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Don't Add Spam To Your Marketing Diet

Thanks to the Internet, business owners have even more options to embellish our marketing plans, specifically, consider using targeted email lists to generate sales, while only spending a fraction of the amount that you would on postal mailings. But how do you know if you are just adding to the millions of messages flooding email-boxes that qualify as "spam"? Here are a few tips to help you create a successful email marketing campaign that will get your company noticed.

Be sure to choose a good list from a reputable broker instead of buying the cheapest available. On the Internet, you can find lists for under \$20, but it's not necessarily the way to go. These types of lists often turn out to be what is known as "spam" lists (databases of names collected without the recipients' knowledge or consent). Spamming can result in a negative impression of your company due to its unwelcome message. The only email lists your company should use are those that are considered "opt-in." This means that they were generated by inviting Internet users to sign up regarding topics of interest and not by pulling personal information off of newsgroups, chat rooms, and web sites.

Ask your list broker questions about how the list was derived. Even though there has been an influx of lawsuits and regulations regarding the blatant use of spam, many email lists that are presented as "opt-in" are actually "opt-out." A good way to make sure that you are not renting a spam list is to check the web site that generated the list. Also, make sure that the list's broker followed guidelines set forth by the Federal Trade Commission. According to the FTC, these three guidelines should be met: users should be informed about the type of data that is being collected and how it will be used; they should be able to sign up to receive



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commercial messages about topics of interest and be able to remove themselves from the list at any time; and they should be able to return to the web site to check, modify or delete the data collected.

Once your list is secured, you next need to decide what you're sending. Don't just send out last year's brochure; include a call to action. Highlight the benefits of your product or service along with an offer the recipient can't refuse. Give a compelling reason to purchase your product or service today. Discounts, free samples, and limited-time offers all work as powerful incentives. You can also provide educational information to position yourself as a credible expert.

Regardless of your message, keep it short and get to the point. If your message takes up more than one screen, cut it down until it fits. When dealing with the Internet, short, to-the-point pitches work better than long-winded ones that go on and on. Internet users are busy

people who receive dozens of messages a day. Don't make them waste valuable time figuring out what you're trying to sell.

Also, as with any marketing, set reasonable goals and don't expect your email campaign to work miracles. Opt-in email lists may generate higher response rates than postal driven campaigns, due to the list members pre-qualifying themselves by signing up to receive emails. In general, a 2-3 percent response rate to an email offer is considered good. While 2 percent of your list doesn't sound like much, on a 45,000 person audience that is 900 people who stopped to learn more about your product or service.

One of the best things about utilizing email marketing, is the ability to discover what works and what doesn't within a span of days. So, run tests to see which lists or offer will generate the highest response before you spend your entire budget on a single list or mail piece. When you find out what works best for your company, go for it and watch the responses pour in.

And, as always, don't put all your eggs in one basket. Incorporate email with your regular advertising, public relations, client relations and direct selling to ensure a balanced program and maximize the synergy among varied tactics.

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