

10 Steps to Acquiring More E-mail Subscribers

By Arthur Middleton Hughes, Senior Strategist

Every year, e-mail marketer loses between 20% and 30% of their subscriber list due to unsubscribes, undeliverables, and various other reasons. If you don't set up an aggressive plan to add more subscribers, your audience will dwindle down to nothing in no time at all. And unlike direct mail, e-mail marketers cannot rent or purchase a list to supplement acquisition activities. Instead, we recommend ten steps you can take towards improving e-mail subscriber acquisition. Some of the steps are easy, some are difficult. But all are necessary if you want to be successful in e-mail marketing.

1: Determine the value of your subscribers

What is each e-mail subscriber worth to your business? I have worked with a dozen different clients to determine their three-year subscriber lifetime value, with averages that range between \$20.00 and \$50.00. Calculating lifetime value can be tricky, but there is a formula available in my book *Successful E-mail Marketing Strategies: from Hunting to Farming* (RACOM 2009). Once you know the value, you are well on your way to having what you need to support a budget for acquiring more.

2: Feature e-mail registration prominently on your Web site

Too many marketers hide the subscription link in fine print at the bottom of the Web site, with no obvious call to action. Just putting the word "Registration" somewhere is not enough. Instead, you need to entice visitors to want to register. Start by highlighting the great benefits customers will enjoy with your e-mail program. If your subscriber is worth \$25, you can afford to give something to subscribers to reward them. It could be free shipping, discounts on certain products, or anything that has a perceived value.

3: Reward your staff

The most often overlooked source of new subscribers is your customer contact staff. Everyone who talks to or meets with a customer should have an easy way to ask for an e-mail address and to put it into your system. Smart marketers reward their employees for doing this. If the subscriber is worth \$25, why not give \$5 to any employee that enters a new e-mail address? Don't forget the important next step: send the new subscriber a Welcome e-mail to confirm his or her interest.

4: Train your employees

Do more than just instruct your employees to ask for an e-mail address. Make sure they know how to communicate the benefits of your program, and train them the answers to customers' questions.

5: Upgrade your POS system

Is your point-of-sale system equipped to collect e-mail addresses at the register? If so, when customers sign up, they can receive a Welcome message the very next day that includes a



discount voucher to prompt a second visit. One company employing this approach found that e-mail subscribers had a 38% higher transaction value than other customers, with 13% of discount vouchers redeemed. In addition, the company increased the subscriber base by 630,000 in 17 months.

6: Reward your subscribers

A car wash company started collecting e-mail addresses at point of sale. Any customer whose e-mail address was new to the system received a coupon code on the receipt. If the customer visited the Web site to validate his or her e-mail address using the code, the customer received a coupon for a free premium car wash, worth \$28.95. The company's e-mail list increased by 71.4% and the e-mails sent monthly to subscribers produced \$70,000 per weekend in increased revenue.

7: Register your subscribers' birthdays

Do you reward subscribers on their birthdays? You should. One company created a birthday club that offered free ice cream on the subscriber's birthday. In two years, 2,000,000 subscribers signed up to receive e-mail. Birthday e-mails had a 62.5% higher open rate than other e-mails, and click-through rates were 350% higher. For the company's 1,700 franchisees, the news was all good: "Overwhelmingly positive response... drives people into the stores... people don't come in by themselves."

8: Use transaction e-mails

A leading car rental company uses e-mail to confirm a car reservation, and uses the transactional e-mail as an opportunity invite customers to join subscribe to the e-mail program. Car reservation e-mails have a very high open rate, and as a result the company has signed up millions of e-mail subscribers.

9: Append e-mails to your database

Any company that sells through catalogs or offline builds up thousands or millions of customer addresses. You can send your customer file to Fresh Address.com to be matched with an e-mail address. One company that did this on a regular basis, sending 15 million-plus customer names quarterly for matching. An average of more than 4 million e-mails were appended and sent messages asking if the customer would like to receive e-mail. More than one million customers became active subscribers every quarter.

10: Put a registration inducement in your ads and products

Be sure that every ad, every piece of copy, and every product sent to a customer or prospect includes an e-mail registration inducement. One popular sunglass manufacturer packs a postage-free postcard in with products so that customers can send in their data. Product ratings and reviews are also an excellent way to interact with customers, getting them to provide an e-mail address. After providing a review, customers can click back on your Web site and read what they entered.

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