

No Web Site Required: An Easy, Profitable E-mail Marketing Tactic for Offline Businesses

By Susan Carter

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We print it on our business cards and stationery.
We give it out to (almost) anyone who asks for it.
We conduct research and gather valuable information with it.
We rely on it for communication with associates, friends and family.

"It" is e-mail. And there's no denying that e-mail is fast becoming as common of a communication tool as telephones and fax machines. Regardless of whether or not you have a Web site, if you are NOT using e-mail marketing for your products and services, you are ignoring a very low cost (and often no cost!) marketing tactic with high-return (and profit) potential. Why not squeeze every ounce of communicative powers e-mail has when dealing with clients and customers?

How?

Begin by turning time-intensive phone calls into 60-second lead generators that provide IMMEDIATE customer service.

Use this easy four-step process:

1. Develop a list of Frequently Asked Questions

Every business receives telephone calls from customers/clients or potential customers/clients asking for the same information over and over again. Retailers get questions like "Where is the business located?"; "What are your store hours?"; "Do you sell such-n-such brand name?"; "What is your return policy", etc. Service businesses field calls asking for a description of services, pricing, and credentials or references. Make a list of the calls your business gets most often and use this list to document these frequently asked questions - along with the answers.

2. Add an opening and closing paragraph to each document.

For each response: 1) add an opening paragraph that specifically thanks the customer/client for requesting the information, 2) provide the information, and 3) add a closing paragraph that, again, thanks them for requesting the information. Sign off with a specific contact name and phone number

with an invitation to contact you directly for further assistance, to place an order, set up a meeting, or whatever else might be a "next step" to continue the communication. If you have a Web site, be sure to list it here and invite readers to visit it to find out more about the company, products, services, you, etc.

3. Develop a follow-up e-mail.

Just as you would initiate a follow-up phone call with a prospect, so should you prepare a follow up e-mail. Prepare a message to be sent a day or two (or longer depending on the information requested) after the first one. This e-mail should ask recipients if they received the requested information and if there are further questions you can answer. This would also be an appropriate time to announce a current special or sale, offer a limited-time-only discount, or introduce a referral program.

4. Create a computer file containing the questions and answers.

Set up an accessible folder on your computer that contains as many Q & A documents and follow up e-mails that make sense for your business. Some of the information may be best combined into one document, like store location and business hours. Other documents will require separate files. The objective is to be able to easily access these response files so you can quickly send them to people asking for the information.

Once you have these documents ready for use, USE THEM! The next time you get a phone call asking for information you have created in your Q&A file, you can say, "I'd be delighted to give you that information. Do you have e-mail? I can send it to you right away!"

Once you have the e-mail address, simply access your Q&A folder, cut and paste the information from the appropriate document file into the e-mail message and SEND! And don't forget to save the e-mail address for future follow-up.

When using this technique, keep these cautions in mind:

1. ALWAYS give recipients an opportunity to be taken off your e-mail list.

While customers and clients may be willing to receive the initial requested information from you, don't assume that they now "belong" to you. Make sure you include a message at the bottom of each e-mail you send stating how they can request to be taken off the list of future e-mails. Say something like, "Occasionally, we like to send our e-mail subscribers special discounts and send notifications of upcoming sales events. If you do NOT want to receive these notices from us, you can request to be removed from our e-mail list by enter instructions here." And, when recipients request to be taken off your list, take them off. Don't send another e-mail explaining why they should stay on!

2. YOU perform the initial action.

Make sure that the work to get the information is done by you, not your prospective clients/customers. For instance, you may have a Web site from which they can access the information. Don't simply refer them to the Web site. That would mean they'd have to type in your site address, find the page where the information is located and then request it. Likewise, if, like me, you use autoresponders to disseminate information, don't just give them the e-mail address of the autoresponder. If they have already initiated a phone call, they've done their part. This is still a customer service action and you need to be the one doing the work. All they should have to do is open their e-mail. Besides - asking for (and getting) that e-mail address is critical to

building your follow-up list.

3. Make an offer **ONLY** when you have an offer.

Refrain from bombarding your new e-mail list members with offer after offer after offer. That's just downright spamming them and before long you'll see the list dwindle.

Using this e-mail technique will:

- **INCREASE** your responsiveness to your clients and customers. You've just given them an **IMMEDIATE** response to their request.
- **DECREASE** the time it takes you or an employee to serve your clients and customers. You give personal and prompt service without taking up too much time on one customer.
- **BUILD** a prospect and client list for future follow up and **SALES!** As your e-mail list grows you will be able to send new product/service announcements, online coupons, and open house invitations, or use it to take surveys, and conduct customer preference profiles, research, start an e-zine, etc.

Some businesses are completely changing the way they get information into their customers' hands by using this e-mail method. I've worked with clients to expand this technique to include the capability to send complete company brochures and catalogs. It's also a great way to build a list **BEFORE** developing your e-zine.

How you use e-mail to streamline your business is up to you. You can keep it simple or you can turn the technique into a sophisticated (low cost) automated customer service system!

Take a few minutes to determine how e-mail can become an economical way for your business to increase customer service. They could be the best few minutes you've spent today to improve communication -- and profits -- tomorrow!

Susan Carter helps business owners "do more with less" to operate and market their small and growing businesses. She is the author of *How To Make Your Business Run Without You*, and *SPLASH Marketing for Overworked Small Business Owners*. Carter offers **FREE** book chapters, and distributes free business-building advice in her twice-monthly ezine, *SuccessExpress Press*, available at <http://www.successideas.com>

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