

Next Generation Email Marketing: New Tools Make E-Newsletters Easier, Less Expensive

By Kathleen M. Hosfeld

New technologies are making email newsletters easier to create and send, putting a powerful resource for customer relationships and increased profitability within reach of organizations regardless of size. If you built an email newsletter program more than two years ago, these new resources may offer enhanced capability over your first system. If you are considering or just getting started with a program, these technologies make it easier than ever before.

Even as offshore spam has become more virulent, many of us have become loyal subscribers to one or more email newsletters that bring us news or insights we value. One self-interested source (Doubleclick) reports that 75% of consumers rated email as their preferred way to hear from their favorite merchants or businesses. *We hate spam, but we love our subscriptions.*

Email marketing has many benefits for the sending organization when done correctly. It:

- helps to retain customer relationships by maintaining awareness of the organization;
- cross-sells new products or services;
- preserves the value of existing products or services through maintenance reminders;
- offers significant cost and environmental advantages over snail mail-based contact systems;
- transmits more quickly than mail when the message is urgent or timely.

Just as we have seen a radical shift in search engine technologies over the last few years, technology for email newsletters has changed significantly. Today, a host of providers offer email newsletter solutions that provide a variety of benefits over the self-hosted solutions we used to create. Among the benefits of these solutions are:

Protection from blacklisting. Blacklisting occurs if a specific ISP receives complaints about suspected spam activity. ISPs then block email sent from that domain; email sent from that address is not delivered. Email newsletter solution providers help avoid blacklisting by following industry anti-spam protocols and actively managing relationships with other ISPs. Unfortunately, blacklists can contain the name of many legitimate email service providers. Conversely, ISP's also maintain "whitelists" to recognize legitimate email service providers and permit their emails to be delivered. As you investigate the provider you would like to work with, ask them where they are blacklisted and whitelisted.

"The (email newsletter solution) is quite a delight and it's actually helping me set up other bits of data in a more convenient manner as well," says one client. Regarding the metrics that indicate number of emails opened, she says "This is so much more informative than just casting them on the ocean of the Internet!"

Superior Metrics. The better email service providers offer metrics (statistics) on response to your email newsletters. These metrics help determine reach and effectiveness. Typical statistics include the number of emails delivered, opened, number of un-subscribes, number of click-throughs (links from the newsletter to Web pages). Analysis of click-throughs can help the company evaluate different calls to action, and monitor interest in particular products or services. It's important to note one metric at the start. It's normal for far fewer



email to be opened than were sent. Some standards are 30 to 40%. This is disappointing if you imagined that all your email was being opened before this was measured. Setting the right expectation will help alleviate this disappointment. Working subject and sender messages over time can help increase the number of emails opened.

Flexibility in Formatting. Email service provider systems offer great flexibility in layout and content, including different templates for different types of communication (news releases, versus newsletters, versus new product announcements, etc.) These typically use Wysiwyg- (What You See Is What You Get) style layout technology, and each system has its own vernacular. Most are relatively easy to use. Some offer low-cost services to design a custom template or banner using your logo and artwork.

Setting Up Your System

Many organizations have the internal skills and ability to plan, design and launch their own email marketing program. The new email service providers make it easy. We encourage this with our clients whenever possible. It is always best for marketing capability to be enhanced and retained *within* the organization. We can recommend that you look at several providers. In designing these systems for our clients, we often work with Lytleworks, Hosfeld & Associates' strategic partner in all things Internet. Our recommendations for small to middle-market organizations include GraphicMail, www.graphicmail.com, and Constant Contact, www.constantcontact.com. For larger organizations, such as financial services firms with extensive customer databases, Lytleworks has evaluated Experian, Topica, Postmaster Direct, and Lyris providers. We also recommend that you collect samples from your own email and write to or contact the senders for their feedback on what they like about their system.

Selecting the right technology is an important component of making sure your newsletter becomes one of the valued subscriptions that your clients or stakeholders receive. The next step is creating newsletters that offer relevant and timely information. How do you assess the kind of information your audiences need and want? How do you offer unique information they can't get elsewhere? What keeps them opening and reading your email over time? We will cover e-newsletter content in our next edition of *Listening*.



Kathleen Hosfeld is the President of Hosfeld & Associates, Inc. Since 1989, Hosfeld & Associates' marketing expertise and services have launched, grown and inspired visionary for-profit and non-profit organizations and projects. We help clients think more clearly and boldly about their goals. We provide the skills and resources clients need to implement breakthrough strategies for profitability, service, and contribution. For more information, please visit <http://www.hosfeld.com>