

# Setting up Forms and newsletters

By Richard Igoe

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In today's competitive world of internet marketing, it is essential to be able to communicate with your prospects. Any visitor that has found your website is probably already interested in your product or service, so to convince them to buy you need to get their email addresses on your newsletter.

This is a simple 2-step process. 1) Set up a form to capture your visitors email addresses. 2) Set up a system to distribute your newsletter.

## SETTING UP A FORM

If you don't you will be losing 70% of your potential customers. You need to be able to remind them to come back to your site and to inform them of special offers or new products or services.

You should place your form strategically on your home page where it will be noticed. It does not have to be large. A simple box on the side of the page will do fine.

Something I learnt from Mark Joyner (ForeverWeb and ROIBOT) is that if you include the word "BECAUSE" your newsletter subscription will skyrocket. Give your visitors a reason to subscribe. You could offer them free information, access to a members area, or something that will be of real value to them. You can get some ideas from our "free" page on our website.

Remember, don't ask for too many details or you will scare your prospects away. However you can easily ask them for

their name and email address. You should also clearly state your privacy policy - let your visitors know that you are not going to distribute their addresses to third parties.

If you are paying for website hosting you almost certainly have a cgi-bin which will allow you to set up a form. Some free website hosts however do not give you a cgi bin because of security issues.

If cgi scripts are beyond you at the moment, you can get a free form at Bravenet.com. With this option you don't need to know how to upload the scripts. All you will have to do is copy and paste some HTML code onto your webpage. Bravenet hosts your form and sends you a notification whenever someone submits it.

For those who don't know, a form works like this. You upload a form script to the "cgi-bin" on your website server (where you host your site). You then put some HTML code on your webpage. When someone fills in the form and clicks on the "Submit" or "Send" button, the information is sent to the "cgi bin" on your website server. The script you have put on your server (form handler) "handles" this information and sends you the results of the form. It may take you a few hours to get it to work properly, but believe me, if you are getting website traffic and don't yet have a form, you are certainly losing sales.

A form will also allow you to redirect the visitor to a thank-you page. Take advantage of this and make sure you redirect them to your special offer page.

## YOUR NEWSLETTER

Once your form is set up you can get it to send any email addresses either to you or to a newsletter server. If the cgi script sends YOU the form details you will have to manually copy and paste the details into a mailing list.

However you can automate this by sending the details to a newsletter server where visitors can subscribe and unsubscribe automatically. Automation of your newsletter management will save you time and let you concentrate on promotion and marketing.

There are a number of sites on the web which will let you start off your own mailing list such as Yahoo, eGroups, and Topica. However you will also have to display their ads on your newsletter and sometimes there are delays in sending out your newsletter because of the number of free users. The above services are largely used for discussion groups so always have heavy traffic.

If you want more control over your newsletter, you can get some excellent newsletter scripts that you have complete control of. This gives your mailing list a bit more class, and you can be more certain that your newsletter is reaching your subscribers on time. You can send your newsletters out from the admin login via the web.

If you need an even easier solution to handle your newsletter you can go one step further and get ROIBOT newsletter server. This is a complete solution that can personalise your newsletter, allow you to schedule it to go out to your mailing lists even when you are away, and the cost is minimal. You can also have an unlimited number of lists of any size.

You can get the HTML code needed for a form and links to the scripts mentioned above from the following pages on our website - <http://www.thewebseye.com/newsletter-promotion.htm> and - <http://www.thewebseye.com/setting-up-a-form.htm>

The next step is to publish your newsletter. You need to keep track of what you have written and when you published it.

You also need to format it to between 55 or 65 characters a line BECAUSE:

- a) it is easier to read short lines
- b) many people set their email programs to read only 65 characters so if you wrote your newsletter with 80 characters, the lines would appear broken.

There is an excellent free application called eZine Assistant that will do all this for you. Ezine assistant can be downloaded free from our downloads gateway - <http://www.thewebseye.com/downloads.htm>

Now you are ready to roll. Simply cut and paste your newsletter from your eZine Assistant or other text editor into your newsletter program and send it out to your mailing list.

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