

No matter what business you're in, it's important to maintain regular contact with both your current customers and your potential customers. Purchasing habits are very closely linked to the brands that we are exposed to most often, and properly applying this fact to your business can make a huge difference in the bottom line.

One of the most effective means to increase your brand exposure is through brief email messages sent out at regular intervals, highlighting items that will be of value to your list. This poses little problem for online businesses who require customers to submit an email address before completing a purchase, but can be a bit more difficult for brick-and-mortar businesses who don't have a large online presence or any similar means to gather email addresses. We'll take you through some simple yet effective strategies your company can implement to begin building an email list for your marketing campaigns.

One of the simplest and easiest strategies to implement is a tried and true one, and involves simply asking customers to sign up for your email list while they are browsing and purchasing in-store. Especially in this financially unstable time, customers are always looking for ways to save money. Offering discounts, special promotions and other deals only to email list subscribers will usually give you a good base to begin your campaigns, although it has become such a common tactic that many customers have become somewhat less responsive to it than in the past. To counteract this engagement problem, it's often best to use a specific initial offering such as a discount on the next purchase, instead of simply promising 'discounts and deals' in general. Customers are always more willing to give up a piece of information to get a specific reward than a vague potential one.

Another excellent approach is to offer customers the option of receiving emailed receipts for their purchases. This is often most applicable for companies offering expensive luxury products and services, as most people aren't likely to bother with an emailed receipt for the week's groceries or a latte. The effectiveness of this strategy will also depend on how you brand the purpose behind emailed receipts. Highlighting the reduction in waste paper and printing equipment will leverage demographics who appreciate eco-friendly initiatives. If customers prove unresponsive at first, experiment with including a small incentive offer for signing up.

One method that has been used effectively for list building since long before email addresses even existed is the business card contest. Customers simply drop one of their business cards into a container in-store to be automatically entered into the draw, typically for a free lunch or other similar mid-range purchase, depending on your business. As the saying goes, though, there's no such thing as free lunch, as every business card now also contains an email address that can be used for your list, and you only have to offer a single prize.

For businesses looking to expand their enterprise into the online world, it's possible to quickly set up a simple website or ordering system that will enable you to gather email addresses more effectively. Restaurants could implement online ordering systems, and even the smallest of shops may benefit from giving customers the option to purchase items online. Thanks to many free, open-source software alternatives, these systems can be set up relatively cheaply by someone with a bit of technical know-how.

As with many marketing systems, the best approach is to use as many of these strategies as possible to grow your list quickly. Once you've begun to implement them, however, it's also important consider what you do with your list. The way you contact the list will have a large impact on how efficiently it grows. Contacting your list too often will drive many potential customers away as they unsubscribe from your list, and if they feel that your offerings aren't providing sufficient value, they'll also begin to abandon the list in favor of competitors with better deals. Weekly contact is usually a good rule of thumb, except under special circumstances such as one-day sales and other similar promotions.

As with any social marketing strategy, the most important factor in determining success is whether or not you're providing the list with valuable content. Experiment with different offers by sending one offer to half your list, and a different order to the other half of the list to help you develop a sense of what will most appeal to your customers.