

Email marketing

The essentials

Email marketing - The essentials

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Email marketing - The essentials

1. Getting Started

In this guide, we'll show you how you can grow your business using our email marketing program, and then show you exactly how to implement it.

We know you're busy – so this guide will keep to the essentials, the core things you absolutely have to know. The information here applies to many email tools, but it's specifically designed for our Email Marketing platform.

To find out more, visit www.123-reg.co.uk/email-marketing/



Quick overview



Average return of 38 times the amount invested



Over 3.3 billion email accounts - more than twice the number of social media profiles



Gather valuable data to help you refine your offerings

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1. Getting Started

Why use email marketing?

That's the first question you should be asking, and the simple answer is that email marketing offers a great return on investment. The Direct Marketing Associations puts the average return from email marketing at over 38 to 1!

Email is also one of the only truly measurable one-to-many and one-to-one communication channels. You'll be able to capture valuable statistics which can help you make better decisions with your other marketing and your business. There are also more than twice as many email accounts as there are social media profiles, with a reach of over 3.3 billion people. Our email marketing benchmarks from 2017, based on over 1.5 billion emails sent by start-ups and small businesses, give average performance figures of:

- Unique opens: 24.79%
- Unique clicks: 4.19%
- Unsubcriptions: 0.49%

These figures show some of the key advantages of permission-based email marketing - response rates and engagement are much higher than unfocussed campaigns, giving you a great return. In order to get the best return on your investment though, you need to implement and manage it properly, and that's what this guide will help you do.

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1. Getting Started

Permission marketing – the important difference

Throughout this guide, we'll be referring to permission-based email marketing. This is a vitally important distinction, as it's the 'permission' part that makes it so effective and differentiates it from spam.

With permission marketing you're only talking to people who have opted in to hear from you specifically. You'll be using email to build relationships and talk to people who know are interested in you.

Email is great to convert interest into purchases and to retain existing customers.

Email is not an acquisition channel

Permission marketing is an ongoing communication between you and your audience, with the goal of turning them from a stranger into a loyal, repeat customer who refers their friends to you. This isn't an instant fix and the main benefits come over time, but it's well worth persevering.

Sound familiar? It's an extension of the way you interact with people in person every day, but using digital tools to enable you to do things on a large scale and measure the results accurately.

Permission marketing picks up where 'interruption' marketing, such as advertising, finishes. Once you have someone's attention, you use permission marketing to get their details and consent to continue the conversation – giving you many more opportunities to sell to them in the future.



Checklist



Write down your goals for your email marketing program

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1. Getting Started

Making sure you get a return on your investment

To get the best return from your email marketing, it's important to decide what your goals are.

- Do you want to build interest in your company before you launch? Increase repeat visits to your site?
- Encourage referrals?
- Get more bookings?
- Fill more tables at lunchtime?
- Generate more online orders?
- Increase customers' average spend?

Once you've decided on your goals, you can work out how best to measure them.

This could be tracking online sales generated from your emails, or redemption rates of vouchers that you send to your mailing list. It could be as simple as tracking open rates on your newsletters to see how engaged your customers are.

Whatever measure you choose, by tracking it you make it easy to chart your progress and aim for continual improvement - and an increasing return.



Checklist



Make sure you have clear privacy policy on your website and data capture forms



Make certain your email footers clearly disclose who you are, with your address and contact details



Every email you send must have a clear way to unsubscribe



Ensure there is a valid reply address on each email you send



Never buy lists of data or 'scrape' details from the web

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1. Getting Started

A quick legal overview

Let's take a quick look at the legal issues you need to be aware of before you start creating your email marketing program.

The really quick version: don't buy or sell data, don't make false claims, never post fake comments and reviews.

It's important to note that you can't ever buy, swap or otherwise indirectly acquire data for permission marketing. Only the person themselves can give you permission to contact them - and that has to be done directly. This isn't just a requirement of permission marketing, it's the basis of law for consumer marketing through email and mobile in many countries including the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and the penalties can be severe.

You must also ensure that you always clearly identify yourself as the sender of any messages, and in email campaigns you must include a valid reply address and your company information, as well as an easy unsubscription (opt-out) mechanism.

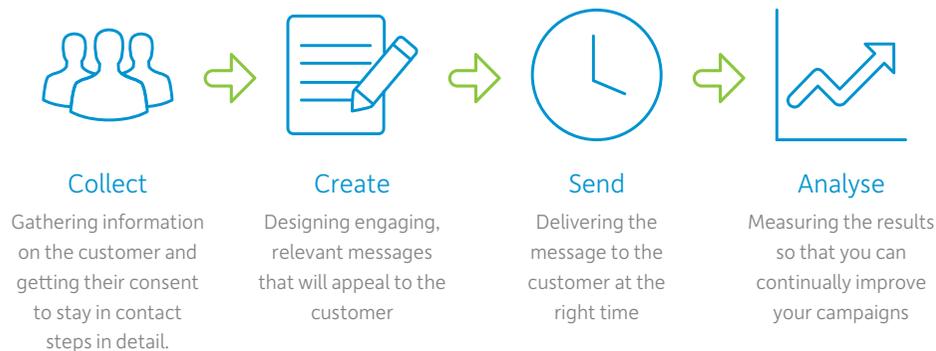
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1. Getting Started

How to structure your email marketing

We developed the Permission Marketing Cycle to make it easy to structure your campaigns.

Any type of permission marketing campaign will follow this cycle:



The rest of this guide will take you through applying each of these.

Email marketing - The essentials

2. Collect: Building your lists

Introduction

The first step in the Permission Marketing Cycle is building your database of people to communicate with.

You need to make effective use of every channel you can and maximise your conversion rate (the number of people who see your opt-in request and complete the process).

You can build your lists offline and online, directly through your own marketing or using co-marketing deals with others.

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2. Collect: Building your lists

The golden rules of list building

Before you start building your lists, there are a few key rules to understand.

Provide a clear benefit - you're asking people to give you their time and personal data, two very valuable assets. Make sure you're providing a clear benefit in return - access to special deals, priority reservations, perhaps even an immediately redeemable incentive like a voucher.

Ask for the minimum information you need - the more data you ask for, the fewer people will complete the process. Start with basic contact details, you can always ask for more information later.

Be very clear what you'll do with the information and how often you'll be in touch - reassure people that you won't be spamming them!

Keep the data safe - once you've gathered data you need to keep it safe and secure, so restrict access to those who need it. Not only is this people's private information, it's also a valuable asset for your business.

Act on it quickly - when someone opts-in, you've got their attention. Make sure you act on it quickly and send them a welcome message as soon as possible. This is easy online, but to do so with paper forms requires discipline.

Have a clearly accessible privacy policy - make sure this is linked to from all your online forms.

Ask for permission everywhere you can - ensure you're making the most of every opportunity to build your audience.

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2. Collect: Building your lists

Offline list building

Once you have met someone in person - whether it be at a trade show or in your shop/restaurant/bar, it's worth making extra effort to get permission to stay in touch with them. After all, you've managed to get their attention, if you can then re-market to them you can substantially increase the revenue you generate from them.

Here are a few simple ways to build your lists offline:

Comment forms - if you have a bar, shop or restaurant then use comment cards or similar with a clear call to action to sign up to your mailing list. Make sure you leave plenty of space for people to write, and ensure you collect and enter the data into your database regularly.

Text-in - set up a text-in service. People simply SMS a keyword and their email address to a special number and they get added to your mailing list. Quick, simple and effective.

Business card drop - provide a prominent place for people to leave their card and join your list. It's important to be very clear that you'll contact them.

Get your team involved - data gathered in person is really valuable to you and getting your team to buy in to this is key. Make sure they understand the importance of asking for permission and perhaps even offer a small prize for the person getting the most completed registrations.

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2. Collect: Building your lists

Online list building

Your online activity gives you a huge range of possibilities for building your lists.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Your website - make sure you have your newsletter subscription form prominently featured on your website, and don't forget to sell the benefits of subscribing. If you haven't launched yet then make sure you have an opt-in form on your holding page so that people can request to be told when you launch.

Twitter - run a Twitter competition and tweet out a link to the entry form, which also lets users opt-in to your newsletter.

Your email signature - add a link to your newsletter sign up form from the signature of your standard emails.

Facebook - use a Facebook tab to host a newsletter form, competition or voucher to encourage people to join your mailing list. Having followers on Facebook is great but having direct contact information is even more valuable as not everything you post of Facebook will reach everyone, thanks to their EdgeRank system.

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2. Collect: Building your lists

Confirmed opt-in

When gathering data online, you'll be using forms which users complete and submit.

These forms are easy to use and well understood, but the unfortunate thing is that they are also open to abuse – anyone can enter anything into a form - so if you're asking for an email address they can enter someone else's, or a completely fake address. There are also automated scripts called 'bots' which fill in forms with junk information, searching for weaknesses that they can exploit to send spam or otherwise abuse your server.

Plus, your visitors may accidentally misspell their email address, submit twice, or enter in the wrong information into the wrong field.

This means that you can end up collecting a lot of junk information - in tests we've seen up to 60% of form submissions containing incorrect data.

To make sure only valid details end up on your database, it's important to use a process called confirmed opt-in (also known as double opt-in) to validate the information.

With confirmed opt-in, once someone completes your form they are sent an email containing a unique link. When they click the link this confirms that they are the owner of the email address and completes their subscription. This keeps your database clean and also ensures you comply with the legal requirement of gaining consent.

Email marketing - The essentials

2. Collect: Building your lists

Checklist: list building



Make sure you offer people the opportunity to opt-in wherever you can



Only ask for the information you really need



Remember to sell the benefits - why should people want to hear from you?



Tell people how often you'll be contacting them



When capturing data online, use confirmed opt-in to validate email addresses



Send a welcome email as soon as possible after someone subscribes



Have a clear privacy policy on your website

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Introduction

Once you have an audience, the next step is to communicate with them.

Planning, writing, designing and testing your email campaigns well is crucial to your success.

Planning your emails

When planning your email campaigns it's important to maintain regular contact, but also to ensure you have something worthwhile to say.

It depends on what they've signed up to but ideally you should contact your customers regularly, to ensure that they remember you - and you should avoid sending to addresses that you haven't contacted for more than a year; they likely won't remember you and you'll end up getting your emails blocked as spam. When using email to talk to your customers, remember that the most successful messages are relevant, anticipated and personal. Every email is a chance to tell your story and engage people with your brand - always remember that you're talking to real people!

Monthly email newsletters - these are a great backbone to your email marketing and a way to ensure you maintain regular contact. Set a specific time of the month that you'll send your newsletter (for example the last Tuesday of the month) and stick to that schedule. A newsletter is a great place to talk about your area of expertise, your latest news and to round-up content you've created through other channels like your blog.

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3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Planning your emails

Special offers - one-off emails are a great way to promote special offers. By featuring a single offer you focus the recipients' attention and with a clear call to action (for example a 'book now' link, or a voucher download) you can produce spectacular results.

Special occasions - seasonal events and other occasions are a great way to engage with your customers. Valentine's Day, Christmas etc. are perfect for email promotions. Scheduling here is key though - make sure you plan your campaigns well in advance to give people time to respond. You could even create a series of emails that change as an event gets closer.

Birthdays - if you're in the hospitality or entertainment sectors, sending customers a personalised email in advance of their birthday (ideally with an offer exclusively personalised for them) is a great way to increase loyalty. Marketing automation tools enable you to do this efficiently and consistently – whenever it's needed.

Competitions - running the occasional competition is a great way to engage your customers and give something back. By using competitions to break up a series of emails that are promoting customers spending money with you, you can reset the balance. Competitions are also a great way to gather more information on your customers by asking additional questions during the entry process.

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Designing your emails

When designing your email campaigns, remember that consistent branding is important - your emails should reflect your brand and feel familiar to your website visitors.

There two types of email that you can send - plain text and HTML. Text based emails are less popular for marketing purposes – the visual aspect is important for most brands. HTML based emails are great as they give you a lot of design options and make tracking your results a breeze, but there are a few challenges to be aware of.

Designing for email is different

If you've been involved in creating your website, you've probably come across the issues involved with supporting different web browsers - you have to test and tweak to make sure things appear the same in Internet Explorer 9 as they do in Google Chrome.

Similar challenges happen with email. There are over 20 major combinations of email client in common use, and lots of things that will work on the web either won't work or will display differently in email. This means that you really need specialist help when creating your email design, to make sure it looks its best for all your readers and that it works effectively, so that you can get the best return on your investment.

Designing your emails

You probably don't want to involve a designer every time you have an email campaign to send. No problem, software programs for creating emails are easy to use and you don't need any specialist design or coding skills.

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Creating great email campaigns

Here are the key things you need to know to create truly effective emails:

Always use a mobile responsive design

Over 50% of emails are opened on a mobile device, like a tablet or smart phone. If your design is difficult to read on a mobile or needs pinching and zooming in order to interact with, there's a high likelihood that it will be deleted without being read.

Mobile responsive design is a way of creating emails so that they automatically adapt to whatever screen size (and orientation) they are being viewed on. It's not just a matter of shrinking the desktop layout to a smaller screen. True responsive design changes your layout and other aspects of your email in order to optimise your reader's mobile experience.

Mobile responsive design uses an advanced HTML programming technique called CSS (Cascading Style Sheets). The good news is that all you need to do is use an email editor which has responsive templates already set up for you to use or choose a free-form graphical editor which has responsive technology built in.

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Start with great copy

By this stage you should have already decided on your goal, so the next step is to write copy to support this. Spending time on writing well thought out and engaging copy is vital if you want people to respond to what you have to say.

People skim read emails, so also think about your layout. How will your text and images complement each other and how will you use these elements to guide your reader through your message to your call to action? In general try keep your emails short. If you have a lot to say (for example in a newsletter), you may want to include just a short summary or key bullet points for each article within the email and then link the reader to the further content on your website or blog. This also lets you see which articles generate the most clicks, so you know what's interesting your readers.

We'd recommend drafting your copy in a word processor first. That way you can edit and refine your message and check your spelling and grammar. You can then paste your finished copy into your email editor. A good editor will have theme features to allow you to automatically control things like font type, size and colour.

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Images are great - but use carefully

Not all email clients display images by default and some of your readers will have turned their image display off. In this case all they will see is a blank box and perhaps some alternative text. Even worse, spam filters can't read image content, so they assume the worst and are likely to move your message straight to the junk folder.

A great email campaign uses a mix of text and images, so that even if your images are not visible your email will still make sense. For this reason avoid having 'mission critical' information or your call to action only in an image.

Keep the total size of all the images as small as possible – under 100 KB is ideal. Most email editors will automatically resize your images as needed but you can help by choosing a suitable format - JPEG, GIF and PNG formats are common depending on what type of image it is.

Keep your FROM name and address consistent

You want your customers to get used to seeing emails from you, so that they come to anticipate them, so make sure you keep your sender ID consistent. You can then encourage users to add your details to their address books, which will allow you to bypass most spam filters, improving your deliverability.

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Make it personal

Personalising your messages will add relevance and interest and is the best way of getting your audience to read and engage with your emails. Simple personalisation is easy and common but savvy marketers take this to new levels.

A personalised greeting is a good start, but also think about how you can refine your content to be more relevant to your intended audience. You might want to create different variations and send them to different segments of your audience. The ultimate in personalisation is to use 'dynamic content' to automatically change or include content that you know will be of the most interest.

However you personalise, you'll need accurate subscriber data to work with. Incorrect personalisation will quickly erode the trust you've worked hard to build.

Think of your audience

Finally, put yourself in your reader's shoes. Is your message welcome, timely and relevant? Get these right and you're well on your way to a successful campaign.

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

A great subject line is key to getting opened

Keep your subject lines short – under 70 characters in length will mean fully readable in as many email clients as possible. Also, be interesting but accurate. Never mislead as that breaks the trust that you're trying to build with your users. As well as prompting people to open and read your email, a good subject line can prime the reader for the action you want them to take, so it can have an impact on your click through rate as well.

Check, check, then check again

Before you send your campaign out, check it thoroughly. First, preview it for desktop, tablet and mobile viewing. As well as the basics like spelling and grammar, make sure all the links work. Finally, check it against common spam filters and preview the email in the inbox combinations most commonly used by your customers, to make sure everything looks consistent. Like your business, you want to make sure your emails are always looking their best.

Email marketing - The essentials

3. Create: Designing your email marketing campaigns

Checklist: Creating great email campaigns



Always use a mobile responsive design. It's a 'must-have'



Think about your layout and how your readers will navigate your message



Take time to create, test and refine your copy



Use a good balance of text and images



Add an interesting and compelling subject line



Check – spelling, mobile view, links, different email client



And, keep your sender ID consistent

Email marketing - The essentials

4. Send: Getting your email to the right people, at the right time

Introduction

You have your audience and you've created your email. Now it's time to send it out.

Targeting and timing

Who you send your emails to, and when you send them, can have a big impact on your results.

The 'who' is straightforward - make sure you're targeting each email at the right group of people, those who will be most interested in that particular message. If you're just starting out, you may just have a single group, but as your business and strategy evolves you'll soon find that your contacts fall into different segments of needs and interests.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking 'but some of this group might be interested in that, so I'll send it to them anyway' – guess what? You may be right but it will come at the expense of losing the attention of those who aren't interested, and once lost it can be very difficult to get that back. The 'when' requires a little more thought. The type of message and the audience are important factors here. Our benchmarks show that ignoring all other factors, on average the most popular time to send is between 10 and 11am on a Thursday, but the optimum time will vary depending on your audience, your message and your objectives/

The best way to find out the ideal time for you is to test different times and then review your analytics reports (more on that later).

Email marketing - The essentials

4. Send: Getting your email to the right people, at the right time

Targeting and timing

Knowing the nature and expectation of your audience will allow you to more accurately target your campaigns. B2B and B2C audiences and different sectors will vary significantly. Weekdays, weekends, daytime, evening are all valid strategies. You just need to tap into what suits your audience best.

The good news is that once you've identified your optimum send time you can simply schedule your emails for this time and leave your email system to take care of the delivery.

Email marketing - The essentials

4. Send: Getting your email to the right people, at the right time

Split testing

Once you have a reasonably sized list (anything over 1,000 contacts will do) you can start to use split testing to help you identify quickly which propositions appeal most to your audience.

Split testing allows you to send different variations of your campaign to samples from your total audience. You can then compare the results to see which worked best. The best performing variation is then sent automatically to the remainder of your audience. You can test subject lines, the wording of your call to action, the type of imagery you use - anything you want, just remember to only test one change at a time, so that you know what made the difference!

If you're still working out your customer proposition then this is a great way to test out different versions and see what has the biggest impact.

Email marketing - The essentials

4. Send: Getting your email to the right people, at the right time

Delivery

Maximising your chances of a successful delivery is an important consideration.

You've spent time and resources creating a great email, you want to make sure people get the chance to read it and it doesn't end up languishing unread in the junk mail folder, or worse, never getting received at all. Normal email systems - the kind you use every day to send and receive your personal emails - simply aren't designed for mass email marketing. Not only will the software struggle to send more than a few messages at a time, but recipient servers treat mass emails sent like this with great suspicion and generally assume it's junk mail, as the majority of spam is sent this way (from compromised computers).

This is where email service providers (ESPs) come in. Their systems are designed to deliver millions of emails an hour and are 'whitelisted' with many internet service providers, meaning that emails won't be rejected simply because there's a lot of them. They also spend a lot of time and energy in maintaining the infrastructure and relationships needed to get your messages delivered.

This isn't a sure-fire guarantee that you'll reach the inbox – the content of your email and your relationship with your audience are still vitally important factors which only you control – but using a good ESP gives you a far, far better chance of your message reaching the inbox.

Email marketing - The essentials

4. Send: Getting your email to the right people, at the right time

Checklist: Delivery



Think carefully about the timing of your messages



Make sure you're sending the right message to the right people



Frequency is important. Stay in contact often enough to remain in people's minds, but not so often that they stop paying attention to what you have to say



Consider using split-testing to help identify what works best for your audience



Use an Email Service Provider to make sure your messages get delivered

Email marketing - The essentials

5. Analyse: Use your results to improve your campaigns and your business

Introduction

The analytics that you receive from your email marketing are an invaluable tool for improving future results and for helping to guide your wider business decisions.

Understanding your results

After you send your email campaigns out, if you're using a good email service provider (ESP) you'll find a wealth of statistics at your disposal. These statistics will show you how people interacted with your email. Used in the right way these can help you to better understand your audience and greatly improve the return on investment from your emails.

Let's focus here on the key statistics which are useful for all organisations.

Email statistics are most useful for benchmarking the performance of your campaigns against each other. Comparing them against industry wide averages is useful but don't forget that it's only a very general indicator as every audience is different.

Email marketing - The essentials

5. Analyse: Use your results to improve your campaigns and your business

Understanding your results

Open rate (unique opens) - This is a measure of how many people opened your campaign. It's compared to how many were sent and is usually expressed as a percentage.

It's not a guarantee that they fully read the email, or a definitive indication that people not listed as opens didn't (especially if you follow design best practices and your email is readable without images) but it is a good starting point for measuring engagement across different emails sent to the same group of subscribers.

What to watch out for: you want to get your open rate as high as possible. If you keep your FROM name the same across your emails (as you should be doing) then the biggest factor here is the subject line you use - this is what gets people's attention. Testing different types of subject line (preferably using split testing) is a great way to find the optimum subject line for your readers.

If your open rate suddenly dives, this could be down to poor timing, sending too often (list fatigue), a bad subject line or your email getting routed to the junk folder.

Email marketing - The essentials

5. Analyse: Use your results to improve your campaigns and your business

Understanding your results

Click-through rate - This is a measure of those who opened your campaign who went on to click one or more of the links. Like open rate it's normally expressed as a percentage of those sent. This number gives you a good basis for judging the relative success of your campaign, particularly if you have a clearly defined objective that you are directing readers towards - for example visiting your online store or viewing a menu.

What to watch out for: whether clicks are important for your campaign depends on what the goal of your email is. If you're trying to get people to book online or download a voucher, it's an important measure of success.

If your email is more informative and isn't directly driving an action then it's not going to be as relevant a measure for you.

Email marketing - The essentials

5. Analyse: Use your results to improve your campaigns and your business

Understanding your results

Bounces - This is how many messages were rejected by the receiving mail servers and so were definitely never received by the intended recipient. Bounces can be classified into two types:

- Hard – a permanent, fatal error, e.g. the mailbox for that user no longer exists
- Soft – a temporary error, e.g. the recipient's mailbox is full

When a message is bounced an error code is supplied by the rejecting server. These codes can give useful information about the cause of the bounce and tell you if you're being intentionally blocked (and what to do about it) but they are not consistently applied.

What to watch out for: if you suddenly start seeing a lot of bounces, something is wrong. It could be that the content of your emails is getting you blocked, or there may be a more technical issue. The best course of action is to contact your provider and ask them to help you investigate.

Email marketing - The essentials

5. Analyse: Use your results to improve your campaigns and your business

Understanding your results

Unsubcriptions - This is the number of recipients who opted out after receiving your email. This is measured using the unsubscribe link that is added into your campaign by your email service provider (this should always be in every campaign you send as it's a legal requirement).

You will always get unsubscriptions, - people move, their needs change etc. As long as this figure is around 0.5% or less, you're OK.

What to watch out for: if you suddenly see an increase in unsubscribes, it's a sign that you're not meeting people's expectations. You might be sending too often, or your content may be boring - either way, it's time to revise your strategy.

Email marketing - The essentials

5. Analyse: Use your results to improve your campaigns and your business

Understanding your results

Timing - For all of these statistics you should be able to view a breakdown by time. This is really useful for deciding when to send future campaigns. Look for the peak times for opens and clicks and adjust your send time to be just before this.

Following up - For actions like opens and clicks, creating lists of readers who did or did not perform those actions lets you run targeted follow up campaigns. You could send a follow up email with more details for people who clicked on a link about a particular offer, or even just use that information to target follow up phone calls to the most likely prospects.

Using analytics to inform business decisions - The information that your analytics provides can help you with more than just your email marketing. By testing out different propositions and calls to action in your subject line and copy you can learn about what appeals to your audience.

When you're starting up and testing different approaches to the market this information can be invaluable.

Email marketing - The essentials

5. Analyse: Use your results to improve your campaigns and your business

Checklist: Analyse



Decide which metrics - opens or clicks - are most important to you (this may vary by campaign)



Review your campaign statistics regularly, but leave at least 24 hours after sending to see the most accurate results



Use your results to compare similar campaigns and improve your relative performance



Keep a close eye on unsubscriptions, you'll always get some, 'but with more than 1% on a regular basis suggests that you're not meeting people's expectations

Email marketing - The essentials

6. Congratulations

You've now covered the basics of email marketing!

Once you're confident with these steps you can start to evolve your campaigns and optimise each element of them, to bring you even better results.