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15 SIMPLE TIPS FOR PRODUCING SUCCESSFUL E-NEWSLETTERS

Each and every one of your users, potential readers and customers has a crowded inbox. It is jammed with messages from customers, the boss, HR, the weird guy in I.T., your friends, Mom, the brother-in-law who sends off-colour jokes every morning, automated messages from Facebook and Twitter and emails from Nigeria promising to send money.

How do you break through this logjam and establish your e-newsletter as a core element of your online business strategy?

When done right, e-newsletters work. A successful e-newsletter has the potential to...

- increase awareness of your business
- build traffic to your website
- create new advertising opportunities
- develop new editorial offerings.

Here are 15 tips to help you establish your e-newsletter and ensure it is highly valued and anticipated by your readers.

1. MOBILE FIRST

About half of Canadians own smart phones, and their use will continue to grow as we consume more and more content on our mobile devices, driving changes in online habits.

Ensure that your e-newsletter is well adapted for all mobile devices so that it's more accessible for your subscribers.

2. DAY AFTER DAY

Chances are you serve audiences of busy, working people. They work full time. Their information needs are today, and every day. Build habit and anticipation by publishing daily.

3. THE EARLY BIRD SPECIAL

An e-newsletter sent at 6 am is more likely to be opened than one sent later in the day – the majority of Canadians (71%) start their day by reading their email.¹

Late in the day on a Thursday or Friday is a waste of time, and weekend deliveries rarely work. Make sure to keep to your schedule of weekday mornings.

4. BE ORIGINAL

Let's face it: Does the world need another e-newsletter? Online content has become a commodity. The only way you will survive is if your stories are unique and useful. Carve out a niche in the online world where you are the only voice.

5. LESS IS MORE

Two or three well-written items of original content with a snappy subject line will outpunch an e-newsletter chockfull of less-than-memorable ideas.

6. LEAD WITH AUTHORITY

Don't be afraid to take sides on issues that position you as an authority. A point of view will help you grow your e-newsletter by sharing it on Twitter where audiences favour decisive views.

7. AVOID BOMBARDING YOUR READERS

Don't bombard your readers with subscription offers and conference or tradeshow invites, send desperate marketing messages on behalf of the sales department, or clutter your e-newsletter with banners and buttons.

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Do these things and kiss your readers good-bye.

8. GIVE THEM WHAT THEY SIGNED UP FOR

If they signed up for an investment newsletter, write about investments. If you drift from your editorial mandate you will lose your readers' trust.

9. THE DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

Would a daily newspaper publish the same headline on its front page day after day? The subject line is the email newsletter's front-page headline. It is commonly neglected and sometimes never changed. Be sure to refresh yours – do a quick Google search for “e-newsletter subject line open rates” to make sure you're on the right path.

10. ALERTS

Alerts are emails used to publish newsworthy stories as they break, rather than waiting for the next scheduled newsletter. There is resistance to using Alerts among those who are concerned with inundating their audience with too many emails. This is not a concern if you are delivering content that is relevant and useful. And if you are monitoring your metrics you will be able to judge the effectiveness of Alerts.

If you continue to send dull, disengaging, untargeted e-newsletters, then even a single email is one too many.

11. TEST, TEST, TEST

Test different times. Monitor open rates and click-through rates. Test subject lines, length and design. And then test again.

12. NUMBERS NEVER LIE

Online publishing is a numbers game. Everyone on the publishing team needs to be familiar with metrics that measure delivery, open and click-through rates. Monitor your “unsubscribes” and bounce rates.

Act on the numbers. A high unsubscribe rate is usually a sign that you are not engaging readers. A high bounce rate may point to a data problem.

13. SPAM IS NOT NICE

Canada's anti-spam law is in force, but so what? You don't need the government to tell you that spam doesn't work. For more information about CASL, view Magazines Canada's webinar, “[What You Need to Know About Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation](#),” visit fightspam.gc.ca or consult a lawyer.

But simply passing the legal test is not good enough. In your readers' eyes, spam is...

- email they don't expect
- email they don't want
- email that prompts them to hit the “this is junk” button; and
- email they may have signed up for, but that doesn't deliver on the original promise.

14. THE SLOW ROAD TO BUILDING TRUST

Treat your potential readers with respect. Invite them to receive the e-newsletter and explain what's in it for them. Tell them about the timing and frequency, the type of content it will contain and any deals or contests involved. Provide links to a sample e-newsletter and when they sign up send a friendly thank-you email.

The most important piece of data is reader opt-ins.

15. SHOW ME THE MONEY

Build an engaged audience of email readers and the money will follow:

- 93% of online Canadians subscribe to at least one commercial e-newsletter, making it “the top communication channel for marketers in Canada”¹
- 44% have made a purchase as a direct result of receiving a marketing message via email

1. “Report #21: The Digital North,” ExactTarget, 2013

