

How to Position E-Newsletters for Success

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By Sharon Hill

E-newsletter success stories tend to have two things in common — The owners have chosen the right provider for their technical skill, and have opted for content marketing rather than direct product sales as their yardstick for success.

Elaine Fogel, relocated Canadian and Phoenix Arizona resident, began her marketing and consulting business in 2005. President and chief marketing officer at Solutions Marketing and Consulting, Fogel has a 2,000-plus email subscriber base. Her open rate can run as high as 30 percent, with a click-through rate she calls “all over the map” — nine percent and up. What subscribers click through the most are not related to business, according to Fogel.

“I [sent an e-newsletter] in August that had click thru over 51 percent,” she said. “I happen to be a fan of international TV commercials — something you would never see in the US — risqué and humorous. They get the highest click-through rates. People like to laugh; they want to be entertained.

A large part of Fogel’s success is her segmentation. She sends three different highly targeted emails, one for non-profits, associations and charitable organizations; and two others to for-profit firms. “I try to segment email communications, because one message is not going to fit all,” she said. “I use my e-newsletters as a content marketing tactic.” Her husband, Allen Fogel, has recently merged his merchandise business with hers. As a result, this third segment of her e-newsletters includes promotion of products for sale online — but they don’t try to close the sale from the e-newsletter.

“We don’t do conversion. We market our services,” Fogel said. “In the main newsletter there’s an instant hand sanitizer on sale,” she said. “This couldn’t be timelier. But subscribers still have to contact us to place the order and discuss their needs. We want to build a relationship with the customer. I’m not looking for conversion rates — I’m looking for open and click-through rates and acquisition.”

Each segmented Solutions Marketing & Consulting e-newsletter provides information on marketing for that particular audience — including articles and links, study results and marketing tips. For the May issue she created an audio delivery of marketing tips.

Fogel is a perfectionist. She admits that these e-newsletters are time intensive. “People move and change jobs and you must keep your database up to date,” she said. “You must

test everything before you send it out." For the non-profit e-mail, as an example, she makes sure that the copy she uses reads "donors or members" rather than "clients or customers." She also provides a standing article each month called Accents on Associations. "I used to do both education and health care segment newsletters separately, but there isn't enough data out there to micro-segment like that," she said. "So I use articles that apply across the board. "

Fogel said that while general wisdom says to send e-newsletters Monday through Friday she decided to test that theory with a weekend delivery, thinking weekdays might be too crowded. "It was lousy," she said. "I now know that my best times are Tuesday through Friday, close to the beginning of the month. If I have a sale that expires at the end of the month I want them to have plenty of time to take advantage of that," she said.

Fogel is a Vertical Response user and advocate — "There is no email marketing software out there for small business that is perfect. I've tried them all." But she said that Vertical Response is a canvas — good for those who have some design ability, are not quite at the coder level, but want a professional look for a smaller fee. "I always tell my non-profit clients and colleagues that Vertical Response gives non-profits 10,000 free email contacts a month. Vertical Response starts with a template and then you can change the background colors, table and so forth. You can start in WYSIWIG but it offers much more flexibility. When you're done with your customization it doesn't look like a template anymore."

While Fogel said that those without her level of HTML and graphic expertise would do well to choose more simplistic email providers that offer templates and WYSIWIG, she did offer one caution. "WYSIWIG tends to make some little booboos once in awhile," she said. "You have to check fonts and sizes. You'll see that when you check the test e-newsletter. Make sure you're receiving it the way the recipients will see it."

Fogel offered this caution about sending e-newsletters. "Don't overdo it. I was getting a business e-mail from one entrepreneur every day. I don't even want to hear from my father every day. Some people have an inflated view of the importance of their message. Look at this from the customer's perspective. Ask them frequency — and what they want to learn. I'm giving them something for nothing and creating top of mind awareness with my e-newsletters. It's a great way of getting attention in a very crowded marketplace."

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