

Inbox Interactive, Inc. presents...

7 Top Things EVERY Marketer Should Know About Email Marketing

By Kim MacPherson

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"Hassle-free email marketing since 1998."

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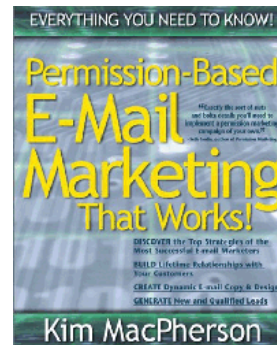
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About Kim MacPherson

Kim was one of the true pioneers in email marketing, having founded Inbox Interactive exclusively as an email marketing agency in 1998.

Along the way, Kim launched the very first weekly email marketing column for ClickZ in 1999; she also wrote one of the very first email marketing books, "*Permission-Based Email Marketing That Works!*" (Dearborn Trade).



Marketing expert and best-selling author Seth Godin lauded Kim's book as "*...a great next step for anyone who is sold on permission marketing. Exactly the sort of nuts and bolts details you'll need to implement a permission marketing campaign of your own.*"

In addition, Kim has keynoted and/or spoken at more than 40 marketing conferences in Australia, Austria, England, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States.

Having been creative director of Inbox Interactive for more than a decade, Kim has written or edited more than 1,000 different direct-response emails and landing pages.

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About Inbox Interactive

Inbox Interactive was founded in 1998 as a "hassle-free, one-stop shop" for email marketing services. We provide creative services (copywriting, design, and production of emails and landing pages) as well as managed deployment services (list hosting, mailing setups, and deliverability management). And of course, we help clients develop their email marketing strategy while making use of current best practices.

Our clients have run the gamut from solo small business owners to names you may know such as AOL, Blue Man Group, McKinsey, Network Solutions, New England Journal of Medicine, Novartis Pharmaceuticals, USA Today, and Western Union.

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Introduction: How Online Marketing is Similar to a Live Sales Environment

Internet marketing has certainly changed a lot since I founded Inbox Interactive as one of the first email marketing agencies in 1998.

If there's one thing that hasn't changed, though, it's the fact that, when you get right down to it, online marketing is really very similar to being in live, face-to-face environments such as offices or stores.

Specifically, there's a very important concept that applies to these sales arenas that quite often applies to email marketing as well. I'm talking about the concept of *building momentum*.

Just about any good salesperson will tell you that, at least in part, the speed and completion of the sale depend on how much momentum is generated during the selling process.

Yes, momentum has a lot to do with building a sense of urgency in the prospective customer. But it goes beyond that. The term really represents a set of stages and processes -- both tangible and borderline abstract -- that can be essential to closing the deal.

The Stages are Set...

Case in point (and be forewarned, you'll need to set the dial on your time machine to "2005" for this example!): Mr. and Mrs. Prospect walk into a new-homes sales center. In their minds, they are just at the "looking" stage, so they're a bit cool when greeted by the sales rep. In other words, their guard is up.

So let's take a look at the stages they go through as they "buy" the house, bit by bit, in their own minds. The movement of thought from a "just looking" to a "let's buy" stage is brought about by a focus on building that momentum.

Stage 1

First, the salesperson addresses the "don't bother me/just looking" demeanor by welcoming the couple in a friendly, nonthreatening manner and then telling them to feel free to walk through the model homes that are next-door. BUT, she adds, there are a few outstanding features that she'd like to point

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out on their tour, if that's OK with them. No hard sell, she promises -- just a few highlights to add value to their visit. Mr. and Mrs. Prospect agree.

Stage 2

So through the model homes they go. The sales rep points out the many features -- and the corresponding benefits, of course -- of the homes. She presents those benefits in such a way that the prospective buyers "move into" the homes in their minds -- statements such as "This alcove at the top of the stairs would make a lovely quiet reading area," and, "With the size of this dining room, you can have a festive Thanksgiving dinner for the whole family at your house!"

At this stage, the couple begins to decide which of the model homes best meets their needs.

Stage 3

The sales rep takes it a step further and offers to show Mr. and Mrs. Prospect the actual raw home sites that are available, so they can visualize things such as landscaping, sun direction, and which windows get southern exposure.

When they pick out a favorite lot, it further bonds them with the home and creates an even stronger "we are living in this home" mindset. PLUS it adds another layer of desire (not to mention pure momentum) to boot.

Stages 4 and 5

After they're done with the tour and they're back at the sales office, the rep reviews the various financing options with the prospects. Further visualization takes place in their minds as they realize they do have the ability to make those payments each month.

So the sales rep asks -- point-blank -- when they'd like to sign. When Mr. and Mrs. Prospect hem and haw, the sales rep reminds them that another couple interested in that home site is coming in later today and that they may very well put a deposit down on it. The home will then most likely be lost to them. Fear of loss seals the deal. (Remember, you set the dial on your time machine to the real estate market heyday of 2005!)

So, what does all of this have to do with email marketing?

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Plenty, actually. A sales arena is a sales arena, and although a big difference obviously exists between physical and virtual realms, the concept of stronger sales and conversions as a direct result of a focus on generating momentum is one of the strongest concepts out there in my opinion. But how do you apply it to email?

Well, that brings me to one of the most important things to develop when you're marketing with email...

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Email Marketing Must-Know #1: Build Momentum

The previous example demonstrates a couple going through a decision-making/buying process at a new-homes sales center. It shows you how momentum is built in an offline sales environment, how it can enhance the entire process, and how these same stages can be applied to an email campaign.

How do I know that momentum works? Well, in another life, I *was* that salesperson. And because my mentor at the time taught me how momentum built through a series of processes can so positively affect the likelihood of a sale, I learned a lesson that translates well to just about *any* marketing environment -- including email.

That lesson encompasses the theory that the act of building momentum -- building excitement -- within a clearly defined, seamlessly connected series of steps can set the stage for closing the deal.

Since I've left the real estate trenches, I've learned that there are definitely parallels between offline sales and online (and offline) marketing.

Let's review the stages again, this time giving each an email spin.

Stage 1: Build trust and excitement from the get-go. Just as prospective home purchasers walk in the door with their guards up, email recipients (especially brand-spanking-new ones) begin their review of a commercial email with at least some trepidation (unless, of course, they are loyal customers of the advertiser/sender). And just as the salesperson in the offline example offered in a very nonthreatening manner to give the prospective homebuyers a quick tour, so the intro in an email campaign can set a similar stage with a clever yet subtle approach to give email recipients a reason to read further.

Stage 2: Establish involvement devices. When the salesperson says, "This sunroom will make the perfect mid-afternoon getaway spot," she's creating a visual for the prospective homebuyers that emotionally connects them with the home. Likewise, an email that effectively homes in on the benefits of the promoted product or service can also evoke an emotional response.

It does more than just present a list of great things; by creating a picture in the prospect's mind, it creates -- and strengthens -- desire.

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Stage 3: Detail the benefits. In stage 2, you make real for your prospects some of the benefits they could enjoy by taking advantage of your offer. Stage 3 presents credibility and substantiation by listing the features -- along with all the details therein -- that contain those benefits. You can liken this to the landing page (and the promoted product page) on your site because even though you can highlight some of these features in the email itself, it would be difficult for you to do so effectively in great detail.

For instance, if your email promotes children's educational software, the message within it is created to engage interest AND incite a click. The landing page that this click directs folks to contains all the details that your prospects need to know before completing the sale. In other words, it is here that they can "see" what they're getting. This page can also include links to FAQs, product details, and company information. Needless to say, however, the focus should be on the product itself.

Stage 4: Close with a sense of urgency. The prospective purchasers may say, "Hey, the numbers work, but let me think about it." In other words, the price may be right, but often, unless a true need is involved (and timing plays a role here), prospects need to feel a sense of urgency to make the final decision. This is when a limited-time trial or discount, a deadline, or even limited product availability can help.

Stage 5: Make it easy for your prospects to commit to the purchase. Ease of use can really help seal the deal. By the time prospects get to the purchase page of the site, you have to figure they're really interested. Adding a toll-free number or customer service callback button can help answer those last remaining questions. Additionally, if it's a house-list campaign and you have customer data, a pre-populated purchase or sign-up form can boost response tremendously because it's one fewer thing that the customer has to fill out.

Some may think the whole sales analogy is a bit too complex to translate into email marketing terms. It needn't be. In fact I would venture to say that a well-thought-out, well-written message utilizing these five stages can be boiled down to an email (and subsequent landing and sign-up pages) that's about as quick and easy as you can get.

Of course the trick is to maintain a seamless flow from stage 1 to stage 5. No glitches. No error messages. No terminally long-to-load site (or email) pages.

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And, between the email and the Web site, there should be a slow build within the mind of the prospect of "like it... want it... need it... *have to have it.*"

THAT'S momentum!

And my goal for this report is to help you improve (and maybe even create) some momentum-busting email campaigns to promote your products and services.

While there are many pieces to the puzzle, let's start with the creative side of things...

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Email Marketing Must-Know #2: Make Your Messages SING

How do you create an outstanding, response-generating email promotion? What do you look for to ensure that email copy is above par?

Good copy doesn't come from a one-size-fits-all approach. Sure, there are certain "rules," but having said that, I've seen many winning promotions break *plenty* of them. In other words, there is no sure-fire formula that you can apply across the board. However, there are certain things you can keep in mind while you're in copy-development mode.

What Motivates Your Audience?

Everyone wants something. Discover what lies at the heart of your target audience's desires, and you're halfway there. If you're selling MP3 players, perhaps your potential customers are looking for peer acceptance -- they want to be perceived as cool. Or maybe they want to relieve boredom... find the right soundtrack for their leisure time... express their personalities.

If you're selling life insurance or financial content, members of your audience probably want to protect their loved ones, be good parents, accumulate and/or preserve money, or have security in their old age.

If you're selling travel services or vacation packages, audience members may be looking for ways to save money, fulfill a few fantasies, seek new adventures, or simply have fun.

What Features and Benefits Appeal?

You can see where this is going. Start with the core -- audience motivation -- and the rest will come naturally. Well, almost.

What you'll end up with is a list of benefits, each of which will appeal to a specific motivation. Stay focused on what you've determined to be your primary motivation, and hone any and all benefits related to it.

For instance, a vacation-resort promotion that drives home the fact that it includes everything from drinks to tips is touting features -- and benefits -- to appeal to the cost-conscious. If it were targeting the fantasy seekers, it would instead sing the praises of the various decadent features that vacationers could enjoy.

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Here's the kicker: Those features and benefits might very well be the same, or similar, for each version (the one for the cost-conscious and the one for the fantasy seekers). However, since the audience motivations would be different, the positioning of those features would be different as well.

Just remember that it's the benefits that truly sell. The features are simply there to substantiate those benefits. So instead of "We have seven miles of prime beachfront property," think in terms of bennies:

"You'll have 7 unique miles of white, sandy beaches to stretch out on"...

"Sip a few ice-cold pina coladas with our compliments..."

"Sit back on one of our cushiony 'laze' lounges..."

"Let the sun warm your skin and melt your cares away..."

Are you getting a good picture of the benefits here? Okay, now it's time to hone in on WHO exactly these benefits will, well... benefit! (Hint: After you've got a good clear vision of who that person is, you can begin creating your message...)

Know Thy Audience

Let it be said for the thousandth time: It's the little things that can make all the difference in the world.

And although it's not a little thing in terms of time, the following is something that we often don't spend enough time on: research. Therefore, know the market even more than you know the product.

Know the lists that the promotion will be sent to. Know them inside and out. In fact: Who are these lists made up of? How did they become members of those lists? Picture them in your head in terms of things such as age, occupation, and lifestyle. That's when you really begin to know who you're "speaking" to.

Think in terms of objections that this audience may have. Then develop answers for those objections -- and why they shouldn't be objections at all.

Keep words, sentences, and paragraphs short for those impatient scanners who need to quickly comprehend the gist of the offer and message. Strive to

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keep most of your words short and simple. Sentences should be no more than one-and-a-half lines long. Paragraphs should be three to four lines max.

Another excellent suggestion I learned long ago is that you should write your copy so that a 10-year-old can understand it. No matter who your target audience is. Even if you are targeting multimillionaire Mensa members (Wow! Say *that* 10 times really fast!), your copy shouldn't be so high-falutin' that the pre-teen brainiacs in the group can't understand what you're saying.

Last, but not least, remember that less is more – generally speaking -- when you're creating a message to generate leads. The opposite is generally true for a paid offer.

Now let's get into the nitty-gritty, the nuts-and-bolts – in other words, details, please! – of email copywriting...

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Email Marketing Must-Know #3: Create Compelling Subject Lines, Leads

Let's get back to that salesperson analogy in the introduction. Ask just about any salesperson what components are essential to closing a sale, and he or she is bound to tell you that one of the most important is the ability to establish rapport. A very basic premise, to be sure... and one that can (and should) be applied to the email channel.

So let's take a look at another offline, person-to-person example for a moment. Pretend you've just walked into a computer store: Two salespeople approach you to offer up their services. Salesperson A (let's call him "Sid") comes barreling down the aisle, shouting, "I've got hardware and software galore - what can I sell you today?" Salesperson B, on the other hand, greets you warmly and says, "Welcome... It's chilly out today, isn't it? Do you mind if I show you around a bit just to get you started?"

Who are you more likely to go with?

Okay. Obvious answer to an obvious question. Yet, there are still salespeople out there like good old Sid. Not to mention the fact there are plenty of marketers who simply don't have a clue how to "speak" to prospects online.

Here's a clip from an email promotion I once received which demonstrates that fact...

"[Company] is pleased to announce the availability of its E-commerce tools. Useful for developers and surfers alike, these tools are available at our website. A partial listing of our features includes..."

Yawn.

There's nary a greeting nor a salutation in sight. In the world of sales, one of the most basic tenets for rapport building is to greet the prospect by name. At the very least, say hello. Begin the dance that will help develop that warm, fuzzy feeling.

Another problem I have with the example above is that it's all about THEM - feature after feature after feature. Where are the benefits? And where do I fit in?

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If the email had demonstrated how those features could positively affect MY world, it would not only have held my attention longer, but would also have helped me better relate to the advertiser. And the ability to relate is yet another element to establishing rapport.

Lastly, because the wording in this promotion is both impersonal and non-conversational, it would have been better sent to the masses rather than the qualified list that ended up receiving it. Plus it's obviously been written to make a sale. Sure, the name of the game is to sell; but you don't want that objective to be so overt that it turns people off.

Turned-off people don't make great customers. Turned-off people walk out the door. Or they simply hit "delete."

Time to take a look at the other side of the coin - a promotion that "gets it." See the difference for yourself:

"Hello Kim,

The holidays are coming! That means chestnuts, Jack Frost and mistletoe. That's right... and now's the time to pick up Calcium, Sam-E, Glucosamine and thousands of other great vitamins and minerals to keep you happy and healthy throughout the holidays..."

Much better. Granted - not everyone's going to relate to mistletoe (or vitamins, for that matter), but that's kinda the point. This has been written to appeal to a certain audience. So it's more personal which, in turn, makes it more inviting. It also addresses me by name and the language is friendly, casual and downright conversational. And the benefits are made clear from the very first paragraph.

Of course, if you're selling high-tech thingamajigs to Fortune 500 CEOs, the style of your message will be altogether different. Suffice it to say you must understand your audience and speak to them in the phrasing and terminology they know. That fact is nothing new to seasoned copywriters.

Just remember: The message becomes your salesperson. Give it the appropriate "personality" and make it work for you. If it sounds like something that can be shouted from the rooftops for all the world to hear, something's probably wrong. But if it reads as though you're right across the table, you're no doubt on the right track. This is only part of the equation, though...

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Having touched on the overall "tone" of an email message and how it should speak "to" instead of "at" your prospects, we now dive into one of the most powerful components of an email promotion: The subject line.

Think of the subject line as the teaser on your email's virtual "envelope." If improperly written, it can all but kill your response. It can certainly make or break a promotion – especially nowadays, when people comb through their inbox with their pinky at the ready on the "delete" button. What's the first thing they look at? Either the subject line OR the "from" field.

Getting folks to open their email is half the battle. And coming up with a compelling "subject" is how to do it.

So try to stay away from the "hard sell" strategy. Consider the following email promotion's subject line from a popular offline sporting goods store:

"FREE SHIPPING! FREE ASSEMBLY! BEST PRODUCTS! HUGE VALUES!"

Sheesh. Talk about hard sell. Not to mention hype AND an overuse of that dreaded "free" word. Sure, that may have piqued the curiosity of some (IF it made it through the spam filters)... it may even have pulled a solid response. But it's sensationalism, pure and simple -- strategies such as this won't, in all likelihood, help you build any friendships. Not to mention long-term customers.

Enough of what NOT to do. Take a look at the following subject line:

"Experience the Luxury of Fine Craftsmanship..."

This works pretty well... in more than one way. First, it leaves the reader with a question: Luxury of Fine Craftsmanship? In... what? Are we talking cars? Jewelry? Furniture? You HAVE to open the email just to find out what the product is.

Second, it opens by "speaking" in the reader's terms. An old rule of copywriting is to use the word "you" to communicate benefits to the reader. You don't necessarily have to use that exact word; however, words like "Experience..." can have the same effect. Think of it like this: If the subject line read, "Our products are luxurious and finely crafted," it wouldn't have the same appeal because it would no longer be about MY experience. It would be only about the advertiser's benefits.

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Last, this particular subject text was short and sweet and didn't have to resort to the hype-filled "free" tactic as that of our sporting goods store above. It also honed in on specific aspects of its offer (the "luxury" and "fine craftsmanship") To that point, take a look at the first example again and notice how general its message sounds. (Remember the "don't write for the masses" rule?)

Indeed, that type of message isn't one that someone trying to sell you directly would use. Therein lies the difference: Be specific and speak to your readers one-to-one. Even in the subject line.

Okay, suffice it to say there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to subject lines; but there ARE some current strengtheners that are working right now. Just to recap:

- Make the subject line compelling. Try to leave the reader wanting MORE with a teaser.
- The word "this" is very powerful in subject lines, as are ellipses...
- Stay away from the word "free" and any hype-filled or filter-triggering language.
- Speak to the readers in their own terms and in a one-to-one style.
- Keep the text brief.
- Be specific.

Remember: Online results can change at the speed of sound. That means what's working today could be a bust tomorrow and vice-versa.

The solution? As always, test heavily. And re-test... continuously. Once you have the subject line down pat, move onto developing the creative for the "meat" of your message -- the email itself...

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Email Marketing Must-Know #4: Make Your Message Stand Out

Legendary direct response copywriter Herschell Gordon Lewis once said, "A well-written sales letter is an amalgam of sales psychology, word manipulation, and mechanical application."

Truer words were never spoken. I could write a book on the psychology aspect, but I'll spare you (for now). However, when it comes to solid copywriting, there ARE certain rules and details that, when effectively applied, can work quite well within the email channel.

So enough on generalities: It's time to get down to the nitty-gritty... the manipulations and mechanics, as Mr. Lewis put it, that make up an effective promotion. And how to make them work online.

The following highlights fall under the "Things That Are Working Now" category:

Make it easy to read online.

- Leave plenty of white space in and around the text to make it easier for your prospects to read.
- Keep the column width narrow. Text messages should be no more than 65 characters across.
- Single-space within paragraphs. Double-space between. Again... makes for easier online viewing.
- Short one to two-sentence paragraphs read easier online.

Have a conversation.

- Use simple words and phrases. Don't try to impress with two-buck words. Don't bore your readers with too many details, either.
- Pretend one of your top prospects is sitting right across the table from you: You've taken him to lunch to pitch him on your products and services. Envision what you would say. Think of the anecdotes and wording you might use... even the humor. Now put those words into writing, EXACTLY as you've imagined. Don't think about

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it; just write. Doesn't matter if it isn't 100 percent grammatically correct. Remember: Your job is to sell, NOT to be an eighth-grade grammar teacher. Which brings me to my next point...

Ignore everything your eighth-grade grammar teacher taught you.

While Mrs. Hill - MY own former teacher - would be aghast, the fact is that the strongest copy often comes from the use of grammatical faux pas such as incomplete sentences and phrases... not to mention the use of the conjunctions "and" and "but" to begin sentences.

Such tactics can really pack a punch. Why? It's a matter of rhythm, pure and simple. It's how you really talk and listen. There's a certain cadence that goes along with reading an effective sales pitch. Take a look at the following two examples, the latter of which was part of a winning promotion:

"Their lives in business were different because of their useful knowledge and its application."

Or...

"So what made their lives in business different? Knowledge. *Useful* knowledge. And its application."

Can you "hear" the difference? The rhythmic ebb and flow creates pauses. The pauses create reflection. That reflection starts a true-sounding conversation and gets you one step closer to the reader/prospect.

Emphasize.

Use one-line paragraphs to emphasize certain sentences. But don't overdo it.

When you need to highlight certain points or words, use capitalization (or, for HTML promos, bold) for easy-on-the-eyes online viewing.

Take a look at the following excerpt:

"We'll help you manage your time. *And nothing more.*"

Sure, it would work in print. But the fact is, italicized text is more difficult to read online. Instead:

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"We'll help you manage your time. **And nothing more.**"

See the difference? This may seem like a minor point, but you'd be surprised at the boost it can give.

Load the benefits.

This is nothing new as far as copywriting goes. You've seen this in earlier pages of this report, in fact. It bears mentioning again because it is, in my opinion, one of THE most essential components to creating a potent sales message.

Just keep the following in mind: Let every sentence pack a punch. That means weave a true benefit into each and every line. Yes, it IS possible. And it's something to strive for.

So now that you've got the nuts and bolts down, let's take a look at how you can introduce yourself for the first time through email...

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Email Marketing Must-Know #5: Introduce Yourself Effectively

We focus a lot of energy on developing regularly scheduled email communications... how to write copy to wow (and woo)... how to segment a house file in order to find the cream of the crop among your customers... and how to optimize design, testing strategies, and more.

These communications are designed to build those all-important relationships with our customers over time, but we may often neglect a very critical contact point that we have with our customers, prospects, and subscribers. That is the very first message that we send to them -- a.k.a. the "Welcome Letter."

Most customer development models include a "welcome" strategy of some sort for greeting first-time subscribers, buyers, and prospects. If you send an email, what do you include to not only inform, but also keep people interested in and excited about the initial offer that they signed up for?

We've all received a warm and inviting "welcome" message by email at some point in our online lives. As marketers, we've probably received hundreds of them. But what makes up an exceptional introductory message? What necessary components do you include to truly make your new list members and customers feel, well, welcome?

Here are a few must-haves:

Personalize and humanize. Depending on your audience, keep the tone of the email friendly. If appropriate, make it sound as if it's coming from someone within your organization. Begin by welcoming, congratulating, or thanking the recipient no matter what your offer is. And depending on your audience, you could even start out with something somewhat humorous to grab attention, such as this amusing little welcome message:

"Someone, you or someone pretending to be you, has just requested that we add you to the subscriber list for..."

Tell recipients who you are. Immediately tell them the name of your company and what you do. Remind them why they signed up, bought, and/or registered to begin with (because they can save money, get great design tips, take advantage of exclusive offers, etc.). Position it so that recipients are well

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aware of what rewards, or benefits, they're about to reap. Remind them how smart they are for finding you.

"Introduce" your key products, services, people, and/or departments. If people are the backbone of your company, introduce a few of your key players to your new audience. Or, if your online store has multiple departments, present a unique introduction and link for each one of them. One online music company does this very well. It sends an exceptional welcome message that's perfect for its audience of music lovers. Included in its introductory email are brief "teaser" messages that describe things such as how members can set their music and artist preferences, create a wish list and gift registry, and register for rewards based on purchases. Each brief description includes a link to that specific area on its site.

Sign it. Conclude the message by having it signed by a real live person with a real live signature file (and make sure the email address actually works).

Offer an "unsubscribe" option. This goes without saying. Yes, people may change their minds upon receiving the very first email, and if they do, you don't want to tick them off by making it difficult for them to unsubscribe if they want to. On that same note, be sure to also make it easy for them to change their email address.

Keep it simple. That means short and to the point, while at the same time keeping the above in mind. The thing to remember is that your welcome message is not a novel, nor is it just a set of instructions on how to unsubscribe. A happy, inviting medium is what you're striving for here.

Common sense? Sure. Just remember that first impressions really do make a difference, especially at that precarious time when you and your new subscribers and customers are just becoming acquainted. So be sure to make that first encounter count: Welcome them with open arms and knock their socks off at "hello."

Then the "only" thing you have to do is keep that dialogue going -- in a relatable and compelling way...

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Email Marketing Must-Know #6: Keep People Excited

If you've been marketing regularly online, then you know that pesky segment of your house file that continues to receive -- yet rarely, if ever, opens or responds to -- promotional emails? Surely you know the kind.

It seems no matter what you do, you simply can't revive them. Yet, for whatever reason, they keep hanging on.

So what's an email marketer to do?

Sure, incentives are fine for the short term, but what will truly inspire action? Let's not be shortsighted and think that because they've opted in, this audience is necessarily a captive one.

A lot of it boils down to what folks have signed up for... or at least what they *thought* they had signed up for.

Plenty of true content seekers are still out there, so when they see "sign up for our newsletter," it's perfectly reasonable that they might assume that they're getting a real newsletter. As we all know, there are tons of so-called newsletters out there that aren't about "news" at all -- they're about sales.

If this could be the issue with your offering, think about pulling off those people and -- if the quantity is high enough to justify it -- creating a regularly scheduled, content-rich message just for them. You'll want to somehow weave little plugs of some sort into the text (natch!), but the emphasis should be on what they have opted in for.

Take this a step further, and think about what you know about your house list based on the information you collected at the point of sign-up. In other words, start using some of that precious data!

We had one colleague who claimed she had signed up for many an offer -- content, sweepstakes promotions, etc. More often than not, the promoting site would ask for her birth date as part of the sign-up/registration/purchasing process. We've all had to do that at some point or another.

Well, what do you know? She recently celebrated her birthday, and she awoke that day with a marketer's natural curiosity. She was actually looking forward to seeing what these companies and sites would do or say for the event.

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You've probably already guessed it. Not a single birthday greeting did she receive. Not one. And we wonder why there are segments of our audiences that never seem to "tune in."

The kind of high-value communication that will thrive in the future is what we're talking about here. Yes, showcasing your products in HTML can be great. Driving home your benefits can help. Substantiating those benefits with real live features can be grand. But what will really get your list to respond requires using some of the technology this venue is famous for.

It doesn't have to be wizardry or rocket science, it just has to be well thought out. In other words, create your strategy based on what you know about your audience and on how you *assume* they'll respond to certain offers.

For example, let's take a look at hypothetical FamousRetailer.com. It sends out to its house list of customers a regularly scheduled emailed "postcard" showcasing its top five "products of the week."

Based on its technology, which allows the company to flag members based on how they responded, FamousRetailer.com has a concrete plan of action for each and every mailing:

- For customers who click and buy on an offer, FamousRetailer sends out *immediately* an autoresponse message thanking them for their purchase... along with a cross-sell or up-sell message.
- For customers who click but don't buy, FamousRetailer sends out a message that will hopefully entice them further. Perhaps it's a "Buy now, and get an additional 25 percent off your NEXT order..."
- And, finally, for customers who don't even open the original postcard, a revised, but similar, postcard is sent based on an altogether different set of appeals.

Remember: The combination of knowledge and creative interaction equals value and relevance for your subscribers.

That was just one consumer-focused example. However, a lot of the strategies we've discussed here apply to both consumer and business-to-business campaigns. And so we'll talk about business-to-business email marketing next...

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Email Marketing Must-Know #7: Even if You're Marketing to Businesses, Keep it REAL...

If your focus is on B2B, then chances are your targeted market already receives tons of promotional email. Obviously, time is valuable for these people and, realistically, you probably have a total of five seconds or less after they open their email to capture their attention and interest.

When it comes to marketing to a business-to-business audience, the top response drivers may not be what you think. Conversely, what you may think of as tried-and-true principles may be killing your response simply due to overuse.

How do you make your promotional mail stand out from the crowd enough to get your audience to read on? Be prepared to take a break from what's worked in the past... and also be prepared to rework the "same old, same old."

In other words, get ready to expel a few old myths. Namely:

Myth #1: The copy must be short. Not so anymore, if it ever really was. More and more, B2B email marketers are seeing results that show longer, more detailed copy pulling a higher response than the "teaser" copy of yesteryear. (Frankly, quite a few consumer marketers have seen this shift as well.) It doesn't mean that email marketers across the board should automatically switch to longer copy. It DOES mean, however, that this one vital component of your promotions requires thorough testing before rolling out.

Myth #2: The email must carry the look and tone of a business letter. Does this mean that your email message should have a header and salutation, and should be signed by an appropriate party - a real, live person? Nope, not necessarily. There are some dynamic business promotions out there that break out of this mold. Just keep in mind that you are still "speaking" to a fellow human being and not a nameless, faceless company. It's people who receive these emails. Make the message compelling... lively, if necessary. Heck, make it fun if you can fit the fun factor in and make it work.

Myth #3: Things that work for B2C don't apply to B2B. Hardly. We've seen sweepstakes, free-gift offers, contests, Palm giveaways, and, more typically, consumer-oriented offers work fabulously well in the B2B arena. Again, you're dealing with real people who have real needs, wants, and pain points - just like everyone else. Know your audience, and you'll uncover where those points lie.

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You'll then learn what types of offers will best appeal to them. This leads to the next myth...

Myth #4: Showcase how the offer can benefit the company. Benefits are great - load 'em into your message. But make sure that a good portion of them directly benefit the *recipient*. Whether it's Joe Smith, purchasing agent for ABC Technologies, or John White, chief technology officer for a major IT firm, tell your audience how your offer is going to help them. Tell them how it will launch them into the stratosphere of their company or how it will get them kudos from their higher-ups or high fives from their officemates. Create those benefits so they appeal to their ambition (or lack thereof), their greed, or their perpetual quest for the brass ring.

Myth #5: Business is boring. This is probably the biggest myth of all. Just because you're marketing high-tech thingamajigs, don't fall into the trap of thinking that all communications need to use the jargon of the industry or need to sound dull and dry. As creator of an email promotion, you can craft it as you want. If it fits your audience and that audience's core desires, create something that is so far beyond boring that it becomes extraordinary. B2B needn't be boring. In fact, just the opposite is true. Because this audience may be so used to receiving messages that carry a certain tone, you may just find that switching gears here gives your response rates a big lift. (Note: This doesn't necessarily give you license to get campy or cheesy.)

Bottom line: Be different. Break away from that oh-so-comfortable tried and true. And remember that businesspeople are still people - and consumers - after all.

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In Conclusion...

As we wrap up this report, the following tips include things you no doubt already know, yet are vital to both our credibility and reputations as online marketers; they bear repeating. Here are my top picks...

Position all communications as being both useful and beneficial. Definitely Numero Uno. This, of course, means that you really need to know your audience your house list of customers. And create offers and messages that truly apply or are of interest to them. Sure, it's great to have a list of 300,000 subscribers to your "special offers" newsletter but NOT if 299,000 of them don't even read it.

True relationship-building dialogue is about engaging those subscribers so completely that they yearn for the next issue to arrive. It's about losing the "pitch" and, instead, having a one-to-one conversation with them. It's also about taking a good, hard look at what people signed up for and making sure you're truly "delivering the goods." And be sure to weave into your messages just how those so-called goods can help them.

How do you accomplish all of this? If you don't have a database solution in place and your list is small enough, one way is to include a fairly detailed, incentive-based survey in one or more of your messages to find out what really makes your customers tick. Then roll out with your best efforts at meeting those customers' wants and needs.

You can also come up with other ways to gather information to determine what your customers will respond to best. Come up with a list of potential "hot buttons" and other ways to create ongoing valuable communications. For instance, months ago I had entered a relative's birthday on a certain floral site's special reminder page, and I had completely forgotten about it until about a week and a half before the event. When I received that reminder email, it was right on schedule. Well, guess what? This particular site got my business because of it. For me, it was all about the convenience.

Provide legitimate contact information within each and every email. If resources are limited and you can't provide a phone number in every email, fine. But if you can't provide a legitimate email address, then you should really rethink why you're marketing with email in the first place. For example, I regularly receive emailed updates from a certain online graphics company. Not only are these messages 100 percent promotional in tone and hype-filled content, they

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also never, ever include a means to contact real people. Yes, they provide plenty of links to get back to the company's site so I can renew... or buy more... or see its latest and greatest. But the bottom line is the company does not make it easy for me to call or to send a quick question by email if I need to - a deadly mistake. Encourage feedback, and even reward it, as noted above.

Keep your messages clean and consistent. This one's a no-brainer, and most marketers who regularly communicate with their customers and subscribers through email don't have any problems here. Just make sure you edit carefully and retain the same look and feel from issue to issue. Too many misspellings or misquotes or mishaps, for that matter can come across as unprofessional and true email aficionados can't have that. (They won't have it for long, anyway.)

When all else fails and you do get that one unhappy camper who wants to unsubscribe, then what do you do? Sure, you can send that person an email, confirming that you're removing him or her from your list... and while you're at it, you can make one last-ditch plea to keep him or her. If you do that, though, do it with grace and dignity. And, by all means, do not ever email that person again unless he or she asks you to. After all, you still have your reputation. And your credibility. Just let that unhappy camper go.

Thank You!

I hope you've enjoyed reading this report, and I thank you for your time and interest.

If you ever have a question for me -- or feedback -- please either send me an email (kim@inboxinteractive.com) or call me on (678) 763-2770 (that's my personal mobile phone).

And of course, if you'd ever like to delve into how Inbox Interactive can support your email marketing efforts, please contact Paul Broni by email (paul@inboxinteractive.com) or phone on (678) 366-8100.

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