Article Side

Direct Sales Email vs. Newsletters

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One of the most common questions that people who are new to email marketing typically have is whether their email marketing program should feature a newsletter or a direct sales email â€¦ or even a hybrid of both. Of course, the most effectiveÂ email marketingÂ programs will contain a combination of both types of emails. However, it's also important to take the time to think through what the difference between an email newsletter and a direct sales email is. With the information that you gained in the previous chapter about the different types of email marketing, their users and the types of information contained in them, you'll then be able to read this section and begin to visualize what your email marketing program should look like.

From here, we'll take a look at newsletters and direct sales email in detail. You can then use this information to help determine what type of email content you should send to for the various goals of your email program and to which user lists.

Email Newsletters: Content Is Still King

The purpose of an email newsletter is to provide users with relevant information that will accomplish the following goals:

Cause subscribers to think of, be aware of and build a relationship with your brand

Create continued exposure of your brand and products in a customer's mind for the time when they are ready to purchase

Drive page views to your website

Create viral awareness of your company, product, or brand through email forwards of useful information

Generate sales through product features and advertised specials

What is the Typical Content of an Email Newsletter?

While the specific content of an email newsletter will be largely driven by industry, the segment of users on yourÂ email listÂ who receive the email newsletter, and your own in-house testing of what content your users respond to, the following is a list of the most common types of content that can be found in an email newsletter.

Articles about issues related to your industry

Opinion columns from experts

Tips and advice columns that will be useful to the consumers of your product

Question and answer columns

Product testimonials

Product reviews, features and announcements of new products

Upcoming events calendars

Special offers and discounts

Featured quotes

Featured customers or users

Links to partner websites

Links to useful sections of your website

Links to social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

A call-to-action to forward the newsletter to friends

Of course, the more creative and unique you get with your newsletter content, the more engaged your users will be. Consider this list a "jumping off point" in order to get you thinking about what the content that your readers would like to see in your newsletter would be.

Email Newsletter Pros and Cons

Like any marketing decision, the decision to include an email newsletter in your marketing mix will involve balancing some pros and some cons. Here are some things that you'll want to keep in mind as you determine whether a newsletter format is the right format for your email marketing campaign.

Email Newsletter Pros

The following are the pro-points of sending an email newsletter:

EngagingÂ email contentÂ means that users are more likely to open, read, and click through your email than they would a direct sales piece

Customers respond well to feeling as though not every communication from you is a solicitation for them to buy something and this causes them to advocate your brand

Sales are generated, though typically not in as high a volume as with a direct sales email

Newsletters are the most effective email type for generating page views to your website, which is important if your business model is dependent on page views or impression-based advertising

Because a newsletter is not a pure sales tool, you can rent or sell advertising space to partner sites within the email itself as you are not reliant on raw sales figures to determine the success of the email

Unlike sales emails, newsletters are typically not as time sensitive and therefore retain their value even if they sit unopened for several weeks before the user reads them

The longer content form of an email allows you to promote more items, website sections, and even company personalities as well as to write in a voice that reflects your brand or company

Email Newsletter Cons

The following are the con-points of sending an email newsletter:

Because a newsletter email is not a direct call-to-action to purchase, your generated sales will be

fewer

There is an increased effort in creating a newsletter, as it requires content generation, editing and inputting as well as typically the creation of multiple on-site web pages to host full versions of articles and columns

Because email newsletters have many sections, it is more difficult to test the effectiveness of changing anything within the body of the email such as the headline of a section or a single image.

In short, an email newsletter may require more work in its creation than a directÂ sales emailÂ would and still result in fewer direct sales. However, email newsletters build customer loyalty and ultimately drive sales both in the short and long term. When considering the pros and cons of an email newsletter, consider your in-house content resources as well as your need to drive immediate revenue from a newsletter via email.

Email Newsletters and the Types of Email Marketing

When thinking about the types of email marketing described above, newsletters are best for emailing as part of your customer loyalty and brand building email program. They may also play a role inÂ customer retentionÂ email marketing. However, they are typically considered under-performing for customer acquisition, direct sales, or customer win-back email programs.

Email Newsletter Best Practices

While we will cover various email best practices in extensive detail in Section 5 of this book, here are the top five best practices that you should always consider when thinking about and designing an email newsletter.

1. Excerpt Content and Link to the Full Version:Â If you are including a column or article, always simply include an excerpt or "tease" within your email newsletter and then link to the full article or column on your website. Not only does this drive valuable page impressions to your website, but it also avoids your email newsletter being flagged as spam instead of going to the inbox because of a questionable word usage in your full content.

2. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links:Â Make sure that all links to your website, partner sites or other locations are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition.Â Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, inÂ email designÂ it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

3. Prioritize the Content That Users Will Care About in the Top Three Inches:Â In a typical email preview pane, you will have approximately three inches to display your content and allow a reader to decide whether to read the full email or not. Make sure that your most engaging newsletter content appears within these top three inches and do not waste the space with graphic headers or filler "welcome" content.

4. Use a "Table of Contents" or "In This Email":Â Because email newsletters tend to be longer and users tend to scan them quickly, use a table of contents or a quick list of what's in the email near the top so that users can quickly refer to it to see what content they may want to read.

5. Allow Readers the Option of Reading the Newsletter on a Webpage:Â Particularly for users who read their email on their mobile device, the option to click a link and instead see a hosted version of the newsletter on a webpage instead of having to read the entire newsletter within their inbox is a huge benefit. Offering this option will significantly increase the number of users who explore your newsletter.

Email newsletters are a great way to provide users with the history, resources and emotional

motivation to make purchases or visit your website. Though the time-to-produce an email newsletter can be lengthy, the ultimate benefits are also long term.

Direct Sales Email: One Action, One Result

Unlike an email newsletter, a direct sales email has one goal: to drive sales and revenue of your product or service for clicks to your website. How you do this may vary with the specific content or tactic of your direct sales email, but the beauty of a direct sales email is that its purpose is simple. That also means that tracking its success is simple, either it generated salesâ€¦or it didn't.

What is the Typical Content of a Direct Sales Email?

With a direct sales email, the content will often be driven by seasonality, industry, the segment of your email database that is being sent to, internal sales goals, and revenue targets. However, the following are typical types of content and promotions that you may see in a direct sales email:

New purchaser incentives

Percentage discount off (automatic or via coupon code)

Dollar amount discount off (automatic or via coupon code)

Free gift with purchase

Buy one, get one free

Free shipping

Free shipping upgrade (to priority or expedited)

Clearance item notification

Bonus dollars or bonus points offers

Refer-a-friend offers

Free trails

Sample products

Exclusive VIP offers

Seasonal products

New product announcements

Product testimonials and reviews

Celebrity endorsements

Direct Sales Email Pros and Cons

Direct sales emails have their own list of pros and cons to consider when putting them into your marketing mix. As you determine the roll of direct sales emails in your email marketing plan, consider the following key points:

Direct Sales Email Pros

The following are the pro-points of sending a direct sales email:

A direct sales email requires less effort to produce than a newsletter, with reduced copy and image needs and typically only a single web-based landing page

Because a direct sales email only has a singleÂ call-to-actionÂ (typically), it is easier to segment your user list and put the most appropriate offer in front of them

Revenue and sales numbers generated will be higher with a direct sales email than with a content-driven newsletter

Because a direct sales email is shorter in content and includes only one call-to-action, testing individual elements of the email such as headlines and images becomes easier to accomplish

Direct Sales Email Cons

The following are the con-points of sending a direct sales email:

Direct sales emails can often generate higher spam complaints and opt-outs from users.

Direct sales emails can often cause "ad blindness" among subscribers who may stop opening emails altogether if they begin to feel that each communication from you is simply a solicitation to purchase something.

Direct sales emails focus on a single task, which means that they do not offer an opportunity to cross promote other sections of your website, partner sites or content.

Direct Sales Emails and the Types of Email Marketing

When thinking about the five types of email marketing described previously, direct sales emails are best for customer acquisition, revenue generation and customer win-back. Direct sales emails may also have a role in your customer retention plan but should not be used as the exclusive means for retaining customers via email communications. Direct sales emails should not be used at all for customer loyalty and brand building email efforts.

Direct Sales Email Best Practices

In Section 5 of this book, we will cover email best practices in great detail. However, here are five key best practices for direct sales email that should be practiced.

1. One Call-to-Action:Â Though you may feature multiple products in a direct sales email, do not ask customers reading the email to do anything other than purchase as you will distract them from the intended goal. Do not clutter your direct sales emails with content links, information links or even social media links.

2. Use Equal Amounts of Text and Images:Â Though it is important to use images to show your product or engender emotion, always remember that many email clients do not display images. Always make sure that there is an amount of text equal to the amount of space taken up by images so that users can know what the offer or product feature is without having to load images into their email browser.

3. Be Careful of Spam Words In Your Text:Â We'll talk about common spam words later, but a direct sales email has a higher risk of using words that may trigger email provider spam filters. For example, words like "free", "sale" and "discount" can result in your email going to spam if not used properly.

4. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links:Â Make sure that all links to your product purchasing pages are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition. Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, in email design it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

5. Put the Best Offer at the Top and In the Subject Line:Â Offers are what sell products, so be sure that if you're making multiple offers or promoting multiple products, your best offer is not only first on the list, it's also featured in the subject line.

Direct sales email is a key method of driving and increasing revenue, sales and page views. Any email marketing mix will include them. Simply always be aware to be tasteful, aware of spam issues, and do not overwhelm your email subscribers with too many offers.

Whether you decide to emphasize a content-driven newsletter or more direct-sales driven emails, your ideal email marketing mix will include both used at appropriate times. Take some time to think about the different versions of emails and how they fit into your email marketing goals, the size and content of your email database, and your own in-house resources. Now you can begin to fully visualize the types of emails you may want to send. However, there is still one more factor to consider, and that is the use of an emailÂ auto-responderÂ program.

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