

A White Paper

Umpteen Ways to Build Your Email List

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Umpteen Ways to Build Your Email List

Getting permission to send someone an email is probably the toughest, yet one of the most important, things you can do. Why is it so tough? Because you have to gain your potential recipient's trust, that's why. They need to feel comfortable that you won't abuse their valuable and personal information.

You're aware of how much email you receive on a daily basis and how infuriating it can be when you receive one that is unsolicited. It's exactly like those telemarketers that never ask you if you have a minute to listen to them when they call during dinner, or the faxes you never asked for that come in and waste your paper.

Developing an email list can be quite a challenge. The two most important things you need to strive for are size and quality. How can you build your list while maintaining the overall good quality? Here a few ideas that will help you start.

Form it Up!

The first thing you must do immediately, right now, stop reading... place a registration form prominently on your website and promote it heavily. Start driving people who visit your site directly to the registration form and you'll be amazed at how many people will end up filling it in.

How it works - Most Email Service Providers (ESPs) provide an easy-to-use form-building tool. This tool walks you through a series of steps enabling you to create your own form that you can customize to fit your look and feel. The best part? It just takes a few minutes to create. Once you've built your form to collect email addresses you will be provided with the HTML code to put on your site. Simply give this code to your hosting company or web designer to include on your home page and sub-pages. Put it on as many pages as you can so you'll have a better chance of capturing that email address. Some forms are free to use and others charge you monthly to host your data depending on how large your list is, so be sure you know up front what costs, if any, you'll incur.

Don't Pry

Collect only the information you need for registration and basic analysis and leave it at that until you've developed more of a relationship with them. Requesting sensitive information such as age and phone numbers can deter people from completing the registration process.

Will you be sending your recipients something by postal mail in the future? If so, you'll need to ask for their postal address. If you only want to know where they live you might at least want to ask for zip code. Then you can do a look up on the cities in which they reside. At the very least you'll want email address and first name, in the event you'll personalize your email (i.e. Dear Jane).

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Also beware of the laws. If you do collect information make sure you know exactly what you can do with it. There are not only laws for anti spam, but also telemarketing and fax laws as well.

Guarantee Privacy

These days, people live in fear of having private information exposed. Assure your website visitors that you're not a business who harvests email addresses for unscrupulous purposes. Put your money where your mouth is and prominently display your privacy policy and contact information prominently on your site. If you don't have one, get one, fast. You'll be surprised at how many visitors go to your privacy policy page to make sure you're a real entity.

Leverage the Web

Once you've highlighted the newsletter and registration form on your site the next step for you is to research other places on the Internet where you can advertise your newsletter. Remember, you can advertise your product or service, but why not treat your newsletter like a product or service too? Here are some ideas you can implement to grow your email list.

Complimentary Sites – What other sites do your visitors go to? It's easier to find out than you think. If you're ranked as a highly visited site on the web, the traffic ranking site Alexa will tell you. Simply go to: www.alexa.com, type in your site URL see where/if you come up in the rankings of all website traffic. If your site is "ranked" you'll be able to review the list of other sites your users visit. Identify them, visit them and see if they have advertising or barter opportunities for your product or newsletter sign up.

Pop-up Windows - Pop-up windows can be very effective if done correctly. We're not talking about those annoying advertising pop-ups that display all over your computer screen and are impossible to get rid of. We're talking about a simple small unobtrusive pop-up window that appears when someone is about to leave your site. For example, if you are selling a product from your site, after your customer purchases from you why not use a pop-up window with your opt-in form highlighting the value they'll get if they sign up for your email? You'll be amazed at how many people will add their email address to your list. If you don't ask for it, you won't get it.

Conversely if you're not selling a product or service you can still take advantage of using a pop-up a window whether they enter OR leave your site with your form on it. Just remember, some percentage of your visitors will have a pop-up blocker activated with their browser so those visitors won't see be able to see them.

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Newsletter Barter – We know you don't want to think your recipients read other newsletters and visit other sites, but they do! Try to find these newsletters or emails that your potential readers might enjoy. Then contact the owner of site to see if they would be interested in bartering space. The definition of bartering is simply trading advertising space with another company within their emails or on their website.

In a barter situation you would simply give the site owner your website address (URL) specifically to the page where you have your opt-in form and copy that outlines the benefits of receiving your email. If you're just starting out building your list and you don't have that many email addresses, you can additionally offer to put their link on your site. This can end up working very well, so identify those and make contact with them to get your offering in their emails. Then sit back and watch your list grow!

Online Retailers Ask!

If you are an online retailer you can collect email addresses in a number of ways.

- 1.** You can ask for permission to email your customers during the purchase process with a checkbox opting them in.
- 2.** You can ask for permission to email your customers after they've purchased.

In the latter (#2) you might want to ask for permission after a customer has purchased by directing them to your confirmation page. If they've just had a positive experience purchasing from you, chances are that a good portion of them will sign up for your "special offers" and they'll remember they gave you permission and your response rate should be higher.

Obtaining Permission Offline

If you have an offline business like a retail shop, a spa, salon, restaurant or doctor's office, there are many ways to get permission to email your customers. Compared to ads in newspapers, direct mail, or telemarketing, email marketing can be very cost-effective. Here are a few ideas for getting email addresses from your visitors:

Fishbowls – If you have a counter or checkout stand try placing a fishbowl and offer something your customers could win for free for giving you their business card. If your customers aren't in the business card carrying type, then print out some sign-up forms and put them near the fishbowl. Fishbowl not your thing? Get an acrylic ballot box with a sign up form attached and place it prominently at your counter.

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Sign-up Book – If neither fishbowls or acrylic boxes aren't right for your business, place a fancy registration book prominently near or on your checkout counter and have people register their postal and email addresses in the book to get special offers and announcements. Then daily or weekly, input those addresses into your contact manager or directly into your Email Service Provider account. Immediately send a welcome email thanking them for joining your list and describe the benefits of getting your email.

Kiosks - More and more retailers are installing kiosks that enable you to collect email addresses electronically. The great thing about a kiosk is that when it's not being used for people registering for your emails you can use it to display advertisements about products that visitors may not have seen. Kiosks can be pretty elaborate but they can also be as simple as a computer near the checkout with your site on the screen and your opt-in form displayed prominently.

Snail Mail

You may find that you have a great list of postal addresses for your customers or prospects but you lack email addresses for them. Wouldn't it be great to have a choice whether to use email, direct mail or telemarketing to communicate with your recipients?

One interesting tactic that we've seen from customers is to send recipients a postcard (that's right a good old fashioned snail mail postcard) to tell them about the benefits of giving out their email address. You can either ask them to call you, or direct them to a web page where you outline the benefits of them joining with their email address and include your opt-in form. Give them an incentive to join such as a discount or something free. This generally works at motivating someone to join. (Just like the Don, make him an offer he don't refuse.)

By the way, we've found that this can be a very effective way to change your direct mail recipients into email recipients saving you direct mail costs in the long run.

Telemarketing

Many businesses have had existing lists long before email became so prevalent. And you may have postal information on them but you may also have phone information on them. Wouldn't it be great to get email addresses for these prospects and customers so that you can easily and more cost-effectively communicate to them?

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“Update your information” campaign – Your telemarketing campaign could revolve around an information update. Simply ask your customers if they’d mind updating their information with you on the phone. Refer to their postal address (if you have it so they know you are who you say your are), then ask if they’d mind getting email offers from you instead of postal mailings. If they’re your customers you’ve got a better chance at getting this information than if they’re prospects.

You’ll get some amount of people declining because perhaps they get enough email or perhaps they just don’t trust that you are who you say your are. Don’t be offended, you’ll get some percentage of people that do give you this information and it’s better than not having any, right?

If you’ve got a larger list it might be tough for you to call them in-house. Outsourcing this task might make more sense. If you’ve got a list of a few hundred, set aside some time each day to make 10 calls. You might be surprised at what you’ll get.

Once you build your list and start communicating to your recipients remember: you made a promise to them about what you would send them when they joined. Try to avoid straying from that promise, it’s all about trust in the end. If you do stray you will have a greater chance of losing them and you’ll spend your time patching your reputation instead of growing your list.