

How To Grow Your Business

Practical advice on how to grow your small business from Businessware

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- Tips for starting your own email marketing campaign.

In this month's issue we cover permission marketing; the new way of marketing that has grown up alongside the internet. We have also included some tips on how you can get started with your own email marketing campaign.

Tips for starting your email marketing campaign

If you are not already using email marketing in your business you need to seriously consider it.

If you were to go back in time to before email. Imagine if you someone came to you and said that in a few years time there would be a way of communicating with potential customers that didn't cost you penny what would you say? If they were to tell you that you didn't need any printing, no stamps, no envelopes, no expensive full colour printed brochures and it could be delivered to your customers anywhere in the world, not in 24 or 12 hours but instantly, you would have snapped their arm off to get into it. What seemed a miracle a decade ago is now in your hands. It seems almost insane not to take full advantage of it.

1) Email is not a selling tool – it is a communication tool. This means you use it to send value-added information to people who have requested it about your products and services. You use it to keep them informed of changes in your business and products and to help them in whatever way you can. By establishing a relationship through email you build trust which eventually will result in many of the people you have built your relationship with becoming customers.

2) Capture email addresses – whether from your web-site, from a business meeting, from an exhibition or a seminar ensure you ask people for their email addresses and their permission to send them information. If you are capturing them from a web-site you need to offer them something they consider of value to them. Of course they are interested in what you have to offer otherwise they wouldn't be at your site in the first place. Your job is to make sure you offer enough incentive for them to sign up to what you have. A free report, newsletter, product sample, free trial etc are all

Permission Marketing

There is a sea change going on in the marketing arena that can be adopted by small businesses to massive effect.

Permission marketing, in a nutshell, means asking people who are interested in your products and services for their permission to start a relationship with them, build trust and hopefully resulting in them becoming customers.

The reason why permission marketing has experienced such a meteoric rise recently is that mass advertising and marketing campaigns are becoming less and less effective due to the sheer amount of it. The number of publications, radio stations and TV channels mean that there is so much of it that most people have learned to ignore it. The biggest single reason however is the rise of the internet. Businesses can now go beyond the traditional advertising campaign to reach potential customers.

Traditional marketing methods are based on interruption. They interrupt people's activities to sell to them. If you are watching *Desperate Housewives* you know that every 15 minutes or so they will interrupt you to show you advertisements. This has worked fine for over 80 years however there are simply too many interruptions for people today. Many businesses, including blue chip companies, are turning to permission marketing as a way of increasing the effectiveness of their marketing. They see traditional advertisements as less effective and yet more expensive.

Permission marketing works by a company asking their potential customers for permission to market to them. It actually works in the opposite way to traditional marketing; instead of you being forced to be interrupted by an advertisement you now have to grant the advertiser permission to speak to you. It is about building a relationship between the business and the potential customer. It builds a trust between them with the end result being that the potential customer becomes a valued customer.

The beauty of permission marketing is that it is open to smaller businesses who can compete on an almost level playing field as large companies. However to do this you need to change your marketing strategy from trying to generate the "immediate" sale. Your aim is to earn the permission of as many people as possible who are interested in what you have to offer.

Why would you do this? How can this possibly benefit you? Let us say you advertise in a publication. Your advertisement is aimed purely at off-the-page sales. The publication has 25,000 readers and you expect to achieve 50 sales from each issue. If you were to change that advertisement to one that was not focussed on direct sales to one that was focussed on starting a relationship where you may offer a brochure or a free report or a free sample then you can easily expect to receive 400-500 responses who, in exchange for receiving something for nothing, will give you their details and their permission to market to them. Provided the information is useful to them and you continue to keep in touch with more information that is helpful

great ways of getting people interested enough to give you their permission to communicate with them.

3) Use the email addresses you collect. You have gone to the expense of getting people to your site and convincing them to sign up, now you need to let them know how you can help them. Prepare several follow-up emails you will send to new sign-ups providing them with more information and more freebies if possible. You can also send them special offers, ask them why they haven't done business with you, send them case studies from existing customers and much more.

4) Be consistent – make sure the recipients of your emails know that the emails being received are from you. The From Name of your emails needs to be consistent, whether it's your own name or the name of your business. If email marketing is going to work for you then your potential customers have to open and read your email. With so much spam around if they see an email from a person they don't instantly recognise your email will be in their trash folder before you know it. Also be consistent with the regularity of your emails if at all possible. If your customers know you send out monthly newsletters try to send them out at roughly the same time of the month.

5) Personalise your emails – do not just put "Dear subscriber" on your emails and CC or BCC everyone in your email list. Make sure the person's name is included in the email – it will stand out and the chances are your email will receive a positive reaction as it lands in their inbox. If you have a small list this should be quite easy. If you have a large email list use an auto-responder system that can personalise your emails automatically and send them out en masse for you without you having to spend half your days clicking the Send button. Some links for auto-responder systems are included below.

6) Deliverability is key – unfortunately you have not just got to worry about whether your subscribers will open and read your emails. You have also got to worry whether their email providers will let you through the door. In their attempt to block out spam (unsolicited emails) many providers are filtering out genuine permission based emails. One step you can take is to avoid using all capitals or double exclamation marks in the subject or the body of your email. Avoid using words such as Free, Amazing, All New, Act Now, Opportunity or Order Now in your subject headers if at all possible. Also ask the recipient to add your email address to their address book.

to them you will build up a trust with those potential customers. The probability of them buying from you when trust is high is greatly increased. The chances are you will turn 20%-30% of those people into customers. That will give you in the region of 80-150 sales, potentially tripling your return from the advertisement. It may take a little longer to turn those into sales, it will take more effort in producing and delivering the information however the impact on sales and therefore profits could be massive.

You could do the same with your direct mail campaigns. By switching from trying to deliver direct sales you could concentrate on getting people to fill in a form and send it back with the promise of sending them free information or a free sample. Traditionally the return of sales from direct mail is 1%. If you focussed on getting people's details rather than making direct sales you can estimate 10% will respond. If 30% of those who respond become customers you have actually increased your sales from the mailing from 1% to 3% - again tripling sales.

Where permission marketing comes into its own however is on the internet. Using internet and email marketing around the permission marketing model you can dramatically increase your sales. This centres around your web-site and your follow-up email campaign.

Again if your web-site is geared towards immediate sales then look to change the general approach where you explain the benefits of what you have to offer and also offer them something for nothing in exchange for their information. If you can offer free trials, product samples, useful reports or a newsletter these are all ways of encouraging people to give you their permission. If your web-site is a shopping site then your approach must be slightly different however you can still make it prominent that they can get something-for-nothing if they sign up. If only 2% of visitors to your shopping site buy from you directly but you can get 15% of visitors to give their permission and you can sell to 30% of those people at some point in the future it doesn't take a genius to work out the benefits to you.

The key to internet permission marketing is email. When someone signs up you must ensure that they provide their email address. You can then send them your information by email without it costing you anything. You can then prepare an email campaign of 7 or 8 emails that you send over the next month to 6 weeks. These should be a mix of information and sales messages but they must all be useful enough for people to open them and read them and ultimately take action. Remember this is not spam; the people you are emailing have given you their permission and they can always let you know if they are no longer interested. After the initial campaign you can ensure you keep in touch with them at least once a month.

It is important to remember that when you embark on your internet permission campaign that you have prepared what you are going to provide and what you are going to say. You need to educate them about your products and services and show what you can offer. For example if you sell carpets you can provide some tips on how best to lay a carpet and what tools they can buy from you to make the job easier; if you sell cookware why not provide some recipes and some information on how your customers can use your products. If you are a plumber how can people spot a problem with their central heating before it turns into a disaster. If you are knowledgeable on a subject or a new product why not provide insightful tips that will really be of help to people.

Permission marketing is really all about trust. For small businesses, getting people to trust them enough to make immediate buying decisions (especially in Business-to-Business) can be extremely challenging. By offering your potential customers the opportunity to get an insight into what you do, what pre-sales value you are willing to provide and to trust you to deliver what you say you will, it can be an invaluable business tool.

Useful Links

Auto-responder systems for automated emailing

www.getresponse.com

www.intellicontact.com

www.awebber.com

www.emailaces.com

www.auto-responder.co.uk



www.business-ware.co.uk