Building Your Email Marketing List

SCORE mentors are often asked the question “is Email marketing still a viable strategy and if so, how do I build my email list?” The quick answer is Yes email is still a very viable marketing strategy because it is an effective way to stay in touch with your base of customers/clients. So let’s focus on this topic and I will give you some key suggestions to keep in mind as you try to build your email list.

To start, CEOs must remember that when it comes to your email list, size matters. Having a large contactable universe gives your brand the opportunity to interact with more subscribers, helping to drive more ROI (return on investment) for your business. But it doesn’t end there.

The quality of the subscribers you’re driving into your business can have a big impact. With more and more mailbox providers narrowing in on engagement as a primary factor in spam filtering decisions, building a list of high quality, engaged subscribers is increasingly important.

Luckily, marketers have many opportunities to build a bigger and better list. I inform SCORE clients that companies that provide email solution services like Return Path and Constant Contact are excellent resources to which I turn for information. I will offer several suggestions that can help increase the number of high quality subscribers opting in to the email program by increasing exposure and making it easy for potential subscribers to find and complete the opt-in process.

So, let’s start by mentioning some basics. Keep in mind that as you build your list, the main goal is to build a foundation for a positive subscriber experience. Let’s make one thing clear: perspective is everything. As CEOs and marketing folks, we can get so caught up in our business goals that we neglect to think through the subscriber experience. This can create major problems for the brand and hinder your efforts to grow your list.

Think through the process from the subscriber perspective and be sure that you are creating a customer-centric, simple path into the email program.

- Throughout the entire subscription process, clearly and succinctly spell out the benefits associated with your email program. This is especially important for B2B mailers, those with a longer sales cycle, or bigger ticket products or services.

- Make sure that “permission” is front and center—and easy to understand. Sure, a pre-checked box or somewhat sneaky opt-in language may increase your list size but you’re far more likely to end up with subscribers who unsubscribe or complain, which
can impede your efforts to get your message in front of your subscribers.

- Reduce friction throughout the process, whether site visitors want to complete the opt-in process or abandon it. Entry and exit points should be user-friendly and intuitive, and next steps should be completely clear.

- Regardless of the point of entry, be mindful of the mobile experience. If mobile users aren’t able to easily read copy, complete the form, or exit, it’s time to pull up the code and rework it.

- If your brand strategy requires a large amount of data, consider implementing a two-step process where users are able to enter basic information then continue on to volunteer additional information or adjust preferences.

- Keep required fields to a minimum to reduce both form abandonment and the likelihood of subscribers providing bad data. Be sure that page visitors are easily able to differentiate between required and optional fields.

- Set expectations for the types of messages subscribers will receive after opting in. Informed subscribers who know what kinds of messages are headed their way are more likely to be engaged and less likely to complain.

- Offer email-exclusive deals, information, and opportunities to increase the value of your email program for subscribers, but don’t bait and switch. Be sure that your email program delivers on the promises you make during the subscribe process.

- Include confirmation messaging or a confirmation page once subscribers hit submit. Dead air after the opt-in can contribute to an awkward and off-putting subscriber experience, and that’s not how you want to kick off your email relationship.

- List hygiene plays a role in how mailbox providers filter messages, so consider using a list validation service. While welcome messages often have high open rates, they also tend to have a higher bounce rate and more list hygiene issues. Help keep your messages out of the spam folder by making sure that you’re sending to a clean list.

- Send a triggered email to confirm the opt-in and welcome new subscribers to your program. While this won’t help grow your list, it’s an important step to start things off on the right foot and stave off list attrition!

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