Dogwood's Guide to Email Marketing

Dogwood has shared a lot about email marketing and we strongly believe in making it a part of your digital marketing strategy. Today we are bringing it all together for easy reference in Dogwood's Guide to Email Marketing.

This guide will cover the following:
1. Getting Started with Email Marketing
2. Email Service Provider Features that We Value
3. Growing Your Email Subscriber List
4. Best Practices for Growing Your Email Subscriber List
5. The Legal Guidelines for Email Marketing
6. Creating Content for Email Marketing

Getting Started with Email Marketing

The first step is to decide which email service provider (ESP) you want to use to send your emails. We are big fans of Mailchimp and Brian has been using it since 2008. Dogwood is now an agency partner. You may choose to use another platform for email marketing but we are recommending MailChimp and use it with all of our clients.

Email Service Provider Features that We Value at Dogwood:

Deliverability

This is a measure of how well the email you send actually lands in your subscribers' inbox as opposed to their spam folder or at worst, blocked completely by their internet service provider. Deliverability is calculated in many ways but primarily through looking at open rates, click rates, bounce rates, and spam complaint rates.

Automations and Autoresponders

Automations are emails that you can set up one time and set to be automatically based on multiple factors such as being added to a list or a birthday. We will discuss more on the types of automation you can use below.

Autoresponders are similar to automations but are triggered when a user performs a certain action on your site. Confirmation emails are an example of autoresponders.

Templates with Easy Building

We value templates for building emails and newsletters and especially those that are easy to use. Many ESPs offer a drag and drop email builder that allows you to quickly and easily put together professional emails.

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List Management

Keeping your subscribers organized is a key part of effective email marketing. List management helps you do exactly that. Being able to identify subscribers into different lists ensures you can send relevant, personalized, and targeted emails to the right people easily. Brian shared more details on using lists and tags (another step in organizing your subscriber list) in his blog 3 Life-Changing Email Marketing Tips.

Detailed Reporting

Make sure your ESP provides detailed reporting. Knowing what actions were taken by your subscribers after you hit send is crucial to making sure what you are doing is working. In addition to an open rate on your emails, make sure your ESP allows for Google Analytics integrations, geo-tracking, social media, and click mapping. This information allows you to get to know your subscribers and create the best calls to action which turn into more sales!

Storage Capacity

Make sure your email service provider is able to store your files with plenty of room. Mailchimp offers unlimited storage as long as the images and other files are under 10 MB each.

Bounce Management

There are two categories of emails that "bounce" back to you as a sender. "Hard bounces" are emails that absolutely cannot be delivered. This could be because the email address was input incorrectly or the recipient's email server has blocked delivery. When your email service provider detects a hard bounce the email address should be removed from your subscriber list.

The second category is called a "soft bounce." A soft bounce means that the email was not delivered... but could possibly be. Reasons for soft bounces could be that the email server is down for the recipient, the mailbox is full, or several other technical reasons on the recipient's end. Your ESP should recognize a soft bounce and take note. If several soft bounces occur over and over again, that address should be removed from your subscriber list.

Spam Design and Testing

Some email service providers provide spam testing to rate how likely your email is to go to spam. It runs your email through popular spam filters before sending it to detect anything that could flag your content as spam.

Send Time Optimization

This feature is part of Mailchimp and may not be available with all their plans and may not be an option with other email service providers but we find it of great value. Send time optimization allows you to send your email but it will be delivered at the optimal time for the subscriber to receive it. Once you hit send, Mailchimp will send your email within 24 hours based on data gathered from the subscribers' previous open rates.

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A/B Testing

This feature can be used to try out different factors to see which ones get the most opens. We've used this to test a person's name for instance versus the company's name. We'll send the email to a random group of people with it one way (group A), and the other random group another way (group B). After a set amount of time, the winner between the two groups will be sent to the rest of the group.

Growing Your Email Subscriber List

Once you have your email service provider ready it is time to grow your subscriber list. Don't become complacent in regard to growing your subscriber base. People change jobs which means they lose a contact, they unsubscribe, or they change email addresses. If you are not actively growing your list of subscribers, it will degrade over time.

Some Best Practices for Growing Your Email Subscriber List:

Make sure that your audience has an easy way to sign up for your emails on your website. While it is tempting to gather as much information on this form as possible. Limit it to 2-3 fields.

Hosting an event? Be sure to include a field for email when they register. Brian shared this tip and some other great details in his blog 3 Tips for Growing Your Email Marketing Database.

Create unique engaging content and encourage your current subscribers to email and share with others. Create a hyperlink "Share with a friend" so that they can easily forward the link for others to read and with your clear call to action at the bottom on how to subscribe, you can gain new subscribers.

Do you have an existing but older list already? Create an opt-in email giving these older emails the choice to sign back up or to decline. The key here is to give them the option but also promise them that if they do not respond you will remove them from the list. Be sure your wording is delicate and not a command but instead reads more of a genuine "hey-I'd love to connect with you but understand if you are not interested and I will respect your time."

Add an opt-in hyperlink to your email signatures. If they are already communicating with customers and potential customers, make it as easy as possible for someone to sign up.

Make a gated offer. A gated offer is the exchange of information. The user will give their email address in exchange for a discount code, downloadable pdf, or other files, or to sign up for a free webinar. If the content you are offering is of value to them, they will give their email address in exchange for it.

Blog and Guest Blog. We are huge proponents of blogging at Dogwood. Include a link on your blog posts asking your audience to subscribe to get the latest content. Additionally, work with other business owners to guest blog among each other and link to each other's sites. This widens your audience and can grow your email subscriber list.

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Be sure to link your sign-up landing page on your social media platforms and create engaging posts encouraging your audience to sign up via social also.

Don't neglect in-person email collection. If you have a brick-and-mortar store or office, be sure to give your customers the chance to sign up for your emails too. You may have to manually put in their information but nothing beats the face-to-face relationship you are building.

The Legal Guidelines for Email Marketing
Finally, make sure you get your emails legally. In many countries, it is illegal to send unsolicited emails. You must include some sort of unsubscribe option in your emails and it must work properly. Once someone unsubscribes to your email it must be removed within 10 days. You must also include a privacy policy or link to the privacy policy. The policy must convey what you intend to do with their information or more importantly what you will NOT be doing with their information. Email addresses are considered private information and must be protected.

The best way to ensure you are following legal guidelines for email marketing is to 1) create a double opt-in for email addresses. Once they have initially input their email address, the first email they get will be a "Thank you for subscribing. Please confirm your email address." with a link to confirm, a link to your privacy policy, and also a box to check that they understand and are aware of your privacy policy.

CAN-SPAM Act from the Federal Trade Commission

- The Federal Trade Commission has put several laws in place to protect consumers from spam emails. In addition to the above guidelines listed, here are more guidelines you should follow. To read all the details visit CAN-SPAM Act: A Compliance Guide for Businesses.
- Make sure your to and from fields are accurate. Make sure the email is actually coming from you.
- Do not write misleading subject lines. For example: Do not offer a 50% off coupon in your subject line only to find the deal is only 10% off in the email content.
- All commercial emails must include a postal address somewhere.
- There must be an obvious way to unsubscribe. Once a user unsubscribes you must remove them from all lists (this includes any lists that you have legally shared with others as outlined in your privacy policy)
- Do not harvest email addresses without consent. For example, do not collect business cards from a conference and automatically add them to your subscriber list. You must have permission.
- Do not send explicit material.

Most of the guidelines are common sense but when in doubt read the details from the FTC link above. Failure to comply with their laws can lead to hefty fines of upwards of $15,000 or more!

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Creating Content for Your Email Marketing

Now that you have set up your email service provider, begun building your subscriber list, and understand the laws and regulations, it is time to put your content together! Take a minute and think about the email marketing that you receive and why you find it relevant. Consider what emails you appreciate receiving from businesses and why you appreciate them. Finally, consider what you want to communicate to your subscribers through your email marketing campaign.

Many email marketing campaigns create the following templates and send them to each new subscriber: confirmation of sign up, welcome email, thank you emails, birthday emails, new product releases, weekly or monthly newsletters, new blog post alerts, and sale or discount announcements. What you send will be particular to your business. If you are an eCommerce site that offers sales, you should read our blog post Email Marketing Automations for ECommerce Emails. We outline many email automation content and why you should use them.

Consider your schedule and how often you would like to send emails to your subscribers. Too many and they may feel overwhelmed but too few and you may be forgotten. You must find a good balance between staying in contact, adding value, and staying relevant.

Use quality images in your emails. Either have some taken professionally or find quality stock photos to include. Remember humans are highly visual!

Once you are ready the only step left is to hit send!

Dogwood Can Help with Email Marketing for Your Business

We know that getting started with email marketing (or getting back into it if you have stepped away) can be intimidating and that as a busy business owner you may not have the time to devote to the steps above. Dogwood can help you set up your email marketing campaigns, create content, and schedule your email automations. Email marketing has an astounding 4200% return on investment (that means for every $1 spent you return $42!) With returns like that, there is no reason your business should not take advantage of this digital marketing strategy. Reach out to us today and let us help you make the most of your email marketing!

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