

# E-Mail Newsletter Marketing Essentials

By Lee Traupel

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If Gutenberg were alive today he would be in publishing heaven! Forget the printing press, the web has fast-forwarded self-publishing in ways that are evolving so rapidly it's becoming difficult to integrate technology and process to leverage the opportunities. Any company, regardless of their size and marketing resources should be publishing an opt-in e-mail newsletter - it's a very low cost way to build community with customers, keep suppliers/partners/other informed and generate new business.

How do you get started? You must decide up front if you have the marketing expertise to develop your "newsletter creative" in-house and how you want to manage the distribution of your newsletters. Many companies turn to agencies/marketing services firms to help them develop the actual newsletter creative and also outsource part of the process to ASP (Application Service Providers), who handle all facets of the list distribution, signup and ongoing management.

Content format can be critical to the effectiveness of your newsletter - we typically don't recommend HTML (text with images/graphics embedded) format unless our client's product or service is very consumer-focused Plain old text is not as glamorous as HTML but it's a lot more effective in most cases - people want information, not fancy eye candy that's appealing to marketing geeks - keep your message, simple, to the point and with customer success stories or references when/where you can to drive credibility.

It's relatively simple to use a Word processor with a mail merge program to integrate the addresses (depending on the volume) with your message and then send out via your ISP. But, doing it in house can be very time consuming - you have to deal with inbound requests for people who want to be added to your list, "unsubscribes" (people who want to be deleted) and integrate your web site into the process, so people can automatically sign up with a back end auto-responder (automatic message) that confirms their sign up.

Most companies utilize an Application Service Provider ("ASP") to outsource the list hosting, signup and unsubscribe management processes and web site integration - typical costs are under \$50. per month based upon your number of subscribers (on average up to 10-30K), frequency of your newsletter mailing (rule of thumb would be 2-4 times per month) and other specialized features, such as bounce back deletions (deleting any e-mails that have a "bad address") and making the HTML code available with a graphic to sign up people directly from your web site. Be forewarned, most list hosting providers tell you up front they reserve the right to delete your account if they catch

you spamming thousands of people whose e-mail addresses were not "opted in" (given to you with permission to market to them).

What do you want to look for in an ASP List Hosting Provider? You want great customer service, an online interface that enables you to easily manage the process, the ability to easily to cut and paste your text (newsletter copy), instant distribution of your newsletter and the ability to know at a glance how many subscribers you have on an ongoing basis and the number of new subscribers and unsubscribers.

There are lots of list hosting companies out there - I'd recommend including two on your short list. One of the oldest, most well established companies that has consistently won rave reviews for excellence in customer service is Sling Shot Media, LLC <http://www.listhost.net> - they've been hosting since 1998 (ancient in web time) and offer a wide range of consulting services related to all aspects of newsletter marketing. The other company to check out would be Microsoft's bCentral Services <http://www.bcentral.com> which offers list hosting as one of its services. I can't give them rave reviews for customer service, as they make you pay extra for anything more than e-mail support which can be a hassle at times. But, their list hosting interface is easy to use, works well most of the time and they are price competitive.

Finally, one of the biggest marketing challenges facing many small to medium sized companies is generating a newsletter subscriber list. I don't have sufficient space in this column to address this challenge - but, it's a classic go/no go situation; the longer you put it off the harder it becomes, so get started, the upside rewards are too significant to delay!

Lee Traupel has 20 plus years of business development and marketing experience - he is the founder of Intellective Communications, Inc. <http://www.intellective.com> , a marketing services and software company which provides strategic and tactical marketing services exclusively to small to medium sized companies. He can be reached at [Lee@intellective.com](mailto:Lee@intellective.com)

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