

Take E-Marketing to the Max

By Rich Finstein

E-MAIL HAS BECOME THE MAIN COMMUNICATION AND promotional vehicle for small businesses, and it continues to grow in popularity. In today's tough budget environment, many organizations have adopted e-mail as their medium of choice because the cost-per-message is about one-tenth that of direct mail. And, needing an IT consultant to send out an attractively branded e-mail is a thing of the past — with the right provider, you can easily do it from your desktop.

While e-marketing creates exciting opportunities, it also requires commitment, and if you don't think through your strategy, you're wasting your time.

Here are six points to consider before starting an e-mail marketing program:

1. E-mail technology changes quickly. To maximize its potential, **keep up with changing capabilities and usage**

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During SAF Naples 2006 in September, Rich Finstein, CEO of Commpartners, led a session on e-mail marketing. Get the tips he gave attendees by clicking on the Info to Go logo on the home page of SAF's member Web site, www.safnow.org, and then clicking on the MagnetMail icon.

E-mail Made Easy

SAF offers members an easy, cost-effective way to create professional e-mail marketing campaigns and newsletters. With MagnetMail, all you do is insert text into a custom-branded e-newsletter template, load your customers' e-mail addresses and click "send." Messages are transmitted and results are tracked instantly. You can even pull material from our online library of flower news articles and photographs that can be inserted with the click of a button.

Find out more on SAF's member Web site, www.safnow.org and click on "Sales and Business Tools."

— Julia Sydnor


patterns. For instance, five years ago, the only marketing e-mails sent were blast e-mails to a large group. Today, businesses are doing more one-to-one e-mail marketing, to opt-in lists and recipients based on expressed interests and needs.

2. E-marketing requires the same amount of planning as traditional marketing campaigns. **Do not shortcut your groundwork just because sending a blast e-mail is relatively quick and easy.** Develop an organizational strategy for message branding and frequency as well as content. Remember that, along with the body of the message, "content" includes an e-mail's "subject" and "from" fields, which can be customized to reflect a consistent, professional image. Also, create a clear policy for list control and bounced-message management.

3. While full-color messages in hypertext markup language (html) are sophisticated and attractive, **create a plan for clients who cannot (or prefer not to) receive this format** by using multi-part messages that include html source code and the text version of the message. Once sent, the recipients' e-mail browsers dictate which version to display.

4. **Make it easy for customers to respond.** Link your communication to your Web site or provide a buying opportunity in the e-mail.

5. **Choose an e-mail program or provider that gives you the ability to maximize your marketing results.** It's possible to automatically send a fax to a customer when an e-mail to him or her bounces. The right broadcast e-mail program also enables you to follow-up with non-responders and track overall usage.

6. While spam accounts for more than 50 percent of the messages your customers receive, **experts say 5 percent to 35 percent of legitimate e-mail is mistakenly blocked by spam filters.** To prevent your message from being accidentally tagged as spam, learn how anti-spam solutions work. To filter out unwanted e-mails, these programs evaluate all messages for red flags, including subject lines that read "buy now," red graphics and a lot of html coding in the e-mail. Avoid using these words and formats in your messages. Automated spam content checkers also can help ensure that your messages don't get blocked. 

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