

E-Communications

There are many reasons why your small businesses should communicate with customers and prospects electronically and many ways to do it. There are also a number of pitfalls to consider once you decide to use e-communication as a way to market your small business.

Whether your e-correspondence is a newsletter like the Kwik Kopy Halifax monthly e-newsletter, a flyer, an event notification, a blatant sales pitch, a thank-you, a reminder or follow-up, using e-mail helps to keep your business top-of-mind with your customer. If done effectively, it isn't really even important that your customer opens and reads the communication, just that it appears in their inbox in a way that is unobtrusive. Most people don't filter e-mail from their suppliers unless we cross the line and become a nuisance.



If you send out mass e-mails too often, fail to remove duplicate addresses from the list or repeatedly send information that is irrelevant, you will be marked as spam and sent directly to the junk mail folder.

What are some of the basic rules of thumb we should observe when sending e-communication to a list?

1. Avoid sending the message more than once per month. If your information is time sensitive and changes quickly, e-mail may not be the best vehicle on a regular basis.
2. Do not send e-mails after hours or on weekends as they are more likely to be deleted.
3. Make sure the e-mail body contains information that is relevant to the customer. If necessary, split your database rather than sending bogus content to some customers to reach others.
4. Make sure that the e-mail provides an easy way for people to unsubscribe,

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preferably through an automated process.

5. Use a provider like MailChimp or Constant Contact rather than sending the data as a message from your computer with everyone's name hidden in a group distribution list or, worse yet, in the BCC field.



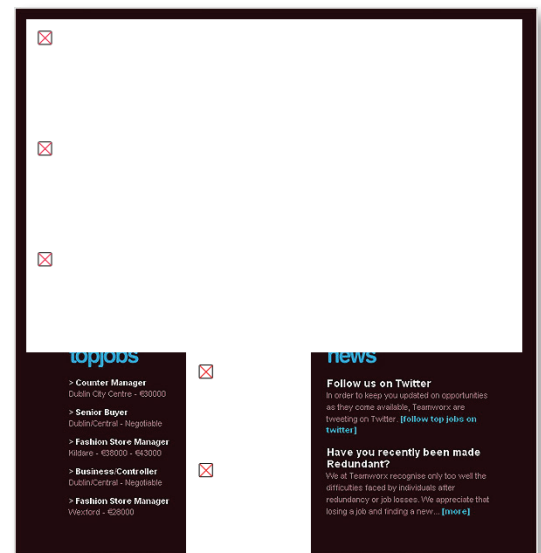
6. Make sure the message is branded consistently so that people become familiar with the layout and style over time.

7. If you use links to other online resources, make sure they are working properly and those pages are organized logically for the user that follows the link, regardless of what internet platform they might use.

8. Use headlines to clearly convey what the recipient can expect to find in the e-mail body should they choose to open the message.

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9. Choose content over style and glitz in the message. Keep in mind that most images are not downloaded with the message and 10 words can be better than 1000 pictures. As seen below, even the best-looking e-mail can be negated by e-mail servers that reject pictures from untrusted senders.



10. Carefully choose the form of the e-mail. Understand whether you are trying to sell something specific at this point in time or create just awareness that may not result in sales today.

It has been our experience that an e-newsletter is a good tool in a service business while not necessarily creating sales leads even though we offer special promotions in each edition. It requires a lot of work to create the content, often six to eight hours per edition and generally slips to the lowest priority category, so having someone other than the business owner responsible is a good suggestion. Like anything else, consistency and perseverance are critical to making e-communication work.