

A GUIDE TO ONLINE CIRCULATION MARKETING

Hotsheets

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DIRECT MARKETING OR BRAND AWARENESS?

Like all marketing, online marketing has two objectives—awareness and revenues. There are lots of ways to measure awareness—eyeballs/impressions, site visits, pageviews, bounce rates, open rates, social media followers, and so on—but always keep an eye on revenues. For instance, if your website generates significant advertising revenue, then increasing your site traffic can directly contribute to revenue. But if it doesn't, then you have to focus on stimulating (and measuring) actual sales, such as subscriptions, single issues, donations or ticket sales to your events.

Evaluate your online marketing success based on profitability (investing \$X in order to generate revenues of \$Y), and if each such program is not too unprofitable (per unit sold), keep doing it—on the assumption that your initiatives are also helping to bring your magazine to the attention of new readers, developing stronger connections with existing readers, and yielding other intangible benefits that may pay off down the road.

EMAIL MARKETING

Sending out emails is so cheap that every marketer does it ... a lot. This means that everyone receiving your email promos is also receiving frequent emails from dozens or hundreds of other organizations, in addition to personal and work-related emails. Many email programs auto-filter incoming promotional emails into separate inbox folders (or spam-block them), so your recipients may rarely see them. Email promos generally have low open rates, and even lower response rates, so emails may complement your other promotions, but should not replace them (especially your most important promotions, such as subscription renewal notices). Although privacy legislation (both [PIPEDA](#) and [CASL](#)) is beyond the scope of this Hotsheet, you must inform yourself on their requirements.

E-renewal notices and e-bills can be effective ways of reminding subscribers to respond to renewal notices and bills that you've sent them by postal mail (either with an issue or separately).

Offering an email newsletter lets you encourage both existing and potential customers to provide you with their email address—and their permission to contact them fairly regularly—assuming you're ready to spend the time necessary to publish such a weekly/monthly newsletter. Sending the e-newsletter list an occasional email about upcoming events, gift-giving occasions, or fundraising drives may also be allowable, as long as you always offer them an opportunity to opt-out of such emails. And collecting email addresses has other benefits, as we'll see below.

You may want to publish separate e-newsletters and maintain separate e-lists for different purposes, in order to improve efficiency. Email marketing success is largely based on carefully

monitoring your subject lines, email copy and design, open rates, click-through rates and conversion rates. It's not merely a matter of deploying as many emails as you possibly can, to as many people as you can. That's spam.



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ONLINE ADVERTISING

Online ads also typically have very low click-through and conversion rates, but through careful experimentation you may find that some perform much better than others. Using Google AdWords, for instance, you can target prospective customers via Search Engine Marketing (SEM) on a pay-per-click (PPC) basis, using keyword lists and text-based ads, or to serve image ads via Google's "[Display Network](#)"—and the former will probably generate much higher response rates than the latter.

AdWords can also serve "remarketing" ads to your own recent website visitors – essentially reminding them of that product that they contemplated buying but never completed their purchase. You can even ask Google to serve your ad to other prospective customers who have search/browsing history like your own past website visitors, by using AdWords' "[similar audiences](#)" function, or you can upload your subscriber email list (or e-newsletter list) and ask AdWords to locate more people who have similar interests, via "[Customer Match](#)." Bear in mind that Google is not just its search engine—AdWords can run your ads on YouTube, Gmail and many other sites.

SOCIAL MEDIA: ESPECIALLY FACEBOOK

It may be even more important these days to have a well-managed Facebook page than to have a website. Yes, everyone has a few friends who aren't on Facebook, or who are only very occasional Facebook users, but really, for many people, Facebook and Twitter are the Internet; that's where many people first hear about breaking news, and social media is their "jumping off point" for any of the articles they read and videos they watch online.

But precisely because social media is so big (with so many users, and so many brands ["Pages"] competing for having their posts noticed), Facebook and Twitter are very selective in determining which of your posts should be seen by which of your followers—your Page may have 5,000 followers, but each of your posts might be seen by a mere 200-500 people. Facebook will decide how much exposure to give each your posts based on the type of content (e.g. video vs. webpage link, etc.), the frequency of posts made by your Page, each follower's past level of interaction with your Page, and so on.

One way to get around this is to include a video of a cute kitten in each of your Facebook posts ... or make each post "Share-worthy" somehow. Another way is to target subgroups of your Page's followers, by turning on "[Audience Optimization for Posts](#)" in your Page's Settings, and then determining which followers are probably most interested in that specific post, using a combination of interest areas and demographics. Perhaps notifications about your upcoming launch party should only be seen by people within 50 miles of your city. Perhaps your post about your article on pesticide-free bananas should have a "preferred audience" of people with a special interest in food topics, or just organic foods. Facebook knows an awful lot about each of your Page's followers, so take advantage of that ability to target your posts carefully.

You should develop a healthy fascination with your Page's "[Insights](#)" (in the menu near the top of your Page), to determine why some of your earlier posts reached 200 people yet others reached 2,000 people ... to find out which posts stimulated the most link clicks and Likes/Shares, and much more. Correlate that with the audience targets that you selected, and start learning how to boost your reach and engagement levels in your future posts.

You can also advertise on Facebook, but don't just click those convenient little "Boost Post" buttons and set your budget. Facebook is now the "mass market", and if almost all of your readers are aged 35 and up, you don't want to pay for ad impressions to reach people aged 18-30. You can also target people who follow your Page, and even their friends, and you can fine-tune even those groups with demographics and interest areas. You can also serve Facebook ads outside of Facebook itself, on Instagram and via Facebook's "[Audience Network](#)" delivering ads in



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many mobile apps and websites. Keep an eye on the "[relevance score](#)" that Facebook will determine for your ads, and adjust your audience targeting to achieve the highest score possible.

You can also upload your own customer list (or e-newsletter list) and targeting those people with Facebook ads. Do you want to reach the 70% of your e-newsletter names who never opened your last few e-newsletters? Upload your [e-newsletter list](#) and advertise to those individuals via a Facebook post, and maybe further refine the ad targeting to those of your subscribers who are likely to have a particular interest in healthy bananas. You can also ask Facebook to identify a whole whack of people who are [similar to](#) your existing subscribers, in terms of demographics, interest areas, and so on – whether or not they already follow your Page on Facebook. And you can "remarket" to your own recent website visitors, displaying ads to them both within Facebook and via the Audience Network.

TWEAK AND REFINE CAREFULLY

In all its forms, online marketing will only become successful by tweaking every aspect of your programs almost obsessively—subject lines, promotional copy and visuals, audience definitions, keywords, landing pages, order pages and so on. Right out of the gate, your results will be horrible. Read a lot, talk to your peers, ask for expert guidance (and maybe even campaign management), beta-test everything, track your results carefully, try new things regularly.

