

Four Ways to Set Goals That Increase the Value of Your Email Newsletter

An email newsletter can be a high impact communication tool, especially for those editors who are always looking to improve their efforts and better serve their readers. This guide offers a quick overview of a measured approach to better aligning your email newsletter efforts with the goals of your organization.

Here is the outline:

- Identify Your Marketing Communication Goals
- Give These Goals Articulated Specifics
- Identify How Your Email Newsletter Will Affect These Specifics While Serving Your Readers First
- Measure Reader Response and Adjust Accordingly

Identify Your Marketing Communication Goals

What impact are your marketing and communication efforts expected to bring to your organization? If you're the chief marketer as well as the owner then what is your purpose for writing this email newsletter?

Some possible higher level goals include (but are not limited to):

- 1) Develop your long-term relationship with readers
- 2) Increase sales (or other business-related conversion) through upsell and cross-sell
- 3) Increase event participation

Give These Goals Articulated Specifics

It is important to have your goals firmly in mind as you create content for your newsletter, but the broader goals won't help you much until you identify and articulate the specifics of these goals. For example, if one of your marketing communications goals is to increase event participation and you've got 1000 email readers then set a goal of creating incentives for 50 subscribers to attend.

Here are the above-mentioned goals with some more detailed, articulated specifics:

1) Develop long-term relationship with readers

a) increase open rates by 10% and click-throughs by 25% in three months. Reduce unsubscribe rates by 50% over six months. Increase instances of "send-to-a-friend" by 5 per issue. Increase email responses from readers to 10 per issue.

2) Increase sales through up-sell and cross-sell

a) push email-driven sales up 5% in your next issue. Move 3 readers along to the next stage in your sales cycle.

3) Increase event participation

a) increase event attendance at your next event by 50 people.

Identify How Your Email Newsletter Will Affect These Specific Goals

So you've done the work of identifying your broad goals and the specifics of the related goals. You know that without these specific goals you'll be unable to reach your broader goals, which are really more like ideals than goals anyway.

Now it's time for the fun part: identifying how you're going to start achieving these specifics while still serving the readers of your newsletter.

1) I'm going to first focus on developing long term relationships with readers as measured by increasing open rates by 10% and content click-throughs by 25 % in 3 months. There are several ways to affect this metric.

a) Ask Your Readers What They Would Like to Read

Of course you have an agenda - you need to let people know of the successes your company has and all the events that readers can attend. You could find that you significantly increase your target metrics by adding a quick note in your newsletter to ask folks what they'd like to see more or less of. If your readers aren't responsive then consider calling up specific subscribers who you know personally. Ask them directly what kinds of stuff would get them to open up your newsletter. Find a way to add a bit of what they requested and then track your metrics over the next several months to see what happens.

b) Grow the Conversation

Anytime you get an email response figure out how to work it into your newsletter. Show the subscribers that there is a readership community that

has an impact on the newsletter and even your organization as a whole. Surveys are great for those readerships who aren't vocal by nature - you can also work in phone calls if you rarely get email responses. Anything to show that you're listening and responding. You will see the open rate metric creep up over time as you train readers to expect more interaction from others like them.

2) Now let's look at increasing cross-sales and up selling by 5% in your next issue. Here are a few strategies to consider:

a) Reader-Targeted Offer

Now that you've spent time tuning up your content by asking readers what they want to read you should have a better idea of how to write to them and what they're looking to read. This will give you clues towards messaging, what kind of incentive will get them moving (price drop vs. special gift), and even an idea of where to place the offer. The more you know the better your aim.

b) Testimonials in Your Newsletter

If you're a service company there may be a way to make these testimonials into case studies. Either way, showing the effects of affiliating with your organization could be a deciding factor for those readers who are on the fence about giving you their money.

c) Specialized Landing Pages

If you're serious about converting readers to your offers you should consider creating more customized landing pages where they can learn more about what you're selling. An added benefit is that you can use these pages as paid search landing pages as well.

3) So if you're working to drive attendance to local events you're going to have to get a little more creative with your efforts, and it may be tough to separate out people who you give incentives to attend versus the folks who would have gone away anyways. Here are a couple of quick ideas though for tracking and increasing event attendance.

a) Gift Coupons/Code in the Email Newsletter

If your list is small enough you could consider a printable coupon for your subscribers. If you can, be at the booth where you hand out the gifts (or complimentary drink tickets) so that you can capture new newsletter subscribers. Consider giving away your prize to folks who sign up for your newsletter too.

1b) Photograph and Briefly Interview the Event Attendees

Ask your readers to come and introduce themselves to you at the next event so that you can put their picture in the next issue. This isn't going to appeal to everyone, but for a few it will be a big deal, and nothing gets folks opening up an email newsletter like the chance to see their own smiling face next to their name and the name of their organization.

Measure Reader Response and Adjust Accordingly

Your email newsletter improvement loop closes with the measurement of your efforts. By benchmarking and following the metrics that relate to your goals you'll be able to see how your efforts are affecting your organization's overall goals. It's vital that you have patience though - especially if you publish monthly - as it often takes several months before you start to see an increase in your target metrics.