

An eBook by

 **Help Scout**

 **AWeber**
COMMUNICATIONS



Acquiring Customers with Email

How to Turn Your Email Newsletter
into a Conversion Machine

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1

Why Email Marketing Is Better Than Social Media Marketing

In building a “minimum viable audience” online, an important question that you need to consider is what to do with the traffic you receive.

While email is a comparatively old, un-sexy technology compared to social media, the rallying cries of “Email is dead!” are simply inaccurate and undoubtedly hurting the bottom line of those businesses who listen.

Email marketing provides the most direct line of communication for turning leads into sales, which is why the savviest entrepreneurs have no intention of giving it up any time soon.

The truth is that you don’t even need to be on social media to make use of it.

Social networks thrive on the sharing of good content, and your only job is to give people something to share.

When they get to your site, your job is to continue communicating with them, and for that, email is the superior choice, avoiding just another update in an overcrowded Twitter stream.

Below, we'll go over the truth of how these channels perform so that you'll be able to get a clear picture as to why email isn't dead, and won't be dying anytime soon.

Breaking Down the Data

In order to convince you that email should be your #1 when it comes to communicating with customers, it's time to bring out the statistics and data to examine how and why email use lends itself to better engagement.

In the sections below we'll discuss just how much more effective email marketing is than social media marketing, with a particular focus on these three points:

1. Email is more popular than social media.
2. People guard their email accounts, so engagement is much higher.
3. You're competing with "fun" on social networks.

Ready to find out why these matter?

1 Email is More Popular than Social Media

According to a recent [study](#) by Ipsos, nearly 85 percent of people who use the web will use email, compared to only 62 percent who use social networking sites.

The key difference to note here is that all social networking sites were included in that 62 percent, which means that each individual site has far less of an audience than you think.

Email is universal, widely used, and still the de facto place where business is conducted online.

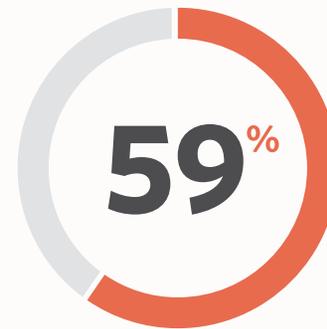
Worse yet, by using multiple social networks (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest), you're spreading your audience across multiple platforms. Comparatively, a powerful email list can be a singular distribution channel for content and updates.

If you're not sold yet on the power of email marketing, wait until you see the statistics below.

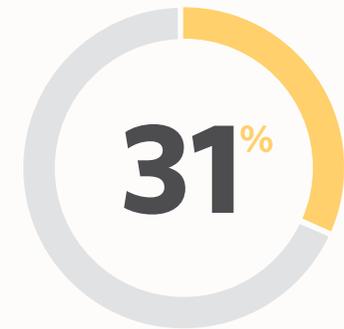
2 Engagement is Much Higher via Email

As an AWeber user, I'm regularly checking my open and click-through rates on recent broadcasts (it's just as addicting as checking Google Analytics!).

After compiling an average of some data from my newsletter, it was apparent that reader engagement via email was incredibly strong.



Open Rate



Click-Through Rate

Better still, since we began heavily focusing on email marketing at [Help Scout](#), we've regularly seen open rates of greater than 21 percent.

To put these numbers into context: a myriad of data compiled on Twitter [shows](#) that the average click-through rate rarely tops 1.64 percent. Without paying for promotion, the average Facebook post is [even worse](#). This is compared to email open rates, [which hover around ~20%](#) for many industries and can go up to as high as 40, 50, and 60 percent (and beyond!).

(Paying to reach the fans you already earned? We'll pass.)

According to [data](#) compiled by [Litmus](#), an email marketing analytics company, email regularly offers better value per dollar spent than even search and paid ads:



Email has higher conversion rates per session than search and social combined:

EMAIL: 4.16%

SEARCH: 2.64%

SOCIAL: 0.48%

It's easy to see that an engaging newsletter is a win-win. You get to send out valuable content to current customers and prospects who have an interest in your industry; in return, you're able to maximize one of the most powerful, personal marketing channels available on the cluttered mess that is the internet.

Perhaps best of all, however, is that you don't have to compete with a myriad of distractions that are present on social networks. I'll outline a few of these problems in the section below.

3 **Email is Made for Business**

An explanation that many miss when evaluating why social media updates, ads, and even promoted posts are so ignored is the fact that you are competing with fun on social media.

When the average user logs into Facebook, they want to see new pictures from last Friday night (so they can un-tag any unsightly evidence), updates from family members who are out of state, and witty status updates from their friends.

Thus, not only does email trump social media in both quantity (more users)

and quality (better engagement), it also has another factor going for it—it's a platform that was made for business.

Social media streams are filled to the brim with items users don't mind being seen publicly.

Email as a communication channel is personal.

As consumers, we are therefore naturally more receptive to things in our inbox—which most of us tend to guard like a mother bear guards her cubs—because they are filled with things we elect to see with some privacy.

This more intimate medium of communication lends itself to more honest decisions; that's an important reason why people will always be “warmer” to being sold on their interests via email, and just another reason why email will always beat social media marketing.

2

Simple Tweaks to Convert One-Time Visitors into Subscribers

We've established that email marketing is most certainly not dead, but one of the most popular questions posed by startups is how to increase the size of their email list, specifically through their company blog.

While content marketing has proven itself to be the best strategy for bootstrapped startups, the problem is that most company blogs are poorly designed for conversions, focusing on featuring useless items like social media banners and category links.

You won't have to fall into that camp though, because today we're going to go over how to take your startup's blog and refine it into a conversion building machine—and the best part is that simplicity is the foundational element, so you

won't have to worry about coding up a ton of random features.

When it comes to must-use tactics, there are two main elements that you must structure correctly to fine-tune your company blog's conversion potential:

1. Place opt-in forms where they count
2. Assemble "hub" pages with your best content

Interested in hearing more?

Great, let's continue on to look what simple tweaks can be made to help maximize the potential of new email signups through your company blog.

Identify the Best Locations for Opt-in Forms

Many company blogs don't convert well simply because they don't have opt-in forms placed in popular, easy-to-use locations.

Most business' blogs are far too conservative in where they place their opt-in forms—worse yet, some don't have them at all!

To strike a balance that promotes harmony between the user experience and your business blog's goals, place opt-in forms in the four high-converting locations detailed below.

1 Feature Box or Pop-up Box

The denouncement of pop-ups has become an [availability cascade](#); people love to point out why they “won't work” despite the fact that the [data shows](#) most people aren't really (all that) averse to pop-ups.

Both the [AWeber blog](#) and the Help Scout blog run pop-ups, and we've *never* had someone complain that it was intrusive or annoying. As a matter of fact, a large portion of Help Scout's newsletter subscriptions are generated by that pop-up!

The point is, they work. If you are still apprehensive about using one, consider another amazing alternative: **the feature box**.

First proposed and popularized by [Derek Halpern of Social Triggers](#), a feature box is a large, well, box that sits above your company blog's content, presenting a snapshot of what the blog is about and why people will benefit if they subscribe via email. To see an example in action, check our personal example on the Help Scout blog:

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Help Scout website. The navigation items are: Help Scout (with logo), Features, Pricing, Resources, Blog, Free 15-Day Trial, and Login. Below the navigation is a light blue feature box with the following content:

Data-driven Insights about Customer Loyalty & Building a Company People Love

Join over 30,000 subscribers and receive a new article every week.

Email address [Subscribe](#)

No sales pitch, unsubscribe any time!

NOVEMBER 6, 2013

A Scientific Take on Viral Marketing (with 7 Classic Examples)

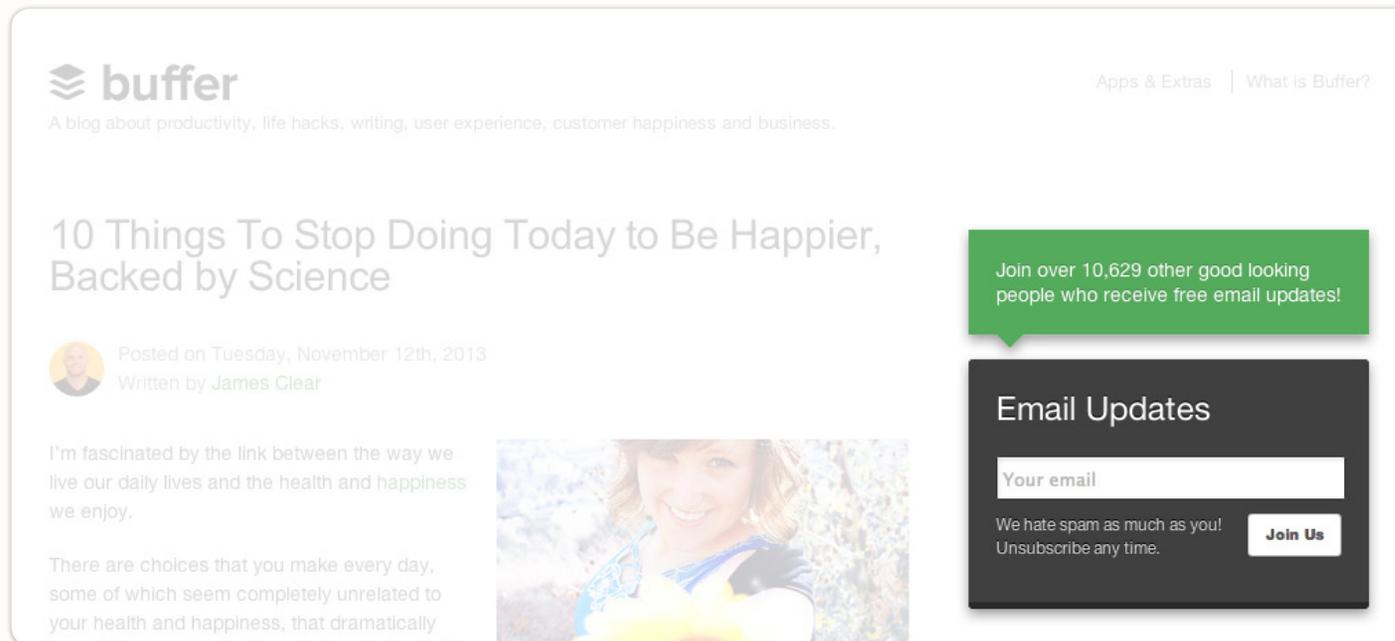
Latest eBook
10 Stories of Unforgettable Customer Service

The feature box works extremely well for the following reasons:

- **It describes what your site is about.** A good feature box provides a 10-second pitch of what your site is about. This means visitors won't have to review your website's navigation or even your content to decide if your blog is right for them.
- **It's eye-catching without being annoying.** If you're not a fan of pop-ups, rejoice: since the feature box is front and center when your site loads, it will grab a reader's attention without impeding their ability to read.
- **You can pitch the benefits of your newsletter.** Few other places on your blog will give you the ability to explain why your site is worth signing up for.

2 Top of the Sidebar

This is the classic location, and for good reason—it works. People expect to see an email opt-in on top of the sidebar.



A great example of the sidebar sign-up form from the [Buffer](#) blog

In similar fashion to when sites place their navigation in strange locations, users are confused when they don't see an opt-in form in this space.

You have lots of options to test here: including a freebie, adding social proof to your opt-in form, creating a “long” form as found on places like [QuickSprout](#), or keeping things relatively minimal, as we do on the [Help Scout blog](#).

No matter what you test or how aggressive you decide to be, make sure you have a form in this location. Readers expect it, and when it isn't there, it can be frustrating for them to try to find it.

3 Bottom of Article (Below the Footer)

If someone reads through one of your 800+ word blog posts, it's safe to assume that they were pretty engaged with the content and likely enjoyed it.

The ending of an article provides a classic example of the “What's next?” phenomenon experienced by web users. The time invested in that activity has ended, leaving users without a clear cue on what they should do next.

Post-footer signup forms should let readers know that if they enjoyed what they just read, they can join the newsletter to get notified of future posts. Whether you keep it super simple...

If you enjoyed this article, get email updates (it's free).

Email Address:

JOIN!

...or go for a fancier approach, make sure this form highlights that they can expect more great content to come by signing up for free email updates.

4 **Dedicated Newsletter or Resource Page**

An entire web page devoted to this endeavor may seem like overkill, but trust us on this one—the Help Scout [resource page](#) is responsible for a huge majority of our new email leads!

If you don't currently have any downloadable guides to offer (more on that later), it's best to stick with a traditional newsletter page [like this one](#). A page like this offers an opportunity to outline the benefits of joining your newsletter, letting you reach current blog readers who need that little extra nudge to sign up.

AWeber has a fantastic example of this copy in its [7 reasons to subscribe page](#), which is a great place to link to on guest posts and off-site features. In other words, an AWeber guest blogger could link directly to this page in their byline, as it will convert far better than just shuffling someone over to the blog homepage.

If you *do* have some resources cooked up, make them accessible by email (via an [auto responder](#)) so they can be delivered safely to a new signup.

Create 'Hub' Pages

This is the step almost *everybody* seems to miss, so pay attention!

As you produce more content, your older stuff is likely to get pushed back further and further into the abyss (and let's be honest, it's rare for people to dig 5+ pages back into your archives).

To highlight your *best* content, rank well in search engines on the topics that *matter most* to your business, and generate **qualified email leads**, you need to create hub pages.

Before getting into hub pages' structure, let's take a quick look at a few examples of what finished pages look like:

- [Moz's "Learn SEO" page](#)
- [Copyblogger's "Content Marketing 101" page](#)
- [Help Scout's "Providing Good Service" page](#)

You can create your own hub pages by following the three simple guidelines below:

1 **Address an important topic in your industry.**

The first requirement of a resource page is that it needs to address a cornerstone topic that is regularly relevant to your industry.

[Copyblogger](#) does these pages very well. Let's take a look at one of their examples:

The screenshot shows the Copyblogger website with a dark navigation bar at the top containing the site name and links for ARTICLES, EBOOKS, SEMINARS, WEBINARS, FORUMS, and LOGIN. The main content area features a large red banner with the title 'Landing Pages' and the subtitle 'Turn Traffic Into Money'. A target graphic is centered behind the text. To the left of the banner is a social media sidebar with buttons for Tweet (563), Like (243), and +1 (125). Below the banner, a red arrow points to the heading 'What is a Landing Page?'. The text below explains that a landing page is designed to prompt a specific action, using the analogy of a golf course's putting green.

copyblogger

ARTICLES EBOOKS SEMINARS WEBINARS FORUMS LOGIN

563
Tweet
243
Like
125
+1

Landing Pages

Turn Traffic Into Money

What is a Landing Page?

A landing page is any page on a website where traffic is sent specifically to prompt a certain action or result. Think of a golf course... a landing page is the putting green that you drive the ball (prospect) to.

Because Copyblogger is all about online marketing, having a hub page dedicated to landing pages—an important subject in the online marketing community—is a very smart thing to do.

It gives readers a starting point if they are specifically interested in the topic

of landing pages, and it lets a passerby reader know that Copyblogger talks regularly about this subject. This hub page also allows the Copyblogger editorial team to recycle and breathe new life into their previously published content on landing pages.

Speaking of which, these pages are perfect for highlighting your blog's "greatest hits." Next we will go over how to do just that.

2 Link to 5-10 pieces of your best content (on that subject).

Categories pages are an inefficient way for showcasing your greatest content, since they put things in chronological order rather than highlighting the must-reads of your blog.

Hub pages, however, will be prominently featured on your site, visited often by people who want more on the topic, and give you the ability to place the spotlight on your most exceptional articles.

On our pages, we call out the most pertinent articles and include a quick description as to what the article is about:

CUSTOMER SERVICE



The 15 Customer Service Skills that Every Employee Needs

Great service cannot be achieved if your team is unable to interact with customers. Read about the customer service skills that really matter.



How to Improve Online Customer Service (3 Essential Tactics)

Providing great service online is *critical*. Alleviate some of customers' woes by ensuring your online support follows three simple rules.



5 Warning Signs that Your Customer Service SUCKS!

The simple truth about customer service is that part of your responsibility is to just avoid screwing anything up! What mistakes should you be looking for?

This allows interested readers to really zero in on the best content on your site about a topic that they enjoy (a win for both of you).

But wait a minute ... what does this have to do with building your email newsletter? Guideline #3 below will walk you through this linkage.

3 Include an opt-in box for continual updates.

Now that you've established the important topic on your site that this hub page will address, showcased your best pieces of content on that same topic, and piqued your readers' interest, it's time to leverage the opportunity to build your email list.

The final item on your hub page should be an email opt-in form that lets readers know how to get updated on this kind of content in the future—for free.

Get Data-Driven Support Tips in Your Inbox



Want even more insight on providing an amazing customer experience?

Sign up for the Help Scout newsletter, which is packed with (weekly) tips on 'WOWing' customers, providing outstanding support, and using data-driven insights to increase customer loyalty.

As a special bonus, you'll also grab our free eBook: [75 Customer Service Facts, Quotes, and Statistics](#)

Email Address

AN ADDED BONUS:

These pages often rank well in search engines since you can aggressively link to them from guest posts and other features because they serve as a content hub on a popular topic within your industry.

Copyblogger ranks on the first page of Google for searches like “content marketing,” “internet marketing,” “copywriting,” and, yes, “landing pages”—all from using this exact style of resource page.

Your business may be targeting eCommerce terms or other industry-specific searches. If so, make sure you take advantage of the opportunity that hub pages provide to help you build your email list!

Increase Email Leads with Content & Features

We've discussed the power of email and the benefits of an easy-to-navigate blog. Now let's move on to content.

Though content marketing should be the backbone of any bootstrapped marketing strategy, many companies find themselves in the “content creation rat race,” as Derek Halpern calls it.

Drive-by traffic can come in swarms from all over the web, but it isn't sustainable if no effort is made to convert one-off visitors over to email.

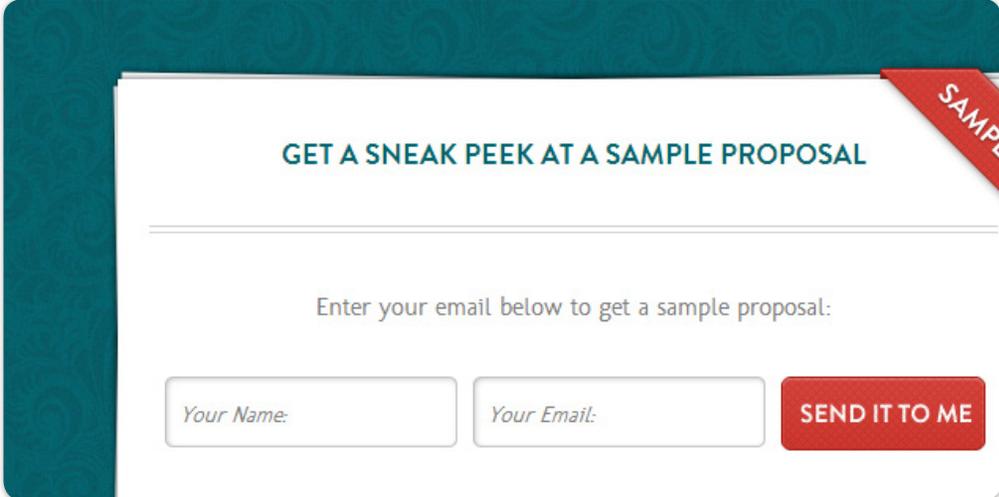
That's why in this chapter, we will highlight some key ways marketers and entrepreneurs can revamp their strategy content and off-site features. Instead of a small bump in Google Analytics that quickly dissipates, you'll be ready to get people on an email list to extend the communication.

Even if you don't have a content marketing strategy in place, this chapter will position you to be more prepared than 90 percent of startups out there ... so get ready to take some notes!

1 Integrate Email into Your Offering

One of the smarter ways to gather email leads online is to simply integrate email into your product's usage. The most basic technique here is requiring an email to sign up (which most companies do), but this is also an opportunity to get creative.

Ruben Gamez, founder of [Bidsketch](#) proposal software, integrates email into his product by requiring your email address to see a sample copy of an assembled proposal.



GET A SNEAK PEEK AT A SAMPLE PROPOSAL

Enter your email below to get a sample proposal:

Your Name:

Your Email:

SEND IT TO ME

This results in qualified leads signing up via email, thereby capturing an audience that has already shown interest in the product's capabilities.

The important thing to keep in mind here: be straightforward with your potential signups. This means being completely honest and transparent about what handing over their email means for them.

If you plan to include them in your newsletter after the signup, notify them. Many people will not object to this, but if you try to sneak them into an email campaign when all they wanted was to sign up, [you'll create a lot of discontent](#) (not to mention kill your credibility).

2 Build Landing Pages ... and Then Build Some More

Email leads are most effectively captured through landing pages. Since landing pages focus on a single outcome, they are fantastic for conversion rates in general, and this also applies to acquiring more email addresses—so don't get skimpy on creating them!

Create a landing page for each downloadable resource, for each guest post

(more on these later), to explain why your newsletter is worth signing up for, etc.

If the desired outcome of any webpage is an email signup, the structure of the content should be styled as a landing page; in other words, no sidebars, no footer, a subdued header, and plenty of single-column copy that dives right in to what the page is about.

If you need more advice on creating landing pages that work, check out the advice featured on [Unbounce](#).

3 Create Free Downloads

Downloadable resources can be an **incredible** source of new email leads. They also provide prospects with useful information that helps them get more use out of your product—so they're a win all-around.

The reason to put them behind an email opt-in (besides the obvious benefit of growing your list) is to *qualify* the people signing up; only the most interested customers will bother with an email form to access the content that suits their needs.

These resources can come in a variety of formats, for example:

- A video series, like our friends [at Wistia offer](#)
- Downloadable eBooks
- An archive of content like [the Scribe Library](#)
- An audio download
- A free template

Founders and marketers always ask what these guides should be about. The best answer we can give you is to create resources based on your [customer personas](#) and your [“affinity” interests](#).

4 Promote Your Resources Far and Wide

Resource-style content such as white papers, eBooks, and infographics is made for promotion. While blog posts and traditional articles are a great way to reach out to people (“Hey, thought you might like this recent piece we did on...”), you can get a lot more mileage out of a broad set of evergreen resources.

One way to promote this content is to take an already existing resource and

transfer it to a new medium. Slideshows are pretty much the perfect platform for this, because they mostly rely on a redesign and don't suffer from Google's duplicate content penalty.

For example, we took our "[75 Customer Service Facts, Quotes & Statistics](#)" eBook and created a set of slides for use on SlideShare.

Notice that the call to action at the end of the presentation leads to our resource page, where visitors can download the eBook in exchange for their email address. This process is effective because it lets you work with content you have already created and turn it into something that generates leads on an entirely different platform.

Additionally, there's always the old-fashioned way to promote your resources: reach out to fellow entrepreneurs, bloggers, or even journalists and shoot them a personal email with your latest resource attached (hint: don't make them opt-in!).

You provide them something for free, which starts the process of reciprocity, and, in turn, they may write about your latest creation and drive new visitors to your site.

Remember to always respect people's time and inboxes.

5 Guest Post with a Purpose

Guest posting is always benefited by a laser focus on generating new email signups.

You've heard how great companies like Buffer have [benefitted from guest posting](#) (especially in the early days), but what many entrepreneurs and marketers don't realize is readers are suffering from **byline blindness**—the result of an over-saturation of guest bloggers.

Since so many guest posts are now floating around the web, bylines are getting ignored. So in order to maximize the return on your guest post, you need to get strategic.

The best way to do this is to integrate step #2 (landing pages everywhere!) with your guest blogging efforts. In other words, create a landing page for each "big" guest post that you write.

For the readers who *do* click through on your byline, seeing something like “Welcome [Guest Blog’s Name] Readers!” is surprising in a good way. This headline is personal and attention getting, and now that you’ve captured their attention, they’ll likely read on to see what your site is about.

Srini Raos, founder of [BlogcastFM](#), does a great job with this technique following a recent feature he guest wrote on Copyblogger.



You don’t have to dip your toe into custom graphics, but you should be liberal in creating these pages for all of your notable guest posts.

Maximizing Newsletter Engagement Rates

Building an email list is a fruitless exercise if your subscribers aren't responsive. A six-figure newsletter distribution list means nothing if nobody is opening your emails!

Newsletter engagement is best measured by open rates and click-through rates. I've worked with some of the best lists out there: the Help Scout newsletter regularly reaches over 21%+ open rate, a tough number to crack in our industry.

Constant Contact keeps a detailed list of average open and click-through rates on their website; you can see the [full set of data here](#).

So how do the most engaged newsletters keep their open and click-through rates so high? The secret boils down to using proven psychological principles that invoke curiosity, grab the reader, and compel them to take action.

Below, we analyze five different studies that offer proven tips for helping you improve engagement.

1 The Information Gap

All marketers should be familiar with the work of George Lowenstein, a neuroscientist at Carnegie Mellon University. Lowenstein's research on [information gap theory](#) reveals powerful insights for creating email broadcasts that people will actually read and click through.

His findings show that when we encounter things that pique our interest but don't reveal "the goods," we have a strong desire to delve further in so that we avoid the dissatisfaction of not knowing the outcome.

We've all encountered this before; it's really just a scientific take on **suspense**. Research in this area (such as those studies around the [Zeigarnik Effect](#)) show

that human beings hate leaving things incomplete if they've had a strong start.

According to one [study](#), when subjects were interrupted while doing brain-buster tasks that they were making progress on, nearly **90 percent** carried on working on the puzzle anyway!

The takeaway: creating suspense in your e-newsletter will make readers want to see it through to the end, which means clicking through to wherever you are sending them.

Do not use suspense in the subject line, though!

This creates a subject that is too vague, and one that might be construed as spam. Instead, be sure to create this need to "close the gap" early in your broadcast through the introductory paragraph by revealing the ending first ("We tripled our sales!") or by creating intrigue ("There are 5 common diet mistakes that...").

2 The Less-is-More Approach

Columbia University psychology professor Sheena Iyengar made waves with her research on *why choice is demotivating*, which was later expanded into her book, *The Art of Choosing*.

Her famous jam study shows how people react to an abundance of choices and explains why action paralysis seems to occur when we are presented with a lot of options.

Iyengar conducted the study by selling jam at an upscale supermarket, testing shoppers' interaction with jams displaying six types on some days and 24 types on other days.

While she noted an increased interaction from customers with the 24-jam display, only around 3 percent of customers actually BOUGHT the jam, whereas more than 30 percent purchased from the 6-jam display!

Having more options increased engagement, but FEWER people actually made a choice and purchased a jar of jam! So if people who are overwhelmed with

choices often opt to do nothing, what is a marketer to do?

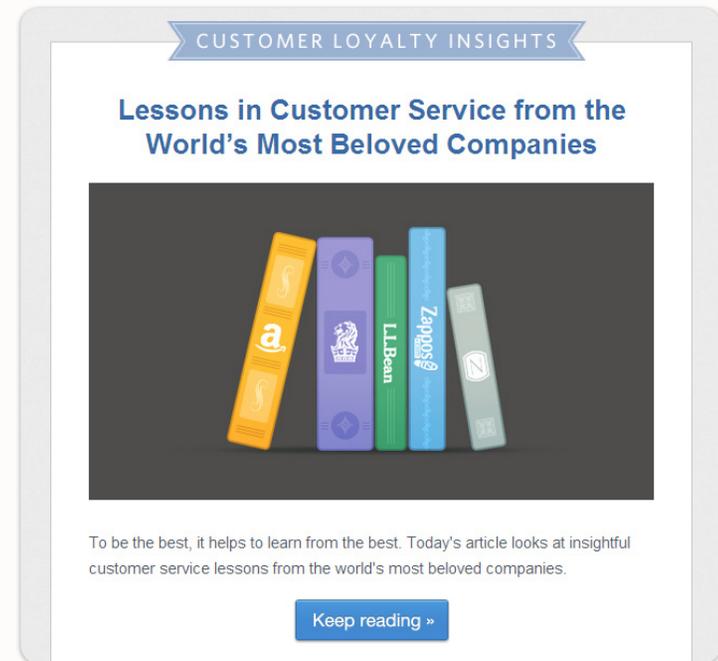
You can specifically apply this to email marketing by following the **one email, one goal** rule, in that each email should only have one desired outcome (view a blog post, see a new feature, hear about an update, etc.).

If you are asking for multiple things, you are really asking for ZERO things, because multiple choices often cause people to take no action.

The Help Scout newsletter embraces this practice with our minimal design and very obvious call to action. There's only one big "ask" in our emails, and this design choice has played a big role in our high click-through rates.

3 Using Urgency the Smart Way

Social psychologist Howard Leventhal conducted a [study on urgency](#) by testing



how people responded to packets of information about tetanus. His goal was to see how he could convince more people to get vaccinated.

He tested 2 types of packets:

1. One pamphlet just had information about the dangers of tetanus.
2. The other pamphlet had the same information and minimal instructions on where subjects could get vaccinated.

Leventhal found that even though the follow-up information in packet #2 was minimal, around 23 percent more people who received packet #2 got vaccinated. He concluded that when urgency is invoked without instructions we tend to mentally block it out by convincing ourselves, “Well, I don’t need to worry about that anyway.”

Thus, it is harder to ignore the warning signs when you’re armed with information on what to do next. You can use this information in your newsletter by creating a crystal-clear call to action after you’ve invoked a sense of urgency.

We use phrases such as “Click here to read XYZ.” This may seem obvious, but we’ve found that trying to be less clever with calls-to-action and speaking more

directly to subscribers has really boosted click-through rates in newsletter broadcasts.

4 Utilizing Everyone's Favorite Word

MRI scans have shown that there is one word that is guaranteed to pique your attention every single time you hear it.

Can you guess what it is?

Your name!

According to recent [research examining brain activation](#), few things light us up quite like seeing our names in print or on the screen. Our names are intrinsically tied to our self-perception and make up a massive part of our identity.

It's no surprise, then, that we become more engaged and even more trusting of a message in which our name appears.

Making use of these research findings in email marketing is dependent upon

gathering a subscriber's name.

For sidebar opt-ins and pop-ups, it's best to keep things simple and just ask for an email, but on segmented lists and specific landing pages, gathering a name lets you use this tactic to create strong, personal connections with subscribers.

5 Keep Them on Their Toes

Reciprocity is a powerful force.

And social psychologist Norbert Schwarz [revealed that *surprise reciprocity*](#) is especially powerful!

Schwarz found that unexpectedly finding as little as 10 cents (this was in 1987, but adjusted for inflation the amount is still small) was enough to put people in a good mood.

Remember that this is perceived value, so giving people things that cost you anything (except time) can still have this same effect. Apply this to your email marketing efforts by surprising subscribers with free stuff. Blog posts don't

count, because there is no surprise there; people EXPECT them to be free.

We're talking about things like free guides, unpublished videos, or webinars—collateral that will create engagement with your email subscribers.

7 Ways to Fine-Tune Your Open Rates

Need even more proven methods to keep engagement rates high?

The following tips have been proven in the field by a variety of companies. So if you're looking for some of the most efficient ways to keep newsletter engagement high, then keep reading.

1 Favor Clarity over Creativity

In a great case study [published on AWeber](#) (and echoed through numerous other tests), a clear picture is painted for what it takes to write a successful subject line—clarity trumps creativity when it comes to open rates.

While creative and “mysterious” headlines can work well for blog posts (since they create curiosity), people have less patience for mystery in their inbox, and they may even confuse the message for spam.

Save your creativity for article headlines and keep subject lines obvious and relevant to your subscriber’s interests.

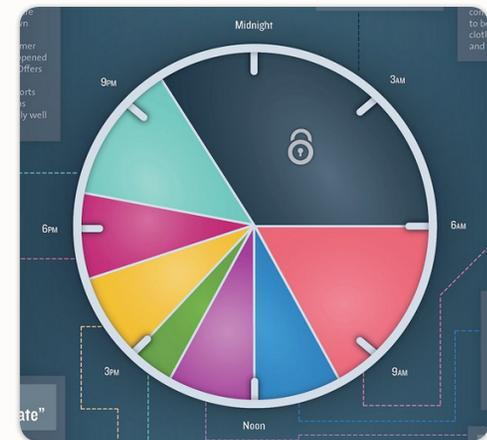
2 Find the Perfect Time of Day

There has been a variety of data published on timing via email marketing (KISSmetrics has a great [infographic on it](#)).

The general takeaways are that early mornings seem to be ideal, weekends are severely underrated, and it’s best to send 1-4 emails per month (as a rule of thumb).

All of these data points are highly reliant on industry and on your business though, especially for email timing.

The best way to find out the perfect time of day to email folks is through *testing*,



and we'll cover more on how to conduct split-tests in a later chapter.

3 Avoid Their Spam Filter

Besides using a personal sender ID (discussed below), you should avoid hitting the spam filter by staying away from these mistakes [as highlighted here by Boris Demaria](#):

- Avoid spam trigger words. There is a [huge list here](#) that you can browse. They are by no means auto-flagged, but too many may set off some alarms (and make your copy look very cheesy).
- Prominent calls-to-action may be confused for spam (CLICK HERE FOR SAVINGS!!!).
- Bad HTML coding could be the source of a spam trigger. [Demaria also recommends](#) you avoid converting Microsoft Word files to HTML.
- The use of 'Re' and 'Fwd' subject lines is not only misleading to your subscribers, but it may also be flagged as spam (mass spam mailers tend to do this to trick people).

- This one was interesting: Demaria recommends that you avoid using one large image as the entire email (especially if it includes text image). The reason being, “Spam filters cannot read images so sometimes emails trick spam filters by embedding text in images.”
- This one is a no-brainer: **never** purchase an email list or use a purchased list. Not only will it not work (bound to get caught in spam), it’s just a very unprofessional thing to do.

In other words, don’t send emails that look/sound like spam, and you should be able to steer clear of all spam filters. Most importantly, always set up a double opt-in email list to protect yourself *and* your subscribers.

4 Personalize the Sender Information

When possible, you should try to personalize who your email is coming from.

I’m more likely to open an email from ‘Rick’ than I am from DO NOT REPLY. At the very least, have the email coming from your company name, rather than listing ‘updates@xyzcompany’ as the sender.

5 Avoid the 'Ignore' Triggers

According to [this research](#) on open-rates, there are 4 words that will trigger your recipients to ignore your email.

Use the following words sparingly:

FREE

HELP

PERCENT OFF

REMINDER

They tend to cause people to glaze over or file away the email for later, so be sure to send them to the cutting board when writing email copy.

6 Beware Email "Half-Life"

If you keep sending out the same subject line to your subscribers, your open rates are bound to begin decreasing.

An easy solution for the most likely culprit (a regular content newsletter) is to simply have a shortened version of the post headline as the subject.

That's not to mention the fact that subscribers in general [tend to become less engaged](#) over time, according to MailChimp's data.

Make sure you're spicing things up with frequency, topicality, etc., or you may start losing people.

7 **Get to the Point**

For most inboxes, you have about 50 characters or less to get your point across to people, so if your subject line ends up longer than a Tweet, you've done something wrong!

According to [this study](#) conducted by the Nielsen Group, people scan emails very quickly (51 seconds), and the only areas they give any appreciable amount of time to at all are the initial copy and headlines.

Therefore, if you want people to open your emails, cut to the chase and give them a reason to as quickly as possible (e.g., choosing "Our lowest prices ever" vs. "Now is the time to shop for the lowest prices we've offered all year!").

Using Split-Testing to Improve Your Bottom Line

The marketing world is prone to using a lot of “what-ifs,” especially when it comes to optimization. Entrepreneurs and marketing strategists often ask, “What do you think would happen if...”

The standard response to these queries should always be:

Don't think, just test.

Split-testing your email broadcasts is one of the best ways to answer the nagging “what-ifs” on what would perform better.

Fortunately, any email marketing service worth its salt has these split-testing

features at your disposal. This chapter will show how you can get started with split-testing your emails for higher conversions.

Different Variables to Test

As with your website's design or persuasive copy, there are a number of elements that can be tested in email broadcasts and extended campaigns.

To get started, below is a universal list of components that can be easily tested (and provide significant results) in your email marketing campaign:

- **Time of Day.** Timing is heavily dependent on location, industry, *and* the type of subscribers who are on your list—there is no 'right' answer for which hour of the day is best—but you can come close by testing it via your broadcasts!
- **Day of the Week.** As with hour of the day, it's hard to come by best practices for timing in this regard. For some lists, weekends will be amazing, and for others they will be so dead you could swear you just saw a tumbleweed roll by. The answer again here is to test it and see which day(s) work for you.

- **Subject Lines.** Chapter 4 offered best practices to utilize in your subject lines as well as some engagement killers to avoid, but open-rates can always be maximized by sending out variations to small segments of your list to see which one resonates the most.
- **Body Copy.** There is never a time that copy isn't important on the web, and it's no exception for email marketing. Getting people to read your emails is quite a feat, but split-testing how you craft your copy can go a long way in teaching what sort of persuasive writing works best with your audience.
- **Layout.** Especially important for HTML emailers, we found out this lesson ourselves when we saw better newsletter engagement from going from 3 calls to action in one broadcast [down to only one](#). Those selling a variety of products (a la eCommerce) will also want to closely experiment with this variable.
- **Calls to Action.** Should you tell people to click right away or save the CTA for further along in the email? Should the button/link say "Click Here" or "Find Out More"? When it comes down to getting people to take action (the most important part of marketing), you simply *must* test a variety of elements to improve conversions, as this is one of the worst elements to leave to guesswork!

- **Design.** The single column vs. dual column debate will arise here, but there are also a ton of other design elements that can be tested in an email, such as the images included (if there are any), the color scheme, the styling of the text, etc.
- **Personalization.** Since it will be important in some cases to gather a subscriber's name from a sign-up form, you'd be wise to test to see if this has a significant impact on open-rates & click-throughs. In some instances seeing a name in the subject line (or intro) will do wonders; in others it may confuse people into thinking your message is spam.
- **The Offer.** Finally, if/when you send out those "money" emails, you need to test out offers. An extra 15-days to try the product, or a \$10 discount for being on the newsletter? Should you offer an incentive to those who have signed up but haven't gotten started with your product, or just send a reminder? Find out the answers with split-testing!

Now that we've covered what elements can be tested, let's run through an example split-test so you can see how this stuff impacts your bottom line!

Case Study: How Split-Testing Can Improve Conversions

A split-test can be incredibly useful in increasing the performance of a brand new email broadcast.

Let's say you're running a deal over the weekend, because from previous tests you've found that Saturday actually works really well for your list.

You want to offer your "Free Plan" customers a chance to upgrade, so you propose a 20% off coupon be sent to their inbox, but you have 3 pretty important things to test that you know will impact how well the email does.

For simplicity's sake, let's use the following splits:

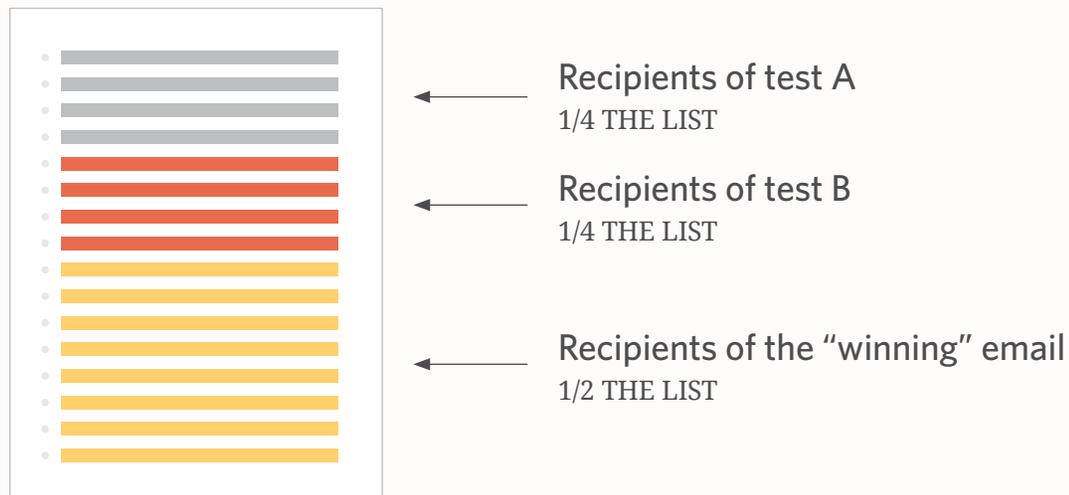
- 1. Time of Day:** 8am or noon?
- 2. Subject Line:** "Get 20% Off" or "Upgrade Today for a Discount"?
- 3. Call to Action:** "Click here to get your discount" or "Click here to save 20% today"?

Now that you have some variables to test, it's time to test the waters by sending

out the different broadcasts. Again, for simplicity's sake, keep this to an A/B test, or 2 different types of emails.

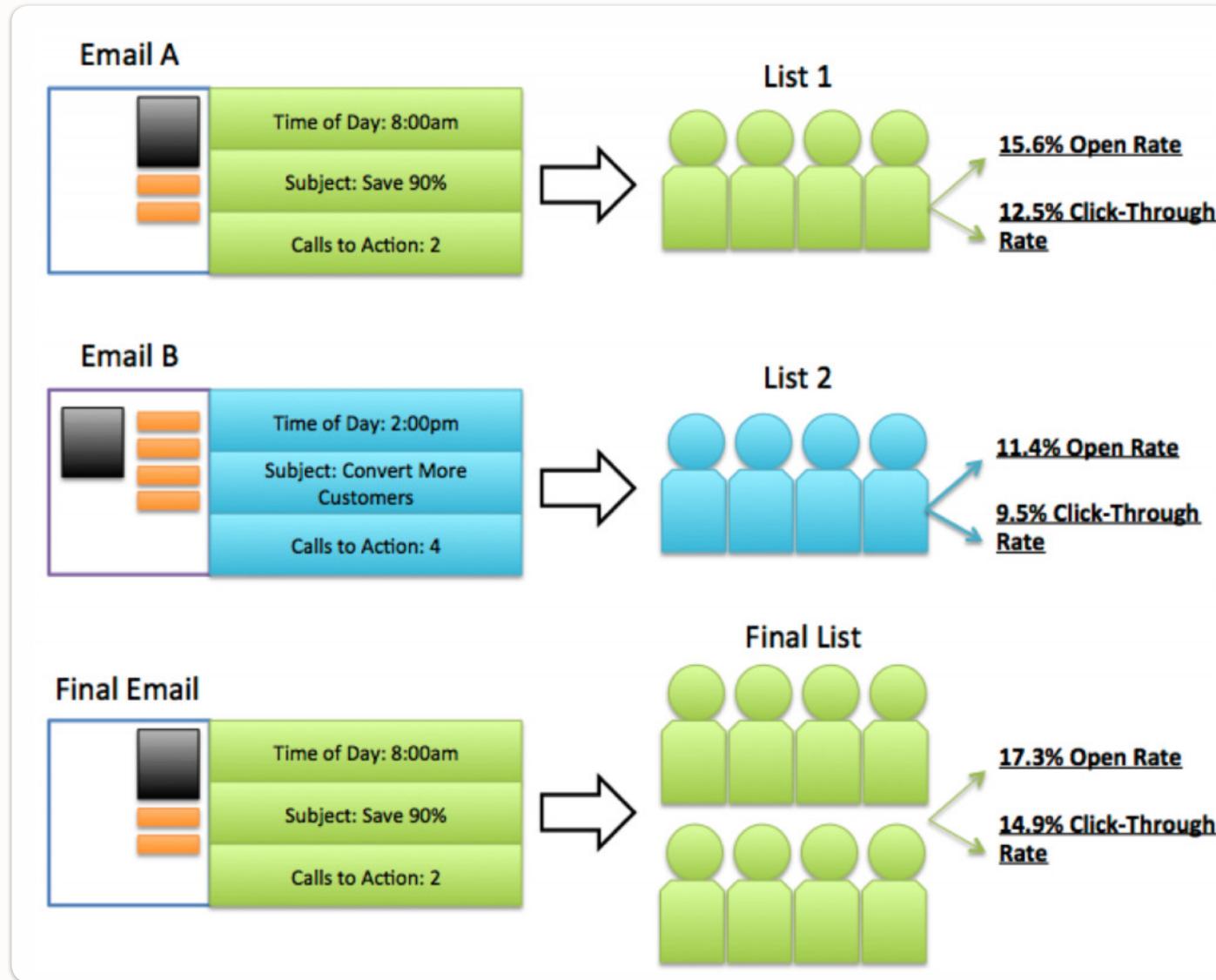
You'll want to send these tests to reasonably large segments of your lists.

As Ashley Zeckman [highlights in this great article](#), the following formula works well for many email lists:



After comparing key metrics like open rates and unsubscribes, you'll be able to have an idea of which email performed better. Once you do, you can email the second 1/2 of your list with the "winning" email.

A split-test can end up looking something like this:



You can see that “Email A” was the clear winner. Now that we know which one performs better, we can email the rest of our list with the best-performing email.

While this is a relatively simple example, it still exemplifies the standard split-test for a majority of early stage startups. Sending out a test with four different variants to 1/8 of your subscribers doesn’t make much sense if you only have 300 people on your list!

Until your list size is big enough to warrant more in-depth multivariate testing (which will still follow the same guidelines), conducting smart A/B tests like the one outlined above will go a long way toward helping you create an email list that converts.

CHAPTER 6

The Awesome Power of Segmentation



Author of this chapter: Justin Premick is the director of education at [AWeber](#), the email marketing software for small business owners. Below, Justin will outline how companies with modest email lists can use segmentation for better performing email campaigns.

After getting your feet wet with some of the essential practices in email marketing, you'll start to get excited as you see better and better results.

This encourages you to send more emails, but without any sort of strategic thinking, these emails may start to level off your previous success: you'll see more unsubscribes, spam complaints, and fewer people taking action.

How can you break through this plateau and continue to maintain a very

effective email marketing campaign, even with tens of thousands of subscribers? The answer is to use smart segmentation tactics to better cater to subscriber interests and needs. If you're unfamiliar with how segmenting an email list works, you're in luck, because we are going to cover that right now!

Below, you'll get a step-by-step look at what segmentation is (and why it works), as well as some simple, yet powerful pieces of advice on segmenting subscribers to maximize the impact of your email list.

What is Segmentation? Why Bother?

At its core, segmentation is about sending unique messages to groups of subscribers within your database or list.

Sometimes these subgroups are created from many criteria, but often they're based off a single, simple criteria such as, "Have these people already purchased a product from me?"

In many ways, segmentation is the secret sauce behind the world's most successful email marketing campaigns.

It's what separates Amazon's laser-focused "here's that exact product you looked at on our website — and 10 others like it" emails from the countless untargeted, low-response generating "batch and blast" style emails that so many other businesses send.



Segmentation is what makes customers feel like you care about them—not about their money (which in turn makes them like you and want to spend their money with you!).

In fact, according to MarketingSherpa, click-through rates on segmented emails can be as much as **double** the rate for unsegmented emails.

Need more proof? Consider the following...

- **Thirty percent of email revenue** comes from segmentation. So by not segmenting you're throwing away, on average, 30 percent of the value of your email marketing campaigns.
- Only 15 percent of email marketers **do not segment their lists**.
- Segmented email campaigns produce 30 percent more opens and **50 percent more click-throughs** than untargeted email campaigns.

Many solo entrepreneurs or small teams don't tackle segmentation because they fear they don't have the time or resources to take it on.

While segmentation is something that big companies with big budgets do, the good news is that you don't have to have a gigantic list to reap the benefits of basic segmentation.

How to Know if Your Segmented Emails are Working

Segmenting is easy, but it's not 100 percent costless. It takes time and effort to determine how to segment your list and what to send to each segment. You'll want to make sure that your segmented email campaigns are indeed performing up to their potential.

Before you start segmenting, *benchmark* your previous campaigns and determine how well your typical campaign performs. Benchmarking just means looking at your past campaigns and determining how well they perform on average.

The metrics you choose to benchmark will vary based on what would determine success for *your* campaigns. To help you get started, here are a few metrics you might include:

- Click-through rate
- Dollars of sales generated per subscriber
- Average order value
- Open rate
- Unsubscribe and complaint rates

Once you've determined your benchmarks, you'll record the results for your new, segmented email campaigns and compare them to the benchmarks of your past campaigns.

Tips for Doing Segmentation Right

There are tons of ways that you can segment your list to offer different groups of subscribers tailored content.

Below are four ways that businesses have used segmenting to improve their email response rates and, ultimately, sales.

1 **Treat new subscribers differently than old subscribers.**

The experience a subscriber has with your emails in the first couple of weeks will set the tone for the rest of their time on your list(s).

You might have good content going out to your more established subscribers,

but is it the right content for someone who's just getting to know you? If not, consider this two-part strategy for onboarding new subscribers and maximizing engagement and conversion:

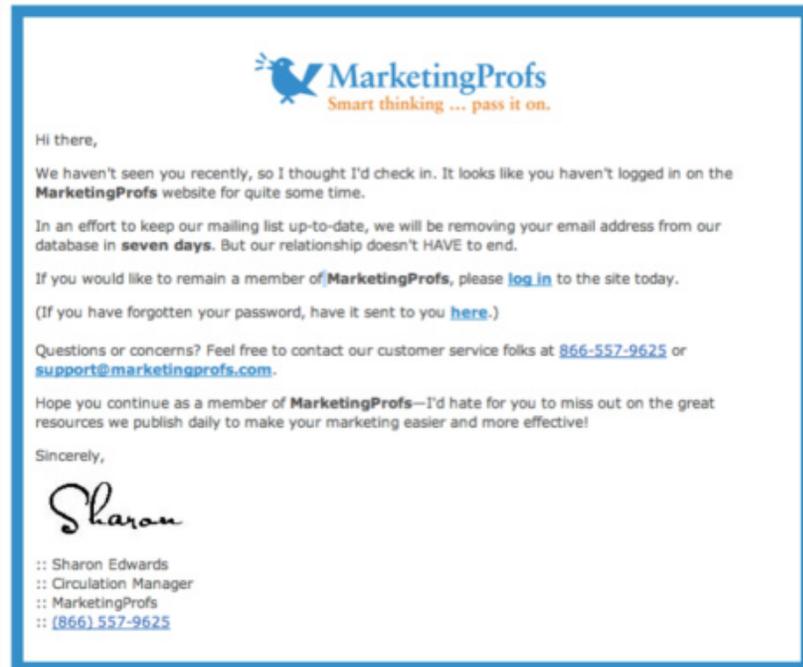
1. Create a welcome series of automated emails specifically designed for new subscribers. This is a great place to answer common questions, deliver free and valuable education, and make subscribers fall in love with your company and emails.
2. Only send your regular newsletters and promotional emails to subscribers who have finished the welcome series.

2 Re-engage subscribers who have become inactive.

Have you ever noticed that when you first join an email list, you tend to read almost every email? But then, over time, you start to lose interest and read less and less—even if you don't unsubscribe?

You're not the only one. This scenario of subscriber fatigue plagues all email marketers. Fortunately, you can address the problem via segmentation. A few ideas:

- Use a reactivation campaign to gauge whether non-responsive subscribers are still reading (just not clicking through or tracking open rates), or if they've truly decided to opt out. An example from MarketingProfs is shown here. The language you choose can play a big role in how successful these campaigns are, so be sure to split-test a few versions to maximize response.



- Send an email asking subscribers what you can help with or what they're most interested in these days. You can collect replies via surveys or by having people reply to you with their answers (if you can handle a decent volume of incoming mail, this is a nice personal touch that makes people feel appreciated).

3 Resend a broadcast to non-responders to increase results.

What's your average open rate for a typical email?

Let's say you came in well above the average ... say, 30 percent. Sounds great, right?

It does, until you realize this means that 70 percent of subscribers—who *asked* to be on your list—didn't respond. Ouch.

It gets worse when you think about this in terms of sales. What's your sales conversion rate on a given email ... 5 percent? So that means 95 percent of respondents don't buy. Double ouch.

It's ok. These figures happen to the best companies out there. The good news is that there's tremendous opportunity in that 95 percent—if you don't write them off after one broadcast.

Resending the email can yield big gains, since you can potentially reach subscribers who might have missed your first email. You could try a different

subject line or slightly different content in the body. You'll also want to segment out the responders—that could be just people who ordered, or everyone who opened or clicked.

4 Send a broadcast to responsive subscribers to reward or thank them.

Your most responsive subscribers are arguably your biggest fans. They are more likely than the average subscriber to *want* more email from you, and they've proven that they tend to act on those emails.

There are many ways you can use segmenting your biggest fans to grow your sales and business. Here are a few to get you started:

- 1.** Run a special “thanks” promotion/offer just for your most loyal subscribers (those who have opened the past X broadcasts, for instance).
- 2.** Give your fans first access to new products, events, and content.

3. If you're promoting a new social media channel or post, send it to your biggest fans first; they're more likely to share, comment, like, and so on. As a bonus, when you email the rest of your list and they click through to the post/page, they'll see the activity from your fans, which makes it easier for them to share/like/comment as well.

Time to Start Segmenting!

In this chapter, you've learned what segmentation is all about and why you need to start segmenting your list.

You've also discovered a few simple ideas that you could implement *in less than a day* to start improving your email response rates and email-driven sales.

Now it's up to you to make this information work for your business. To get started:

- Grab a pen and a sheet of paper. Yes, right now. No, you can't check Facebook first.

- Write down the segmentation idea from this lesson that you think makes the most sense for your business. (You can always do more later, but pick one for right now.)
- Write down what statistic you're going to track to see how well your segmented email campaign works.
- Set yourself a deadline of a week from today to build the segment in your email program, draft the email, and send it out.

Trust us. Once you start seeing the results of segmentation for yourself, you'll be hooked.

Ready, Set, Broadcast

Now that we've reached the end of the guide, allow me to say that I sincerely hope you've been inspired by the pure potential that is an effective email marketing strategy.

Before you go, I wanted to offer some words of encouragement that I wish someone would have told me when I began with email: when you encounter a

ton of information, like what's been shared in this guide, it is all too easy to get caught up in "bike shedding", otherwise known as [Parkinson's law of triviality](#).

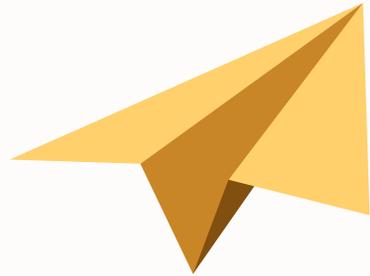
That means it is deceptively easy to get too swept up in the trivial details instead of focusing on the **essential** stuff that matters.

If you're a bit new to email marketing, leave the complex remarketing campaigns alone until you've gotten your feet wet. Instead, make sure the following basics are primed and ready to go:

- Have you made sure that your company blog has enough opt-in forms?
- Have you tried creating a simple auto-responder message greeting new subscribers?
- Have you attempted your first basic A/B test to your current list?

Once you've dipped your toes in, you'll feel far more confident trying out the more complex advice in this guide like segmenting subscribers.

Armed with information and a very feasible gameplan, you'll be ready to put an effective email strategy in place, to the benefit of your subscribers, customers, and your own bottom line.



Happy emailing!



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