

Getting the word out

How e-mail distribution lists can help target the right message to the right people **Interviewed by Sue Ostrowski**

E-mail distribution lists can make it simple for a company to communicate with its clients, potential clients and internal employees. By carefully targeting recipients by specific interests, you can make sure the right people are hearing the right message from your company.

“Mailing lists are a very high-value and very inexpensive way to keep in contact with a lot of people,” says Wayne Walton, a business analyst at Arke Systems. “Having well-defined mailing lists will not only help control your message to customers and employees but also control your message for the company as a whole.”

Smart Business spoke with Walton about how to target your message and how to make sure you aren't sending out too much information.

How can a company get started disseminating its message using e-mail distribution lists?

Ideally, if your company has customer relationship management software, there will already be a database of e-mail addresses that you'll be able to pull from. If you don't have that, there are numerous companies from which you can purchase marketing lists. The other way to do it is to start searching through your company's history. Even if you're not aware of it, your company as a whole will have that information; it just may not be in a central application. In addition, external salespeople have their own lists that you can gather from.

It then comes down to deciding what you need to be looking for within your customers or potential customers that you want to base that list on. Your marketing lists can be as specific as you want — one company could have hundreds of lists. You could have just 10 people on a list if you know they're high-value people who have a particular interest in common.

How do you target your message to different audiences?

Each list tends to include entirely different messages, especially if you're looking to create high value for the



Wayne Walton
Business analyst
Arke Systems

people on the receiving end. You need to make sure that the message is well targeted and that it's going to be within their area of interest.

Even if you're going to be marketing the same product to two different groups, it could be two completely different messages that you send them based on their needs. You wouldn't want to send a message about a product to IT managers telling them how it will increase their sales, and you wouldn't want to send sales managers something about how much better their search function is going to be by using your product.

How do you craft your message for maximum impact?

As marketing and advertising gets more sophisticated and businesses get more competitive, crafting an effective message has become more challenging than ever. Using four steps, known as AIDA, can help companies stand out.

Attention — How does your ad grab the audience's attention? In a print ad, this may be a wacky image. In a seminar, this may be a personal story that engages the crowd.

Interest — How does your ad create interest in your product or service? Are you appealing to a specific problem in a specific industry? What can you say quickly to get them to the next step?

Desire — Now you must make the reader/customer *want* your product. This is where you attach to their emotional need to fix the problem you can solve.

Action — Do they drive to the store to get your product? Do they need to schedule an appointment for your service? What do you want the prospect to do as a next step?

How often should you send out messages to keep your name in front of clients and potential clients?

How often you send messages to your mailing lists really depends on how relevant your message is and how much value it has for the group of people you're sending it to. If you're marketing a product or service to a group of people who find your message to be of high value, whether it's important information or a special offer, they won't mind receiving these messages from you on a more frequent basis. For example, a business professional may enjoy receiving a semi-monthly newsletter from your company if the articles you publish speak toward their particular role and responsibilities within their company. Or, a person with a special interest in golf may like to get weekly e-mail offers or promotions from their favorite golf store.

However, if the messages you're sending out are broad or general, many people would prefer to receive them on a less frequent basis, quarterly for example. This should be enough to get your name in front of them, but not too frequent that they become annoyed by your communications or send you to spam. You should also consider data such as opt-out rates to determine if you're communicating too frequently or sending out non-relevant information. <<

WAYNE WALTON is a business analyst at Arke Systems. Reach him at (404) 812-3123 or wayne@arkesystems.com.

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