

Does Everyone Ignore Your Newsletter?

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Does Everyone Ignore Your Newsletter?

By Matthew Coers

As Internet marketers we all know how important it is to have a successful newsletter to help us

keep in touch with our customers. But it can be pretty frustrating to spend all those hours developing content and campaigns only to have the program flop. Open rates can dive into the single-digits and click-through rates can fall to mere fractions of a percent.

So if this happens, what do you do?

First of all, don't panic. Usually, if you spend a few minutes looking at your data you can identify the problems pretty easily.

Determine Which Problem to Fix

Take a look at where your leads are coming from. If you are purchasing lists from other websites or publishers, make sure you segregate each source in your reporting so you can measure the quality of each list. You want to make sure you have a way of determining the quality of a list source before you merge the purchased group into your master list.

Also, if it has been around for a while, try segregating your opt-in list into three groups by age:

- * Under 6 months
- * 6 months to 1 year
- * Over 1 year

It is normal for open and click through rates to be highest for the "Under 6 Month" category, and lowest for those who have been on your list for over a year. However, there should not be a significant drop off as people move from one category to the next.

Look for anomalies in the data. Here are a few things I look for when I'm troubleshooting a client's campaign:

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* Is there a significant drop-off behind the first mailing? If the first mailing that a recipient gets typically achieves a 35% open rate, but the second has a 7% open rate, then the problem is not with the list source, or the header information (subject line, "From" address, etc.) it is with the content of the newsletter itself. If the drop off is 35% to 29%, then one might consider that to be normal.

* Has there been a change in frequency? We all get busy, and one of the first activities that can get forgotten is the newsletter. Unfortunately, absence in the Email marketing realm does NOT make the heart grow fonder. In fact, a prolonged period of non-communication is one of the leading causes of opt-outs.

* Are your articles relevant to the demographic? It is a good idea to survey your house list periodically to test your assumptions about their levels of expertise and interest in different subjects.

Wake Up Your Sleepy Optin List

Look at how you approach the people who have subscribed to your list. Remember that with email

newsletters the permission your subscribers have given you to send email to them is not permanent; they can opt out at any time if they lose confidence or interest in your newsletter.

More often than not, however, people don't actually opt-out. They simply stop opening and reading your email. I call these "sleepy" subscribers. They are getting your messages, but since they are "asleep" they can't read them. Although there's no way to know for sure, I would guess that your "sleep" rate is probably about 4 to 5 times the size of your opt-out rate. So your opt-out rate is an indicator of your "sleep" rate.

It is vital to understand what your subscribers think of your publication. Again, surveys are a great way to get feedback on your program. You can also provide an open link on each newsletter that asks for general feedback. Very few people will take the time to provide feedback on a feedback form, but you can bet that those who do represent a large chunk of your audience. Take their feedback seriously, and learn from it.

Five Steps to Improve Your Performance

Following are five steps that have always lifted the performance of my campaigns.

* Get in touch immediately - From the moment someone signs up for your newsletter, they start to forget you. If you take three weeks to send something to them, then they won't remember signing up and they will reject your email as spam. Make sure they get an issue of your newsletter (or an ebook, or a free report; something that is relevant to them and has value) immediately after they sign up.

* Make it personal and entertaining - Email marketing is a one-to-one communication, it is almost always best to keep the tone personal and entertaining. Try telling a few stories about yourself or your company. Let people get to "know" you, and feel like an "insider" with your company. This increases their personal equity in your brand.

* Make all emails "high-value" - Every time you send an email it should be valuable to the recipient, not just to you. Straight sales letters with no "meat" can dampen open rates for future mailings. Train your recipients to view each email you send as a valuable piece of information they cannot afford to miss.

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* Test multiple article types - You can write all kinds of articles, and depending on your industry and demographics of your subscribers, they may prefer instructional and how-to articles; others may prefer current industry events, or breaking news. Test these out and see what works best.

* Test different formats - Try splitting your list and send half your recipients an HTML newsletter and the other half a "text-looking" email. Make sure that the "text-looking" email really does have HTML in it, or else you won't be able to track the open rates!

Keep Your Chin UP

All newsletters can experience a blow to their response rates. If this happens to you, it is important to identify the problems and fix them before you lose too much of your list to opt-outs and list fatigue. Variety is the spice of life, and it can "wake up" a sleepy list by injecting some excitement. Make sure each communication you send is high value, and provides something new. And keep the lines of communication open so your subscribers can help you improve the quality of your content.

Matthew Coers is an Internet marketing expert. His website,

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.

Download his FREE Internet Marketing report,

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Creating Your Email Newsletter

By Imand.com

If you've never done one before, creating an entire email newsletter can seem like a daunting task - and more so when you think about putting

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one together as a regular thing. But it's not that hard. Here are some guidelines to follow.

1. Don't expect more than five minutes from your customer. He's busy: running a business, surfing the Internet, changing diapers, checking out new ringtones. A newsletter of between 500 and 1000 words per issue is ideal for most, especially if you include click-throughs for your website, where they'll find more content.
2. Keep it simple and short. Subdivide that short newsletter into bite-sized bits, smaller articles of 200–500 words. Use short paragraphs and lots of bullets.
3. A picture really is worth a thousand words, but only if your customer accepts HTML. If your customers accept HTML in their inbox, you can include images of your products in your newsletter. You should always be ready with a text version, just in case they can't accept HTML.
4. Your newsletter should be supplementary to what's on your website. Your primary goal for your newsletter is to get your customer to your website, where they will buy products. Always keep that in mind when composing your newsletter.
5. To maintain a high level of presence in your customer's mind, you should send out a newsletter every four weeks. More frequently can get annoying, and less frequently may cause your sales to drop off. With a short newsletter, this can be very doable.
6. Content can be anything useful and entertaining. If you run an online bookstore and want to have short stories and book reviews for your content, that's fine; if you sell genetic engineering products and want the latest technology news, that's good too. The key is that it must captivate your customer and get them to your website.
7. Use email newsletters to communicate information about sales. Remember, this is a marketing tool. If you have a hot buy, write an article about it in the newsletter; for instance, if you're trying to get rid of H-scale train track, write an article about H-scale trains and advertise after the article that your track is on sale, with a click-through to the site.
8. Use email newsletters to reward your most loyal customers. With good email newsletter programs, you can subdivide your newsletter so that you can target your most loyal customers with coupons and discounts just

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for them. The corporate marketers do it; you can, too.

9. Use email newsletters to instigate that first sale from new customers. Have a special newsletter in reserve that introduces new customers to your site, and include a nice coupon in it to encourage the first sale. It's much easier to get the second and subsequent, once they're in the habit of buying from you online.

10. Keep good statistics on your email click-throughs. Again, with good email newsletter programs, your click-throughs - the times your customers click on links in the newsletter to go to your website - are recorded. If you know what customers click on and what they ignore, you can set up subsequent emails accordingly to maximize click-through.

11. If you can, find out more about your customers. The more you know about your customers, the better you can target your newsletter. Run surveys from your site, or simply ask for more, optional information when your customer signs up for your newsletter.

12. Use your newsletter to sell advertising to your vendors and affiliates. With a good customer base and proven sales from your newsletter, you can sell advertising space to related businesses, or even to your vendors when they want to push a product. Don't overlook the eventual money-making potential of your newsletter!

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