Email Marketing Playbook

Why Email?

"When it comes to customer interaction, email is the Holy Grail of marketing communication. That's because done right, it produces phenomenal results. In fact, the ROI for email marketing can be as high as 4400%. That's $44 for every dollar spent on an email marketing campaign."

- Campaign Monitor

The ROI (return on investment) we are trusting God for is lives changed for Jesus and spiritual movements everywhere. But the point remains the same. We can count on email as a critical marketing channel that allows us to communicate with the people who we want to help win to Jesus, build in their faith and send out to reach others for Jesus.

Email Marketing Foundations

What value are you providing the recipient? Are you aiming to delight?

With every aspect of your email marketing efforts, you want to be **helpful** and **human**.

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them…" - Jesus

Treat others people's inbox the way you wish others would treat your inbox. Respect their personal inbox space. Aim to build trust and nurture a long-term relationship.

Build trust at every turn: From the sign up process to the actual email sends to the unsubscribe experience, your goal is to build trust. This is done by setting expectations, sending the emails they want and not sending emails they don't want (or weren't expecting).

Email Strategy

A good starting point: The most basic email marketing strategy is to build a list of subscribers who have opt-in to receive emails from you at a specific ongoing frequency. This newsletter strategy allows you to nurture relationships and journey with people over a long period of time.

Key Consideration: What frequency does your team have capacity for? Weekly or monthly sends or some other frequency? Do you have helpful and valuable content to keep pace with that frequency? Would that frequency serve your subscribers well? Keep in mind, once you have set expectations with your subscribers, it is hard to change the frequency thereafter.

One Way to Build Your List: An easy way to begin gaining subscribers is by placing the sign up form somewhere prominent on your website. This could be on the homepage, as a tab in the main navigation bar or at the bottom of articles and blogs that see a lot of traffic. Leveraging your website traffic is a simple (and free) way to get subscribers.

Another to Way Build Your List: Some people are more inclined to subscribe to a finite email series on a certain topic, like a seasonal devotional or 10-part email series on a spiritual growth topic they are interested in. If you delight and build trust through a finite campaign, a conclusion email with an invitation to your ongoing list could be well received.

The Sign Up Process

This is the first key moment for building trust. Before someone submits their email and becomes a subscriber, you want to make sure you have set clear expectations.

Be Clear: How often will you email them? Is it an ongoing list? If a finite campaign, how many emails are they signing up for (and at what frequency or until when)?

Stick to It: The saying "under promise and over deliver" does NOT apply to email marketing. You establish trust by only sending a person the emails they consented to receive from you.

What Info Do You Need?: Give some thought to what information you would like to know about your subscribers. In addition to their email, it's very common to ask for their first name in a sign up form, which lets you address them by name (you can make it a required field or not). A short and simple sign up form is usually good for conversion rates. But if you have a strategy that necessitates collecting more information, you can test out a sign up form that asks for that info.

Strategy Tip: If your sign up form is for a finite campaign, you can also add an **unchecked** box that the user can check to opt-in to your ongoing email list. This is the most effective way to build your ongoing list through finite campaigns.

Email Campaign Structure

Welcome Email: Ideally, the user will receive this email within seconds or minutes of signing up. In this email, it's a good idea to say thank you, reinforce the value of what they signed up for and reiterate what they should expect to receive and when. Another good idea is to provide value by including content in the welcome email, which gives the user an initial chance to engage with one of your emails.

The Main Emails

Conclusion Email (if applicable): If your email campaign has an end point, you'll need to send an email to wrap it up. But don't just say goodbye! Offer the user an appropriate next step to take. An invitation to subscribe to your ongoing email list is often a natural next step and a good way to keep them engaged long-term. There could be a different next step you'd like the user to take. Think strategically and don't simply say goodbye.

The Actual Email

What Drives Email Design?: Your email design, from send time to copy to use of images, will flow from the answer to these questions: Why are you sending this email? What is your goal for the email send? What do you want the user to do?

Send Time: There is no single time that is definitely best to send emails. The best time to send can vary from one audience to the next and also depends on the type of email you are sending. For example, a daily devotional email series might be best sent in the morning. An email inviting someone to sign up for something might be better sent mid-morning or later in the day. Your best bet is to do some research and test different send times.

Subject Line: It's a good idea to put some thought into your subject line, because if a recipient doesn't open your email, it does not matter what's inside. Some considerations are length (usually best to keep it under 50 characters), which case (title vs sentence case), including first name personalization and simply coming up with compelling copy. A helpful (and free) subject line test tool is offered by CoSchedule. Check it out here.

Preview Text: Preview text is what appears right after or under the subject line in many email clients. If you don't specify the preview text, the email client will pull whatever it can from the beginning of your email as the copy for the preview text. To increase email open rates, be strategic with the preview text and set it yourself. Think of it as an extension of the subject line and additional real estate for compelling copy. If you don't personalize the subject line, consider personalizing the preview text.

More Actual Email Design

A Note About Images: Images are a great way to give life to your emails and make them "pop". However, there are a few things to keep in mind when including images in your email design:

1. Always specify alt-text for your images. The alt-text will appear instead of your image for recipients who have their email client set to block images.

2. Given that your images may not always appear, it is best to avoid placing important copy and messaging within an image. Your copy should exist by itself, apart from the image.

3. Your use of images should support the goal of your email and move the user toward the desired action. If the goal of your email is for the user to click a call-to-action button, placing too many images above your call-to-action may hurt your results.

Need Some Design Inspiration?

Check out the curated collection of beautiful emails at Really Good Emails. While you would have to be savvy in email HTML to replicate many of the examples, there is plenty of good email design inspiration to be found for the email marketing beginner. Be sure to explore their categories tab to see emails organized around different use cases.

The Actual Footer

A Critical Conclusion: It is critical to wrap up each email with a proper footer, because the elements included in it help keep you in compliance with the laws that regulate the email marketing landscape. Campaign Monitor offers a very helpful overview of these laws and how to be in compliance.

Example Footer

© 2020 Cru. All Rights Reserved.
100 Lake Hart Drive, Orlando, FL 32832

Physical Address Required!

Reminder of opt-in.

This email was sent to bill.bright@cru.org because you signed up through our website.

Unsubscribe

Required! Make it easy to find to built trust.

Privacy Policy | Terms of Use

Before You Hit Send

Test!

Assuming you are sending your email through an email service provider (ESP) like Adobe Campaign Standard or MailChimp, it is most likely that you are not sending a plain text email. Instead, your email is made up of HTML code, which is read and interpreted by your recipient's email client (such as Gmail, Apple Mail, Yahoo Mail, Outlook, etc.).

The "fun" (or frustrating) reality that email marketers have to account for is that each email client interprets and renders the HTML code a little differently. Your email could look fine on an iPhone but have formatting issues on Gmail.

Before you send off your email to your subscriber list, you will want to preview and test your email on a desktop device, mobile device and on as many different email clients as possible.

Getting Serious About Email?

If your ministry team is getting serious about your email marketing efforts, it might be worth investing in a service like Email on Acid. This service allows you to quickly preview your email across almost every email client, making your testing fast and thorough.

Because Outlook...

Testing is especially important because Microsoft Outlook is especially troublesome in the way it renders email HTML. Your email can look beautiful on every other client but woefully broken on Outlook! Testing allows you to identify the issues and fix them.

After The Send

Review What Happened: Like all marketing activities, it is important to review the analytics associated with your email marketing campaigns. The analytics from the the sends that have already occurred can help you learn how to make your future sends successful.

Open Rate:
Emails Opened divided by Emails Delivered

This metric helps you know if you are sending at a good time and if your subject line and preview text are working. It is also a good indicator if your subscriber list is more engaged or less engaged.

Click-Through Rate:
Recipients Who Clicked at Least One Link divided by Emails Delivered

This metric is a good measure of overall email engagement. A user has to open and then click a link within the email to be counted in this percentage. It takes into account the subject line, preview text, send time, email content, etc.

Click to Open Rate:
Recipients Who Clicked at Least One Link divided by Emails Opened

This metrics focuses on the content within the email by removing open rate as a factor. It is especially useful for analyzing how effective your email content is at leading someone to click the desired call-to-action.

Questions?

Contact:
marketing@cru.org