**Increase the Effectiveness of your Email Marketing**

In my last column, I stated that Email marketing is inexpensive and delivers an amazing return on investment (ROI). In fact, a 2016 survey by the Direct Marketing Association and Demand Metric found that email marketing had a median ROI of 122 percent — more than four times higher than other marketing formats, including social media, direct mail and paid search.

So, how can a small business CEO manage this very effective marketing strategy? I will share some suggestions that I have learned from specialists in this marketing field. I enjoyed comments from Julie Gordon, Director of Marketing Partnerships, Deluxe Corp (one of SCORE’s content resource partners) who put it this way, “Email marketing is one of the most economical ways to generate repeat sales. A lot of business owners don’t want to spam their customer base, but it’s not spamming when those customers want to hear from you.”

**Create an editorial calendar.** To save time and streamline your emails, map out your messages in advance. An editorial calendar is a tool that helps you plan the types of emails you plan to send subscribers over the coming weeks and months.

To begin your editorial calendar, you may want to plot out emails around four key areas:

1. Holidays (Valentine’s Day, 4th of July, Halloween, Small Business Saturday, Christmas, etc.)
2. Events (Super Bowl, back to school, etc.)
3. Upcoming promotions or events (seasonal sales, deals of the week, customer appreciation parties, etc.)
4. Product or service updates (new releases, seasonal recipes, etc.)

Think of your editorial calendar as a guide, not a rigid set of rules that you have to follow strictly. If something pops up that makes sense for your business to email about — timely and relevant news, a new product launch, updated service offerings — it’s perfectly fine to override your editorial calendar.

**Avoid common email sins** Email marketing has benefits for every business, but it doesn’t come without potential pitfalls. To get the most out of your emails, avoid these mistakes which I summarize from Deluxe Corp (one of SCORE’s content resource partners):
- **Sloppy copy**: This should go without saying, but avoid sending emails containing misspelled words or poor grammar. These messages project an unprofessional vibe and tarnish your credibility.

- **Buying email lists**: As tempting as it might be to take shortcuts to build out your email subscriber lists, buying a set of addresses from a third party is almost always a bad idea. It’s crucial to build your list with subscribers who are actually interested in receiving your emails, and buying lists is the opposite of that. In addition, purchased lists are often filled with invalid addresses that will flood you with bouncebacks. You might also run afoul of some anti-spam laws, which leads to the third sin.

- **Spamming readers**: Spam is not only an annoying tactic that can paint your business in a bad light with potential customers, but it can also be illegal. In the U.S., for example, there are a number of email regulations businesses need to follow under the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003. It’s also important to note that email marketers are bound to anti-spam laws where the email recipients reside, not where the business is located. In many countries, an opt-in from recipients is required for email marketing.

- **Sending from “noreply@yourbusiness.com”**: When setting up your email campaign, include a personal address or at least one that looks personal — in the “from” field. It could be the name of the business owner, or a manager. Emails sent from generic usernames such as “noreply” or “admin” feel impersonal to readers. And, if a recipient replies to the email with a question, it’s unlikely anyone will read or respond to it.

- **Novel-length emails**: It’s perfectly fine to have some substance to your emails, but don’t make them so long that readers tune out or feel annoyed. Short and sweet is often the safest play.

- **Not enough (or too many) links**: Sprinkling useful links throughout your emails is a bit of an art form. On one hand, you don’t want to include too many because you may overwhelm or confuse your readers. At the same time, you don’t want to send emails without any links at all, particularly if your goal is to entice the reader to take an action. Go with a happy medium. Take a look at some promotional emails you’ve received recently, and try to emulate what seemed to work best on you. Sometimes one can’t-miss call to action (CTA) is all you need.

- **Not including an unsubscribe function**: The U.S. CAN-SPAM Act requires businesses to let recipients know how to opt out of receiving
messages, and opt-out requests must be honored promptly. You also 
don’t want to make email subscribers feel like they’re locked in. Most 
appreciate an easy-to-find “unsubscribe” button or link, even if they 
don’t plan to use it.

Dean L. Swanson  
Southeast Minnesota SCORE  
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce  
220 South Broadway, Suite 100  
Rochester, MN 55904  
www.seminnesota.score.org/  
*Dean is a volunteer Certified SCORE Mentor and former SCORE Chapter Chair,  
District Director, and Regional Vice President for the North West Region