

Building Your Online Fan Club

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The Marketing Minute <http://www.yudkin.com/marksynd.htm>

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According to a Recording Industry of America survey, about 7 in 10 music fans do not become aware of the news that their favorite performer has released a new record. Substitute "new product" or "new service" in that statistic and you have the plight of most businesses. Whether you sell diet counseling or electric drills, collecting and nurturing enthusiasts requires little or no money online and pays off handsomely.

It's important to note that fans need not be paying customers. Admirers who will never directly pay you a dime may recommend you repeatedly to buyers, to the media, to industry heavyweights or to investors.

Here's the strategy in broadest terms. In every situation where you have the opportunity to make an impression on people interested in your area of expertise, you offer them the option of joining your e-mail list. Then you stay in touch with them regularly, reinforcing their impression of your competence and becoming trusted and familiar to them. At that point they'll practically mobilize themselves to act like fans, either buying from you themselves or talking you up to third parties who might never otherwise know of you.

And now here are some techniques that help channel casual, one-time contact into an enduring fan relationship.

* Your e-mail signature. Exchanging e-mail just once about business can turn someone into a subscriber when you append a few lines tempting someone to add themselves to your list. For instance: "For a free weekly dose of motivation to stay on your diet, send any e-mail message to signup@easydiets.com." Enable the automatic signature feature in your e-mail software so that this gets tacked on the end without you having to remember it.

* Your business cards. If you can squeeze it on -- there's almost always room on the back -- add a suggestion on your business card similar to the signup@easydiets.com one. That way, people who meet you at a networking event will see your prompt to subscribe when they get home and look through their stack of cards.

* Your voice-mail message. Image consultant Mary Lou Andre of Organization by Design

(<http://www.dressingwell.com>) does this especially well. If you call her office after hours you hear this recording, in part: "While on our site, we hope you'll sign up to receive our Dressing Well Tip of the Week, which is delivered free of charge each Monday to your electronic mailbox. If you leave your e-mail address on our voice-mail system, we'll be happy to sign you up directly."

* Your brochures or flyers. If you speak, as I do, or man a booth at trade shows, hand out something giving attendees a reason for them to get onto your list. "For free solutions to common drilling problems five days a week, sign up for The Daily Drill at <http://www.thedailydrill.com> ." My brochure includes the contents of two sample Marketing Minute (<http://www.yudkin.com/markmin.htm>) texts along with instructions for subscribing.

* An invitation at your Web site. Too many sites ask people to type in their e-mail address without a description of the contents of the subscription and its benefits, not to mention privacy reassurances. Those extra elements make a big difference in turning first-time visitors to your Web site into quality registrants.

* Your signature in online forums or discussion lists. For instance, a Web designer includes an invitation for you to enter her sphere of influence when she posts to discussion lists:

Martha Retallick
Web Design That Works - Lrpdesigns
Unbiased Internet book reviews
- delivered to you!
FREE subscriptions at:
<http://www.Lrpdesigns.com/subscribe.html>

Once you collect a solid core of followers, maintain their favor by providing them regularly with useful information. In 2000, I tapped the power of my fan club by telling subscribers to my weekly newsletter, The Marketing Minute, that my new book, Internet Marketing for Less than \$500/Year, had just been posted on amazon.com, with the rock-bottom rank of 1,559,153. About 30 hours after I pressed the "send" button to my fans, I checked the same book page and my new book had shot up to 6,000-something.

Imagine hundreds of people marching off to their local hardware stores to ask for your drills -- because you had laid the groundwork for that effect among your e-mail brood!

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Marcia Yudkin marcia@yudkin.com is the author of Internet Marketing for Less than \$500/Year, Six Steps to Free Publicity and eight other books. Based in Boston, she provides business owners around the world with creative publicity strategies and performs marketing makeovers of Web sites and print materials. You can read more articles by her or subscribe to her free Marketing Minute newsletter at <http://www.yudkin.com/marketing.htm> .

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