



EMAIL MARKETING TOOLS & PRACTICES

Is Email Marketing Dated?

Email Marketing is indeed old, but it doesn't mean it's ineffective. In fact, its maturity can be a strong indication that it's here to stay.

Look at the following pros:

- **Lifespan:** Social media platforms can come and go. An email address? People tend to hang on to the same email for an average of 10 years.
- **Facebook and other social media tools are primarily advertising platforms.** The data on their users is a goldmine they aren't willing to share. With email marketing, you control everything you get to know about your users.
- **Flexibility:** once you've got your address list, it's easy to switch providers. All you need is to export/import the list via CSV.
- **Ease of use:** Today, it takes two seconds to integrate a sign up form, create a template and email everyone. It will certainly be faster to send your first newsletter than to create an ad campaign on Facebook or Twitter.

Email marketing platforms are increasingly easy to use for complete beginners. Best of all, many of them come with free plans so that you can test them before investing money in the solution.

How to Pick the Best Email Marketing Software?

Most email marketing software is designed to perform a range of functions beyond simply sending emails and newsletters. Here's a list of key features you should consider:

- Drag and drop editor: An easy-to-use visual editor that will let you customize your email templates (without any coding) is your best bet for getting campaigns sent out quickly and efficiently.
- Different campaign types: Your software should be able to support a range of email types, including regular newsletters, A/B tests, and autoresponders.
- Marketing automation: Whether you need just simple autoresponders or more targeted automated campaigns, it's important to make sure that your software can cater to your automation needs.
- Sign-up forms: A good newsletter tool will allow you to create your own form to capture subscribers, which can either be embedded on your site or hosted on a separate landing page.
- Integrations: Does your email software need to link up to your other key applications (e.g. your blog, online store, analytics tool, etc.).
- Deliverability: What good is a newsletter service if your emails don't get past the spam filters?
- Support: A thorough knowledge base, email support and live chat/phone support are all ideal.

If Looking for a New Email Marketing Solution, Here's a Few to Evaluate

There are numerous email marketing solutions available, offering a wide range of functionality and pricing. The solutions listed below are not recommendations but a listing of some of the most popular and least expensive solutions that you may desire to take a look at before making a decision on which works best for your association. Many solutions offer special pricing discounts to nonprofits. Some have free plans. Choosing a free plan to start is relatively risk-free. However, keep in mind that your emails will show a small ad and you'll only have limited support. Included pricing is for general comparison only and is subject to change by the provider.

Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com)

Constant Contact has been doing email marketing since 1995 and were the first solution to offer tools not available in other solutions (event management, surveys, social campaigns). They have around 650,000 users worldwide and 270+ apps for integrating extra services to their platform. One of the most popular tool, event management, has been removed and Constant Contact offers an integration with Eventbrite. It is known to provide very good deliverability results. However, it is relatively expensive for basic functions that can be found in other solutions.

General Pricing: 500 contacts: \$20/month; 2,500: \$45/month; 5,000: \$65/month; 10,000: \$95/month

Mailchimp (www.mailchimp.com)

Mailchimp is one of the world-leading solutions in email marketing, thanks to their generous free offer: you can send up to 10,000 emails per month to 2,000 subscribers, with only a small footer ad. The premium plans come with advanced marketing features such as automations. Social media features are good, and so is the quality of the support (for paid subscriptions). You can easily customize the email templates and subscription forms.

Mailchimp is popular for those users who want a great free and easy way to use email marketing services. Even though the free plan is generous, premium prices are fairly high compared to some other plans.

General Pricing: 2,000 contacts: \$0/month; 2,500: \$29.99/month; 10,000: \$75.99/month; 30,000: \$219/month; 50,000: \$259/month

MailerLite (www.mailerlite.com)

A newcomer based in Lithuania, MailerLite provides a modern and simple newsletter product. MailerLite offers good tools, easy to use, a robust editor and a “free for life” price plan. The templates are well-designed and flexible with good deliverability rates, too. Email templates are not included in the free plan.

General Pricing: 1,000 contacts: \$0/month; 2,500: \$15/month; 5,000: \$30/month; 10,000: \$50/month; 15,000: \$75/month

SendInBlue (www.sendinblue.com)

Launched in 2012, SendInBlue is a young Parisian platform that used to focus on transactional emails. They send around 30 million emails and SMS daily in more than 14 countries. Their solution is considered easy to use with good list management, automations and reporting. Pricing is per transaction and includes a generous free plan.

General Pricing: Free Plan: \$0/month; 40,000 emails: \$25/month; 60,000: \$39/month; 120,000: \$66/month

Mailjet (www.mailjet.com)

Based in Paris, France, Mailjet used to focus on transactional emails. Their recent foray into the world of email marketing seems logical and their editor works great. You can send transactional emails and also send SMS. Their premium features include advanced features such as automations, A/B testing, sub-accounts (e.g. for agencies) and team collaboration. Their plans appear to be affordable, the free offer is generous too. Automations, segmentation or A/B testing is not available in the free plan.

General Pricing: 6,000 emails: \$0/month; 30,000: \$9.65/month; 60,000: \$18.95/month; 150,000: \$68.95/month

Email Marketing Best Practices

Determine the best time to send emails to optimize opens

What's the best day (and time) to send your emails to get the most opens? While current research shows that Tuesday and Thursday mornings get the most emails open compared to other days of the week. However, your target market could be different, so initially experiment to determine what results in the best open rate.

Stick to a consistent schedule

Figured out the best day/time for sending to your list, then stick to it. Your customers will quickly get used to your schedule. A consistent schedule leads to improvements in opens and clickthroughs. An erratic schedule does the opposite.

Don't bombard your subscriber list with emails

Too many emails will see your engagement rates plummet. And your unsubscribes go through the roof. According to research data, the optimum frequency (to get your emails opened) is 2-5 campaigns per month.

Personalize the email greeting.

How often do you read emails that begin, "Dear Member"? You might segment your email audiences by the type of customer they are (member, subscriber, user, etc.), but it shouldn't be the first thing recipients see in your company messages. Personalizing the greeting of your emails with your contacts' first names grabs the attention of each reader right away.

Then, the address line of your email would automatically produce the contact's first name by fetching this personalization token in the email's HTML, like this:

Personalizing an email's greeting line with 50 recipients' names doesn't mean you'll have to manually write and send 50 different emails. Most email marketing tools allow you to configure the greeting of your email campaign so that it automatically sends with the name of the people on your contact list -- so everyone is getting a personal version of the same message.

Optimize the email's preview text.

You've seen this link in the marketing emails you receive; it's a helpful warning. But keeping it in the preview text of your email could be a death sentence for the email's open rate. By default, preview text pulls in the first several words of the email body and displays it next to the subject line before the person opens it. The problem is custom email templates often stick conditional statements like "can't see images?" or "not displaying correctly?" along the top banner, allowing it to slip right into the preview when it goes out.

Make your emails SUPER valuable

Emails don't just have to be for sales messages or generating clicks to your website. Make your emails super valuable. Make your subscribers light up when they see your email popping into their inbox.

Avoid using 'No-Reply' in the sender's email address.

Have you heard of the [CAN-SPAM Act](#)? This longstanding piece of legislation is an important guideline for all email marketing in the U.S. One major rule in CAN-SPAM is to never use the words "no reply," or a similar phrase, as your email sender's name (for example, "noreply@yourcompany.com"). "No reply" in an email message prevents recipients from responding and even opting out of further emails, which CAN-SPAN protects their right to do at any time. Instead, have even your automated emails come from a first name (for example, [jamie@mycompany.com](#)) or a recognized entity. Your customers are much more likely to open emails if they know they were written by a human being.

Stick to fewer than three typefaces.

The less clutter you have in your email, the more conversions you'll experience. Don't junk up your email with more than two, or a maximum of three, fonts or typefaces.

Include an email signature.

Even if your newsletter is technically being sent to your contacts on behalf of the company, rather than an individual, the email should include the signature of a specific person. People are naturally more inclined to read and listen to emails if they know it came from a human being, not just a collective marketing team. And your email signature is your ticket to their attention.

Keep your email 500-650 pixels wide.

If your email template is wider than 650 pixels, you're asking users to scroll horizontally to read your entire message. This is even more cumbersome for a recipient who's reading your email on his or her mobile device. Your email pixel width is a critical component of its lead-capturing ability.

Put your logo in the center or upper-lefthand side of the email.

Eye-tracking studies have found that people instinctively look for logos in the upper left-hand side of emails -- often because it's consistent with the placement of a logo on most websites. However, it's also acceptable to put your logo in the center to align it with the email content beneath it. Branding the header of your email reminds your recipients that it came from you and it's part of a series.

Write compelling (but concise) subject lines.

A good subject line should contain between 30 and 50 characters (including spaces). Email accounts and mobile devices often cut off any subject lines that go beyond this length. Your email subject line should also create a sense of urgency, while giving readers some indication of what to expect once they open the email.

Keep the main message and call-to-action above the fold.

If your main call-to-action (CTA) falls below the fold, as many as 70% of recipients won't see it. Also, any CTA should be repeated at least three times throughout the email in various places and formats.

A/B test different subject lines and calls to action.

If you can't seem to increase your email's open and click-through rates, a couple of things might be wrong: You're not emailing the right people or the content of your email needs to be improved.

A/B tests, or "split tests," can be used to improve almost any of your digital marketing content. In an email, this test effectively "splits" your recipients into two groups: Group A receives the normal newsletter, while Group B receives the newsletter with a specific variation. This variation tests to see if your audience would be more or less likely to take an action if your newsletter was different.

Allow recipients to subscribe to your newsletter.

You might be thinking, "wait, if they received the email to begin with, shouldn't they have already subscribed?" Usually, yes, and therefore adding a "Subscribe" button to your email doesn't help those who've already agreed to receive your emails. But great content is shareable content, and if your current subscribers are forwarding your emails to their friends and colleagues, you'll want to help them subscribe, too. Add a small but visible CTA that allows an email viewer to subscribe to the newsletter if they received this email from someone else.

Clean your mailing list regularly.

Some of your email contacts might not opt-out of your email campaign, but still never open your emails. It's tempting to email as many people as possible to reach more prospects, but keeping your least-engaged recipients on your mailing list can kill your open rate. People who never open emails make your campaign look worse since you're not analyzing the campaign's quality against your most loyal recipients.

Remove Invalid Emails (hard bounce) - A hard bounce means that the email address doesn't exist on the server. You should remove any hard bounces from your list.

Monitor Soft Bounces - A soft bounce can happen if an inbox is full, or temporarily unavailable. You might not want to remove a soft bounce immediately. But if you're getting a consistent soft bounce from an email address, then it's probably worth removing it. A 3 strikes policy might be worth considering.

Remove Unengaged Email Addresses - This one is a little trickier. How long should you wait before removing an unengaged email address from your list? A good rule of thumb is that if someone hasn't opened any of your emails for a year, then they are probably not interested in your list anymore.

Use auto-responders for opt-ins.

Be prepared for your readers to forget they opted in. Set up an auto-responder that reminds people they opted in to your email database. The auto-responder should be sent out one day, five days, and 10 days after the person registers. Each auto-responder email should also include additional content or bonus material to reward the reader for opting into the newsletter -- or your readers might not feel they have enough incentive to actually opt in.

Don't purchase contact lists.

Email campaigns depend on a healthy open rate, and if you're contacting people whose information you bought -- rather than earned from a previous interaction -- you'll quickly see your emails' performance drop.

Make it easy to unsubscribe

No matter how awesome your emails are, some users will want to unsubscribe. Perhaps they are no longer using your product, or maybe they had a career change. Unsubscribes are part of running a list. What you DEFINITELY don't want is spam reports.

Your emails should include an option to allow customers to unsubscribe. Not only is it a basic part of unsubscribe best practices, but it's required by law under the [CAN-SPAM Act](#). Most will include their unsubscribe information in the footer of the email.

List of Email Marketing Features and Terminology

- **Autoresponder:** A series of automated emails sent in sequence. Usually start as soon as a user subscribes to one of your forms. They can range from tips and tricks to sales funnels designed to convert clicks into sales.
- **Bounced email:** Undelivered email, because the address is invalid or deleted. Email marketing providers usually deactivate these users for you.
- **Deliverability:** Not all emails reach users' inboxes. The success rate is called deliverability, and it's worth considering when settling on a provider.
- **Email automations:** Slightly more complex and flexible than autoresponders, as they don't need to be on a time schedule. You can tag a user depending on the page they visit on your site and send them customized automated emails. Or you can trigger an email based on behavior (for example when they click a link). Some of these automations can go really far with site-tracking and complex logic trees.
- **GIF:** It's a graphic file that can be animated. Why is this important? It's essentially impossible to embed a video in a newsletter that works across all email clients – most of the time it would be blocked. That's why animated GIFs are a popular way to add moving images. Services like Mailerlite and Mailchimp even automatically create a GIF animation by simply adding a video link (e.g. YouTube) to the template.
- **Pay as you go and subscription models:** You can credit a certain amount of emails to your account. Or you can pay monthly, which seems to be the most popular solution. This usually means unlimited campaigns, with price variations based on your amount of subscribers.
- **Responsive email:** Like for a website, the email adapts to the screen size. It means your newsletter should look good on desktops, laptops, smartphones and tablets.

- **Template:** A predefined style for your newsletter. The design styles might be basic or very fancy, with different fonts, colors and buttons. Using the built-in template-editors, you can easily create nice looking emails that contain images and rich-formatting.
- **Transactional emails:** Some providers also offer the ability to send triggered, business-related emails – e.g. order confirmations, password resets, and renewal reminders.