

# Your guide to email marketing

**Email marketing is the latest addition to the arsenal of direct marketing. In essence, many of the principles are the same, however the delivery vehicle is not press or post, but email.**

As in any other direct marketing communication, the key variables to success are:

- the **quality of your list** – is it accurate and up-to-date?;
- the **offer** – is it targeted to your audience?;
- the **call to action** – is it time specific, enticing recipients to act now?; and
- the **creative** – this is the clever marketing spin which catches the reader's eye and invites them to read on. Whilst the creative is certainly important, even the cleverest campaign will fail if it has an unappealing offer and is sent to an out-of-date list.

## The list

The best list is your in-house database of clients. If you haven't already done so, introduce the collection of clients' email addresses as part of your ongoing business practices. To kick start this off, you could run

a mail campaign whereby you ask clients to provide their email addresses for the chance to win an appropriate prize.

Whilst we have grown accustomed to receiving unsolicited mail via the post, this is unacceptable via email. It is therefore crucial that you:

- placate clients' fears by guaranteeing their details will not be provided to a third party;
- only send emails which you truly believe will be of interest to your clients;
- if you are sending out a regular newsletter, ensure your clients can 'opt out' (or request to be removed from the list) at any time; and
- comply with current privacy laws by obtaining permission to use clients' email addresses for marketing purposes.

## The format

The two format choices are html or text-only.

Html enables you to introduce colour and images into your email communications. Text-only is just that – only words.

The table below summarises the pros and cons of each approach.

Format	Pros	Cons
<b>Html</b>	<p>Enables you to use colour, your choice of font, larger headings and images in your email, thereby increasing its appeal.</p> <p>Breaks out from the clutter of the day-to-day text-only emails. For the best results, use a professional designer.</p>	<p>The file can become large and slow to download. This is a consideration if your recipients have old computers or dial in to download their emails.</p> <p>Due to the larger file size and depending on your server's capability, you may have to send these emails in smaller bundles, e.g. to five email addresses at a time.</p> <p>If your email monopolises their PC for 15 minutes while it downloads, don't expect them to eagerly read it!</p> <p>In extreme cases, large emails can 'crash' a system. This is particularly disastrous if your client uses the system for work purposes.</p>
<b>Text-only</b>	<p>Easy to produce and rapidly delivered.</p>	<p>The formatting can go astray (such as line breaks appearing at odd junctures). Therefore, what the recipient sees in their email doesn't necessarily reflect your formatting (what you sent out). This is due to different programs being set up differently.</p> <p>In addition, if the email text is substantial, it is very cumbersome to read as it is difficult to differentiate between headings and text.</p>



Many email marketing pieces have a text-only email with an html attachment. The problem here is that some Internet Service Providers (ISPs) (such as Bigpond) block the receipt of emails with 'exe' files, as these are common means of hackers sending viruses. This could mean your email is undeliverable to a portion of your list.

One way around the html/text-only issue is to have a simple email which links to the more graphic-rich and detailed material, stored at the back of a website. For example, the email may read as follows: "With interest rates rising, experts predict a changing economic climate. [Click here](#) for the full story." – providing just enough information to invite the recipient to click through and read on.

The only consideration here is that the reader must still be online to access the material. If you don't have a website of your own, investigate whether you can post your material on an alliance partner's website. It will be up to you whether their website will be linked to your newsletter or whether your newsletter will exist as a stand-alone page.

## The content

The content needs to be timely and relevant. In financial services, where the soft sell is the best approach, a regular informative emailed newsletter is an excellent means of keeping your services top-of-mind.

The content must be well written and reader-friendly. Remember – people's patience for reading material online is limited, so the copy should be succinct and to the point.

You should also pay close attention to the 'subject' line in your actual email, which is the equivalent of the heading in a press ad. The subject line needs to grab the recipient's attention and invite them to open your email.

Finally, the sender's details are a key consideration. Don't try to be clever with your sender's ID – you want the recipient to immediately recognise you or risk them deleting the email unread.

## Blast off

Having checked that all links from your email work, your email campaign is now ready to be launched into cyber space. Avoid emailing on a Monday or a Friday;

both days are notoriously bad in terms of capturing your audience's attention. You may also check with your ISP as to the best time to send your group emails (e.g. overnight while internet traffic is slow).

Running a test campaign using a small portion of your list is always recommended – particularly if you have never used email marketing before. You never know what the test campaign may uncover. For example, many of the email addresses on your database may be out of date and will therefore be returned as 'undeliverable'.

Before you launch your email, make sure all your staff members are aware of the details of the campaign. You should also ensure that you have the resources to respond to any queries that the campaign elicits – either via phone or email. One means of managing this is to segment your list, and only send out the email to a portion each couple of days.

Segmenting the list also enables you to better target your email (e.g. including a story about annuities to the retiree market and wealth creation strategies to the younger demographic). It also allows you to change a specific element in your email, and testing to see its impact on response rates.

## Tracking the campaign's success

A wide variety of software systems are available which enable you to track the 'click-through' rate of your email. In other words, analyse how many recipients click from your email to the landing page of your website or html file.

However, you can effectively measure the campaign's success without these aids. At the end of the day, the click-through rates are interesting, but the impact on your business is the key issue. As with any marketing activity, you should have a predetermined, clear objective – one that is realistic, measurable and specific. For example, make eight appointments with new leads and 12 review meetings with existing clients over a three-month period.

And remember – continuity is the key. There's only one thing a brilliant one-off campaign needs – a great follow up.

**This article was provided by LUCID Marketing Communications, a Melbourne-based marketing and PR agency specialising in combining new and traditional means of promotion.**