11 Ways to Improve E-mail Open Rates

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There is a dirty little secret in the world of e-mail marketing: In order to get your customers excited about what you send them, you need to first entice them to open your e-mail. A recent study from MailChimp examined about 200 million e-mail campaigns and found that the open rates ranged from 93% all the way down to 0.5%.

Mind you, that's not conversion rates. That's just open rates. In other words, the poor soul who sent out 10,000 e-mails and got a 0.5% open rate didn't even manage to make his or her pitch to 9,950 of the people he or she targeted. If we assume a similar rate of conversion, the person may have made a single sale (or possibly no sale at all) for all his or her efforts.

The problem of course is that people are inundated with spam and simply clicking the delete button on any given e-mail is incredibly easy to do. So how do you manage to get better open rates? Read on to find out.

Words to Avoid

There are a number of words that you simply need to avoid if you want to try to get better open rates in your e-mails. Things like 'FREE' are a good example. Often, e-mails with the word 'FREE' in the subject line (especially in all caps) go straight into the spam filter, never to be seen by your potential customers. It also doesn't help at all to try to trick the spam filter with things like F'REE or F*REE. Sure you might get past some spam filters but the problem is that most people ignore such e-mails anyway because they know they're likely spam.

Some other words which will either trigger spam filters or get people to routinely delete your e-mails include:

- % off
- notspam

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3

- Act now

- Anything to do with sex or medications

- Capital letters (i.e. DON'T WRITE LIKE THIS – IT LOOKS LIKE SHOUTING!)

- Get out of debt

- Be your own boss

- Cash bonus

- Dollar signs ($$$)

- Dear friend

- Most things having to do with debt elimination or payday loans

- Hello

- Most things having to do with weight loss

- Winner

- Reminder

This is hardly a comprehensive list but you get the idea – if it sounds spammy to you, it probably sounds spammy to your potential customers too. Also, according to that aforementioned MailChimp study, 'reminder' and 'help' are also likely to negatively impact your open rates even though they'll likely get past spam filters.

Don't Try to Pretend Either

Another common tactic we're now seeing is where people try to pretend that the e-mail they sent is actually in response to something requested. One common way to do this is to include "Re:" in the subject line. In other words, it makes it look as if this is part of an ongoing conversation. There are two problems with that – first, most people will remember that they didn't have a conversation going with you (and even if they didn't remember, when they see it's an ad, it's going to be a huge turn off).

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4

Second and even more importantly, this kind of thing may violate the CAN-SPAM act and could get you fined. The CAN-SPAM act specifically forbids misleading subject lines so this is something you don't want to risk.

Another tactic some people employ which is a bad idea is to say "here is the information you requested." This again could be a violation of CAN-SPAM. It is also likely that it's not going to improve your open rates because most people know they didn't ask for that information.

Don't Bother with Names

It used to be that you could get away with sticking the name of a potential customer into your e-mail subject line. These days, it's more likely to be seen as a spam tactic. Interestingly though, inserting a location can help (assuming you get the location right that is – remember that people do move around so unless you got the location from the customer, it's best not to use it).

So What Can You Write?

It may seem from what we've said above that you're pretty much screwed in coming up with good subject lines which will get people to open your e-mails. All the 'tricks' that we've heard about seem to be overused and they seem to be counterproductive these days. Well here's a fresh idea, how about telling the truth for a change?

No, we're not saying your subject lines need to be boring. That won't help your open rates much either. Instead, what you want to do is to have subject lines which are interesting but which still engage in the old truth in advertising ideal.

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11 Ways to Improve
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So for example, let's consider that you have a cool WordPress plugin you want to sell which allows you to do what's commonly called 'pay with with a like.' In essence, these kinds of WordPress plugins allow you to partially lock your content and unlike them with a 'like' on Facebook or a tweet on Twitter (or any number of other social actions). These kinds of things are very useful to anyone running a WordPress based blog because it allows them to also improve their social media penetration.

Let's look at a few possible subject lines and see which one is most likely to get opened:

Closing Soon! Act Now

Well that certainly is designed to grab attention. It demands that the person look because the opportunity is going to disappear soon. The problem is, we have no idea what is closing soon or why we should act now. Some might click to find out what it is but many more will just assume it's spam that they have no interest in and move on.

Pay with a Like Plugin

This one has the opposite problem. It's just plain boring. It doesn't make anyone want to open the e-mail because it has no pizazz and no action about it. You don' really care that much one way or the other about it unless it's something you really know you need. Plus, if you're not familiar with this kind of plugin, you may be wondering what it is and assume it's nothing you care about.

Easy Way to Increase Your Social Media Penetration

Now this one is actually pretty good. It's descriptive because it tells us what the e-mail is going to be about and it gives me a good idea of why I should care. One minor change we might make to this in order to improve it further is:

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6

New, Easy Way to Increase Social Media Penetration – Just Released

The advantage here is that this gives us more of an impetus to take a look because we may have heard of lots of other methods and assume that the "easy way" mentioned in the previous example is just rehashed stuff (which truth be told this would be – pay with a like has been around for a while. However, we'll assume for this example that it's something new).

In other words, yes, you should be truthful about what you write but it doesn't have to be written in a boring way.

A Word about Newsletters

Newsletters are pretty boring creatures. Everyone and his brother seems to be peddling some kind of a newsletter to the masses and frankly, most people just don't care that much when they get an e-mail letting them know that the new newsletter has just arrived. The exception is when it's a small and passionate niche though (for example, fans of Star Trek: Phase II, an online professional quality fan produced Star Trek series probably will care that a new newsletter has arrived in their inbox).

For the rest of us though, newsletter e-mail subject lines could use a bit more. If your newsletter consists of a single article, mention in the subject line what this week's/month's newsletter is about. This helps tremendously in getting people to open it because they'll see there is something valuable in the newsletter they've just received.

It's also helpful to consider going beyond a simple newsletter. Make it into an online magazine and you can improve the number of people willing to open the e-mail and take a look at what you just sent them.

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7

Length of Your Subject Line

Another interesting point: shorter subject lines generally work better than longer ones. Ideally, keep the subject line around 50 characters or so. Definitely don't write a whole paragraph's worth in it though because most people won't see the whole thing and will delete it. Bottom line, keep it short and simple.

From Lines Matter Too

Another thing many people forget is that the 'from' line also appears in the line where people see e-mails. Generally, it's best to identify yourself as the author in the 'from' line so that people can feel comfortable with what you are sending. Even just putting down an actual name instead of a company name can often help to keep people interested. Don't try to be cute about the 'from' line either. Keep the cute stuff for the subject.

Remember that Where You Get Your List Matters

The number of people who will open your e-mails is directly related to the quality of the e-mail list you use. If you create an e-mail list yourself which includes people who have actually made a purchase from you in the past, you are that much more likely to get good open rates. Buy one of those junk e-mail lists where it's 50 million e-mails for $99 and you are likely to see abysmal open rates.

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8

The same thing applies to frequency. Want to kill a good e-mail list? Send out e-mails every day with lots of junk offers. People will quickly learn to avoid e-mails from you. If you want to keep your e-mail open rates higher, stick to no more than once a week and make your e-mails useful instead of spam, spam and more spam.

Try Lists

By the way, another good way to grab people's attention when you're trying to get good e-mail open rates is to use lists. This of course only works when sending out e-mails which include a newsletter. However, lists such as "11 ways to improve your e-mail open rates" will generally work better as a subject line than "Improving your e-mail open rates."

Consider Your Timing

Try to send out e-mails so they arrive at your customer's desks late in the morning. These e-mails are more likely to get opened because they're not going to be buried with the previous night's list of e-mails and they're not likely to put off until tomorrow either.

Watch Out for Those Who Never Open E-mails

This isn't about subject lines but it's worth mentioning in a report about subject lines anyway. Watch out for the customers who never open your e-mails. At a certain point, you need to simply drop these people from your e-mail list because they are never going to purchase anything from you and you're just wasting money and effort trying to get them to buy.

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9

When at First You Don't Succeed…

You've probably heard the old adage, when at first you don't succeed, try, try again. This works with e-mails as well. Want a better open rate? Grab a list of the people who didn't open your e-mails (you can get it from most autoresponder services) and then create a new subject line. Send out the same e-mail again to those who didn't open it the first time. The odds are good you'll get more people to open your e-mails when you give it a second go. Sometimes the new title is enticing. Sometimes, people just didn't notice it the first time you sent it and sometimes (gasp) the first one ended up in the spam filter.

Bottom Line

Look, the bottom line here is first of all to realize that nobody gets a perfect open rate. Decent open rates can range substantially depending on if you are marketing to your relationship based list or if you are expanding your customer base with a purchased targeted list. But above all, think about what would make you open the e-mail and then do the same when contacting your customers.

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10

Love What You See?

If you really loved what you saw in this report (and what's not to like?) we'd love to share even more great ideas with you about how you can build your e-mail list and make it into an effective vehicle for making money online. We offer a FREE newsletter packed with useful information along with great deals on rented lists which can greatly increase the number of subscribers you have. Give us a call today at 1.800.547.848 or drop by our website at: Listguy.com.

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