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E-NEWSLETTERS: Harness the Power of the Internet to Drive Shoppers to Your Store

3 Keep it plain. You can send out your E-mail in two formats: plain text or HTML. A lot of people like the latter, which stands for Hypertext Markup Language, because it allows you to include formatting of text, tables and pictures. The problem: Because not every recipient of your E-newsletter uses the same E-mail software program, your HTML newsletter will not look the same for each person.

If you feel you need to provide the graphic appearance of HTML newsletters despite the drawbacks, here is some advice from Byron Lunz, owner of DataBack Systems, an E-newsletter service provider in Beaverton, Ore. (www.databack.com).

"If you decide to go with HTML formatting, keep it as simple as you can," he said. "Avoid tables, columns a flashy graphics. The more complex the things you do in your E-mail, the greater the chance some of your recipients will not be able to read it."

Bonus tip: You might ask recipients for their format preference, then prepare two versions of each newsletter for separate plain text and HTML mailing lists.

4 Build your list. Encourage people to sign up for your E-newsletter. Have a way for shoppers to subscribe near the cash register. Give everyone request cards that contain blanks for their E-mail addresses and their names.

"Ask for their first names so you can personalize the subject line later on," said Wilson. Have each person sign a brief statement that says, "I give you permission to send me your E-newsletter," and keep those cards on file.

Your employees can be great salespeople for your E-newsletter. They

can promote benefits such as advance notice of sales, new lines of merchandise and the many how-to techniques for using your merchandise.

Bonus tip: Provide incentives. Perhaps each person who signs up for your newsletter will receive a gift certificate worth \$10.00 or will receive exclusive invitations to private seminars.

5 Use a good E-newsletter service. You want to make sure your carefully prepared E-newsletter actually gets to recipients' mailboxes. Employ the services of a reputable company to process each mailing.

6 Avoid being labeled a spammer. Send your E-newsletters only to people who have requested them. Avoid being labeled a spammer; it can result in the loss of your Internet account.

7 Stay current with E-newsletter trends. You will create more profitable E-newsletters if you stay current with what is happening in the field. For relevant news, visit the E-Commerce Times, published by the ECT News Network, Encino, Calif. The Web site is www.ecommercetimes.com. For more ideas about good newsletters, visit "Web Marketing and E-Commerce" at www.wilsonweb.com. For a good example of what an E-newsletter service provider offers, visit Databack Systems at www.databack.com.

How successful is your E-newsletter? Bottles & Bridles answered that question by including links to the store Web site in each mailing. Each week, McCarthy gets a report from her Web hosting service on the origination of people accessing her Web site (www.bottlesandbridles.com). "I can see that many Web site visitors come directly from the E-newsletters," she says.

Launch time

The tips in this article should get you started on the path to a profitable E-newsletter that makes your cash registers ring a happy tune. You can take the plunge now without a big investment in time and money.

“Using a computer is so much easier and cheaper than mailing paper newsletters,” said McCarthy. “It’s the wave of the future.”



How to Select an E-newsletter Service

If your mailing list is small, you may want to send your newsletter using your own computer and phone line. For small lists, it's not too much hassle to tackle administrative tasks such as processing bounces and entering changed E-mail addresses.

With lists exceeding 100 people, you may consider handing the job to an E-newsletter service provider.

"My recommendation to finding a good service is to ask other retailers for referrals," said Byron Lunz, owner of DataBack Systems, an E-newsletter service provider in Beaverton, Ore. (www.databack.com). "Find a newsletter you like, and ask the retailer how happy they are with the service provider."

Here are some questions to ask:

- > Is the service provider dependable?
- > Do newsletters show up on schedule?
- > Are staff members friendly and knowledgeable?
- > Are staff easily reached?
- > Is its Web site easy to navigate?
- > Does it handle bounces efficiently?
- > Are there any unpleasant billing surprises?