

How to Tackle Email Marketing

Dynamic e-business guru [Susan Hallam](#) challenged our scepticism about the ethics and effectiveness of email marketing, debunked some of the myths around it and gave us a whistle-stop tutorial on how to venture into this form of marketing.

Some key facts about the curse of 'spam': 84 per cent of email messages are unwanted, and people only open and read (or, mostly, merely scan) a third of their emails. But conventional mail shots are expensive, and their results can't be quantified: so, are there good reasons to consider doing some email marketing?

Susan contends that email marketing, done well, benefits both us and our clients. We can use it to retain existing clients, find new ones, keep in touch with people and obtain immediate responses. Having made her pitch in favour of email marketing, Susan proceeded to explain how to tackle it:

- *Set objectives*: for instance, to retain clients or to generate interest in particular services.
- *Consolidate existing data*: collate the contact information that most of us keep unsystematically in our email address book, elsewhere on our computers and on paper (address books and files).
- *Understand the legal situation*: for instance, it is legal to send unsolicited emails to businesses but not to individuals; and we can send people an invitation to subscribe to our 'newsletter' - they have to opt in positively, though, and every issue must include an unsubscribe option. By issuing a newsletter, say twice a year, we can remind subscribers that we exist, and tell them about our projects or any new services.
- *Write effective content*: the 'from' field should have a clear 'brand', the 'subject' field should be arresting and short enough to fit in the 'window' (35 characters maximum) and the text should be designed to be scanned rather than read. Avoiding words such as 'best' or 'free' (especially in large mailings) reduces the chance of your email being identified as spam, and in case the sending address gets blocked as a 'spammer' it is best not to use your usual email address. Some personalization - but not too much - can be useful: for instance, addressing the recipient by name.
- *Plan the design*: email marketing templates are available free on the internet. HTML is considered to be a more successful format, provided that it looks like plain text, which people feel is more 'trustworthy'. It is best to send both versions so that the recipient can choose.
- *Choose the delivery mechanism*: Microsoft Outlook can neither personalize mass emails for each recipient nor give good information about how recipients deal with your message. This requires software such as Ganymede or Constant Contact.

■ *Deal well with responses*: for example, select a relevant page on your website as a 'landing page' for recipients clicking through from your email. Reply to unsubscribers, thanking them for their interest and enquiring (gently) why they are unsubscribing.

■ *Monitor what people do with your email*: specialist email software will provide details of those recipients who have bounced, unsubscribed, clicked, opened or not responded at all to your email, so that you can refine your marketing to particular groups or types of recipient.

The presentation led to a flurry of questions from the audience, mostly on the subject of blogs (web logs). Susan considered that professional (not personal) blogs can be very effective marketing tools if done well: Google and other search engines are attracted to blogs because they generate constantly changing content on the web page. They also have an advantage over emails because they are not caught by spam filters.

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For help with planning and delivering your own Email Marketing Campaign, contact:

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