

# M LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

*The Marketing Guide for Local Businesses*

April 2015

*8 Proven SEO  
Strategies That Get  
Results in 2015*

**Our Annual Email  
Marketing Issue!**

**Email Marketing  
in 2015**

**5 Email  
Newsletter  
Tips for Local  
Businesses**

**8 Common  
Email Marketing  
Mistakes that  
Could Be Holding  
You Back**

**Infographic:  
Email Marketing**

**FREE!**

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Welcome!

Thank you for taking the time to read this month's magazine. We hope you find it full of interesting articles, and more importantly, that you'll be able to learn at least one thing that you can immediately apply to your business.

This month, we spend a good amount of time discussing Email marketing. Executed properly, email marketing can be an effective marketing platform that provides a high return on investment.

You'll also find new versions of our popular Marketing Calendar and Infographic.

If you're not already receiving this magazine regularly, we suggest you add your email to our subscriber list. We have some exciting articles already in the works for the upcoming issues. Don't miss out!

If you like the magazine, and know other local business owners that could benefit from receiving our magazine each month, please do us (and them) a favor by forwarding a copy to them.

If you have any comments about this issue or would like us to help you with your marketing please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards,  
David Akers  
President / CEO  
LMS Solutions, Inc.

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# Marketing Calendar

Plan your marketing messages around these upcoming holidays and proclamations.

## April

National Autism Awareness Month  
National Humor Month  
International Guitar Month  
Keep America Beautiful Month  
Lawn and Garden Month  
National Poetry Month  
Stress Awareness Month  
Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April 1st - April Fool's Day  
April 4th - Passover Begins  
April 5th - Easter Sunday  
April 23rd - St. George's Day (UK)

2nd - Reconciliation Day  
2nd - Children's Book Day  
4th - School Librarian Day  
6th - Sorry Charlie Day  
7th - World Health Day  
7th - National Beer Day  
9th - Winston Churchill Day

10th - National Siblings Day  
11th - Barber Shop Quartet Day  
11th - National Pet Day  
12th - Big Wind Day  
12th - Grilled Cheese Sandwich Day  
13th - National Scrabble Day  
15th - Tax Day  
15th - Titanic Remembrance Day  
16th - Wear Your Pajamas to Work Day  
17th - World Hemophilia Day  
19th - Primrose Day (UK)  
20th - Look Alike Day  
22nd - Earth Day  
22nd - Girl Scout Leaders Day  
22nd - Administrative Professionals Day (US)  
23rd - Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day  
24th - Arbor Day  
25th - DNA Day  
26th - Pretzel Day  
30th - Adopt a Shelter Pet Day  
30th - Hairstylist Appreciation Day

## May

ALS Awareness Month  
Asthma Awareness Month  
Celiac Awareness Month  
National Pet Month  
Foster Care Month  
National Barbecue Month  
National Bike Month  
National Blood Pressure Month  
National Hamburger Month

May 1 - May Day  
May 5 - Cinco de Mayo (US)  
May 8 - Victory in Europe Day (UK)  
May 10 - Mother's Day  
May - Memorial Day (US)

1st - National Mother Goose Day  
1st - National Space Day  
3rd - National Two Different Colored Shoes Day  
4th - Star Wars Day

5th - National Hoagie Day  
6th - National Nurses Day  
6th - National Teacher Appreciation Day  
8th - National Military Spouse Appreciation Day  
10th - National Babysitter's Day  
10th - Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive Day  
12th - National Fibromyalgia Awareness Day  
13th - National Apple Pie Day  
13th - National Receptionists Day  
15th - National Police Officers Memorial Day  
15th - National Pizza Party Day  
15th - National Bike to Work Day  
15th - NASCAR Day  
16th - National Armed Forces Day  
18th - National Visit Your Relatives Day  
25th - National Missing Children's Day  
25th - National Brown-Bag It Day  
25th - National Wine Day  
27th - National Senior Health & Fitness Day  
28th - National Hamburger Day



# Email Marketing in 2015

In spite of the ubiquity of social media in modern life, email continues to be the primary medium for B2B and B2C communications, particularly in the case of the former. The majority of businesses use it as a way to deliver content and promotional material to their target audiences. Partly facilitated by the unprecedented rise of mobile, email is actually more popular than ever before, with an increasingly large number of people checking their accounts throughout the day using their smartphones or other portable devices.

Although email is a critical tool for any business, it has, like all other areas of digital marketing, changed a great deal in recent years, and businesses need to adapt these changes in order to maintain and grow their target audiences and reach out to the right people. Given that most people receive dozens or even hundreds of emails per week (most of which can be safely categorized as spam), it is even harder these days to formulate

a sustainable, opt-in email newsletter campaign whereby a business can offer genuine value to its audience to the extent that recipients actually want to hear from them.

This guide takes an in-depth look into building a future-proof email marketing strategy in 2015 that will help to both draw in new, valuable subscribers as well as nurture existing ones.

## Current Trends and Statistics

According to research conducted by Salesforce and outlined in their 2015 State of Marketing Report, email continues to maintain a high profile in the business world, particularly with regards to B2B industries. The studies, gathered from the experiences of around 5,000 marketers, showed that email will play an even more important role throughout 2015, with 73% of marketers

considering it core to their businesses. Additionally, the study claimed that 60% of marketers believe email to be an essential enabler of their products and services, up from 42% in 2014. Another recent study, conducted by eMarketer, concluded that almost 70% of Internet users in the US preferred to use email when communicating with businesses.

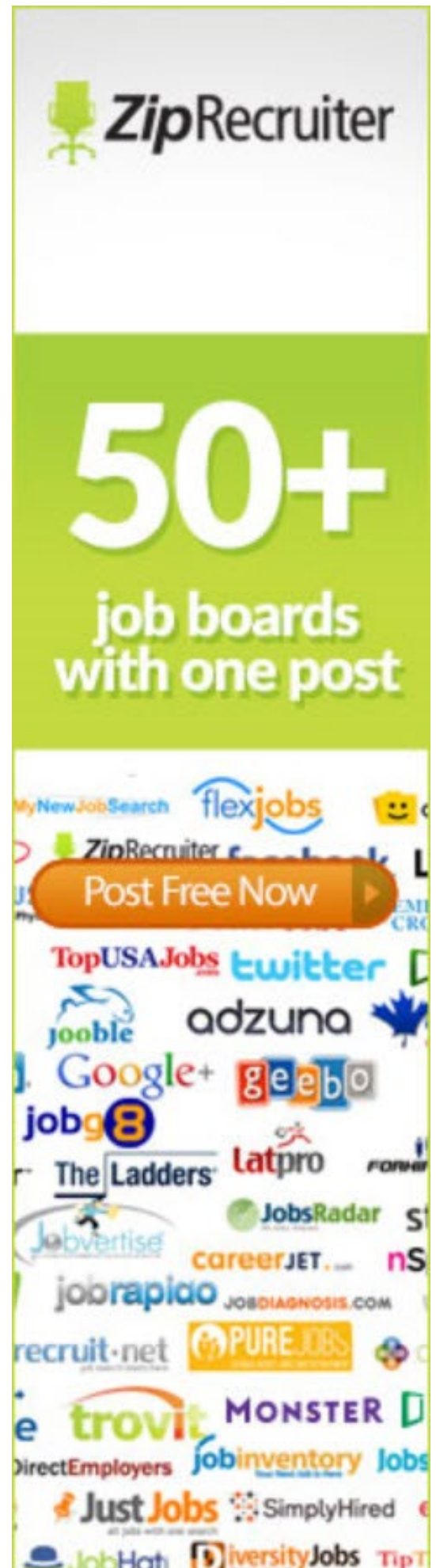
Email has been popular for a long time, so the above statistics really shouldn't come as much of a surprise. However, by far the biggest trend in recent years has been the growth of mobile Internet, and this has very much changed the way in which people access their email. Mobile and email have become inextricably connected to such an extent that all email marketing strategies need to prioritize mobile users. Forrester Research found that over two thirds of Internet users access their email via a smartphone at least once per week, and this statistic is also on the rise.

Another important trend in the world of email marketing is the shift towards more visual content, in spite of the fact that many mobile devices do not display images in emails by default. However, HubSpot's Science of Email survey in 2014 concluded that about two thirds of consumers preferred image-driven content in their email newsletters.

In spite of the growth in popularity of visual content, text-based content remains essential for the simple reason that many email clients, both mobile and Web-based, do not show images from unknown senders by default.

To summarize the most important trends in email marketing for 2015 and beyond, consider the following key points:

- Responsive newsletter designs have become critical, since they allow the content of the email to scale automatically to any screen size, whether it's a smartphone, tablet or desktop computer.
- Since Gmail recently introduced its new easy opt-out feature, unsubscribing from newsletters is getting easier, and businesses need to accommodate this fact in order to maintain trust and operate within legal requirements.



- Email is becoming more closely intertwined with social media and content, and businesses will find themselves under increasing pressure to link their email marketing strategies with their social media operations.
- Email is becoming a more dynamic platform thanks to more sophisticated HTML capabilities that allow users to engage with content delivered in email in a wider variety of different ways.



## Defining Your Goals

Any time is a good time to set or redefine your marketing goals based on current trends in the ever-evolving online marketplace. Setting realistic and attainable goals will also form the basis of your marketing strategy by giving you something to focus on in the increasingly fragmented and often confusing digital landscape.

For many businesses, a main priority is to grow the mailing list, though the quality of the list is far more important than the number of subscribers alone. A good mailing list is one of the most valuable assets of any successful business, but a

poor one, by contrast, is only going to get you labelled as a spammer.

To grow your mailing list, you're going to need to know how to reach out to your target audience and seek their express permission to receive newsletters from you. You'll also want to make it as easy as possible for people to sign up, and you'll need to give them a compelling enough reason to make the effort.

By promising and delivering value to your target audience, you'll be able to build up your mailing list with relevant, quality contacts.

Another key goal of any email marketing strategy is to increase open rates, and this is directly related to building up a quality mailing list.

If people actually take the trouble to subscribe, and they know the value of signing up right from the outset, then they will be far more likely to open your emails rather than just plant them straight in the trash folder, or worse still, report them as spam.

In fact, the open rate is even an even more important goal than the growing your mailing list, since it is more closely related to your return on investment. With your goal being to increase

open rates, you're going to want to make sure that subscribers actually want to hear from you and that your newsletters stand out in crowded inboxes with excellent, engaging subject lines.

The next goal in the hierarchy is to increase email engagement. Even though a subscriber might get as far as opening a newsletter, they might not see anything inspiring enough to keep reading, and it only takes most people a few seconds to decide. After all, first impressions account for a lot, particularly in the world of marketing.

You'll be measuring email engagement rates by tracking the number of click-throughs that you get, since they show you how many subscribers are not only reading your newsletters, but also clicking on the links provided in them.

A clean, responsive and user-

friendly design combined with excellent content and a compelling call to action are all factors that help to determine email engagement rates.

Finally, the true success of your email marketing campaign will be determined by the way in which it impacts your business's overall performance. You'll no doubt be aiming to maximize your ROI, and this means thinking beyond open rates and click-throughs alone.

At this point, it is important to look at the individual goals of each area of your email marketing strategy. Following are some possibilities:

- To drive online sales, typically through promotions and new product launches.
- To raise awareness of a local store or venue and bring more people to it.

- To reach out to previous customers who have been away for a while.
- To drive more traffic to your website, social media profiles or other portals.
- To conduct customer research for better segmenting your target audience.
- To follow up with promising leads or nurture existing customers.

### **Building a Quality Mailing List**

Building up a mailing list takes time, effort and a long-term commitment. Taking into consideration your target audience, you should already have a good idea of what type of people you want to have subscribing to your email newsletters. However, before

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you start building or reworking your mailing list, you'll need to have a clear idea of what qualifies as permission to send.

Not only is an opt-in mailing list, whereby you seek express permission from subscribers, essential for maintaining your reputation and maximizing engagement rates; it is also a legal necessity in most countries. Legal acts, such as the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 in the US, make the laws very clear with regards to email marketing.

Ultimately, there is a very big difference between having access to a list of emails and having the right to send promotional emails to them.

The following generally counts as permission of the level that you should be seeking:

- People who sign up through your online store by giving their permission without being manipulated by things such as checkboxes that are selected by default.
- People who sign up in person at a local store or venue or an event such as a trade show.

As you can see from the above, explicit permission is very specific, and it generally requires that you have

an agreed opt-in from the subscriber. However, you'll also gain access to numerous email addresses when people purchase from your online store or you obtain their addresses through any other means, such as a financial transaction or customer support query. However, including such emails in your newsletter list is not advisable, since it will likely lead to having many irate customers or would-be customers.

As a marketer, another very important consideration is the age of your mailing list. If your list is a few years old, then it is not likely to be very useful any more.

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Having permission at one time doesn't mean that you always have permission to send out email newsletters forever after, and sending out emails to past customers who are no longer interested won't do you any favors.

You should never buy an opt-in mailing list either, no matter how 'reputable' the broker might be. Not only does buying mailing lists conflict with the law in some countries: you're not likely to have many valuable contacts on any list that you didn't build up yourself. Instead, consider the following tried-and-tested methods for building up a quality mailing list:

- Use paid advertising platforms, such as Google AdWords or Facebook Ads to drive traffic to a sign-up landing page. Such platforms allow you to target your ads based on factors such as age, gender, location, interests and more.
- Offer an incentive for people to sign up, such as exclusive discounts, a discount code that is immediately available or any other similar reason to inspire people to subscribe.
- Provide an option for people to sign up to your email newsletter in the form of a call to action on your website, blog, social media profiles and during checkout in the case of an online store.
- Provide a link to a sign-up page in your email signature, so that when people receive things like invoices or reservation confirmations from you by email, they'll be able to sign up to your newsletters.

Always make it easy for people to sign up, but never try to force the issue or trick people into signing up.

## **Best Practices for Creating an Email Newsletter**

You might have the best mailing list that you could possibly hope for, but maintaining it by keeping your audience interested while also meeting your other goals is quite another matter.

With more than 100-billion promotional emails being sent out every day according to a study conducted by the Radicati Group, standing out among the competition and avoiding the frustrated click on the unsubscribe link, or worse still, the report spam button, is more challenging than ever before.

Formulating and committing to a long-term email newsletter strategy and delivering engaging, actionable content is what it's all about, and this section takes a look at some of the most important practices for creating excellent newsletters.

- Start every newsletter with an irresistible subject line that will stand out in the crowded inbox. You don't have much space to work with, so some creativity is essential at this stage, unless you're simply highlighting an extremely special offer. Subject lines that are personalized to the recipient tend to work best, while those that use spammy symbols, a purely sales tone or are too long are rarely effective.
- Make sure that every newsletter features a responsive design that provides easy readability and facilitates engagement on any screen size. Be sure to test your newsletter template before using it by sending it to yourself. Examine it closely in a variety of mobile clients, and make certain that any links provided in the email also lead to mobile-friendly websites. In fact, everything that you have online should be as mobile-friendly as

possible.

- Integrate social media with your email newsletters. Many marketers have traditionally stayed clear of integrating these two closely related platforms, but by including social sharing buttons in newsletters, businesses have seen average click-through rates increase by up to 158% over those that do not include them.
- Provide engaging text content. Yes, people might prefer visual content, but text content remains the most important, since any email client can display it. Images and even videos and animations can be very effective, but they should not replace simple text content. However, be sure to keep your written content short and to-the-point as well, so that it does not distract or bore your readers.
- Show off your call to action above the fold so that recipients never have to scroll down to find it. The best calls to action tend to be those that are placed inside buttons or images, since they are easy to follow and understand. After all, you

certainly don't want to lose interested recipients by confusing them and not letting them know what they should do next.

- Always personalize your emails for each segment of your audience so that subscribers receive the promotional material and other content that is most relevant to them. To help show that you are in touch with your audience, it is also wise to address the recipient by name.
- Consider providing informational content as well as promotional content. Not all content has to be or even should be promotional, and email is also a great medium for providing current information and news pertaining to your industry and other things that affect or interest your target audience in some way. Informative content adds value and helps to build up brand recognition and hold onto existing subscribers. Informational emails also have much higher average open rates. The same applies to other content that is not primarily promotional, such as humorous or other entertaining emails.



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## Essential Tools for Email Marketing

The most important tool in any email marketing campaign is the service provider that you choose, and there are certainly many to choose from, some of which include a wide range of additional tools for helping you to maximize your return on investment. Top Ten Reviews gave its Gold Award to iContact in 2015 with a total score of 9.83/10, citing its ease of use as its main selling point. However, there are many other extremely popular email marketing services, such as the well-known Constant Contact and MailChimp among others.

Many services also offer a free, albeit limited option for smaller businesses and those wanting to test the system before purchase. Of course, the best service for your particular needs will vary depending on your personal preferences and individual priorities. Whereas email marketing service providers can be quite expensive, there are also many free tools that you can add to your arsenal to maximize your ROI. The following include some of the most notable:

- Litmus Subject Line Checker allows you to see how your subject lines appear in a wide variety of different email clients and devices. It also shows you how emails will appear in notification boxes on various desktop and mobile operating systems and clients.
- MailChimp Subject Line Researcher is a popular tool for helping businesses to tweak their subject lines for maximum effectiveness. The tool, being from one of the largest email marketing service providers, also suggests subject lines based on maximizing your newsletter open rates.
- Litmus Scope is another free tool from Litmus that allows you to instantly create Web-based versions of your emails complete with previews for desktop and mobile clients. More advanced users can also use the code inspector to view the source code behind HTML emails.
- ISnotSPAM is one of many spam testers whereby you can test your email newsletter by sending it to an address and viewing a report. The reports will let you know if there is any content in your email newsletters that might trigger spam filters.
- While email marketing automation tools are critical for any large-scale email newsletter campaign, it is essential that you do not allow your brand to lose its human voice. Automation tools exist to help streamline and simplify the marketing process, but they are not meant to be relied on entirely. In fact, marketing automation should be considered an extension of human interaction by allowing you to reach out to a far greater number of people by way of meaningful engagement.

## Measuring Success

No marketing plan would be complete without a way to measure its performance right from the beginning. While any email marketing service provider should provide you with a wealth of useful information pertaining to the performance of your campaign, it can sometimes be difficult to understand and keep track of the most important metrics. You should already have some idea about the sort of data that you need to track from when you defined your goals, but

the following takes a closer look into some of the key metrics and what they mean:

- The bounce rate refers to the total number of undelivered emails. Emails may be undelivered if the recipient has either closed their account or there was a problem with the service provider. There are both hard and soft bounce rates, with the former referring to temporary problems only. Monitoring your bounce rate is important for exposing problems with your mailing list, and having a lot of hard bounces can get you labelled as a spammer by email service providers.
- The click-through rate refers to the number of people who open a newsletter and click on one of the links in it. A far more important metric to track than open rate, which generally brings inaccurate results anyway, the click-through rate provides invaluable insights into the engagement levels that readers have with your emails.

The click-through rate is a key metric to track

in any email marketing campaign, but for maximum effectiveness, you'll need to track it for separately for the different types of emails that you send, whether they are promotional, informational or transactional.

- The forwarding and sharing rate refers to the percentage of subscribers who share your newsletters with their friends, either by forwarding them or by sharing them on their social media profiles.

A high sharing rate shows a very high level of engagement with your newsletters: after all, it means that people are not only interested enough to read the newsletters themselves, but also to share it with others. Keeping a close eye on the forwarding and social sharing rate will provide useful insights into the type of content that your audience is most interested in seeing.

- The conversion rate is the ultimate indicator of the performance of email marketing, since it directly determines its return on investment.

The conversion rate refers to the number of newsletter recipients who, starting from a link in one of your newsletters, went on to make a purchase from your website.

A poor conversion rate, on the other hand, could signify a problem with your landing page rather than the content of your email itself. For example, if your click-through rate is high, yet your conversion rate is still poor, the problem likely lies with the website that you are sending your subscribers to.

Tracking the above metrics will ultimately allow you to track your return on investment as well as the health of your mailing list. On a final note, the above metrics are far more important than things like open rates and unsubscribe rates, both of which are very inaccurate and do not give clear enough insights into the performance of your marketing strategy to make them worth bothering with.





# 5 Email Newsletter Tips for Local Businesses

Contrary to what the doomsayers might claim, email remains the preferred way for businesses to keep in contact with both other businesses and consumers.

In fact, email as a medium for direct communication is actually growing, with more businesses investing in an email marketing campaign than ever before.

Small, local businesses can also enjoy the potential of a solid email newsletter strategy by defining their audiences

and focusing on delivering excellent content that educates, promotes and improves the image of their brands.

The following tips take a look at some of the key ways in which local businesses can formulate an excellent email newsletter campaign that enjoys the highest engagement rate:

## 1 - Promote Local Events

If your venue is organizing a local event, there's no better way to promote it than to

let your subscribers know in an email newsletter. To help draw in more attendees to your event, be sure to provide plenty of information about the purpose of the event and what it has to offer your audience, and provide a schedule, accompanied by suitable images where appropriate.

By launching and promoting an event on social media, you'll have the opportunity to attract a great deal of attention, particularly if your event is related to charity or a certain public holiday.

## 2 - Accommodate Mobile Users

Since most Web traffic is now mobile, simply accommodating mobile users is not enough: every area of your online marketing campaign, email included, should prioritize mobile users.

With regards to email newsletters, make certain that they are presented in a responsive format that scales automatically with the resolution of the screen they are being displayed on.

You should also provide engaging text content, with the most important content being close to the top of the page so that mobile users do not have to scroll down.

While visuals are important, they should not be relied on entirely, since many email clients (particularly mobile ones) do not display images by default.

## 3 - Offer In-Store Coupons and Exclusive Promotions

People should have some kind of incentive to sign up to your email newsletters, and offering

exclusive promotions are among the most effective.

Most people go online looking for special offers, particularly during and leading up to public holidays, and if you can promote them in your email newsletters, you'll likely increase your reach enormously.

In-store coupons and other promotions also make for very sharable content, and if you have an irresistible offer to show off, your subscribers will be far more likely to forward the email to their friends.

## 4 - Segment Your Audience

While small local businesses tend to have a narrower focus than much larger, broader ones, you'll may still want to consider segmenting your audience so that you can deliver more personalized content to the right people to ensure a higher return on investment.

You'll also need to focus on geographical location, particularly if your business serves multiple areas, in which case you'll need to adapt your email marketing strategy to each location to ensure that relevant content reaches the

right audience.

## 5 - Offer Valuable Content

Not all of the content in your email newsletters should be directly promotional. After all, people are much more likely to open newsletters if they contain useful information that is relevant to them or a special offer that they can't resist.

Starting with a catchy subject line, make sure that the contents of your newsletter does not disappoint.

Use the opportunity to promote things other than your business, product or service as well, such as recent blog posts or curated content from other sources. After all, the goal of an email newsletter doesn't always have to be to directly drive sales.

In order to build up a loyal following, you'll need to focus on delivering content of the type that your audience are most interested in receiving.

You can gain a great deal of insight into what your subscribers want by engaging with them over social media or inviting them to join the occasional survey or fill in a poll.

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# 8 Common Email Marketing Mistakes that Could Be Holding You Back

With the vast majority of businesses maintaining an email newsletter strategy, email marketing remains enormously popular. It is cheap and fairly uncomplicated, and it presents an exceptionally high return on investment compared to almost every other area of digital marketing. However, given that some 100 billion business emails (many of them spam) are sent out every day, it is not always easy to stand out. If your email marketing strategy is failing to deliver the results you expect, consider the following mistakes that could be holding you back:

## 1 - Not Seeking Permission

Sending unsolicited promotional emails is the quickest way to get you labelled as a spammer, and it is also breaking the law. Even if you purchase a mailing list from a supposedly reputable company, you won't be getting much in the way of quality, relevant contacts. Building up a quality, opt-in mailing list takes time, but it is also extremely valuable. Ensure that you have explicit permission from all recipients.

## 2 - Not Providing an Unsubscribe Link

The law demands that you include an unsubscribe link in all promotional emails, and you should never try to obscure it in any way. Additionally, the law also requires that you include your business's address in any business emails. As far as recipients are concerned, a clear and easy option to unsubscribe helps to instill a sense of trust, provided that the link works correctly.

## 3 - Not Writing an Engaging Subject Line

The subject line is always the first thing that people will see when your newsletters arrive in recipients' inboxes, and given that the average inbox is rather crowded, it is essential to craft an engaging but accurate and relevant subject line that encourages people to take a further look. If your subject line is not exceptional, the vast majority of recipients will either ignore the email, bin it or even label it as spam.

#### 4 - Not Using a Mobile-Friendly Design

More and more people are checking their emails from their smartphones or tablet computers, and the number of mobile-only Internet users is also growing rapidly. If your emails newsletters don't feature a mobile-friendly design, you'll end up with a far higher bounce rate. Always use a responsive design, ensuring that the most important information is close to the top of the email.

#### 5 - Not Providing Sharing and Forwarding Options

As far as marketing is concerned, email and social media should work closely together. You can help to facilitate sharing by integrating social media buttons in your email newsletters so that people can easily share content that they like on Facebook and other networks. It is also important to track sharing and forwarding rates by providing specific buttons for these functions in your emails.

#### 6 - Not Providing a Call to Action

A promotional email needs to be actionable, and this means that it should feature a clear call to action that guides interested readers towards the next step. Whatever the goal of a particular email newsletter is, it is important that this call to action is close to the top of the page. If recipients have to scroll down to find it, your click-through rate will likely plummet.

#### 7 - Providing Promotional Content Only

Email newsletters should be seen as a content marketing format in that they should not always be purely promotional. After all, consumers are surrounded by advertising everywhere they look, whether in the real world or in the digital one. Your email newsletters should focus on providing genuinely interesting content to such an extent that your recipients will actually want to hear from you.

#### 8 - Not Testing before Sending

Before you send out your email newsletters, be sure to test them by sending them to yourself and your colleagues. Make certain that they look the part on any screen size and in any email client. After all, the number of different ways in which people access the Internet and check their email is greater than ever before, and you need to be sure that everyone can receive your message.

#### Conclusion

On a final note, be sure to plan your email marketing strategy carefully, and start tracking your performance from the very beginning. Among the most important metrics to watch are the growth of your mailing list, the deliverability of your newsletters, open rates, click-through rates and conversion rates. Fortunately, most email marketing service providers offer useful tools to help make sense of the data.



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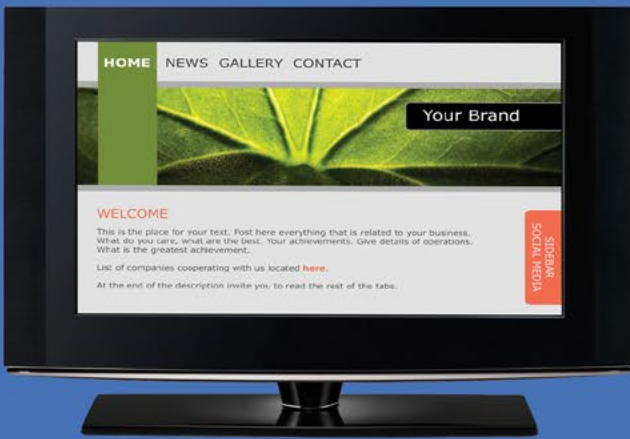
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# 8 Proven SEO Strategies That Get Results in 2015

The Internet has reached maturity, but search engine optimization (SEO) continues to evolve as new applications for online technology emerge. Mobile devices are changing the way that website visitors consume content while traditional desktops remain relevant for content creation. Search engines continue to favor activity on social media through shares, mentions, and links. Below is a full overview of how SEO has changed and how businesses can capitalize on these new opportunities.

## 1. Social Signals

The gap between the importance of social signals and traditional links continues to widen. Search engines are perceiving social media activity as more important because this activity is difficult to manipulate and provides detailed contextual information about the motivation behind a share. Contextual information will continue to grow in importance as search engines develop more sophisticated methods of understanding

social signals. Continued social media growth means that businesses looking to increase their traffic through SEO must develop shareable content and nurture relationships with thought leaders to receive valuable shares.

## 2. Mobile Website Optimization

Many businesses continue to underestimate the importance of mobile website optimization for SEO. Individuals still prefer to develop content on a traditional PC, but 56 percent of online content is now consumed on mobile devices, according to ACI Information. An optimized mobile website is now essential for SEO success because 72 percent social media shares come from users who visit a web page on a mobile device. Businesses can, therefore, make their content significantly more shareable by optimizing content for mobile devices.

## 3. Implied Links

Google has recently filed for patents that take advantage of implied links, or citations

that reference online content without using an explicit URL. Implied links will become critical for brands as mentions of a company or product name becomes more important than traditional links. Google has prioritized development of an implied link algorithm in an attempt to decrease the effectiveness of artificial link building as part of an SEO campaign. Brands looking to increase the authority of their website will need to devise strategies to increase online chatter about their products and services.

## 4. User Intent

Content must now be tailored to user expectations to ensure that search engines perceive it as relevant to targeted keywords. User intent has been important since the early days of SEO, but the growth of alternative devices means a greater disparity of visitor intents. For example, a user browsing the Internet on a smart TV is unlikely to have the same intentions as a user looking to get work done on a traditional

desktop. The disparate contexts of mobile device usage mean that user intent will vary widely between platforms. Businesses seeking to succeed at SEO must now account for intent by developing content that is appropriate for a wider range of usage contexts.

## **5. Thought Leaders**

Traditional marketing has always involved strong interpersonal relationships, but the Internet has decreased the significance of relationships in favor of programmatic methods of directing website visitors to information. The underlying human factors have not changed, however, and search engines are modifying their algorithms accordingly. Search engines will continue to leverage thought leaders to weigh the value of a link on social media or an individual web page. Businesses seeking to succeed at SEO will need to nurture a diverse network of thought leaders to increase the perceived authority of their content relative to targeted keywords.

## **6. Merger of SEO and Technical Design**

The principles of website design have changed very little over the past decade because of well-implemented web standards. Millions of individuals now possess a working knowledge of HTML, CSS, and even PHP. Compliance with SEO standards is now the norm from most

website design firms. Website designers are now expected to understand advanced SEO techniques. Tens of millions of individual website owners have also taken the time to understand the basics of an SEO-optimized website. The democratization of SEO means more cutthroat competition for simple keywords and increased customer expectations for individuals purporting to be SEO professionals.

## **7. Spam Penalties**

The increased sophistication of search engine algorithms means more ways for legitimate websites to be deranked by an unethical competitor. Search engines have done little to combat predatory SEO practices because the anonymous nature of the Internet makes it almost impossible to assess blame. Businesses seeking to acquire leads through SEO, therefore, will need to carefully blacklist bad backlinks before search engines apply penalties. Defense strategies should not, however, be limited to the website itself. Businesses may need to block followers purchased by a competitor or posts that are highly shared by spam accounts. A strategy for countering negative link spam may become a core aspect of SEO in the years ahead for marketers targeting competitive niches.

## **8. Increased SEO Competition**

SEO is still almost twice as

cost-effective as traditional marketing because of limited competition, but more businesses are starting to see its potential value. Even local businesses are now investing in sophisticated SEO campaigns that leverage social media and local thought leaders. Businesses that rely on SEO for a significant proportion of new leads must prepare themselves for a new reality that accounts for growing competition. Businesses concerned about competitive pressure should launch follower growth campaigns and seek to increase engagement on social media. A stronger presence on social media can help businesses retain SEO dominance when competition arrives.

## **Moving Forward**

Businesses that rely on SEO must be prepared for a new competitive climate that will increase the importance of social media and decrease the significance of traditional backlinks. The quality of content is now more important than ever, and responsive websites can facilitate content shares on mobile devices. Businesses that have not optimized their website for mobile devices must do so soon to capitalize on the growing importance of alternative devices. Increased competition will continue to raise the bar for success, but 2015 still presents more opportunities than ever before to acquire customers through SEO.



# News You Should Know

## Upcoming Changes to Google Search Algorithm

Google recently announced an upcoming change to its search engine algorithm, scheduled to become effective on April 21st.

In their announcement, Google noted "This change will affect mobile searches in all languages worldwide and will have a significant impact in our search results."

It is unknown how "significant" these changes will be, but many SEO experts are expecting a larger impact than the recent Penguin and Panda updates.

A large part of the update will be the favor given to mobile-friendly website pages.

To see how your site might fare, use this tool:  
<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/>

## Google Announces Extension Verifications

Google has announced verification will be required for all call and location extension phone numbers starting in June 2015.

Phone numbers that haven't been approved will be listed as "Unverified" or "Unverified phone" in the Ad extensions tab.

To get phone numbers verified, you'll need to take one of these steps.

- Have the phone number being used in the extension listed on the website (in text).
- Link your AdWords and Google Webmaster Tools accounts.
- Add your AdWords conversion code snippet to the landing page in your ad.

If you're using 3rd party call tracking you can still use options 2 and 3 to verify your numbers.

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# Email Marketing Facts



**76%**

76% of e-mail opens occur in the first two days after an e-mail is sent.<sup>1</sup>

**\$44**

Email marketing delivers the highest ROI (about \$44 per dollar spent, on average) of any digital marketing tactic.<sup>1</sup>



**66%**

66% of consumers have made a purchase online as a result of an e-mail marketing message.<sup>1</sup>

**8%**

Only 8% of companies and agencies have an e-mail marketing team.<sup>1</sup>



**158%**

Emails with social sharing buttons increase click-through rates by 158%.<sup>2</sup>

**64%**

64% of people say they open an e-mail because of the subject line.<sup>1</sup>

**9x**



There are nine times as many marketing emails sent each year as direct mail pieces delivered by the U.S. Postal Service.<sup>1</sup>

**64%**

64 percent of marketers say increasing email click-throughs and open rates is among their top priorities this year.<sup>3</sup>

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