

E-mail Newsletters

Keep Customers Coming Back

Get more repeats and referrals with e-mail marketing.

By Phil Sasso



Do you use e-mail marketing to promote your restyling shop?

If you don't, consider it. If you do, consider how you can improve it. E-mail is the number one Internet marketing tool—not just for restyling shops, but for all businesses.

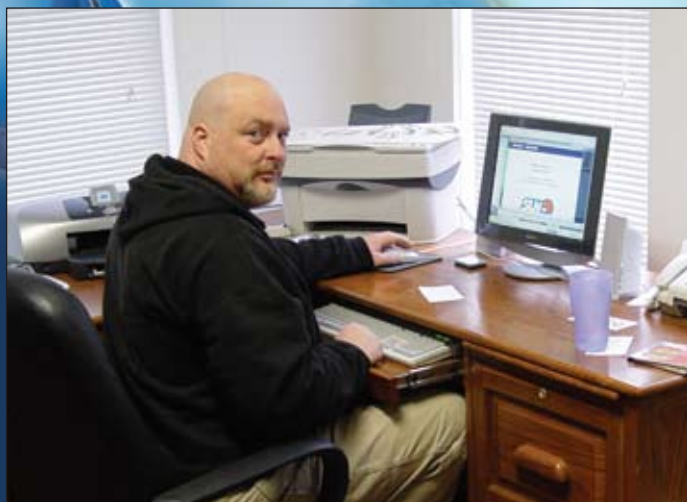
If your e-mail box looks like mine, full of spam, you may doubt e-mail's effectiveness. The only thing more irritating than junk e-mail is that guy who seems to forward every joke and chain letter he gets. I'm not encouraging you to become a spammer. Unsolicited e-mail only turns off customers. I'm recommending you create an opt-in customer list of people who *want* e-mail from you.

I almost always open e-mails from certain businesses. You probably do, too. Those e-mails tend to be interesting, informative and/or offer great deals. Create this kind of e-mail to your customers and you'll keep them coming back. They may even forward your e-mail to friends who will, in turn, become loyal customers.

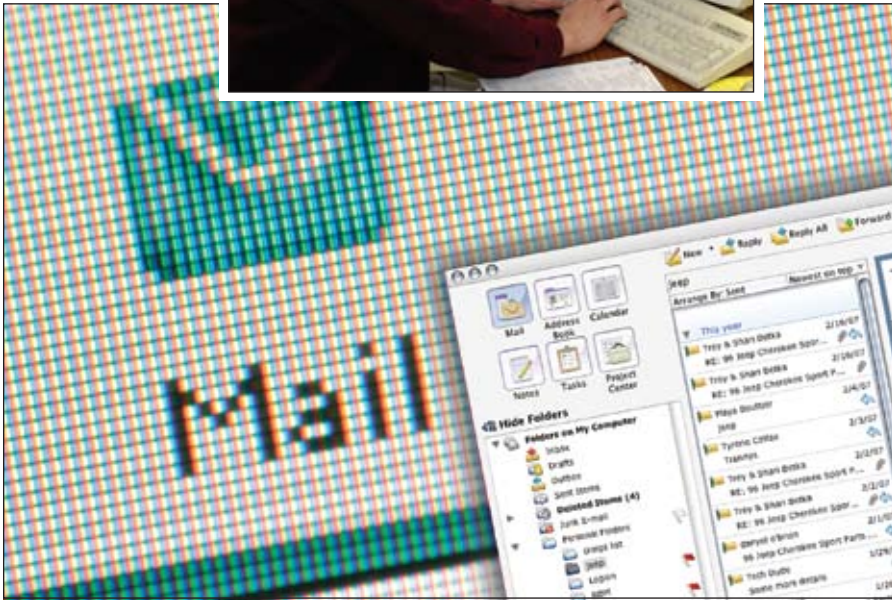
Launching an e-mail marketing campaign seems overwhelming, but it's cheaper and easier than you may think. For as little as \$15 a month, online services like ConstantContact.com, Campaigner.com, and iContact.com make the entire process quick, simple, and painless. Most services offer a 30 or 60-day free trial period, so you have nothing to lose and a lot to gain by testing e-mail campaigns.

I'll warn you, don't try running a campaign using your regular e-mail program. I've done it. It's labor-intensive and problematic. And it's hard to monitor your campaign's effectiveness.

Also, although e-mail services automate the process, you still need a living, breathing human being to run the campaign. (If just using the Internet gives you hives, consider assigning the day-to-day management to a staff member or ask your web site designer for help. Be sure you personally review the content and monitor campaign results.)



A properly managed e-mail campaign can keep your customers returning again and again.



E-mail marketing campaigns have four parts: the list, creation, distribution, and monitoring.

The List

Always ask permission to e-mail your customers. It's smart marketing. You don't want to annoy anyone with unwanted e-mail. And it keeps you on the right side of the law—sending unsolicited e-mails may get you in trouble.

You can build your e-mail list offline or online. I recommend both. Just don't share your private e-mail list with anyone. Your customers have entrusted you with their e-mail address. Don't break that trust.

Gathering e-mail addresses in your shop is easy. When writing up an order, simply ask: "Would you like to be on our e-mail list to get information on new products and exclusive discounts?" Note you're not just asking for their e-mail address. You're asking permission to e-mail them and giving them a valuable reason to be on your list. Most people will say yes when you put it that way.

Building your e-mail list online is even easier. Just put a sign-up box on your home page. Most services have forms that filter e-mail addresses directly to your online database without any extra work from you.

Organizing

Once your list is begun, you need to decide how often you'll e-mail and what.

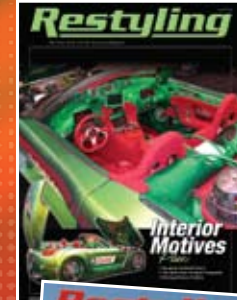
I suggest starting with a monthly newsletter. Monthly is often enough to be memorable, without being annoying. And a regular monthly e-mail will be easier for you to manage, too. Schedule a mailing date, say, the first Monday of each month. Then stick to that schedule. The biggest failure I see in e-mail campaigns is inconsistency.

Your newsletter can be as simple as a brief text-only letter or a flashy newsletter with photos and graphics. Online templates can make designing a professional-looking newsletter a breeze. It's best to start simple and grow as you become more confident.

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Overall, e-mail campaigns are more than just popular. They're productive.

What should you say? Study the business e-mails you open: new products, coupons, events calendar, reviews and such. Be sure to include "E-mail Exclusive" offers. This will help you monitor your effectiveness later.

Distribution

When you're ready to send your newsletter, first send a test to yourself. Too many things can go wrong to risk sending everyone on your list a bad newsletter. And if you have several lists, double check you're using the right one. I once sent a personal e-mail to the wrong list. Never again!

Some services have extra features like surveys, personalization, and scheduling. All these features take longer than just hitting "send." But the results can be worth the time.

Monitoring

E-mail services provide detailed reports on items like e-mail open rate, undeliverables and click-throughs. Wait about a week before you review your results since most people don't check their e-mail daily. Then use these results to improve your next newsletter.

The open rate will tell you how many people read your e-mail. This is very useful. If few people open your e-mail, consider making your subject line or content more interesting. If many people open your e-mail but no one buys anything, you may need stronger news, offers or discounts.

Keep track of undeliverables. Delete bounced e-mail addresses immediately. They take up space and can cost you money. Bad addresses have no value.

Click-throughs tell you what links readers clicked. Put links to sections of

your website in each newsletter. This gives you feedback on what's of most interest to customers.

Overall, e-mail campaigns are more than just popular. They're productive. They can cost-effectively help you keep in touch with customers and monitor your newsletter's interest. But most importantly, it can have a measurable impact on your sales.

Phil Sasso is the president of Sasso Marketing, Inc., an aftermarket advertising and public relations agency. Sasso is also a speaker, trainer and consultant—and he's been using e-mail marketing since 2001. Sign up for his free weekly marketing tip e-mail at philsasso.com/blog or e-mail tips@shaboom.com. ©