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# Marketing your business on the Internet – Part 5

Email marketing, boosting your sales, and visits to your new website

The most common version of email marketing is an email newsletter, but it's not as easy as it sounds and you need to answer a few questions before you send out your first newsletter. Consider these points when preparing your newsletter campaign.

## Serving your audience

Think of a newsletter as a way to serve your audience on the Internet and to build a trusting relationship with them, rather than making it a forum for pitching your products or services. Be creative, there are many aspects of your business and the sign making craft that you may explore.

Choose a clearly-defined and specific niche. In the previous issues we were discussing and analysing your customer. We ended up creating a table of different customer segments that we used as a blue print for our website. Each of your customers has a specific niche. Feed this niche into your newsletter.

Quality content should be your first priority offering real value to the recipient. This is the point where many fail. Why? They collect as much as they can for the first newsletter, make it a very long and informative one and run out of ideas for the next one. I meet a lot of business owners keen to send out their first newsletter without thinking about the next one. If you want to make your newsletter campaign last you need to create a plan for the whole year and, as much as possible, know the content of each newsletter in advance. Talk to your marketing managers, production managers and sales people and get them to prepare parts of the newsletter. You will find that content is the hardest part of the process.

In formatting your newsletter do not mix editorial content and advertising. I wouldn't mix these as two different messages may confuse the reader and therefore diminish the content value of the newsletter.

Build your newsletter list on an opt-in basis only. Don't sign people up without their permission. It is easy to be tagged as a spammer.

Everybody should have an opportunity to opt-out at any time and you need to comply if requested. It is enforceable by law.

Be selective in accepting articles from outside sources. Make sure that such articles offer the right information and are not just another sales pitch. We do this on the [www.signtrade.org](http://www.signtrade.org) website. We are selective in what we publish and there is always value for the customer on our mind. You should also try to source relevant articles for your readers. Signmakers are in the promotion, marketing and visual display business so selecting articles relevant to our industry is not only the best choice, it also empowers marketers with good value.

Develop a thorough editorial process. Line-edit every article to eliminate typos, poor grammar, and vague and confusing passages. Also, do a good job of content editing, to make sure that you are publishing coherent, well-structured articles. It is a good idea to check each newsletter in detail before it gets published.

Commit yourself to a regular publishing schedule. It may vary depending on the content from twice a year to weekly. Remember that your audience is getting bombarded with huge volumes of e-mails, so don't send them the newsletter too often as there will be no time to read them. When preparing a marketing plan think carefully about your publishing schedule.

You need to know that building a successful newsletter may take a long time and you need to be committed if you want to be successful. We could be talking several months or even longer, but like any business – you need to do the hard yards first and the rewards come later. Be prepared to spend time and money to promote your newsletter and slowly build up your readership.

In the last issue we discussed offline strategies to promote your website. The same applies to your newsletter. Don't rely only on the site alone to grow your numbers. Be active

and use other marketing techniques.

I'll conclude with a few thoughts on the technology used for email marketing. There are lots of systems and software packages hosted or installed on your computer offering you these services. Usually you pay for either the sign-up or the whole software package and then you pay extra per email sent using this technology. Some of the aspects you should consider when deciding what software to purchase are:

- support and customer service
- ease of use
- reliability
- integration with your customers database
- purchase price and running costs
- statistics, reports and analysis
- training to get you up to speed with the software

## Many technologies to choose from

Remember, there are a number of technologies out there you can choose from. Overall, they all do a similar job – sending out emails. The difference is in the support you get from the software company to help you with the email template, graphics, training and support in the likely event that you need it. Many of these companies rely on automatic tools to solve their customer's problems, but I think good old-fashioned customer service is here to stay with us for some time. Happy mailing!

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