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Making e-mail marketing work >

Executive Summary:

Don't just blast away with your e-mails. Target them, organize them, understand what you're trying to accomplish.

By Janeson Keeley

With postage and printing costs increasing, many local businesses are turning to e-mail marketing campaigns to reach prospective customers and stay connected with existing

clients. But before you start compiling your mailing list, make sure you know how to avoid the potential pitfalls of e-mail marketing and how to take advantage of the opportunities. Here are some tips.

Use a reputable e-mail campaign marketing service. Services such as iContact and Constant Contact offer tools that help you create, categorize, and manage your contact database; create e-mails; and, evaluate the effectiveness of your campaign. These services also help you manage your legal obligations by providing an unsubscribe tool that automatically removes subscribers from your list at their request.

Send e-mails to a specific target audience. If your contact list consists of categories of people with slightly different interests, target the content of the e-mails you send to them to best meet their needs. Jean Holzinger, executive director of marketing at Hollins University, provides an excellent example: "When the Hollins riding team came in fourth at the Intercollegiate Horse Show national competition in early May, we sent slightly different messages to admitted students who had expressed an interest in riding and to prospective riding students."

If you want to reach businesses in the Roanoke Valley, Debbie Kavitz, executive director of the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce, notes that the Chamber offers its members E-burst service which, for a small fee, will send your message to all

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Chamber members. The Roanoke Regional Chamber offers a paid monthly e-mail service for its members, reports Pennie Anderson, communications manager.

Write an attention-grabbing subject line. Holzinger notes that, "Writing subject lines is an art in itself. Familiarize yourself with words that are likely to send your message directly to spam folders. Compose subject lines that offer a benefit to your readers."

Offer valuable information. Matt Huff, associate with Poe & Cronk Real Estate Group in Roanoke, uses Constant Contact to send special announcements to subscribers. He recommends that campaigns "be selective with use and material. Make it worthwhile for people to pay attention to what you are saying."

Pay attention to the results. The bottom

line is that e-mail marketing campaigns can help or hurt your business. Track your results in terms of number of e-mails opened, the number of people who stay on your list, and how, in the end, your campaign is affecting your bottom line. "I've found these e-mail marketing tools to be very beneficial to my business by increasing registration for my classes and improving communication with my clients," says Charlotte Mason, president of The Advantage Resource Group Inc.

While it's tempting to simply blast something to everyone in your contact list, by doing so you run the risk of annoying your clients, having your e-mail address flagged as spam, and even having your mail server blacklisted for sending spam. Follow the guidelines above, and e-mail marketing campaigns can improve existing client relationships, help you reach prospective customers, and increase your revenue. 

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