the process easier and much more effective built-in analytics, templates and automated workflows mean you can track, adjust and test copy, designs and offers to continually improve your results.

What should you look for in an email marketing solution?

- 1. Ease of use** – email marketing software shouldn't require you to know HTML or be a designer. Nor should it be overly complicated to set up and manage. If it is, using it will become a chore and your campaigns will consequently be much less effective.
- 2. Affordability** – look for a provider offering a range of pricing options. A pay-as-you-go cloud-based email marketing service, for example, is highly cost-effective for even the smallest business.
- 3. Scalability** – any email marketing solution should have the capacity and flexibility to handle more contacts as your business grows and changes.
- 4. Integration** – look for seamless integration with other programs, especially your CRM (Customer Relationship Management). Some providers have an application programming interface (API) you can use build your own custom integrations.
- 5. Social media compatibility** – this will allow you to connect your campaigns to Facebook[®] and Twitter[®] feeds, so emails are automatically posted to those sites.
- 6. Automated workflows** – being able to create responsive workflows is not just a massive time saver, but allows you to 'drip market' by automatically sending targeted messages based on how recipients have responded to previous emails.
- 7. Personalization tools** – these give you the ability to customize emails so they match the needs of individual customers.
- 8. A/B testing tools** – being able to test alternative emails lets you tweak campaigns to get the most from your email marketing.
- 9. Mobile responsiveness** – with more people opening emails on mobile devices, your emails must be properly optimized for smartphone and tablet, or they won't be viewed.
- 10. Analytical capability** – you must be able to measure and assess your email marketing performance. Graphical reports that show opens, clicks, and bounces help you do this visually.
- 11. Design flexibility** – having a range of pre-formatted email marketing templates in both HTML and plain text means you can customize a campaign to suit your needs and those of your market. Act! emarketing, for instance, offers over 100 email templates as well as the option to import your own HTML files. A good, clean, simple email template will mean all you need to do is drop in some copy, images and links and away you go.

12. Reliability – a proven email marketing platform will help ensure you don't get let down in the middle of a campaign. Check out user recommendations and social media reviews before committing.

13. Ongoing support – problems can happen with even the best email marketing platforms, so make sure your email marketing service can provide technical backup as needed and in a way that suits you.

14. Lead scoring – being able to create a prioritized list of contacts for follow-up after an email has been sent will make your sales team much more effective.

15. Deliverability – check that your email marketing service provider takes deliverability seriously. If they don't, then your emails won't be getting to the right inboxes and you will be in danger of having them blacklisted.

4 30 ways to create a better email

There are two key components to a successful email - the subject line, which determines whether your email is opened in the first place and the content of your email the recipient then sees, which determines whether they will act on your email. These tips will help you write the best possible email.

How to write a great subject line

1

Tell people what's inside the email, don't expect them to just open it.

Use simple, concise language so the message isn't confusing.

2**3**

Use keywords that resonate with the recipient, as this will increase their interest.

Create a personalized subject line using knowledge from your CRM, so they feel that the email has been written for them.

4**5**

Using the recipient's name or location improves open rates.

Include a benefit, such as 'Increase your open rates by 50%' as this gives them a reason to read your email.

6**7**

Create a sense of urgency. 'Today only' will encourage them to take action now.

Include numbers. They get better click-throughs.

8**9**

Don't try to be too clever or funny. The recipient may not think you are.

Keep it below 50 characters. Longer lines can get cut off.

10

11

Put the most relevant information upfront, so it doesn't get lost.

Avoid 'spam words' like 'free' and 'act now', and don't use punctuation, such as ! and ? because this is what 'spammy' emails often do.

12

13

Don't use CAPITALS. They trigger spam filters.

Send the email from a real person and not a generic address.

14

15

Continually test alternative subject lines to improve open rates.

How to create great content

Be clear about why you are writing an email. What do you want it to do?

16

17

Make only one clear offer, or it can confuse the reader.

18

Make sure that all text, images and links in your email clearly show why someone should read it.

19

Don't make the recipient jump through hoops to access your deal. Keep the next action simple.

20

If you include links to elsewhere, tell the reader why they should click on them.

Use templates for consistency and to make emails easier to write.

21

22

Include your company's name, postal address and an unsubscribe link. You must do so by law.

Use ow.ly or bit.ly to shorten URL links to make your email look better.

23

24 Keep images relevant, or people will wonder why they are there.

Use JPEGs for images, not PNGs, which never render properly in emails.

25

26 Avoid video. Most email clients can't render it well. Send a screen-grab with a link to your website instead.

Use customer comments and feedback to create better emails in future.

27

28 Keep text to image ratio low to ensure your emails sail through spam filters and take less time to load.

Test that your email can be read by different email clients.

29

30 Use clear, large CTAs that are powerful and repeat them at the end of your email.

5 Staying 'email legal'

To prevent uncontrolled and unwanted email marketing, anti-spam law requires you to have someone's permission before you can send them a marketing email.

Any marketing emails you do send must clearly state who you are and include a valid physical address so recipients know you are legitimate.

The subject line of your emails must not mislead. They must say what your email is about so someone can decide if they want to open it.

You must also give the recipient a chance to opt out of receiving further emails, so your email should include a direct link for doing this, or a return email address that is set up to receive such requests. You have to tell someone clearly how they can opt-out and also make sure that your own spam filter does not block these opt-out requests.

You can't charge a fee if someone wants to opt out, ask them for additional identifying information, or make them go through multiple steps for doing so. When you receive an opt-out request, you should act on it promptly.

In the United States, The Federal CAN-SPAM Act governs commercial email marketing and you can be fined as much as \$2 million for any breaches.

For more information on this topic, refer to the [CAN-SPAM Act](#) or the [Act! emarketing Anti-Spam Policy](#).

**“You can be fined as much as \$2 million dollars for any breaches to email law!”
Federal Trade Commission**

6

DO

Plan

Think about what you want to achieve through emarketing based on your brand and business needs, as well as customer buying habits.

Segment

According to email marketing service Mailchimp, the open rate of segmented email campaigns is nearly 15% higher than for non-segmented ones where the list isn't split into groups.

Personalize

The open rate for marketing emails with a personalized message is higher than for those without.

Automate

Companies that automate their email marketing are 133% more likely to send messages matching their customer's purchase cycle, resulting in more business.

Employ clear 'calls to action' (CTAs)

In every email, tell readers exactly what to do next and why that matters. Use CTAs near the top of a page so readers don't have to scroll, and buttons to make them stand out.

Track metrics

Email marketing tools let you drill down into data to see who's engaging with which emails and when. You can use this 'marketing gold' to create more effective campaigns.

Split test

Only by continual testing can you effectively tweak your email campaigns to obtain better results.

Make opt-out easy

You don't want to send emails to those who don't care enough to read them. Getting people off your list who don't want to be there lets you focus instead on your best prospects.

Check and recheck your emails before sending

Emails containing errors will not only reflect badly on your business but also hit sales. So, always make sure they are proofread for typos and grammatical errors by more than one person.

Engage with your customers all year round

Keep your customers and prospects informed throughout the year so that they stay aware of your brand, products or services.

DON'T

Forget mobile

As 43% of people now check emails on smartphones, if they can't do so easily because of formatting issues, your email will be ignored or deleted.

Break spam laws

Random, irresponsible emarketing will damage your reputation and leave you potentially open to fines^[12].

Buy lists

Ready-made databases bought from brokers may seem a short cut to email marketing success, but they generally aren't. Building your own list is much more effective.

Neglect content

If your emails aren't information-rich and relevant, why should anyone click through? Also make sure landing page content matches the promise of your email.

Send emails without testing

If you do, you won't know what really works and be able to adjust your campaigns accordingly. That will leave you wasting money and potentially alienating those on your list.

Are you making the most of emarketing?

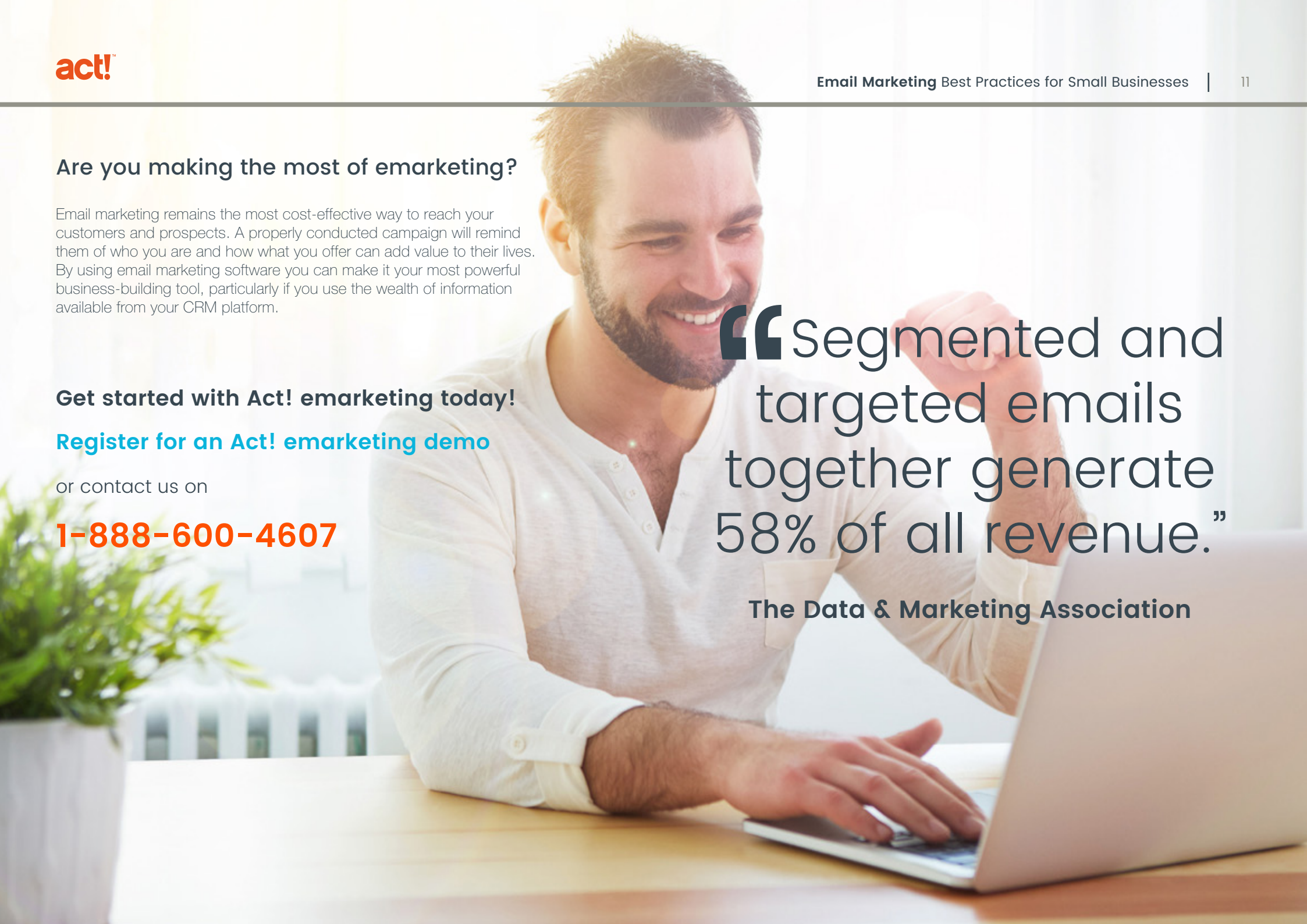
Email marketing remains the most cost-effective way to reach your customers and prospects. A properly conducted campaign will remind them of who you are and how what you offer can add value to their lives. By using email marketing software you can make it your most powerful business-building tool, particularly if you use the wealth of information available from your CRM platform.

Get started with Act! emarketing today!

[Register for an Act! emarketing demo](#)

or contact us on

1-888-600-4607



“Segmented and targeted emails together generate 58% of all revenue.”

The Data & Marketing Association



What is Act!?

Act! makes it easy to build relationships that last with quick, organized access to highly personalized customer details. Because every business runs differently, you have the freedom to tailor an Act! experience to your business and industry needs—your adaptable, everywhere, connected workspace.

Finally, a CRM solution that's uniquely yours.

To learn more about Act! visit

www.act.com

Or call us on

866-873-2006

Connect with Act!



[1]: "over 294 billion of them sent daily", [Statista](#)

[2]: "three-quarters of consumers", [Marketing Land](#)

[3]: "\$44 for every \$1 spent", [McKinsey & Company](#)

[4]: "The average open rate for an email marketing campaign is around 24%", [SuperOffice](#)

[5]: "may actually be on the rise", [Epsilon](#)

[6]: "35% of email recipients open email based solely on the subject line", [Convince & Convert](#)

[7]: "experience 27% higher unique click rates and 11% higher open rates than those that do not personalize", [Experian](#)

[8]: "MailerMailer thinks it's a Tuesday or Wednesday, with weekends the worst. MailChimp on the other hand, considers the best day for sending emails is a Thursday", [MailerMailer](#)

[9]: "Receiving too many is the number one reason people unsubscribe from a list", [Marketing Charts](#)

[10]: "86% of consumers are happy to receive marketing emails from companies they do business with at least monthly, while 15% would like them daily", [MarketingSherpa](#)

[11]: "over three-quarters of companies opt to handle email campaigns in-house", [Lionbridge](#)

[12]: "irresponsible emarketing will damage your reputation and leave you potentially open to fines", [FTC](#)

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