

Electronic Marketing – Is it Right for Your Business

By Lorraine Grout

Is e-mail marketing right for your business? Marketing via electronic mail is attractive because it is a low-cost form of advertising with the potential to reach thousands of new clients. If done correctly, it can be a very effective marketing tactic because it is pro-active – targeting customers rather than waiting for customers to search for a service or product. However, as with all forms of advertising, there are both positive and negative aspects.



Pros:

Electronic mail is instant. More than 50% of internet users check their inbox daily, this means that your marketing message has the potential to be read the same day. E-mail therefore is a very effective form of advertising for short-term offers where customers will feel urged to take up a special offer within a specified time-frame. This encourages them to 'buy now' or risk missing out on a deal.

The usefulness of e-mail marketing can be monitored and tracked fairly easily providing feedback as to what sort of campaign is most effective and which groups or types of customer are most likely to respond. This information can then be used to build a customer database. It is also possible to track how often messages are being opened and read. If it transpires that the majority of e-mails are being deleted, consider changing your marketing strategy or using a different advertising method.

Marketing by e-mail is a more environmentally friendly option that printing flyers or advertising using more traditional formats such as magazines or posters.

Cons:

With the abundance of spam and scam mail that penetrate inboxes each day, care must be taken to ensure marketing mail-outs are not automatically deleted. One way of achieving this is to personalize the message. This can be time-consuming but worth it in the long run to ensure the message is read and absorbed.

Mail-outs should be concise – everybody is time poor these days and want to know what you're offering and when without having to read through a lot of unnecessary pulp. Ensure your message is clear.

'Blind' targeting (cold calling) may offer a small reward in the form of new customers but care should be taken to target to appropriate customers – there's little point

sending e-mails advertising walking frames to athletes. This sends a negative message about your business.

Care must also be taken not to contravene laws governing spam mail or privacy issues. These rules may be implemented by government and / or your internet service provider so it is best to check first with both. All e-mails should contain an unsubscribe option for users to opt out of receiving further messages.

How to get the best out of e-mail marketing:

Timing is important. If your business offers a product that is popular as a gift, sending an e-mail just before important holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's Day can be effective. If your service or product is geared towards a specific event or season, there's little point sending marketing messages outside those time frames, for example advising customers about your pool cleaning service in the middle of winter. Those e-mails are likely to be deleted as irrelevant.

Direct marketing in the form of electronic mail works best with existing customers – to remind them of follow-up services or offer special deals to encourage repeat business. It can be highly effective when targeting those customers that have opted in to receive information on particular products and services because they will have a predetermined interest in your business.



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