

Lead Nurturing Through Email Marketing

Inbound Marketing University (Zhu, Jia Li Lily)

<http://inboundmarketing.com>

July, 2010



Lead Nurturing Through Email Marketing by [Jia Li Lily Zhu at HubSpot](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#).

Lead Nurturing Through Email Marketing

After a business acquires leads from call-to-actions and landing pages, it needs to follow up to filter leads by their potential interest in its products or services and cultivate them into customers. Email marketing can be an effective tool for lead nurturing. While poorly designed email campaigns could appear as spam and serve to repel instead of engage leads, well crafted email updates may serve the opposite end—that is, guide leads deeper into a business’s sales funnel. What components does a successful email marketing campaign contain that can drive business growth?

Defining SEO

Why should businesses use email marketing? According to Eric Groves at Constant Contact, an email marketing software company, 91% of Internet users between the age of 18 and 64 send or read emails. Besides the wide usage of email, email marketing is also 20 times cheaper than direct marketing and among the cheapest marketing media¹. The question therefore lies not in whether to implement email marketing but in how to implement it effectively

In the context of inbound marketing, email marketing means delivering *professional* email communications containing *valuable* information to an *interested* audience. That is, effective emails are not considered spam for two reasons. First, they target people who have chosen to provide their contact information, also known as “opted-in”, to a business’s correspondence and thus expect to receive information. Second, the emails a company sends contain information of value to prospects. Prospects are therefore more likely to read and act upon these emails.

Of course, sending valuable content to an interested audience does not guarantee a high email open or response rate. Variables in email marketing can significantly impact the success of an email campaign. To effectively nurture prospects by email, a business needs to plan every step with discretion.

First, a business needs to build a qualified email list. To decide whom to include in the recipient list, a business can check the sources through which it has obtained visitors’ contact information. If call-to-action forms are the email sources, a business knows that these leads have willingly provided their contact information on the website. These leads could still be surprised to hear from the company, however. Email recipients recognize the company and know the reason they are being contacted only if they receive emails shortly after visiting its website. A company should therefore categorize leads by how recently they have filled out landing page forms and send different groups of leads different messages.

After determining whom to email, a business needs to compile an email message that leads are willing to open and read. People are first exposed to the headline and sender

¹ Eric Groves, Constant Contact, Inbound Marketing University (CV 301)

information, which means that these two components are crucial to a lead's impression of a business's email update. Headlines and sender information play different roles in shaping impression. Sender information tells recipients where the email comes from. It should be a name associated with the company that its leads recognize. Unless the business owner or an employee is better known to certain leads, a business should make sure that its brand name is included in that field. Once leads recognize the email source and confirm its reliability, they will skim the email subject line to decide whether the email is worth opening. A subject line should therefore encapsulate the immediate benefit of opening the email. Besides offering value, content in the subject line should also be related to leads' activities on the company's website. Relevant content reminds leads of the information they have requested on a website, reinforces their understanding of the reason they are receiving an email, and motivates them to read it.

The next goal is to get leads to read content in an email. An email message should first contain valuable content such as expertise, tips, facts, testimonials, and discounts narrated in a personable voice. Valuable content also needs to be displayed in a clean layout to be readable. The format of an email should be concise, and the email should be short enough to not require extensive scroll-down. Another way of making content readable is to use bullet points or summarize information into short sentences. This helps leads focus and capture the main points of the email relatively easily.

Now that leads have finished reading an email and become interested in learning more, a business should get leads to act upon what they read by clicking links in the email to visit the company website for more information. This strategy guides leads toward the next stage of the company's sales cycle. A business can, for instance, include a call-to-action text link that will direct leads to a landing page. If the lead converts a second time by filling out another form on a landing page, the company knows this person is very engaged with the company and could become a good customer.

To maintain email subscription rate, a business may also include a brief message indicating that it respects and protects prospects' privacy. In other words, a company should give to get, both of which are important to the success of email marketing.

Business owners should distinguish open rate from click-through rate. Open rate refers to the act of opening an email. If tracking codes are embedded in a link, a company can measure the open rate. Click-through goes beyond open rate. A click-through happens when subscribers click on a link embedded in an email to visit a company website, download a file, take an online survey, or send the company an email. Since clicking on links reflects leads' interest in further engagement, click-through rate is a better indicator of level of interaction. The two are closely related, though the former is closer to achieving business results.

In summary, careful email campaign design can help a business achieve online marketing success. Informative headlines, professional sender information, organized email layouts, appealing call-to-action offers, relevant email content, and timely follow-ups all contribute to high email open and click-through rates. When used in conjunction with call-to-actions and landing pages, email marketing is capable of both deepening leads' interactions with a company website and, more importantly, cultivating leads to enlarge a company's customer base.

Review

1. When is email marketing not considered spamming?

- Email marketing is not considered spam when it delivers *professional* email communications containing *valuable* information to an *interested* audience

2. How often should a company email its leads?

- Frequency of email marketing should depend on the content of an email. If an email offer is appealing and has an end date, a company shouldn't worry too much about emailing its leads.
- If a company sends periodic updates to leads, it can compile more content in emails and send them less frequently.

3. How can a company raise its email open rate?

- Leads are more likely to open an email if they recognize the email sender, find value in an email subject line, and receive the email shortly after visiting a website associated with the email sender. A company that follows up promptly, provides professional sender information, and writes a compelling and informative email subject line may successfully raise its email open rate.

4. Should a company care more about email open or click-through rate?

- Click-through rate implies a deeper level of lead engagement with a company because leads are intrigued enough to visit its website for more information.
- Email open rate is, however, often correlated with click-through rate (since those who click on a link in an e-mail must have opened that email). As a result, a company should pay attention to both to gauge the effectiveness of its email marketing campaigns.

Discussion Questions

1. Can a carefully designed email marketing campaign targeted at a purchased list of leads work effectively? Why or why not?
2. If an email campaign that implements all of the suggestions in this piece experiences a low email open rate, what can a company do to resolve the problem?
3. What proportion of the content in an email should be devoted to information sharing versus call-to-actions? Should it differ by the business objectives of sending certain emails?

Additional Resources

Inbound Marketing University Class on Email Marketing

<http://inboundmarketing.com/university/successful-email-marketing-cv301>

Top 21 Email Marketing Information Resources

<http://www.email-marketing-reports.com/iland/2007/02/top-21-email-marketing-information.html>

Email Marketing Tips and Articles

<http://www.lyris.com/resources/email-marketing>

Email Marketing Resources from Blue Sky Factory

<http://www.blueskyfactory.com/resources.php>