

# How to Plan and Start a Great Email Newsletter

by Nicolette Tallmadge

**EXTRA! EXTRA!**

You Can Read All About It  
By Email!



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# THE Most Important Thing Your Website Must Do

Quick! What's the most important thing that your website must do?

- Showcase your best art? Nope...
- Get ranked on Google? Nope....
- Sell your work? Definitely important...but nope.

The most important thing that you website must do is help build **the list**.

- That list of people who have bought your work and may buy from you in the future.
- That list of people who admire your work and might buy from you in the future.
- That list of people who know of someone else that may love your work and will happily refer them to you.

If you're using your website as an online brochure or portfolio, this is obviously useful. But what if you're selling your work online? How can building your list be more important than actually selling your work? Think about it this way...you'll naturally gather the contact information of anyone who buys something from your website. But what about those who love your work but for whatever reason can't or won't buy it right that second? You don't want to let them go hoping they'll remember to return once they're ready to buy...because trust me...they won't.

You're already encouraging sales... you need to encourage those who may buy in the future not to leave your site without a way for you to contact them. How do you keep in touch with them? How do you remind them that you'll be at that craft show in their hometown next week? How do you remind them that Mother's Day is coming up and that you have the perfect gift available? How do you encourage sales if they leave your website without buying? You do it by encouraging them to join your list.

# Starting an Email Newsletter

A great email newsletter program is a major tool in any web marketing toolbox. With a good program of newsletters or regular email messages, you can:

- increase sales, both online and offline
- encourage people to visit your booth
- encourage people to visit your retail galleries
- encourage repeat sales both on and off your website
- keep your name in front of current and future customers

Sounds good? Let's get started!

Any decent email newsletter program starts with a bit of planning up front. There are a number of things that you need to get settled before you start shooting out emails:

## **1. What's the goal of your newsletter?**

Why are you starting the newsletter in the first place? What are you hoping to accomplish by starting the newsletter? It's a big mistake to start an email newsletter just because you heard that it's a good idea. A good email newsletter takes some time start and maintain. In order to be successful at it you need to have some definite, measurable goals ...and these goals should be tied to improving your bottom line.

## **2. Who's your audience?**

Who are you starting your newsletter for? Your audience dictates everything else about your newsletter...the content, the frequency, and the format. Everything about your newsletter needs to be designed to benefit your audience. People aren't going to join your newsletter just to be nice. Your newsletter has to have something that they find valuable. And the only way you can design your newsletter to please your audience is by knowing exactly who your audience is.

So how do you know what your audience wants? The simplest way to find out is to ask them. If your audience is going to be your retail customers, you can poll individual customers or you can ask them to fill out a survey either on your website or through snail mail.

### **3. What's in your newsletter?**

When someone opens your newsletter, what are they going to read? The content of your newsletter is the thing that will make it a success or a total flop. Like I pointed out just a moment ago, there are two things that will dictate what you have in your newsletter...your goals and your audience.

When you're planning your newsletter content, it needs to 1) help you accomplish the goals of your newsletter, and 2) be something that benefits your audience. Figure out what that is and you're well on your way to creating a great newsletter.

### **4. How long is your newsletter?**

In addition to your newsletter content, you should also give some thought as to how long it should be. Again, the length of your newsletter greatly depends on your audience. Some people prefer short, quick newsletters...others may prefer longer, information packed newsletters.

Also, the content itself can dictate the length of your newsletter. If your newsletter is going to be a "tip-of-the-day" type of newsletter, then a short email would be perfect, whereas if your newsletter will contain short articles, or multiple pieces of content in each message, a longer newsletter would be more appropriate.

### **5. What's your frequency?**

How often will you send out your newsletter? Daily? Bi-weekly? Weekly? Monthly? Bi-monthly? You'll want to send out your newsletter often enough so that you make an impression on your readers...however you don't want to send so many messages that you end up annoying them. For the purposes of building a relationship with your audience, you don't want have a newsletter frequency of less than once a month.

Another thing that you want to consider is that the length of your

newsletter can also suggest how frequently you should send it. Longer newsletters will do better if you send them out less frequently. If your newsletter is going to be short, then you can stand to send your messages out more frequently.

#### **6. What's your consistency?**

How regularly will you send your newsletter? Every Friday at 10 am? Every other Wednesday afternoon? On an as-needed basis? The advantage of having a regular publication date is that it's easier for you to plan your newsletter. Plus, it's easier to build a loyal readership if you have a regular schedule. On the flip side, if your content is timely or time sensitive, keeping to a regular schedule may prove to be more difficult. Plus, once you start building up the expectations of consistency with your readers, you have to be really careful to maintain it.

#### **7. What's your format?**

What format will your newsletter be? When it comes to email newsletters, you have several choices, plain text and HTML. The most universal and accessible format is plain text. Anyone that has an email program will be able to read your plain text newsletter. The disadvantage being that plain text emails are visually rather boring.

On the other hand, with HTML newsletters, you have the ability to insert text, color, and different font types and sizes which makes for a more aesthetically pleasing newsletter. But there are some big disadvantages to HTML newsletters including the fact that they can be difficult to design so that they appear the same in every email program.

#### **8. Do you have the time, energy, and material?**

With all the things that have to do already, do you have enough time and creativity to put out your newsletter on a regular basis? Don't underestimate this point. Trust me...I know how difficult it can be. Putting out a regular newsletter takes time, energy, and the ability to develop ideas and content for each and every newsletter. If you decide to start off with a daily newsletter or even weekly newsletter, without ever having the experience of put out a regular publication before, you may find yourself running out of steam after a few weeks, or when you have a time crunch.

You may want to start off things slowly with a short monthly newsletter. You can always increase the length or frequency of your newsletter once you get the hang of the process. And starting off slowly will also give you the chance to start building up a stockpile of future content for your newsletter.

### **What's next?**

Once you've decided on the preliminaries, it will be time to start planning your content out in detail.

## Planning Your Newsletter Content

Now that you have some preliminary plans made for your newsletter, it's time to decide on your content. Content is the heart and soul of your newsletter. Good content should :

1. **Help you accomplish the goals of your newsletter**– this could mean that you want your newsletter to help you increase your new or returning sales, or attract new customers...what ever the goal, the content of your newsletter should help you accomplish it.
2. **Be something that your customer find useful**– your customers will sign up for your newsletter if you can provide them with something that they find fun, informative, or useful.

So, how do you know what kind of content to put in your newsletter? First, ask your current customers to see what their interests are. You can do this online by using an online polling service like Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) or Zoomerang (<http://www.zoomerang.com>). You can also send a brief survey by mail, or interview some customers over the phone, or if you see your customers on a regular basis you can do an informal poll face to face.

Here's one thing that I'm finding to be pretty effective. Recently I added a brief survey to the thank you page of my newsletter sign up which asks new subscriber why they joined the newsletter and about what kind of information they would like to see in future issues.

What makes this approach so effective is that these new subscribers are more likely to fill out the survey because they don't have to take an extra step to find the survey page and fill it out. As a result, I'm getting a lot of good information about what my subscribers are expecting and that will dictate what I will write for the newsletter and blog in the future. This also works well if you have a brand new list and aren't able to poll potential subscribers.

Once you get a good idea of what your subscribers want, you need to decide the type of content you're going to put in your newsletter. There's a lot of different forms of content to choose from. You can use a combination of different types of content or you can base your newsletter

on one main piece of content. Just remember that whatever you choose, it must help promote your newsletter goals, and it's also something that your subscribers want. Content can include :

- Articles (short or long)
- Polls
- Surveys
- Trivia
- Contests
- Giveaways
- Quick tips & tricks
- Links to resources
- Company news
- Sneak Peaks
- Reviews (books, DVDs, CD, etc)
- Reader Q&A
- Reader feedback
- Excerpts from blog posts
- Letters to the editor
- Current events and trends
- Interviews
- Guest articles
- Special offers/Coupon
- Sponsored content (content that others pay you to run in your newsletter)

- Advertising (either for your own products or others)

### **Regular vs Periodic Features**

Most newsletters are designed to have regular features that appear in every newsletter. This newsletter for example always has a table of contents, an article, a list of previous blog posts, and a sneak peak into the next newsletter. Having regular features can make it easier for you to plan your newsletter and your subscribers will know what to expect.

It may also benefit you to have some periodic features that can add every now and then to keep the newsletter fresh. Content like polls, surveys, reader feedback, guest articles, or interviews are a great way to introduce a periodic feature to your newsletter.

### **How Much Content is Enough?**

The amount of content to put in a newsletter is a balancing act. You want enough to make your newsletter interesting, but you also don't want so much that your readers won't read your messages. If your newsletter is monthly, you could probably stand to have a longer newsletter that has a variety of different features. If your newsletter is published weekly or even daily, you'll need to make them short enough that your customer can keep up with the reading.

One solution for a too long newsletter is to only include an excerpt in the actual email and then to include a link to a page on your website that contains the full text of your article or other piece of content. That way you won't be overwhelming your readers and they will still have access to your content.

Be aware that some readers may be annoyed by this approach, especially if your newsletter contains nothing but links to your website. So make sure that you use this technique carefully.

### **Maintaining the Balance Between Promotion and Information**

Remember that it's important to balance promotional content with informational content. Nobody wants to just get email after email filled with yet another request to buy your stuff. Even the most dedicated subscriber will get bored with your newsletter if it's nothing but one

serial commercial. Even if the purpose of your newsletter is to sell make sure that you balance it out with non-commercial content as well.

In addition, if you are planning on including advertising or sponsored content, that is content that someone is paying you to include in your newsletter, make sure that it's relevant to the people subscribing to your list.

If you are a painter and the people on your list are interested in collecting paintings and fine art, it doesn't make sense to include an ad about magazine subscriptions or a sponsored article on car detailing. However, if you include a short sponsored article from a lighting company on the best way to light artwork, then that's relevant, even valuable content to your subscribers and it will be more acceptable to include it in your newsletter.

### **Encouraging Active Subscribers**

Here's a tip that I got from Alice Seba. You should include a call to action in every newsletter you send. If you're familiar with advertising terminology, you'll know that a "call to action" is the part that tells the customer to act in some manner...whether it's to place an order, call for more information, or visit a website to sign up for something.

Now you might be thinking, "Wait a minute! You just said don't try to sell in every newsletter?" Yes I did. But your call to action doesn't mean that you have to tell your subscribers to buy something. A call to action could be as simple as telling people to watch out for the next newsletter, or to read a specific blog post on your blog, fill out a survey, sign up for a contest, or to pass the newsletter on to a friend.

Now why do you want to boss your subscribers around? Because you want to cultivate a list of **active** subscribers. A large list of people means nothing if they aren't reading or even opening your messages. Some people will remain subscribed simply because they're too lazy to unsubscribe. They'll simply delete your messages without reading them

People that interact with your newsletter tend to remain subscribed and will be more likely to click on the link with the special offer or visit your website to look at your new work when you send out that special promotion. Don't worry about offending subscribers with your

business. It's better to have a small, active list than a large list of people who don't read your newsletter.

So, now that you have a good idea of what's supposed to be going into your newsletter, it's time to think about what it will look like.

# Designing Your Newsletter

Now that you've considered what your newsletter is going to be all about have decided what's actually going into the newsletter, now is a good time to think about what your newsletter is going to look like.

## Text or HTML?

You need to think about whether you are going to publish your email newsletter in HTML or text format. Simply put, a text newsletter is a newsletter that designed only using plain text. No graphics, no colors, or complex layout. On the other hand, an HTML newsletter is an email newsletter that can contain graphics, colors, different types of fonts, links, and can be laid out like a web page.

Which is the best format? There's pros and cons of each and the format you choose it partly depends on your audience and what the goals of your newsletter are.

## Text Email Newsletters

A lot of people automatically turned toward HTML newsletter because they feel that plain text is boring. But text newsletters have some pretty significant advantages that you shouldn't ignore. Here are a few of them:

1. **Easy to design**– Text email newsletters are easy to design. You don't need to know HTML or web design in order to make a well-designed plain text newsletter.
2. **Universal and consistent**– Every email program in existence can receive and open a plain text newsletter. Also, it's certain that the newsletter will look the same in every email program it lands in.
3. **Fast loading**– Plain text newsletters are quick to load up in your subscriber's email program. And since the newsletter contains no graphics, it doesn't force your subscriber to wait while the email program grabs all of the graphics in the newsletter.

4. **Less of a spam risk**– A text email newsletter is less likely to land in the spam folder as many email programs treat emails with graphics and HTML in them with suspicion.

That being said, text email also has a couple of disadvantages:

1. **Visually boring**– A plain text email can be...well plain. Since art is a visual medium, this can be somewhat of a disadvantage if the goal of your newsletter is to promote your artwork.
2. **Hard to track**– It's near impossible to tell how many people are opening or even reading your plain text newsletter. However, it is possible to track how many people that are clicking on your links in the newsletter if you use a link shortening service like SnipURL.com to put links in your newsletter.

## HTML Newsletter

HTML newsletters have gotten to be pretty popular for some pretty good reasons. Here are some of the advantages:

1. **Eye catching**– Because you can format text, insert graphics, and design attractive layouts for your HTML newsletters they can be much more eye catching than a plain text newsletter.
2. **Brandable**– You can “brand” your newsletter by making it match the look and feel for your site.
3. **Trackable**– You have the ability to track how many people are actually opening your newsletter and you also have the ability to track how many people are clicking on links within your newsletter. This will give you a better idea as to how active your subscribers are.

HTML newsletters have some pretty big advantages over text newsletters...especially for a visual group like artists. But that doesn't mean that there aren't some considerable disadvantages to them as well:

1. **Not universal or consistent**– While most popular email program can handle HTML newsletters, there's no guarantee that they will display your newsletter consistently. A newsletter that looks one way in Gmail may look a bit (or a lot) different in Outlook.

2. **More difficult to design**– You’ll need to know HTML and some web design in order to design your email newsletter. Because there are some differences in different how email programs display HTML, you’ll need to be aware of how to handle the differences design-wise.
3. **More likely to be considered spam**– Since a lot of spammers use HTML in their messages, many email programs tend to classify a lot of HTML email messages as spam. That could mean that your newsletter may have a higher chance of landing in the spam filter.
4. **Slower loading**– On average, a HTML newsletter will take a longer time to load up in a person’s email program than a text email that has the same message.

### **Doing Both**

One solution that some people go with is to simply offer both versions and letting your subscribers decide what they want. Be aware that if you go down this route you’ll have to design and distributed two versions of your newsletter.

### **The Verdict**

So which format should you choose? It’s really up to you. For my own newsletter, I decided to stick with a text format even though I do have the skill to design my newsletter myself. Why? For two reasons: 1) Out of the list of things to do, I didn’t want to take the time to design and test an HTML newsletter, and 2) My newsletters are information heavy and a lot of graphics and a slick layout isn’t really necessary.

For your own newsletter, you should weigh the benefits and disadvantages of each format. A word to the wise, if you do plan on going down the HTML route, I strongly suggest that you either hire a designer to create your newsletter template (preferably one that has experience in designing HTML newsletters) or you should use a service that has pre-designed HTML newsletter templates available. I’ll talk about these services in the next article.

### **Some Newsletter Elements You’ll Need:**

There are a couple of elements in your newsletter that you need to think about including when you're designing the format:

- **Masthead**– This is the very top of the newsletter that contains the name of your newsletter, the issue number, date, and logo (if HTML newsletter). Mastheads are good because your subscribers will be able to identify who the newsletter is from. Plus, you can also include a tagline or slogan and brand your newsletter further.
- **Table of Contents**– If you have a newsletter that has a lot of content, it can be useful to have a “Table of Contents” or a “What’s in this Newsletter” section right below your masthead.
- **Footer**– Be sure not to neglect the bottom of your newsletter. Include a footer that contains your company information, email address, copyright notice, or ISSN number if you happen to get one for your newsletter.
- **Subscription and Opt Out Information**– Somewhere in your newsletter you need to include a message that tells the subscriber why they are receiving your newsletter and how to unsubscribe if they wish. Don’t hide this information and make sure that people can find this easily.
- **Send to a friend**– Include a message in every newsletter that encourages your subscribers to forward the current newsletter to someone who may find it useful. This can be a good way to expand your mailing list with no effort.
- **In the Next Issue**– This element is good for creating some amount of anticipation among your subscribers about the next newsletter. And as a planning tool, it can force you to think several newsletters ahead.

### What’s Next?

Once you’ve decided on your newsletter design and format, it’s time to start looking around for a way to distribute your newsletter and gather subscribers.

## Distributing Your Email Newsletter

One mistake that a lot of artists make when they send their first newsletter out is to try to send it by using an email program like Outlook or Apple Mail. Please don't try it. Email programs like Outlook, Hotmail, and Gmail aren't built for sending out bulk emails. Their purpose is to send and receive individual emails. Trying to use them to send out dozens and dozens of emails at a time can get tedious in a hurry.

In order to run your email newsletter, you'll need a program or service known as a "mailing list management" program. Now of course one of these mailing list programs will be sending out your emails, but that's only one part of what a good program should do. It also has to:

- Automatically manage subscriptions **and** unsubscriptions
- Manage bounced emails (emails that get returned due to bad email addresses or full email boxes)
- Be able to import and export subscription information using a spreadsheet or some other type of text data
- Automatically gather and store the subscription information for each subscriber (name, email address, and other information)
- Must be able to send out multiple email messages at a time
- Should be able to personalize your messages with a subscriber's name, email address, subscription details, etc
- Keep track of the email messages you've sent and who you have sent them to.

Basically when it comes to sending out and maintaining your email newsletters, you have one of two choices. You can either use a third-party service or you can buy mailing list software and install it directly on your website. Both options have their advantages.

## Mailing List Services

A mailing list service is a third party service that will help you administrate your email mailing list and your all of your newsletters and mailings. There are a number of advantages to using one of these services:

- **No software to install**– you don't have to know how to install software onto your hosting service. Using one of these services is as easy as filling in some blanks.
- **No maintenance issues**– you don't have to worry about installing upgrades or chasing out problems and bugs.
- **Includes HTML templates**– if you want to send out HTML newsletters, most mailing list services have pre-designed HTML templates available for you to use. In most cases, these templates have been professionally designed and tested on a number of different email programs to ensure consistency.

On the downside, if you choose a mailing list service there is couple of things you should consider:

- **Cost**– Most of these services aren't free. List services charge a monthly fee based on the size of your list or the number of messages that you send out during a period of time.
- **Difficulty in handling multiple websites**– If you have more than one website, you may not be able to create different newsletters for different websites depending on which service you choose

Because of the ease of use, most people decide to use a mailing list service to administrate their email mailing lists. If you plan on going down that route, here are a couple of services you may want to check out. Most of these services have free trials so you can try the service out before you pay for it.

- **Mailchimp**– <http://www.mailchimp.com>– costs about \$15 per month for up to 500 subscribers. It has some great HTML templates you can use for your HTML newsletters. If you don't have a large list yet and don't want to pay monthly, you can use one of their pre-paid plans instead.

- **Constant Contact**– costs about \$15 per month for up to 500 subscribers. If you pay 6 months in advance, you get 10% off.
- **iContact**– about \$9.95 per month (not sure of how many names). The advantage with iContact is that it also includes autoresponders, the ability to create lists for different websites, and the ability to create surveys for free (you pay extra for this with Constant Contact)
- **mailer mailer**– unlike some of the other services, mailer mailer charges per message instead of per subscriber. It's free for up to 200 messages per month, (10kb size limit per message) the paid version is \$29.95 per month for up to 20,000 messages per month.
- **AWeber**– is \$19.95 monthly (you can also pay quarterly, semi-annually, and yearly for some discounted rates). AWeber is more known for autoresponder capabilities, but the service does include newsletter capabilities and templates. The monthly fee is for unlimited messages, autoresponders, and newsletters.

For a full list of these resources, visit:

<http://www.craftedweb.com/resources/mailing-list-services-and-software/>

If you are technically inclined or if you have access to someone who is, you can opt to install mailing list software on your website as opposed to using a third party service provider. There are actually several advantages to going down this route:

- **Complete control**– if you get good software, you'll be able to control everything about your mailing list and the messages you send.
- **Multiple lists for multiple websites**– If you have more than one website, you'll be able to create different mailing lists and newsletters for each site without having to pay an additional fee.
- **Lower overall cost**– most mailing list software can range anywhere from free to a few hundred dollars. But even if you do have to pay for your list software, it may be cheaper in the long run than paying

for a monthly mailing list service, especially if you send out larger volumes of emails, have a large list, or if you plan on hosting a list for more than one website.

Of course, there are some disadvantages to DIY email list hosting:

- **Maintenance and upgrades**– you will of course be responsible for maintaining your list software and for installing any upgrades and security updates. And if your list software breaks down, you'll have to get it fixed.
- **Not as many HTML templates**– some list software does have HTML templates available, but they are usually not as extensive as the ones available from a service like Mailchimp or Constant Contact. And in some cases you'll have to buy them in addition to the software.
- **May require server add-ons**– most hosting services will have the ability to run the majority of mailing list programs, but you'll still need to check with your hosting service to make sure that it has all of the requirements available to you.

If you want to go down the self-hosting route, here is some software you could take a look at:

- **PHPlist**– this is a free open source program that many hosting services may already have available to install on your service. It does have the basic mailing list features, but it does not have the ability to create and send autoresponders. But for being free, it's still a great program to start off with.
- **Oempro**– For my own list, I use a program called Oempro created by a company called Octeth. It runs about \$268.00 for the latest version and you'll need to have PHP and MySQL installed on your web host in order for it to work. It does have the ability to send both HTML and plain text emails and it also has autoresponder capabilities. Octeth also provides some free HTML newsletter templates to go with your system as well.

Once you've decided on how you're going to distribute your newsletter, it's time to start creating your very first newsletter.

# **Your Email Newsletter Pre-Launch Checklist**

So you've written your newsletter and you're ready to launch your very first issue. But before you hit that "Send" button, here are some things that you need to check first.

## **Spellcheck your newsletter**

Look your newsletter over for misspellings, grammatical errors, and just to see if what you've written makes sense. This is especially important if you have a long newsletter, or a newsletter that has a long article. Just because it's email doesn't mean that you shouldn't be careful with how you write!

## **Beware of Word**

A lot of people compose their email newsletter in a program like Microsoft Word. If you do, don't cut and paste your newsletter directly out of Word into your email management program. Word processors puts all kinds of invisible code in your text...especially if you're using formatting like bold, italics, or underlining. Also, if your copy has special symbols like em dashes, ellipses, tildes, accent marks, and copyright symbols, they won't translate into your message. Instead, you'll end up with some pretty funky looking formatting or weird symbols in your message.

The best way to avoid this problem is to cut and paste your text out of Word into a plain text editor like Notepad or Textpad. Doing this strips out all of the hidden formatting and symbols and leaves just the plain text. Simply cut and paste your copy into an empty Notepad or Textpad file, then copy and paste that text from your Notepad file into your email program. Notepad is included on all version of Windows...if you're a Mac user, you can use a text editor like BBEdit or the free open source text editor, Smultron.

## **Pretty up your plain text newsletter**

If you are sending out a plain text newsletter, you'll have to do a bit of work to make it look nice without the benefit of colors, images, and text formatting.

- Use asterisks or dashes as a replacement for bullets.
- Provide line breaks to separate paragraphs.
- Use dashes, pound symbols, or other text symbols to divide different sections of your newsletter. For example, the line of dashes below help to create a visual divider.

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- Avoid using a lot of dollar signs and exclamation points in the writing and formatting of your newsletter. These two symbols are known triggers for spam filters.
- If you have links in your email newsletter, be sure to put in the full link including the http://. This will make the link clickable in most email programs.
- Your text email shouldn't be more than 65 characters wide. Any longer, and you'll get some awkward line breaks in your newsletter. Add a line break at the end of each line of text when it reaches around 65 characters wide.

### **Do a spam check**

Before you send your newsletter, run it through a spam check tool to minimize the chance that your newsletter will end up in the junk mail folder instead of your subscriber's inboxes. These tools check your newsletter for known "spam triggers", factors that will cause an email client to throw your message in the Junk mail folder. Some known triggers are:

- Subject lines that start with the word "free"
- Overuse use of capital letters
- Overuse of characters like "\*" or "!"
- Overuse of trigger words like free, money, etc

You can see a list of trigger words at:

[http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt8/spamfilter\\_phrases.htm](http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt8/spamfilter_phrases.htm)

This is not to say that you can't use these words at all, you just need to be aware that if you use too many in one email, it runs the risk of being flagged.

Most third party email management services have these tools built into the service. If you are hosting your own newsletter, you can use a free online tool called SpamCheck to audit your newsletter.

SpamCheck- <http://spamcheck.sitesell.com>

### **Test your newsletter**

Before you send out your newsletter you should test it thoroughly first.

- **Test the subscription system**- Try subscribing and unsubscribing to your list to make sure that the links and the sign up forms are working properly. Read the welcome emails and the sign up screens to make sure that everything is spelled properly and the directions are clear. If you have a friend or a customer that can help you test out the newsletter sign up system, get them to go through the subscription process and have them report any problems.
- **Test your links**- If you've included any links in your newsletter, click on them or cut and paste them into a web browser to make sure that they go where they're supposed to go. You should also do just before you send out every issue of your newsletter.
- **Send a test newsletter**- Send out a couple of test messages just to see what your newsletter will look like. See if your subject lines make sense and be sure that the body of your newsletter looks good. If you are sending out an HTML newsletter, check that all of the images appear, and keep an eye on how long your newsletter takes to load up in your email program. If you use more than one email client, say you have a Gmail account and also use Outlook or Apple Mail, look at your newsletter in both to see if they look the same.

- **Test scheduled newsletters**– Most email management programs will allow you to schedule newsletters out ahead of time. If you plan on using this feature, schedule a test message to make sure it delivers when it's supposed to.
- **Check your spam filter**– If your newsletter doesn't show up in your inbox, check your junk mail folder. If it ends up there, then you'll need to run your message through the spam check tool again and make adjustments.

### **Hit the "send" button**

Once you've run through this checklist, it's time to press the send button and launch your newsletter to the world!

Now what if you don't have any subscribers yet? Send your newsletter anyway. If you have a schedule, follow it even if no one is reading yet. By the time you have readers, you'll be in the habit of sending your newsletter regularly.

So now that you have a newsletter, it's time to really start building that list.

## How to Get Subscribers to Sign Up for Your Mailing List

So! Now that you've done the hard work of planning your mailing list, finding a service, and writing some newsletters, you'll need to find subscribers. This is going to be an ongoing, long-term task, so you should always be promoting your newsletter. Here are some tips on how:

### **Put your sign up form prominently on every single page of your website.**

That's right...every single page. That one sign up form on your contact page is nowhere near enough. Neither is that tiny "email me" link at the bottom of your page. Your potential subscribers might not make it to your contact page. You want them to be able to sign up no matter what page they're on.

And don't hide your signup form. For some reason, a lot of people tend to put their forms on the bottom of the page or keep it on one page of their website. If you make your visitors look around for the signup they won't do it. It should be one of the first things that they see when they land on your website. The top left hand or right hand corner is usually best.

### **Don't ask for too much information.**

Some artists make the mistake of creating a long contact form for new subscribers to fill out. A long form asking for postal addresses, phone numbers, and other personal information is a hassle to fill out and will also scare off potential subscribers. The first thing that will cross their minds is "Well why do they need to know my phone number?"

Remember, these folks don't know you yet and even handing out just an email address requires an act of trust.

Keep it short and simple. Just asking for a name and email address is plenty for an email mailing list. You'll have time to ask for more information once you get them on your list. If you're going to ask for a phone number or snail mail address, then you better have a good reason why you're asking for it and explain why on your signup form.

## **Give them something of great value immediately.**

Remember that asking someone to sign up for your mailing list is a trade. Customers are giving you information in hopes of getting something useful back. The promise of future newsletters and updates are fine, but you'll get a lot more signups if you can offer something of immediate value like:

- A printable coupon to use on your website or at your next show
- A free article or special report with tips or useful information
- An audio or video download with tips or how tos (these are extremely powerful incentives)
- Access to a "subscribers only" section of your website (you should list what's in this section on your sign up page)
- Entry into a contest or giveaway

## **Don't forget your blog and email.**

If you also maintain a blog in addition to your regular site, don't forget to include a sign up form there as well. Blogger and Typepad makes it fairly easy to add a sign up form directly on your blog. If you use Wordpress.com you'll need to use a service like Feedburner or Feedblitz because they do not allow you to add forms to your blog.

Plus, think of some way to mention your mailing list in your blog posts and encourage people to join. You can even post a link to your mailing list page at the end of every post with a message asking people to join, kind of like a signature message for your blog. By the way, you should also include link to your mailing list sign up in your email signature so that you're encouraging people to sign up every time you send out an email.

**\*Here's a super tip:** If you have a Wordpress blog running on your hosting service, there's a plugin that you can install called "What Seth Godin Would Do". Here's what it does: when someone lands on your blog for the first time it automatically puts a brief message along the top of the first post. In most cases the messages says some like

"Welcome my blog, please sign up for my RSS feed". Instead of the default message, I've included my newsletter sign up form in the message and asked for people to sign up for the newsletter. About 75% of my new subscribers sign up through this message!

You can find the plugin here:

<http://www.richardkmiller.com/blog/wordpress-plugin-what-would-seth-godin-do>

Please note that you will need to have Wordpress running on your own web host...this won't work if you have a free blog at Wordpress.com

### **Tell everyone about your newsletter.**

Don't keep your newsletter a secret. Tell everyone you know about it and ask them to join. Contact your current customers and ask them to visit your website to sign up. If you have a Twitter account, or a Facebook account talk to your Twitter and Facebook friends about the latest article or giveaway you're featuring in your newsletter. Whenever I post a tweet about my latest newsletter article on Twitter I always get at least 3 or 4 new subscriptions that way.

Promote your newsletter off the web too, through your voice mail messages, through signups at shows and open studios.

### **Don't obsess over unsubscribes.**

When you're first starting out, you'll probably keep your eyes glued to your subscription statistics. So of course you'll probably get a little disappointed if someone unsubscribes from your list. Don't worry about it. Your numbers are going to fluctuate and unless you start to notice a downward trend in your subscriptions, don't obsess every time you get an unsubscribe.

So there you have it! You're well on your way to building your own list of potential buyers and collectors! You simply need to build your system and work it!