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Recently I was coerced into attending a three-day insurance marketing workshop. The guru giving the workshop claimed that he would reveal marketing (and namely Internet marketing) "secrets" specifically for the insurance industry. In his email promotions, he talked up one tool in particular, which he called "a silent money-printing-press" that would "skyrocket your retention, multiply your income," and so on. Hype at such a high decibel makes me recoil mentally, but I wanted, as my client requested of me, to keep an open mind.

The guru's obnoxious email promotions kept coming, even though I had already registered for his workshop. This was a bad sign. While the workshop was supposed to reveal an amazing marketing system, the guru's own system didn't even acknowledge that I was already a customer and therefore shouldn't be bothered with more sales letters. That's basic marketing - or basic common sense. And the letters themselves compounded my irritation. The guru would end each letter with his signature, a PS, and then a PPS. Then - to hell with the post scripts - he would continue the sales pitch, once even using the cheesy expression, "But wait, that's not all!" I found the tactic amusing at first: the familiar image came to mind of a toddler in public easing away from his parents, away from constraints, and then bolting toward freedom. But there was no parent to scoop up the guru and bring him back to reality - to say, "Did you think we wouldn't notice that you ended the letter 30 paragraphs ago? Did you really think such a tactic would work?"

Judging from the packed auditorium on the day of the workshop, however, he was doing something right. Still, I believe his marketing schemes succeeded in spite of his junk-mail language, rather than because of it. I looked around at the other people in attendance, most of whom were seasoned insurance agency owners or brokers who had tried everything to grow their businesses. They weren't marketing professionals, but they weren't suckers either. They had an inkling that the guru had something of value to offer, even if it was obscured in a smokescreen of hype and pointless deception (the worst of which I haven't described).

That brings me to autosequence messaging. That's the precious nugget that I extracted after sifting through fool's gold for three days. The guru's "secret," his "silent money-printing-press," is

essentially the autoresponder, which most Internet service providers offer at no cost. And I've delivered this amazing secret to you in merely four paragraphs.

At its most basic level, an autoresponder is simply an email that is automatically sent to the recipient after he or she fills out a form or sends an email requesting information. It's an easy way to provide customer service - and reduce the number of frivolous calls to your customer service staff. When you subscribe to most eNewsletters, for example, you receive a confirmation message via an autoresponder. No big deal. But if you add a few key features - such as turning the single response into a sequence of emails - the technology's potential becomes enormous. The autoresponder becomes an autosequence. You can make autosequence messaging work even harder by programming it - or by using a service provider such as AWeber (<http://www.aweber.com>)- to skyrocket your retention and multiply your income! Well, maybe not, but if the guru could fill an auditorium using the technology (and base a three-day curriculum on it), you can get some positive results.

I have two resources for you, which together will provide a greater quantity and quality of information on autosequence messaging than my three-day workshop did - aside from one thing about the guru that I should mention. In a way, he took the technology further than anybody else I've encountered, which may or may not be advisable depending on your content. He has developed a system of autosequence messages that subscribers continue to receive until a) they remove themselves from the list, or b) they become a customer - at which time they would begin to receive a different cycle designed for customer retention. So you could have thousands of prospective customers at different places in the autosequence cycle - thousands of leads being nurtured automatically for weeks, months, or even years.

When wouldn't this be advisable? While the guru has built an impressive autosequence system, he also showcases the two blunders that, I believe, can make such a system disastrous.

1) Using faulty technology or planning. Namely, his emails didn't stop or become customer-focused after I registered for his workshop (I believe he used an in-house programmer to create his system). His sales letters became unbearable and I removed myself from his list forever, which leads me to the second blunder.

2) Using unsuitable content. Even if you're hitting the right demographic, you have to choose a tone of voice that lends itself to repetition. Aggressive sales language is not a good example of this. See this article by Debbie Weil, an expert copywriter, for more on how to write autoresponder messages: http://www.clickz.com/em_mkt/b2b_em_mkt/article.php/841971

I promoted two resources. In addition to Weil's article on writing effective copy, here's your best in-depth resource for learning the technology: AWeber's autosequence tutorial, which you can access by clicking here <http://www.aweber.com> (I have no affiliation with them). After pulling up their web site, just type your name and email address below the sentence: "Test drive the AWeber follow up system now!" It's the best tutorial in the business. The seven lessons are geared to teach you AWeber's own technology, but you'll also learn all there is to know about the nuts and bolts of autosequence messaging along the way. The fact that other autoresponder service providers have copied some of AWeber's content word for word is an indication of the quality. You won't need to concentrate on keeping an "open mind" during this presentation.

Doug Pond is owner of SubjectLine Marketing & Design (<http://www.thesubjectline.com>), which helps businesses build on existing client relationships while developing new ones.

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