



## Back to Basics: Email Marketing for Small Business



[Email marketing](#) is often overlooked when a small business tries to generate more online leads and sales. However, building your email list is the linchpin of any digital marketing campaign.

In this article you'll learn why it's so important, how to set up an opt-in email list, and how to get your emails delivered, opened, and read.

I speak at a number of national social media conferences, and that means I often get to hang out with the “big dogs” in the speakers’ room.

These are people with tremendous followings on social media. Many of them are also highly competitive, and often a bragging contest breaks out. However, none of these social media experts boast about how many people follow them on Twitter or Facebook. Instead, talk turns to the size of their “list.”

[In the age of social media, email is still king. \[Click to Tweet\]](#)

## Why Email Marketing Matters: You Own It

When you build your platform on a property you don’t own—like YouTube or LinkedIn—you are at the mercy of the whims and business needs of that platform. (Facebook algorithm changes, anyone?)

By building your email list, **you** are in control. Even if you’re using a service like Constant Contact or MailChimp, you can take that list with you if you become unhappy or outgrow your provider.

## The Inbox is Boardwalk

**Your customer’s (or prospect’s) inbox is the most valuable piece of real estate on the Internet.** Consider their opt-in as your own personal Advance Token to Boardwalk card.

Every day you miss thousands of tweets, Facebook status updates, YouTube uploads and more. But any email that ends up in your inbox requires **at least** a click of the trash icon. Which means you saw the brand and the offer before you made that decision. Even when your customer isn’t ready to buy from you, they’re being reminded you exist.

## Email Sells

My email list and my Twitter following are approximately the same...somewhere around 13,000 at the time of this post. But I know from experience that a tweet about a webinar, blog post, or The Agents of Change conference, will get about 1% of the activity of an email.

Some of that's due to how few people actually see your update, or how long your tweet can be, or whether they even see your post at all. But regardless, email sells.

## Getting Started

So now that we're in agreement that your email list may be the most important asset your small business owns, let's talk about how to build your subscriber base.

## Choose a Provider

You definitely don't want to be running your email list through Outlook or Gmail. While those tools are fine for one-to-one conversations, your hosting company or ISP will shut you down for sending out bulk email, even if you have people's permission.

Instead, you'll want to choose an Email Service Provider (ESP) like [Constant Contact](#) (aff,) MailChimp, Aweber, and so on. These vendors have the tools and metrics to make your email marketing much, much easier. Here are just a few of the benefits:

- **Responsive templates:** So many emails are read on a smartphone...if your email isn't readable on the small screen, they'll hit delete before they roll out of bed. But mobile-friendly isn't enough! You want **responsive** email templates. These read well on a smartphone AND a desktop computer.
- **Scheduling tools:** Write now, send whenever. You can make sure your emails go out at the best time of day or the best day of the week to reach your customers.
- **Metrics:** Find out how many people opened your last email, and how many people clicked on that link to your webinar or online store.
- **Segmenting:** Did a bunch of people click on the link to your Spider-Man plush toy? Add them to a list of "comic book fans" and "plush toy enthusiasts" to better target your next email.
- **Management:** Your ESP will manage your signups, opt-outs, bounces, autoresponders, and a ton of other tasks, simplifying your day and letting you focus on your message to your audience.

## Customize The Experience

Once you've chosen a provider, you'll want to personalize important aspects of your account.

- **Signup box:** Your ESP will provide you the code to add a signup box to your website. By default, it will include some dull come on like, “Join Our Mailing List.” This fails on so many levels.

It’s completely (and necessarily) generic, so you miss out on an opportunity of truly branding yourself and your company.

It also fails to have a strong call-to-action. “Join Our Mailing List” sounds like marketing-speak for “Sign Up for My Spam!” Tell people the benefits of joining your list. Discounts in the store? Free shipping? Download an important white paper? Give them a reason to join up.

You should also let them know what to expect: how often you’ll be sending emails, whether your email will be delivering great content or offering amazing sales, and anything else you feel is important.

- **Landing page:** Now, not every ESP will send new subscribers to a landing page on your site, but if they do, create a custom message for your new subscribers. I know of a number of companies that actually **sell product** on these landing pages. After all, this person has just shown that they’re interested in your message, so you should strike while the iron is hot!
- **Welcome message:** Once people have signed up, your ESP will send them a completely (and again, necessarily) generic welcome email, welcoming them to your community. This is another opportunity to brand yourself, make a connection, or even sell them a product.

## Leverage Your Website for More Email Signups

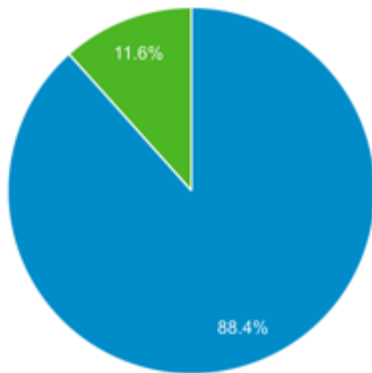
We already went over the benefits of a website in our [Back to Basics: Your Website](#) post. It is the hub of your digital marketing and critical to your online success. It’s also where most of your email signups happen.

You should have signup boxes, lead magnets, and calls to action throughout your website. Put them on the home page, your about page, in your blog’s side column, and embed the ability opt-in to your email newsletter on your contact form.

Consider using those annoying-but-oh-so-effective lightboxes (because “popup windows” carry too much emotional baggage.)

Keep in mind that most people come to your website **and never return!** However, if you can get them to sign up for your email newsletter while they're there, you can continue to communicate with them once they're gone.

■ New Visitor ■ Returning Visitor

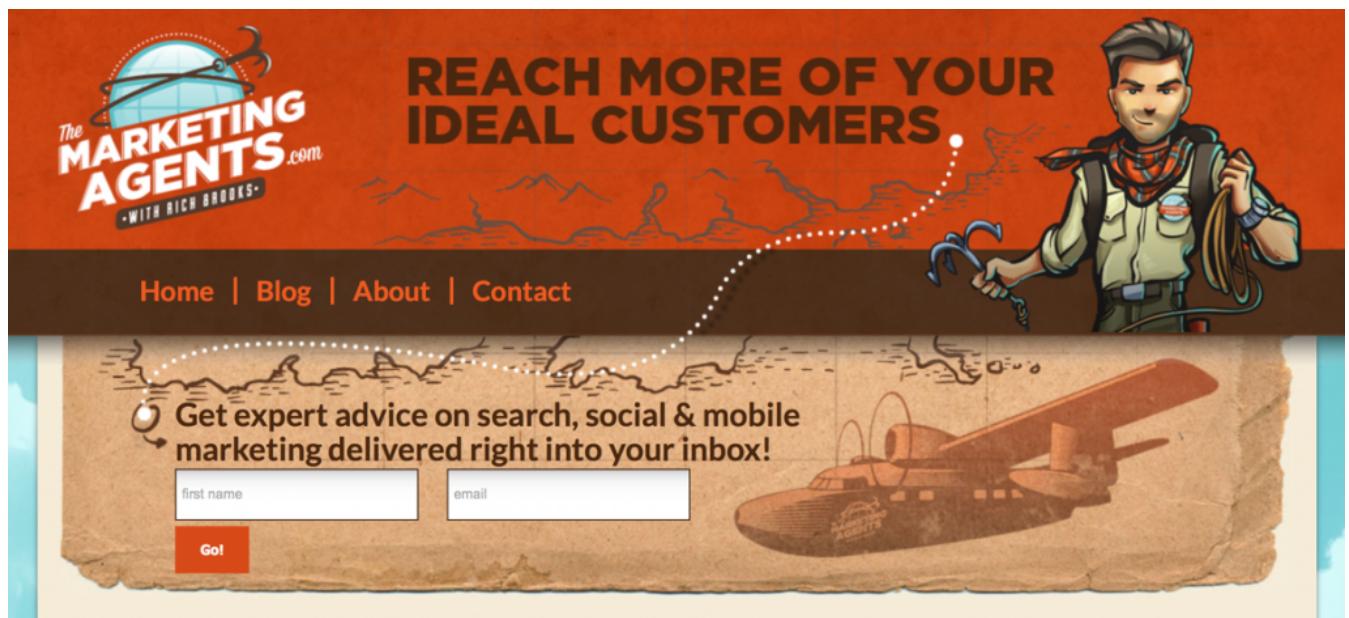


To get a sense of how many people never return to your site, visit your Google Analytics and look at the percentage of New Visitors vs. Returning Visitors. And a lot of those returning visitors may be due to being subscribers to your email newsletter! Imagine if you could just increase your email conversion rate by a few percentage points...how many more people could you stay in contact with?

## Leverage Your Blog for More Email Signups

If you do have a blog, you're already creating the content you can use for your email newsletter, you don't need to create additional content for your email. Instead, think of your blog as the home for your fresh new content, and email as the delivery system.

Include a big call to action at the top of your blog, explaining the benefits of subscribing to the email version.



Have an email signup box in the right hand column of your blog. It can be tied into a lead magnet or simply include the call to action of “free updates” or “never miss another update.”

You can also have that call to action at the bottom of each blog post. And something I’ve seen recently and begun experimenting with is a value add lead magnet tied into the content of the blog post.

For example, Amy Porterfield has this...



(Don’t bother clicking it...it’s not real. But since I wrote that bonus content for Amy when [she interviewed me for her podcast](#), I guess I can [share it with you](#).)

And we did the same for our first [Back To Basics post on Websites](#). We included some advanced topics that were available for download, tied into email registration.

## Create Lead Magnets



So what exactly is a lead magnet?

In the old days, it was fairly easy to get someone to sign up for your email newsletters, because there weren't that many out there. But now, our inboxes are full of personal emails, business emails, newsletters we signed up for, and hundreds more that we didn't. Plus: spam.

So, getting someone to sign up for your email list is increasingly difficult. After all, few people complain of not getting enough emails or not having enough information. To get that opt-in, to get access to their inbox, you'll need to trade them something of value.

That is the lead magnet.

Now, in your business that may mean discounts in the company store. It may a download called "101 Ways to Save Money for College" or "5 Horrific Mistakes New Dog Owners Make." The only constant is that it must be perceived as valuable in the eyes of your visitor.

## Configure Lead Magnets



In the “Leverage Your Website” section above, we discussed how to promote a Lead Magnet. But how do you configure one?

When it comes to a download, I’ve found the best way is to host the document at your website and create a link to it in your Welcome email. This ensures that your visitor has provided you with an accurate email address and that they have been automatically entered into your ESP’s database.

If you’re providing discounts in your store, you can either include a discount code in that welcome email, or provide ongoing discounts in future emails to keep people subscribed.

## Getting Emails Delivered

Even when someone has opted in to your email list, it doesn’t mean that they’re going to get your emails. There are roadblocks setup all along the way. Your email could be blocked by their Internet Service Provider (ISP,) their company firewall, or an overactive junk filter.

**Choosing a well-respected ESP** will help. Less reputable companies—that let anyone upload a list and blast it—are more likely to be blacklisted by ISPs.

**Alert new subscribers on your landing page to be on the lookout for emails** from “flyte new media” and “contact@notquiteflyte.com”, replacing that with your real contact info (obviously). You can also ask them to “whitelist” you, but honestly, I don’t know anyone who actually does that.

**Avoid spammy subject lines and copy.** Unfortunately, spammers use words like “free” and “today only” so much, that those words are like poison to email deliverability. Getting too “sales-y” in your copy will lower your chances of getting in their inbox.

**Drop the dot biz.** OK, this is anecdotal, but it happened to me. Dot biz domains attracted spammers and never got “gentrified.” Dot coms, nets, and orgs have better deliverability. Consider getting an additional domain just for email. (We considered flytemail.com until we were able to acquire takeflyte.com.)

## Getting Emails Open

Sadly, just because you ended up in their inbox doesn’t mean the battle is over. You need people to open, read, and act on your email. Here are some tips to increase your chances of success:



**Recognizable From Address:** Make sure that your name (or company name) is recognizable to the recipient. If they don't know who you are, they'll just hit delete (or worse, spam.)

**Compelling Subject Line:** "Monthly Newsletter" never lit a fire under anyone's butt. Instead, give them a compelling reason to open that email.

Sometimes it will be by telling them about the value they'll find in your email:

- 10 Craft Ideas for Your Next Sleepover
- What NOT to Say at Your Weekly Staff Meeting
- Apartment Living: How to Teach Your Cat to Use the Toilet

Sometimes it's about playing up urgency or scarcity:

- Amazing Deals on Silver Jewelry This Week Only
- Only 5 Spots Left for Our Vegan Cooking Class
- Early Bird Discount End Friday!

Sometimes it's about intrigue or making emails feel more personal:

- Peter, Meet Jill [Where Peter is the subscriber's name pulled from a mail merge and Jill is the expert you're bringing into a webinar. Note: Michael Hyatt did this recently and I totally believed he was making an introduction to me!]
- I need to reschedule lunch [which I recently used when I found out the time I had promoted for a lunch & learn was incorrect]
- Tuesday [used for any deadline. Replace with "Fri night," "Sat am," or any other appropriate time.]

## Getting Emails Read & Acted Upon

It's recently been said that the attention span of the average Internet user is about that of a goldfish.

So, write for goldfish.

Here are some ways to engage your audience and keep their attention:

- **Have a responsive email template.** Yes, I've said this before, but the number one activity on smartphones is checking email. Many people check their email on their phones before they even get out of bed, which means they're doing that on their phone. If your email doesn't look good on that small screen, you're dead to them.
- **Use images.** People are visual creatures and images are the universal language. (Sorry, love! And Esperanto, we hardly knew ye.) Just make sure that you've got a descriptive alt-tag so that people who have their images turned off can "see" what the image is all about.
- **Keep it short.** Yes, there are successful emails that are well over a thousand words. However, most emails these days are "transactional." They act to get people out of their inboxes and over to your website or sales page. Be as brief as possible in persuading them to take that action.
- **Include a clear call to action.** We assume that people will know what we want them to do next. But they're busy, and yours is one of 200 emails in their inbox, so spell it out for them. "Download our white paper here." "Register for the workshop." "Save 20% on all cat toys now!" Each of those are links, taking them to the specific area on your site you want to drive them.

## Keeping Subscribers On Your List

If you create an irresistible lead magnet, deliver email subject lines so enticing that they almost open themselves, but deliver content duller than nursery school scissors, your subscribers won't stick around very long.

**With every email you send you are only one click away from an unsubscribe.**

Because of that, make sure you know what your subscribers want. For a retail store, it might be about new arrivals, what's trending, or sale items. For a business consultant, her audience may be looking for an article on a recent change in import laws, managing remote workers, or exit strategies,

Whatever your audience needs, deliver on the expectations you set out for them when they first signed up.

## What's Next?

I hope it's evident that your email list is critical to your online—and offline—success. Start by making compelling offers on your website, giving people a reason to sign up. Get your emails delivered and opened by following best practices and getting creative with your subject lines. Deliver value in each email you send, and use persuasive calls-to-action to generate leads and sales.