

50 Top Tips For Email Success

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1. **Think About the Customer's Benefits** -- Like with any marketing campaign, the customer needs to know what's in it for them. Spell out your benefits clearly -- your product may be wonderful, but be sure to specify exactly (and probably more than once) how buying it will help your customers.
2. **Promise to Respect Customer Privacy** -- People don't want spam, and lots of people are leery about entering their email address into a Web form unless they know how their information will be used and protected. Reassure customers you're not going to sell their address, and you're more likely to receive permission to contact them.
3. **Make Your Call to Action Obvious** -- What do you want the customer to do? Buy? Subscribe? You may know your goals for your marketing campaign, but will the person reading your message? Spell it out, and make as clear and easy as possible for them to understand.
4. **Use the Preview Pane** -- Make sure the most important of your message is at the top, and include it in text formatting so it appears clearly in the customer's preview pane. Even if the customer doesn't open the message, you can still get your point across.
5. **'Free' Still Grabs Eyeballs** -- "Free" is still the most effective word in marketing, especially when you can couple it with other customer benefits associated with your offer. Free shipping is the most obvious example, but there are lots of other bonuses you can highlight in your email campaigns.
6. **Dollars Trump Percentages in Offers** -- Offering 20 percent or \$5 off a \$25 product is the same discount, but positioning it as a \$5 savings is more immediate to the customer. The extra step of having to calculate the savings may prompt a distracted customer to move to their next message.
7. **Reaching Mobile Users** -- If a customer is responding to a message on a mobile device, redirect their session to a mobile-friendly landing page with simpler navigation and fewer complicated graphics than your Web responders will see. The mobile page should load more quickly, but still provide an effective call to action.
8. **Monitor Your Frequency** -- How often should you contact customers? How often are they likely to need your product or service? If it's the kind of offering customers are only likely to need once or twice a year, bombarding existing customers with weekly or monthly offers isn't going to pay off (and instead may annoy them into blocking your messages)
9. **Personalization Boosts Repeat Business** -- If a customer's done business with you before, using their name in the greeting of a follow-up offer helps you establish a relationship that can lead to further or repeat sales. People love to hear their names, which is why savvy marketers repeat them.
10. **Avoid Personalizing the Subject Line** -- Although you want to personalize your greeting within your message, don't use the customer's name in the subject line --

doing so makes your message appear more like spam. Because friends don't use each other's name in the subject line, you shouldn't either.

11. **How Are We Doing?** -- Following up a customer order with a message asking how they like the product of service is a helpful way to remind customers you're out there. Few will be motivated to respond, but asking is a good way to help maintain the relationship.
12. **Avoid Spam-Like Formatting** -- While you want your subject line to stand out among lots of unread messages, trying to get too creative with text formatting can backfire several ways. Using all capital letters or lots of punctuation marks (like exclamation points or dollar signs) can make your message look too spam-like.
13. **Integrate Social Media** -- If you're active on social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter, promote those links in your email marketing campaigns. Customers on those sites often don't mind following for friending brands, if the content is appropriate and doesn't offer a heavy-handed sales pitch.
14. **Test Your Design** -- Customers are likely to see your message with a variety of email clients and devices. Web mail pages, Outlook, Blackberries and iPhones can render the same page differently. Test your design on several platforms to ensure a message that looks good on one device isn't gibberish on another.
15. **Work With Your ISP** -- Contacting the Customer or Technical support departments at your ISP or hosting provider can be a helpful step to avoiding spam flagging in the early stages of an email marketing campaign. Let them know you're a legitimate marketer, and review their spam guidelines to avoid any needless mistakes or delays.
16. **Extend Your Brand Design** -- The design of your email offers, Web pages and product packaging (if applicable) should reflect each other seamlessly so customers know they're dealing with a brand they can trust. This is obviously easier with HTML mail than with plain-text, but in other case, pay attention to your brand messaging.
17. **Pick the Right Metrics** -- A common metric in email marketing is the "open rate," the percentage of messages that are supposedly opened by readers. But this can include messages that only appeared in someone's preview pane, and may not reflect your call to action. Understand your campaign's goal, and make that the metric for success.
18. **Let People Unsubscribe Easily** -- As much as you'd prefer people subscribe to your offers or newsletter, U.S. anti-spam legislation (and good business practice) means you also have to provide an easy mechanism for opting out or unsubscribing, such as a reply with "remove" in the subject line or a dedicated link.
19. **Preview Your Direct Mail Campaigns** -- If you're launching a mail campaign for a promotion or an event invitation, emailing a preview or 'save-the-date' announcement creates awareness and increases the odds of the printed piece getting read. And if the offer is compelling enough, some customers might not wait for the printed piece before acting.
20. **Apologize Effectively** -- As good as you are at your craft, everybody makes mistakes. And when you do, it's important to acknowledge it and to notify customers

as quickly as you can. Make sure the subject line alerts them to the mistake (but avoid the clichéd use of the word “oops”).

21. **Authentication Promotes Delivery** -- While not official standards yet, authentication frameworks such as DomainKeys Identified Mail and Sendmail use various techniques to verify the identity and legitimacy of a company sending e-mail messages, and can be helping in keeping your messages away from your customer's spam filters.
22. **Populate Landing Pages** -- If you have customer data from previous or recent orders, populating that information on an email offer's landing page makes your call to action easier to complete. Including shipping info makes the landing page more appealing to a customer who doesn't want the hassle of re-entering that data.
23. **Double-Check Your Links** -- The links in your email messages should be tested several times before the campaign launches. Any internal coding errors, server reconfigurations or other glitches that produce a “file not found” error are going to annoy and chase away prospective customers.
24. **Redirect Outdated Offers** -- Once a campaign is over, don't take down that landing page -- use it as an opportunity to redirect any customers who happen to click on older messages to your current promotions. Today's deal may not be the same, but don't write off the value that may result from older messages.
25. **Distribute Industry Newsletters** -- For a services firm or consultant, a monthly newsletter summarizing industry developments or offering professional tips can be a great networking and marketing tool. Repurposing blog content, offering advice or answering reader questions can help you maintain relationships with your customers or industry community.
26. **Consider the “From” Field** -- Customers don't want to see a string of numbers or other coded addresses at the top of their messages, so use the name of a real company or person in the From field to improve the readability and effectiveness of your message.
27. **Tone Down the Rich Media** -- Emailed messages with rich media files (such as embedded animations, sounds or videos) can take longer to open, or they can startle customers that don't expect them. In their haste to silence the unwanted noise, they probably won't see your offer.
28. **Imagine Your Message Without Images** -- Since a lot of email clients block images by default, consider how your message would look if the images remain blocked. The images may be helpful to your campaign and branding, but if the customer doesn't see them, the text may have to carry the message alone.
29. **Avoid Generic Links** -- Use your links as another opportunity to highlight the benefits of your call to action. Saying “Click here to save \$5” or “Click here for our helpful hints newsletter” is more likely to attract customers than just saying “Click here.”
30. **Newsletters Can Highlight Other Offers** -- Some newsletter readers may not receive or open your promotional mailings, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't see

the latest offers. A small box on the newsletter with brief highlights and links to a landing page can extend the reach of your campaign.

31. **Include Subscription Info in Newsletters** -- Since some newsletter readers may forward your content to people beyond your subscriber list, be sure to your contact and subscription info and links in your email newsletter so interested readers can sign up for their own subscription.
32. **Test Your Delivery Times** -- There's no guarantee people will open messages right after they're delivered, but you can increase your response rates with careful timing. Targeting the inbox of busy people for the early morning (in their time zone) can improve your odds of surviving an end-of-day mass deletion of unread messages.
33. **Subject Lines Matter** -- Consider the subject line to be as important to your campaign as the title is to a book's sales. You should specify, as concisely as possible, how the customer will benefit from opening your message, and why they should open it right away.
34. **Testing Spam Filters** -- While you want your message to grab customers' attention, you don't want it to be so provocative that it gets flagged by spam filters. Send tests to dummy accounts at the leading Web mail providers to make sure your campaign can clear their filters.
35. **Avoid Generic Subject Lines** -- The customer may not read beyond a boring subject line, so don't waste the opportunity to establish the credibility of your content right away. A subject line that says "(Company name) March newsletter" is going to pull fewer readers than "10 Proven Ways to Save Money Today."
36. **Test and Test Your Message** -- Before you send thousands (or millions) of messages with the same offer, it's a good idea to pull random segments of your lists for tests. If one subject line is clearly more effective with one small portion of the list, that success will probably carry over to the rest.
37. **Respect Customer Choices** -- Customers have come to expect the ability to control the format and frequency of communications from the companies they do business with. Give customers a choice about the types of content they receive from you, and you'll build a better relationship when they're ready to act.
38. **Monitor Your Competitors** -- There's no faster way to stay on top of your competitor's offers than having them delivered to your inbox. Subscribe to their newsletters (if applicable) and promotional distribution lists, and you'll know right away if you need to respond to competing campaigns.
39. **Check the Calendar** -- Research shows the most effective days for email messages to be opened is Sundays. Fewer people are working or running weekend errands, so Sunday (typically) offers a more relaxed opportunity to check out online offers or to get a head-start on the week's messages.
40. **Concise Subject Lines Prevail** -- If someone is scanning a screen of unread messages, your subject line has to get its point across quickly to prompt a customer to open your messages. You have to convey your message in six or seven words or the customer will keep scanning (or hit 'delete').

41. **Holiday Promotions** -- If you're hoping to boost sales tied to a specific holiday, plan on a series of holiday-themed messages that start early enough to leave plenty of time for action. You may need five or six messages, all with special discounts or themed content, to break through holiday clutter.
42. **Consider the Customer's Printer** -- Although email is designed to be read on-screen, the odds are good that someone's going to print your message. Consider including a link to a printer-friendly version, or try to ensure that your message fits on one printed page.
43. **Create a Dialog** -- If your product or service lends itself to hobbyists or similar communities of people with shared interests, consider answering reader questions as part of your promotional messages. A family campground that engages with its customers online will gain more loyal customers than one that just offers parking spaces in the woods.
44. **International Markets** -- If you're trying to reach an international audience, consider how they access the Internet as you're designing a campaign. Outside the U.S., Web access is probably more common on handheld devices than on PCs, and more people use SMS than send emails. Understanding these differences can be critical to global success.
45. **Spelling and Grammar Count** -- Nothing can sink the professionalism of your email campaign (or brand image) faster than misspelled words or improper grammar. If you don't want your messages to look or sound like they came from a spammer, make sure you don't spell like one.
46. **Deadlines Create Scarcity** -- For most messages, the call to action has to be completed on the first shot. If someone sets a message aside, the odds are good they won't open it again. Setting an expiration date or a limit on the number of discounts (first 500 respondents) will help to prompt customers to act now.
47. **Turn Images Into Actionable Links** -- Images can do more than enhance the appearance of your message. Make the images into clickable links that send customers to the campaign's landing page. You'll improve the number of opportunities for customers to respond and the overall success of your campaign.
48. **Beware the Holiday Spike** -- As major holidays approach, many marketers ramp up holiday-themed promotions. This makes sense, except you have to be careful to avoid sending so many messages that customers grow jaded and opt-out of future mailings or, more likely, blacklist you via the "report spam" button.
49. **Consider the Night Owls** -- Email marketing pros continue to debate the best time to schedule an email blast, but if your competitors are aiming for early morning deliveries, don't overlook the value of having your message delivered after 9 p.m. (in your customer's time zone), which can help you avoid the clutter.
50. **Segmentation Helps** -- Like any business, a small portion of your customer base accounts for a comparatively larger share of your revenue. Make sure you divide your lists so your best customers get the best offers, and contact them more frequently than less loyal patrons.