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Marketing via e-mail? Personalize to avoid deletes

JAMIE HERZLICH | jherzlich@aol.com

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When you logged on to your computer this morning, chances are your e-mail in box was chock-full.

And you probably deleted many of them before you even got to the second word of the subject line. Just as quickly as you hit "delete," many of the people receiving your own company's e-mails are doing the same. That's why it's important to keep a few pointers in mind before hitting that Send key.

First and foremost, you want to send your corporate e-mails to people who actually want to get them, experts say. "Spam is such a problem out there," explains John Arnold, author of "E-Mail Marketing for Dummies" and a regional development director for Constant Contact in Denver, which provides e-mail marketing and online survey tools for small organizations. "You want to send e-mails to people who you have a real business relationship with."

That means that in some way you've either had contact with them or they've expressed interest in getting information from you. Just purchasing or renting any random e-mail list probably isn't going to give you the most bang for your buck, some experts say. "I highly recommend creating your own lists," suggests Andrew Hazen of Prime Visibility, an Internet marketing company in Bethpage.

To do this, start by collecting e-mail addresses from customers or colleagues. You might want to create incentives for people to willingly give you their e-mail addresses, he says. One way to do that is to offer a money-saving coupon on your Web site that requires a consumer to submit an e-mail address to print it.

Your Web site could also feature contests and informational white papers that are accessible only to users who submit an e-mail address. Hazen has found such incentives to be effective. For instance, the company's white paper on search engine optimization for CEOs resulted in 140 downloads in September alone.

Newsletters can also do the trick in attracting an e-mail audience. Just make sure they are informative and consistent. "It's about providing relevant, quality content," says Brandon Milford of iContact Corp., a provider of e-mail marketing software in Durham, N.C. He suggests providing a link on your Web site that allows people to sign up for your newsletter.

And try to develop a schedule so people can anticipate when it is coming.

For Michael Hanley of Merl & Hanley, LLP, a Smithtown accounting firm, it's every Tuesday at 6 a.m.

"People grow to expect it and look forward to it," says Hanley, who sends the weekly newsletter to about 800 recipients. "A lot of times, people will forward the newsletter to someone they know." Each newsletter contains about three to six short articles (about 100 words) plus helpful tips, and readers can click on a link to get the full articles.

Hanley makes sure when sending the newsletter that his "from" and "subject" lines make clear what the content is and who's sending it.

"The first thing people recognize is the branding of who's sending the e-mail," says Tom Taylor, vice president of the Marketing Advisory Group, a direct marketing advertising agency in Amityville. So if you're recognized by a certain company name, stick to that name. Testing different subject lines may indicate which ones get opened, he suggests. E-mail providers such as Constant Contact, iContact and EmailLabs can track which e-mails were opened and which were bounced. And keep in mind that certain words trigger spam filters. In general, stay away from excessive punctuation, lots of exclamation points, dollar signs and all capital letters, Arnold suggests. These are typically spam triggers. And the last thing the world needs is more spam.