



The Essentials of Email Marketing

How to Use Email Marketing to Drive More Sales Leads



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Email marketing has been around for more than a decade. You can make a case that it's been around in its precursor form, drip marketing, for as long as the direct mail industry has been sending out bulk promotional mail. While snail mail has fallen on hard times since the rise of the Internet (and email), email marketing continues to enjoy healthy ROIs.

This white paper is designed to educate marketers and business executives in B2B technology companies on the ways of designing, building and executing an email marketing campaign.

What is Email Marketing vs. Drip Marketing?

Drip marketing refers to the stream of marketing communications a company sends to its list of prospects and customers in order to stimulate future sales. Since many technology companies rarely use direct mail to drive leads given the higher unit cost, drip marketing usually takes the form of email communications through a marketing automation platform. Email marketing campaigns tend to have a higher frequency output, most going out as often as weekly or bi-weekly. Like drips of water coming out of a hose, email marketing supports a company's lead nurturing strategy, encouraging leads to move farther down the sales funnel.

While drip marketing is synonymous with email marketing, there is a greater sense of the programmatic and strategic implied with the term drip marketing. That said, we may refer to both terms in this white paper given their functional overlap.

A final note on definitions of drip marketing vs. email marketing is related to where your leads fall within the sales funnel. Drip marketing is an umbrella term that you can apply to any and all programmed email marketing sent to leads, prospects and customers. Leads at the top of the funnel (TOFU) may receive content that differs from leads in the middle of the funnel (MOFU); and MOFU leads may receive different content compared to leads (prospects) found at the bottom of the funnel (BOFU). It's highly recommended to create different content tracks (discussed in detail below) for your different audiences.



The Case for Email Marketing

Many B2B tech companies face long sales cycles, which is why email marketing campaigns are integral to lead generation. The longer the sales cycle, the greater the chance the prospect will either change his or her mind or opt for a competitor's offering.

As mentioned above, email marketing provides a chance for you to set up a series of emails that are sent on a consistent basis and allow you to stay top-of-mind among your leads, prospects and customers alike.

The rate at which e-mails prompt purchases is not only estimated to be at least three times that of social media, but the average order value is also 17 percent higher. (Why Marketers Should Keep Sending You Emails, McKinsey, 2016). Still not convinced? In 2015, VentureBeat surveyed 1,300 email marketers and learned that email marketing yielded the highest ROI of all marketing channels used (the ROI for mid-sized companies was an eye-popping 246%).

Tools of the Email Marketing Trade

To be successful in any sustained email marketing campaign you have to rely upon the tools of the trade. It's not practical to send out email campaigns using Gmail or Microsoft Outlook. When sending out large batches of emails you run the risk of your ISP shutting your account down as a potential spammer. Logistically speaking, it's nearly impossible to conduct email campaigns across various customer segments without a great deal of effort on the backend. Finally, you will have zero visibility into who opens and clicks on the content you send when using your own email client.

Final verdict? Investigate and invest in technology that delivers the best solution for your company's needs.



Marketing Automation.

Today B2B marketers have a profusion of choices when it comes to what email marketing technology to use. But with profusion also comes confusion. What amount of marketing technology do you need really need to do the job? Will you actually use, let alone need, most of the features that make some marketing automation platforms so pricey?

If you use Salesforce as your CRM system and want seamless integration between your email campaigns and sales team workflow, then your options are limited to more robust marketing automation solutions, all of which will cost in excess of \$10,000 for an annual subscription. HubSpot, Pardot, Marketo and Eloqua are examples of marketing automation software that can work well for SMBs.

Small tech companies may find that MailChimp, MyEmma or Constant Contact can do the trick. MailChimp's ease-of-use and flexibility make up for its lack of robust features. Seasoned marketers with a need for more sophisticated marketing activities, however, will no doubt prefer a more muscular solution.

Email & Website Tracking.

There are several options for tracking the results of your email marketing campaigns. The key is to use them so that you can see the actions your target contacts take once they reach your website. Fortunately, most marketing automation applications do a good job of tracking activity inside the email sent: which links were clicked, how many times they were clicked, comparisons to past email campaigns and industry averages, etc.

These days there are several options for tracking detailed visitor activity on websites. Google Analytics provides incredible value in large part because it's completely free and offers more than enough data to help you determine how visitors are interacting with your content. Another analytics app we like is HotJar, which, while not free, is still affordable for many SMBs given the amount of insight it provides into how visitors interact with your website. HotJar allows you to see recordings of how a visitor moves across your website, and also has a heat-map feature to show you where visitors tend to focus their attention (and mouse pointer!).

A hand holding a black pen points towards a pie chart and a bar chart on a desk. The pie chart is divided into three segments: blue, yellow, and red. The bar chart has multiple bars in orange, green, and red, with numerical values labeled on top of each bar. The background is a wooden desk with a black cup visible in the upper left corner.

Automate as Much as Possible

Just because you purchase a marketing automation solution doesn't mean everything is suddenly automated. The truth is, only a fraction of a typical drip marketing campaign is capable of being truly automated.

You can set up an auto-responder to any contact form a prospect may fill out. From white paper downloads to newsletter sign-ups, you can easily create an email that acknowledges the action and thanks the prospect. While you're at it, go ahead and add a lead capture solution to your home page and blog so that visitors are invited to leave behind a name and email to receive your awesome content!

Autoresponder: For any B2B companies offering SaaS products, you can also set up an autoresponder to send out a coupon within a prescribed period of time, say the day after a form fill. It may just trigger a sale or further engagement deeper in your sales funnel.

Content Tracks for Buyer Personas

If you are a B2B technology company with lower frequency, high-dollar transactions, then chances are the buyer journey of a typical prospect will include multiple buyer personas and take far longer to complete. An effective email marketing strategy will encompass most, if not all, of the possible buyer personas you will encounter during the sales process. That means you will have to tailor your email content, which itself is derived from your content marketing strategy, to suit the informational needs of people at different levels within a prospect organization.

Take, for example, the case of a cyber-security company offering a cloud-based SaaS solution for SMBs. It's entirely possible



that the person who discovers the SaaS company's offering is an IT professional charged with maintaining an organization's IT security on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps what caused the IT professional to find the SaaS company is frustration with — or fear of — the organization's lack of security over a specific element of the company's IT infrastructure, say database permissions and change audits.

Once the IT professional discovers the SaaS company and signs up for its newsletter, it's entirely possible she forwards some information over to her boss, who then begins to engage with the SaaS company's website. Now, there are two buyer personas in play for the SaaS company's drip marketing campaign, each one with slightly different needs.

Say a VP or CISO (Chief Information Security Officer) eventually enters the equation because he has the final say over the adoption — and purchase — of a new cyber-security solution. It's possible that he, too, will leave behind his email in exchange for content. Mind you, he probably spends far less time on a given vendor website 'kicking the tires' and assessing the product offering. Still, he may need additional information to convince him of the business case behind the purchase. For instance, he may want to see testimonials, case studies and any details proving something along the lines of an ROI or NPV (Net Present Value) for the product offering.

We provided a grid below that illustrates at what point in the sales funnel each of the three buyer personas would most likely be contacted as part of an ongoing email marketing campaign. After all, email marketing should not only support a B2B tech organization's sales team in terms of lead conversion but also help close the deal where appropriate.

As mentioned above, drip marketing can and should support the sales process. It can even be a primary driver of a purchase decision, as in the case of a coupon offering that is acted upon. Coupons may not be appropriate for some B2B companies, particularly service-based ones. But a coupon (or limited-time promotion) can be a trigger for a deeper conversation, which is why it's such a great format to include in email marketing.



Email Types

Emails are not all made the same. They are defined by the intent of their mailing as much as they are by their actual format.

Newsletter.

Newsletters are a particularly popular email marketing format, if only because they provide a perceived benefit in the eyes of recipients. Newsletters allow you to provide educational content in the form of tips, show off your technical knowledge and share helpful industry news.

Newsletters are also a marketing analyst's dream come true. Inside one email you can measure:

- Click-throughs to determine what topics are of most interest to your contact list.
- Duration visitors remain on your site.
- Behavior of visitors (e.g., where they browse) once they are on your site.
- Effectiveness of call-to-actions and other content are at driving future actions (e.g., effectiveness of video at driving demo requests).

This list above, and much more, can be measured, tracked and optimized over time as part of a well-planned and executed drip marketing campaign.

Alert.

Another type of mailing is the alert or flash news. If your company is a reseller of security apps to financial service companies and there is a trending threat such as a wave of ransomware or a newly-discovered security weakness, then you may decide to send out alerts to your customers and prospects to prove your company's value, not to mention trigger inbound sales inquiries.



Product Update.

This type of email is intended to inform your audience of new features (or shine a light on existing ones) in hopes of moving leads and prospects further down the sales funnel. The email often includes graphic illustrations and/or videos, a list of product features and benefits, and a call-to-action button (“Learn More”).

Promotion.

This is a multi-purpose email that is often sent to MOFU and TOFU prospects announcing a special promotion. While this is not intended to supplant the one-to-one communications a salesperson has with a prospect, it can be effective at pushing MOFU prospects into engaging with one. The bottom-line, a promotion announcement is designed to create a higher degree of product interest and is typically used to hit quarterly or annual sales goals.

| A/B Testing

A/B testing should underpin your email marketing campaigns. A marketing automation tool or even an email client along the lines of Constant Contact or Emma can easily set up A/B testing scenarios where you can test the effectiveness of email titles and call-to-actions.

Some marketing automation apps like Pardot will even provide an extra layer of A/B testing by running the test on an initial batch of emails to determine which email title gets the most opens or click-throughs. I always recommend testing on click-throughs as that is a truer measure of who is reading and responding positively to your email. Either way, the winner of the A/B test is then used for the remaining batch of emails.

When A/B testing, you need to vary your email titles enough for the difference to be noticeable. For instance, let's continue with the SaaS cyber-security example from above. Say the company is about to send an email that addresses the recent rash of ransomware and how its solution could help defend against future ransomware attacks.



The email might have these email titles as part of an A/B test:

“How to avoid the next ransomware attack”

“The top 5 ways to avoid future ransomware attacks”

You won’t know which one will perform the best until you A/B test a batch of several hundred email recipients. The larger the batch, the better, by the way. That said, I don’t recommend testing more than 20% of your total contact list as you will want to reserve your best email title for the majority of your contacts to maximize your results.

If you only have a few hundred contact emails, then A/B testing in advance probably won’t yield a statistically meaningful result. You would be better served to A/B test on the entire population in order to obtain insight into which kinds of title tend to perform better over time.

Also, you may have a theory about which email title will perform the best, but just when you think you can make an accurate prediction your audience will surprise you. Ideally, the test will be a close call, which means you are using the right trigger words (more on that below) in your email titles. The winning title will go out to the remaining contacts and enjoy higher click through rates. Yay!

| More on Email Titles

If you are ready to test the effectiveness of your email titles in order to see which ones perform well, then it helps to know which kinds tend to outperform others. Titles that address pain points, greed, and vanity always get a lot of interest. As do ones that pique our curiosity, make us think we’re missing out on a deal, and even appeal to our sense of humor.

Titles that tend to perform particularly well? Ones that begin with “How” and “The,” as well as ones that begin with numbers “5,” “10,” and “3.” Consider these examples:



“How to increase your inventory turns by 10x in just 100 days”

“The biggest IT security risk nobody is talking about”

“5 influencers you should follow now”

“3 ways to speed up your software sprints”

“10 ways to close more sales from trade shows”

The length of the subject lines should be shorter rather than longer. The fewer words the better, although there are undoubtedly plenty of subject lines with more words that performed well. Just keep in mind that:

- People tend to rapidly scan email titles for trigger words of interest (or lack of interest) to them.
- Many email clients have limited space for titles.
- More and more people use smartphones to read email.

The faster you set the hook with a reader, the better the chance you will see a click-through and future lead conversion.

Trigger words are ones that most closely relate to a person's pressing need, address that person's job responsibilities or appeal to a person on a more fundamental level (e.g., emotions, fear, humor, etc.).

For example, if your company is a custom software developer for traditional industries, then here are some trigger words you might consider using:

- Bottlenecks
- System downtime
- Manual workarounds

Managing Drip Marketing

Editorial Calendar.

An editorial calendar will keep your drip marketing campaign on schedule. It also helps you plan your content around any upcoming marketing initiatives including new product or service launches, trade shows, sales promotions, thought leadership campaigns, etc.



Be sure to link your editorial calendar to your blogging and social media calendar to ensure your other marketing channels are in sync. This is where more robust marketing automation software can really pay off. Apps like Hubspot allow you to set up multi-channel campaigns to automate the posting and seeding of drip marketing content. From creating landing pages and blog posts to executing organic social media and email campaigns, a marketing automation platform will ensure your entire campaign stays in sync and on schedule.

Staffing Considerations.

The best tools on the planet won't do you much good unless you have assigned ownership of the drip marketing campaign to a person with the proper skills and knowledge. In most SMB tech companies, that means finding an experienced marketer with a grasp of B2B lexicon and a proven ability to write great copy on deadline. If your company has a marketing team, then it's entirely possible several marketing professionals will share responsibility of various functions. For instance, one might manage the newsletter while another manages the weekly customer / prospect email stream.

Key Skills.

The marketer you hire should also be fluent in the basics of marketing automation. As mentioned above, running an effective email marketing campaign requires some form of marketing automation. How elaborate the app is will depend upon your budget and need for additional features, as well as your bandwidth and ability to effectively execute the process.

Graphic design skills are also extremely helpful, although not always necessary, as there are plenty of affordable ways to outsource design. Familiarity with easy-to-use design apps like Canva can actually allow novices to add design elements to stock art, thereby giving a more customized look-and-feel to your visual communications.



Video is a format that is growing in popularity among B2B tech brands. The SEO value of placing video on YouTube combined with the ability to drive click-throughs and increase time-on-site certainly argue for its use. The cost of video, especially if you want the production quality to be a good representation of your brand, is not something to take lightly, however. Video can easily cost up to \$5-25,000 for a 90 second piece, depending upon the sophistication of the production. Hiring voice talent, acting talent, multiple cameras with illumination technology, green screens, directors and editors, -- it can add up fast. Animated video can cost less, but there are degrees of quality with animated video and spending less may yield a poorer quality product. That, and animation is not always the best approach to take for every marketing communication as it may be taken less seriously or have a cheaper connotation than well-produced live video.

While finding a single marketer who can write amazing copy and at the same time create graphics and shoot video is a pretty tall order, it's something you should be willing to invest in to make sure your drip marketing produces results over time.

Training.

It's important to make training an integral part of your drip marketing program. Over time the technologies you depend on will evolve, new best practices will emerge and your staffing needs will change. By installing a continuing education requirement as part of your marketing program you will ensure your team stays on top of its game and builds a competitive advantage for your company. Each staff person should take some kind of training on a quarterly basis, if not more frequently. Training options might conceivably include:

- Marketing automation (tutorials from your application provider)
- Copywriting
- HTML basics
- Video production
- Graphic design



Should you Outsource Drip Marketing?

Much like any business activity that requires a specialized set of skills and knowledge, there are vendors you can call on to help you on almost any aspect of setting up and running an email marketing program.

The reasons for opting to outsource are many, but all eventually come down to the cost of running it internally versus the cost you'll end up paying a 3rd party provider. If time (and quality) is not an issue, then there is a good chance you can spend less money by hiring somebody to handle your drip marketing program.

The advantages of hiring a marketer include having somebody on your team who is there to support your needs day in and day out. That person can grow into the job, work closely with other parts of your sales and marketing staff and deliver tremendous value to the organization over time. When practical, hiring a marketing professional always makes sense.

There are times, however, when hiring a professional is not the best course of action to take and outsourcing your marketing program is. The advantage of bringing on the help of an outside agency is that you can typically get a much higher level of expertise and knowledge than can be easily found in one person. The right agency will have expert copywriters who know how to write highly persuasive emails that will net higher open and click-through rates. An agency will also have other skills at the ready, including graphic design, video production and marketing automation expertise. A marketing agency can also assist you with higher-level needs like branding and marketing strategy.

In short, you won't have to waste time training an agency as it is used to taking a plug-and-play approach to helping clients.



Examples of when it makes sense to go with an outside agency include:

- Startups or small companies without the desire to commit to a full-time hire.
- Tight labor markets where finding a marketing professional is extremely challenging.
- Companies in need of expertise setting up a marketing strategy from the ground up.
- Lack of expertise internally in key parts of the drip marketing program.
- Need for fast results.

For any of the scenarios listed above, a 3rd party agency is the natural choice. And despite the higher cost, the end result often ends up delivering a superior ROI given the expertise and efficiency gains an agency will provide.



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Dave Manzer is founder and president of Manzer Communications. Dave has over 10 years experience helping B2B technology companies with grow their revenue through results-oriented marketing communications, PR, social media, lead generation campaigns and more. Dave is a self-avowed espresso snob and enjoys spending time in the great outdoors with his family.

Manzer Communications is a revenue growth agency that helps B2B technology companies with:

- Brand and marketing strategy
- Drip marketing / email communications
- Lead generation campaigns
- Digital marketing strategy and execution
- Brand awareness through social media, PR and thought leadership

If you're looking to improve your company's revenue potential, please visit our website or email us at info@manzercommunications.com.



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