E-Newsletters Made Easy

Are you cold yet? Here in Milwaukee, it is a whopping 4 degrees outside. Wowww, or should I say, "BBrrrr"- time to break out the 'ol swimsuit, hey? No matter where you live in the United States right now though, temperatures are probably at their lowest of the year. Along with that comes the body, mind, and spirit, which also can be at their lowest. According to this article, January 21st this year was "the most depressing day of the year" (known in science circles as 'Blue Monday'), a term coined for the time of the year "when post-holiday blues and freezing weather" lead to "all-around low motivation" for individuals.

Having said this, it's not hard to understand why we tend to struggle to keep up with responsibilities this time of year. Marketing efforts, and newsletters especially, can become harder to design and layout, and communication to customers can become "muddled" if one is not in the right frame of mind to prepare messages carefully. Let's review the basics of e-newsletters this month to get through a tough month for creativity and back into the right frame of mind in time for spring.

Key Points in E-Newletters

1. Decide on the purpose of your e-newsletter

You have probably heard of the terms ezine, e-newsletter, and newsletter. They are all interchangeable, and basically refer to a magazine or newsletter you publish electronically to your intended audience. The first question to ask yourself though when preparing one is, "**Why** am I preparing one?" Common responses will include:

- Provide customers with information about upcoming events
- Provide customers with information about products and/ or services
- Sell those same products and/ or services
- Relay company information
- Drive traffic back to main website

Utilize **1-2 main point(s)** when issuing a newsletter. Many newsletters become convoluted when they are created. The "main message" is lost in a hodge-podge of random thoughts and "things that have to make this newsletter". While many use a standard template from week-to-week or month-to-month, give yourself permission to deviate from the norm, and switch it up from time-to-time.

2. Target your audience through demographic and psychographic analysis

To truly engage your audience, keeping your open rates high and unsubscribes low, you **HAVE** to send relevant information tailored toward their specific needs, desires, and wants. In order to do this though, you really have to study your audience and ask yourself, "**What** makes them tick?"

Consider age, gender, location, and what they do for fun. Use studies, surveys, and other

analysis to help here. Try to come up with at least 2-3 targets you want to court. You**SHOULD** have multiple sends, one for each target demographic (a.k.a.- segment; most e-clients contain segmentation tools based off of extra information entered about the e-mail address).

Sending repeated blasts to the same target gets *VERY* repetitive for the recipients after a while, especially when the subject line is always the same. Not only that, but your audience begins to feel you don't care about their specific needs and desires. Their potential is being missed through your broad, generic, one-size-fits-all approach.

You only have to look in your own personal e-mail account daily to see the same list of "deletes"; that is, vendors you don't necessarily want to unsubscribe from because you do frequent them on *OCCASION*, but on the other hand getting BOMBARDED with daily e-mails from them is ridiculous!

Like I said, you don't unsubscribe from them per se, but they typically have the same 'ol subject line every time, so that as soon as you see who it's from and the subject line combined, it's pretty much an immediate "delete" response.

> *NOTE: You shouldn't "pound" the point home for e-marketing purposes. I'm a firm believer in quality versus quantity. You don't want your audience to have the same response you do when they see your newsletter, so consider their reactions. The first thing people notice is the subject line.*

> *Don't always use the same tired "special", "day of the month", or "discount". If you use these tag lines sparingly, they CAN be effective, but only when combined with very few sends to begin with. The eyes naturally perk up a little by the audience when they see something they're not used to seeing.*

3. Who, what, where, when, why, and how?

After sketching the general layout for your newsletter and considering elements such as columns, feature articles, and website "redirect" link placement, start asking the crucial questions above. Recipients will EXPECT this information to be answered, *IF* they decide to open the newsletter at all. Proper format will:

1. Post most important information at the beginning of the article.
2. Have information included in case someone wants to reprint the article.
3. Contain industry information with catchy headlines pertinent to the target. Should make the recipient want to read the article.
4. Contain plenty of white space...too much content and copy is bad for an e-newletter.
5. Use colors found in your logo and/ or website to tie the theme together, and for "brand image" recognition.
6. Ensure all links work. Links should be on words and not "click here" and "view here".
7. Use pictures (preferably photographs) relevant to the copy.
8. Double check facts and statistics and have proofread several times.
9. Include unsubscribe information.

4. Manage your lists and keep them current

Multiple lists can be daunting to manage, but your regular e-newsletter as well as main website should contain opt-in *AS WELL* as opt-out links or forms for easier access by recipients. Opt-in forms can be placed on your website, from code your e-mail service provides (we at MTR offer this) so that those who sign-up using the form will automatically be placed into a pre-determined list of your choosing, making adding new contacts easier.

Import new lists, using events to pass around sign-up sheets for opt-ins. Ensure you have a system in place so people who want off your list are not still receiving your emails. On the flip side, make sure you have a "forward to a friend" button within your newsletter. This allows for new contacts to be added periodically.

5. Use statistical analysis to determine if goals were met

All e-mail clients nowadays have statistical analysis tools (many include Google Analytics standard). Analyze these reports in-depth as they speak to open rates, click rates, conversion rates, links "clicked on" rates, bounce rates, forwards, unsubscribes, and more. You obtain a real sense of the life of your e-mail from beginning to end, and how much "love" it received once received by your market.

Be realistic in your expectations; don't expect unrealistic numbers but instead research industry standards for your market. You'll probably find your data in line with other predefined e-marketing standards. Test and evaluate using different headlines, feature articles, colors, subject lines, days of the week sent, time of day sent, length of time between sends, your different segments, even the name you place in the "From" field.

> NOTE: Many e-mail clients use built-in spam checkers to rate your newsletter before it's sent. However, remember the following are often spam filter "magnets":

- These words are notorious: *free, discount, act now, limited time offer, call now, click here (now)*
- Bright excessive colors, especially red
- Any excessive punctuation or symbols, like **$$$**
- Big no-no- **ALL CAPS**

This blog covered just the basics. Sending a targeted, well-rounded newsletter that resonates with your target market for whopping open-rates is really a modern-day art form. This doesn't mean it's impossible to send that perfect ezine though. Set some goals in relation to your statistics, tweak segments if necessary, and create an additional newsletter tailored specifically for that other segment if need be.

Subject line is **HUGE**. It has to be catchy without getting stuck in spam filters which can be hard to achieve. Be aware of which designs are working or not. Test compatibility across different email browsers to see how the campaign looks in "preview" mode. Good luck, and if you have any questions about the *More Than Rewards* e-marketing client, give us a holler! Until next time, stay safe and warm!

NOTE: Learn from your failures, be personal, and focus on 1-2 main items per send. Never attach media like audio and/ or video. Instead link to a media web page. Avoid overblown (hyped) language at all costs, proofreading as you go.