



The Internet Digest

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Special Report:

Ezine and Email Marketing Basics

by Mario Sanchez

How to ethically use email to promote your business

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What Is An Ezine or Newsletter?

An ezine or newsletter is an electronic magazine delivered via email to people who have signed up (opted-in) to receive it. Ezines are published on different schedules (some weekly, some monthly or bi-monthly) and they can feature extensive content or just announcements (for example, when a website is updated or when a new article goes online).

The main advantage of ezines as advertising vehicles is that they are delivered to a very targeted group of readers. Usually, the quality of the subscribers will be higher in ezines that focus on a single, very narrow topic.

An email newsletter is probably the most effective way to communicate with your target audience. Email Marketing allows you to develop a personal one-on-one relationships with your clients and prospects, and turn these relationships into long-term, profitable success for your business.

Choosing your newsletter delivery method

The best option for a small business owner who is not familiar with the technical intricacies of managing CGI or PHP mailing list scripts, or who may find their web host mailing list capabilities confusing, is to use a third party service to manage the delivery of their newsletters (ezines).

Third party services can be paid or free. These services offer hands-free operation, which means that you won't have to worry about the subscribing and unsubscribing process. You will also get an email address where you can post your messages or your ezine issues, which will then be automatically distributed to all your subscribers or members of your mailing list. These services also offer the option of confirming a request for subscription (so nobody can accuse you of spam), and the possibility of archiving your back issues .

The two most common free third party mailing list operators are Topica (<http://lists.topica.com/>) and Yahoo! Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com>). These services are supported by advertising. I prefer Topica, since Yahoo! Groups advertising is too obtrusive. Topica usually just includes a couple of lines of text at the end of your message promoting their service, something entirely acceptable considering the great service they provide. The only drawback of free services is that they usually only allow message in Text format (not HTML) which limits the visual impact of your messages.

Paid third party services, like [Topica Email Publisher](#) or [Constant Contact](#) offer full HTML capabilities, templates for you to choose, and detailed statistics to analyze your email campaign results. Some of them will charge you a monthly fee that varies according to your number of subscribers, while others will charge you a fixed monthly fee plus a surcharge based on the number of emails sent by month.

Small businesses that send regular messages to their existing customers, and are not planning significant growth for their mailing list, can probably just use their Internet Service Provider email program. ISP's, though, usually limit the number of email recipients to less than fifty per message, to control spam. So, if you have more than 50 members in your mailing list and are planning to actively recruit new subscribers, a third party mailing list service is your best choice.

Email Newsletter Format: HTML or Text

Until a few years ago, some email programs couldn't handle HTML. Nowadays that is not an issue, since most email programs are HTML compatible: AOL versions 6 and higher, Internet Explorer versions 4 and higher, Microsoft Outlook and Outlook Express, Eudora, Yahoo Mail, and Hotmail all support HTML. HTML email newsletters can easily be managed and sent using services

As we mentioned before, plain text is the format of choice for those who use a third party free mailing list services like Topica or Yahoo! Groups, since these free services usually don't support HTML.

If you use plain text, remember that you won't be able to use formatting tags, such as *bold* or *underline*, and that you must create hyperlinks by adding the prefix **http://** before the URL, and the prefix **mailto:** before the email address, if you want to create an email link. Also, it is recommendable that you limit your lines to 65 characters, since some old email programs have trouble wrapping up the text automatically.

HTML will usually give you better visual impact than text, and increased usability. However, the HTML format is sometimes associated with advertising, so you may find that a large amount of users that still prefer text.

The approach I prefer is a hybrid between HTML and text. I compose my email messages in HTML, but using mostly text. HTML allows me to use simple formatting tags like bold, underline and italics, and a nice, screen-friendly font. I use a lot of white space to facilitate scanning, and include only a summary of each article or topic, with a link to the full article or discussion, which resides on my website.

Permission Email Marketing: Single vs. Double Opt-In

Effective Email Marketing is based on two pillars: **permission** and **respect for privacy**.

In order to send customers or prospects a message, you must first get their permission (they must opt-in to your mailing list). At the same time, you must agree to never sell or share your list with anybody else.

Opt-in Email Marketing (also called Permission-Based Email Marketing) has proven to produce the best response rates compared to other marketing methods, such as direct traditional mail or banner advertisements.

Opt-In Email comes in two forms: "single" opt-in and "double" opt-in.

A "single" opt-in list is usually created by inviting members to join via a web form or by sending an email message to a "subscribe" email address. Once readers send the form or the email message, they are subscribed to the list.

A "double" opt-in list, also called a "confirmed" opt-in list, requires the subscriber to reply to a confirmation message to activate the subscription.

The advantage of the "single" opt-in method are that your list will grow faster. However, there are some pitfalls, like the fact that people may subscribe friends or family, who may not want to receive your messages and who could, in the worse case scenario, accuse you of spam.

The advantages of the "double" opt-in method is that you will have a higher quality list (since only interested readers will take the time to go through your confirmation process). "Double" opt-in lists also command higher advertising rates because they get far better responses from readers. Double confirmation also makes list administration easier, by keeping the email list clean with valid addresses of willing subscribers (clean lists are also delivered faster, because the server doesn't spend time retrying bad addresses).

The main disadvantage of "double" opt-in lists is that many people may not understand your confirmation message or may not want to go through the extra step. Some Email Marketing companies consider the percentage of people who fail to confirm to be as high as 50%.

All things considered, we strongly recommend the "double" opt-in approach. It is not only the most ethical way to create a list, but the one that builds more valuable memberships.

Also, with the current increase of anti-spam legislation, double confirmation may soon become the only safeguard against being blacklisted by anti-spam organizations.

Finally, a couple of suggestions on Opt-In Email Marketing etiquette:

- Always include a short line of text at the beginning of the message reminding your readers that they are receiving your email because they subscribed to your mailing list. This is important because we receive so much email these days that we may easily forget that we have subscribed to any particular list.
- Always include clear and easy-to-follow instructions to unsubscribe. You must not make your subscribers jump through hoops if they want to stop receiving your messages. You must either include an "unsubscribe link" (which most mailing list hosts will provide) or a "mailto link" where readers can send a blank message to unsubscribe.

How to Increase Your Newsletter Subscription Rate

If you want your visitors to give you access to their inbox, you have to make it easy and risk free for them to subscribe. Here are some pointers that will help you:

- Use a subscription form on your website instead of asking your visitors to send a blank email: Sending blank email is counter-intuitive, and some people may think it won't work. On the other hand, displaying a simple subscription box with a "Send" button next to it will make the process easier. If possible, place a subscription box in all the pages of your website.
- Always include a link to archived issues of your newsletter next to the subscription box. Very few visitors will sign up for your newsletter if they don't know what it looks like.
- Give a free bonus to entice your visitors to subscribe. It can be an ebook, a special report, or anything else of value to your readers. There are many online authors that will let you distribute their work for free in exchange for including an author box with a link to their site. You can also build your own special reports using articles from other authors, that you can pick up free of charge in numerous article submission sites, like <http://www.ideamarketers.com> or <http://www.goarticles.com>
- Indicate the frequency of publication. If you don't, some of your visitors may worry about receiving too much email and may not subscribe. Many newsletters are published monthly, but weekly or every other week are also considered acceptable frequencies.
- Explain that every message you send will contain clear and easy instructions to unsubscribe. It is better to provide a link that your visitors can follow to unsubscribe, rather than to ask them to send an email message.

- Include a privacy policy link, or, even better, a small privacy policy spelled out next to the subscription box. Nothing works better to reassure your visitors like an iron-clad statement like: "Your email address will not be sold, rented or disclosed to anybody under any circumstance".

Finally, include a link to your subscription page on every issue of your newsletter. Satisfied readers will most likely send your newsletter to friends who may in turn become subscribers. Nothing works better to turn readers into subscribers than a recommendation from a friend.

What do I write?

You can write your own articles based on your own experience, and use them as content for your newsletter. If you don't want to write your own content, you can always use other people's articles, which you will find in websites like: <http://www.ideamarketers.com> , <http://www.goarticles.com> , <http://www.articlecity.com> , or <http://www.family-content.com/> . You can also use your newsletter to post announcements about your company, for example:

- A new product you're launching
- A special promotion
- A recent update of your website
- Lists of links to valuable resources
- Any news about your company

How often should I send out a newsletter?

There is not a specific frequency. A rule of thumb is to email your subscribers every time you have something important to communicate. Some email marketers do it every week, some every two weeks, some every month or two. I recommend a minimum of once a month, and try to make your email valuable to your subscribers, not just a sales pitch.

If you're ready to start your ezine and would like to have more specific information, we recommend [The Step by Step Guide to Creating and Promoting Your Ezine](#) by Karon Thackston. The author will walk you through every single element of creating and promoting an ezine.

Advertising in Ezines

Advertising in other people's ezines is a great way to deliver highly targeted traffic to your website. If you pick the right ezines, and the right type of ads, you will experience above-average conversion rates for the product you sell.

Types of Ezine Ads

Ezine ads generally falls into one of three categories:

Classified Ads: They are the cheapest (sometimes even free), but they are also the least effective. Usually, classified ads are buried at the bottom of the ezine and consist only of a few words. Free classified ads are sometimes given away as an incentive to subscribe. Usually the best results with classified ads are obtained in the largest ezines (fifty thousands of subscribers or higher), since response rates are usually very poor.

Sponsor Ads: They are priced higher than classified ads and are usually found at the top of the ezine, or in the middle (within the content). They allow for more words, and are more effective than classified ads. If you are promoting affiliate products with moderate profit margins, sponsor ads may be the way to go.

Solo Ads: A solo ad is an email that contains only your offer, and that is sent to everyone on the mailing list. No other content is included, so you get the reader's full attention. Since a solo ad is usually seen as an endorsement from the ezine publisher, your message will enjoy a great deal of credibility. Solo ads are expensive, though, and you should reserve them for your best products (those with an excellent profit margin and not a lot of competition).

What is a Joint Venture?

"Joint Venture" is one of the most common buzz phrases in the Internet marketing arena. However, there is nothing misterious about it. A joint venture is just a Solo Ad where instead of paying a fixed fee to run it you reach an agreement with the ezine publisher to split the profits 50%-50% (or any other mutually agreed percentage split). The beauty of joint ventures is that you can tap into somebody else's mailing list and pay only if you actually sell something. Joint ventures are a clear example of how email marketing can be utilized to create a win-win situation.

Before you spend money on ezine ads, it is a good idea to do some research: ask the publisher what is the typical conversion rate, or read the testimonials and contact those people to see what kind of conversion rate they enjoyed.

To estimate if an ad will be profitable, you must know what your gross profit per sale is and, based on the size of the subscriber base and the typical conversion rate, estimate what your total gross profit will be. If your total estimated gross profit is more than the cost of the ad, you may want to give it a shot. In summary:

Gross Profit per Sale x Number of Subscribers x Typical Conversion Rate - Cost of Ad = Total Profit/Loss

You must also pay attention to your headline, your ad copy, and the copy of your landing page, since they can all have a dramatic influence in your conversion rate.

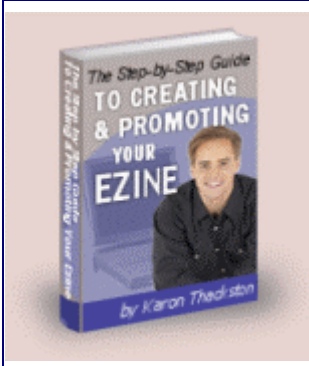
Where do I find quality ezines that accept ads?

There are several good online directories that list ezines by topic and subscriber base size, and provide information on advertising options and costs. Probably the best ezine directory is the [Directory of Ezines](#), where you can find relevant information on almost 1000 high-quality ezines, most of which accept articles, reaching around 39 million readers. The Directory of Ezines charges a small yearly subscription fee. However, if you are serious about email marketing it is well worth it.

Other ezine directories you can try are <http://www.freezineweb.com> , <http://www.bestezines.com> , <http://www.go-ezines.com> and <http://www.jogena.com/ezine/ezinedata.htm> , or go to Google and search for "ezine directories".

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Resources



[The Step By Step Guide to Creating and Promoting Your Ezine](#): **Ezines** are powerful, relationship-building, sales-generating tools that can boost your business. Author Karon Thackston walks you step by step through every single element of **creating** and **promoting** an ezine. If you are serious about effectively promoting your business and building profitable relationships with your customers using email marketing read this ebook first.

[[More Information](#)]



[Web Design Mastery](#): In this thorough 7-Volume course, author Shelley Lowery reveals all of her web site design secrets and takes you step by step through the design process of a professional web site. Everything you need to know to **design** and **market** your website by yourself in one place. Heralded as the "**Bible of Web Design**", this is probably the only web design eBook you'll ever need to buy.

[[More Information](#)]



[The SEO Book](#): The industry standard **#1 ranked** SEO Book. Author Aaron Wall tells you everything you need to know about **Search Engine Optimization**. Covers all major search engines, not just Google. This eBook comes with **free updates** for life so you can rest assured that you will always be current with the latest search engine developments. Highly recommended.

[[More Information](#)]



[Google AdWords: 21 Pay-Per-Click Campaign Secrets Your Competition Doesn't Know](#) : This insightful analysis of how the **Google Adwords** system works, by Andrew Goodman, will help you find the **best bargains** and achieve the **highest click-through** rates. This ebook will save you time and will pay for itself many times over. A must read for anybody who wants to get results with Google Adwords.

[[More Information](#)]

More Resources:

Search Engine Optimization:

[Search Engine Yearbook 2004](#): (by *André le Roux*) If you love all things about search engines, SEO, SEM and whatever other acronyms are cropping up, you'll want a copy of this reference ebook. A single search engine resource that really covers it all.

[The Nitty Gritty of Search Engine Optimization](#) (by *Jill Whalen*) This special report in ebook form is probably the most thorough guide on how to write for the search engines. Making sure that your main keywords are well represented in your page copy without sacrificing readability is not always easy, but this special report shows you how to do it.

[Search Engine Visibility](#) (by *Shari Thurow*) Most web developers/designers build a site first and worry about "searchability" later, which is a costly mistake. This book will teach you how to design a site primarily for your visitors, while making it easy to find in the search engines. Forwarded by Danny Sullivan, from Search Engine Watch.

Web Design:

[What You Need to Know Before You Hire a Website Designer](#) and the very popular e-book [Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business](#), by Mark Frank, website designer and Internet consultant. Both books can be found at WebsiteDesignBiz.com

[Simple Web Sites](#): (by *Stefan Mumaw*) You've probably heard me mention the virtues of minimalist web design in my articles. In fact, end users are tired of and turned off by overloaded sites that are difficult to navigate and slow to load. This book offers valuable insights on creating simpler web sites, while offering the reader visual inspiration.

[Color Logic for Website Design](#): (by *Jill Morton*) This book provides a solid foundation in color usage in web site design, saving time, trouble and rework. Enjoy new design potential through the informed use of color in web design.

Email Marketing:

[Ebook Starter](#): (by *Shelley Lowery*) Do-It-Yourself ebook design kit. Ebooks are the "perfect" online product, as they provide your customers with instant gratification and can be downloaded right over the Internet. Not only does this package include a complete ebook tutorial, but it also provides you with professionally designed templates that will give your ebooks the look and feel of a real book (including a page turning effect).

General Internet Marketing:

[Multiple Streams of Internet Income](#): (by *Robert Allen*) In spite of hints of hype in some of its chapters (after all, the author is a best selling Real Estate guru), this book gives you a

broad overview of all the possibilities that Internet marketing can open for you and your business. This is the book that inspired me to launch my newsletter.

[You Name It](#): (by André le Roux) A practical guide to naming products, services, businesses, divisions, domain names, newsletters and just about anything else.

Copywriting and Content Creation:

[The Step By Step Copywriting Book](#): (by Karon Thackston) This widely acclaimed ebook by shows you how to write effective web copy that both **sells** and **ranks high** with the search engines.

[Net Words](#): (by Nick Usborne) Mr. Usborne is one of the leading advocates of good web copywriting. Net Words builds a compelling case about how of interesting, [highly personal copy](#), always gets far better results than the boring copy usually found in corporate sites, or the overly aggressive text common in most sales sites.

Web Usability:

[Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity](#): (by Jakob Nielsen) Creating Web sites is easy. Creating sites that truly meet the needs and expectations users is not. Usability guru Jakob Nielsen shares his insightful thoughts on the subject.

[Homepage Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed](#): (by Jakob Nielsen and Marie Tahir) Specific observations and suggestions about 50 of the top websites in the world, backed with solid quantitative analysis and graphic aids. Focuses on the Home Page.

[Don't Make Me Think](#): (by Steve Krug) Author Steve Krug lightens up the subject of usability with good humor and excellent, to-the-point examples.

["About Us" -- Presenting Information About an Organization on Its Website \(124 pages PDF\)](#) Representing a company or organization on the Internet is one of a website's most important jobs. Explaining the company's purpose and what it stands for provides essential support for any of the site's other goals. This report contains **50 guidelines for improving the design** of "about us" areas of corporate websites, and is richly illustrated with 85 color screenshots from many different websites.