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Building an E-mail Address Database

By Lauri Harpf

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E-mail marketing works, there's no denying it. Its key advantage over other Internet marketing methods is that it enables you to contact the customer instead of forcing the customer to contact you. This ability is especially useful when something that your customers need to know as soon as possible has happened. Whether you've just released a new product or decided to cut your prices by 10%, the fastest way to spread the word is via E-mail.

However, unless you want to give your company a bad name, you can't simply start sending E-mails to people that haven't agreed to receive them. The only ethical and reasonable way to advertise via E-mail is to first obtain a permission, or an opt-in request, from the receiver. The trouble is that this can't be done via E-mail, as it would be similar to asking someone whether you can ask them a question. What's the point in doing that, when you've already done what you wanted them to allow you to do?

Getting people to opt-in

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Due to the above reasons, creating your own opt-in E-mail database is not an easy task. In addition, because of privacy concerns and the fear of spam, many people are reluctant to give out their E-mail address without a good reason to do so. These fears can be soothed by creating a strict privacy policy and sticking to it, but it's harder to convince your visitors that it would be in their best interest to reveal their E-mail address to you. Fortunately, there are some time-tested solutions available

for that problem as well:

1. Arrange a sweepstakes with an attractive grand prize, for example one of the more expensive products sold on your site. Require everyone who wants to enter the drawing to give out his E-mail address and agree to receive occasional E-mails from you.

To get the best possible results, it is advisable to declare that the winner will be contacted via E-mail and needs to claim the prize within 7 days in order to receive it. By doing so, you'll eliminate the problem of people giving out bogus E-mail addresses in order to avoid receiving advertisements.

2. Open a discussion forum on your site. By only allowing registered users to post, you can collect E-mail addresses and deter pranksters from writing abusive messages at the same time. However, if you decide to use this method to build your list, be very careful. Sending advertisements too frequently to the regulars of your forum may cause them to move elsewhere and thus reduce the traffic to your site.

3. Start publishing a newsletter. Although it requires quite a bit of work, an interesting newsletter quickly gathers subscribers and increases the size of your E-mail database. An additional advantage of having a newsletter versus a simple E-mail announcement service is that you'll be able to submit to the multiple newsletter directories on the Internet.

4. Continue to allow everyone to access most of the content on your site, but also add a "Members only" area that contains articles or other information that is valuable to your visitors. Give out free memberships, but require members to register, reveal their E-mail addresses and allow you to send them an E-mail advertisement every now and then.

This idea is especially suitable if you're eventually planning to charge for some of the content you provide. The step from requiring your visitors to register to requiring them to pay is smaller than moving from giving everything for free to fee-based access.

5. Whenever you ask your visitors to give out their E-mail address, remember to offer them the possibility to join your opt-in mailing list at the same time. Do you have a form on your site that allows the visitors to contact the webmaster or the

sales department? Perhaps you have a Tell-A-Friend script that asks for the sender's E-mail address and name? Both are excellent opportunities to suggest subscribing to your E-mail announcement list or newsletter to your visitors.

If you want to gather a sizeable list of E-mail addresses from your visitors, you shouldn't be afraid of trying hard to get them. Just keep in mind that there is a fine line between being persuasive and being annoying. Don't cross it.

Lauri Harpf runs the A Promotion Guide website, where he offers free tips on how you can use E-mail, search engines and other methods to promote your site. His site can be found at <http://www.apromotionguide.com/>

Scary Mail

By Gary Onks

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I wish it was Halloween mail that I was talking about, but due to recent events, it's everyday mail that now scares folks.

Mail is very important to all of us. We look forward to its arrival each day. From a business perspective, mail is an essential part of our daily activities. As individuals we look forward to getting letters and postcards from people that we care about. Whatever our age, getting mail is a decades old and ingrained habit. As for seniors, they will read just about everything that you send them. There is little if any *junk mail* from the senior viewpoint.

However, there has always been some mail that most of us are a little suspicious of and it truly applies to mail we get today. Mail without a return address screams JUNK rather loudly and nowadays no address will mean no opening or viewing. A real close second is mail with a PO Box address. We tend to view this as a fly-by-night or at best a small potatoes outfit. After all what kind of business would fit in a PO Box anyway and nobody could actually live in one (hey, it's an old saying so bear with me).

To avoid these old issues as well as the scary new ones, here are some tips. Follow these and your mail will get through and not be ignored and cast out or even worse, returned to you unopened. These tips apply to all envelopes and mailing labels that you use.

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- * If possible do not use a PO Box address
- * Show your full street address (with PO Box if necessary)
- * Print telephone number and toll free number with return address
- * List your website and email address as part of return address
- * Use a postage meter for the "real look" of business mail

We have been doing this all along here at my company. The whole point is to make your business as real, legitimate and easy to contact as possible. Not just to the person you are mailing to, but to everyone who sees and handles your materials in transit. It's an inexpensive advertising method that could bring more sales.

SOS Factoid: Well labeled mail is not scary mail to anyone.

Gary Onks is the author of "How You Can Reach & Sell the \$20 Trillion Senior Marketplace" which is

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