

Beyond E-Newsletters

by Mary Costa

By now, many small businesses are using e-newsletters to maintain communication with current and prospective clients. But if everyone is doing it, how can your business stand out in the crowd? Here are a couple ways to leverage e-marketing in an age when Internet use is at its highest.

Perform Market Research

In the past, only big business could spend the money to get insight about clients and prospects. Today, even the smallest businesses can use online surveys to get quick feedback. Online surveys are extremely inexpensive when compared to their print counterpart, plus you get instant results. Why get the information? One reason is to find out who to target with advertising campaigns, e-mail blasts, direct mailings, and other promotional efforts.

Some sample survey questions are: What magazines do you subscribe to? What hobbies do you have? What is your annual household income? What is your age?

By asking questions like these, marketers are able to target the appropriate audience, rather than assuming who their clients are.

Provide an Incentive

To stand out among the barrage of e-mails consumers receive these days, consider including an incentive and performing a sweepstakes. Sound difficult? It's not. Clients and prospects are much more likely to open and click through an e-mail that offers something such as a free gift certificate, free service or other award. This doesn't mean you have to offer the incentive to everyone who opens the e-mail; all you need is one or two gift certificates and a couple winners. This is a great way to draw traffic to your site. With do it yourself marketing tools, it's easier than ever to conduct an online sweepstakes, randomly select a winner and track results.

Sweepstakes can also be a successful method to encourage service adoption. For instance, say you really want to lower costs by having customers pay online. Persuade clients to open an online account by entering them in a sweepstakes for an iPod or gift card if they sign up online. The prize can even be a voucher for the service or product

you provide. This kind of enticement can be applied across the board with businesses.

Listen to Customers

Surveys can also help you gain information about customer preferences. Before launching a new product or service, survey your customer base to find out what they want. Sending a survey to prospects who haven't done business with you is the perfect way to find out how to improve your business and increase sales, while reestablishing relationships.

Crossroads Development is just one business that leveraged online sweepstakes for their client, Bush Industries. This company asked Crossroads to perform market research to find statistics and info on customer design requirements, and measure consideration for purchase and price elasticity, before starting new office furniture development.

To generate 200 responses within a short timeframe, Crossroads created an online sweepstakes with a drawing to win one of \$250 gift cards.

By performing an online survey, Crossroads was able to condense six weeks of research into seven days, shortening time to market and providing a huge competitive advantage. And, as a result of the survey, several features were added to enhance the furniture as well.

High Tech for Low Tech Businesses

If you don't have a Web site, it doesn't have to hold you back from e-marketing. Surveys and sweepstakes are a successful way to make contact with customers and prospects without spending the time and money developing a site. Track who opens your message, and follow up with the most active prospects.

It's easy to implement these ideas with your own business. Don't limit yourself to just one type of online marketing tool. Creatively combining online approaches delivers results faster. ▼

Editor's Note: Mary Costa is the director of sales for Ennect. She has over nine years experience helping businesses increase their visibility online. Ennect online marketing tools help you work more effectively and efficiently. Visit www.ennect.com, write to info@ennect.com, or call 866.435.1212.

"Use Surveys and Sweepstakes to Provide Incentive, Get Response."

– Mary Costa