

# Filter Finesse BY JACOB MOORE Avoiding the dreaded "spam" designation is the first step on the path to effective e-mail marketing

**A** good product can sell itself to customers, but a good company knows how to sell its product, and e-mail marketing offers a cheap method by which business owners can spread the good news. In an Information Age plagued by spammers and pyramid schemes, the e-mail route may seem to some like a fast track to the trash box, but with careful planning and setup, a small business can capitalize on e-marketing.

The first step is to understand the purpose. Clint Smith, co-founder of Emma, a Nashville-based e-mail marketing company, says that the trend has shifted from using e-mails as a tool of acquisition to a retention tool. Spam filters and tightened legal definitions make broad, fire-and-forget campaigns a possible liability. "One of the biggest mistakes is the small business that has a great relationship with customers that sends out a generic e-mail," Smith says. The key, according to Smith, is to reinforce existing relationships with clients, rather than "purchasing a list, sending out a mass e-mail and hoping for the best."

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM WILLIAMS

Being labeled a spammer can be problematic enough from a legal standpoint. Mark Plotkin at Waller Lansden says that the CAN SPAM Act of 2004 makes a clear distinction between what is legally spam and what is legitimate marketing. According to Plotkin, the law requires that e-mails include a clear identification of the sender and subject matter, with the clear note that it is an advertisement. The physical address of the sender should also be included, and none of the e-mail addresses used in the list should be pulled through automated means.

Given the clear criteria, it's relatively easy to avoid the legal distinction of spam, and enforcement is difficult since individuals can't sue a company directly. As Plotkin points out, however, "Even if people don't know the law, they can clearly identify when a company is being shady." Unsolicited e-mails can be enough to get blacklisted by ISPs and e-mail service providers, which means e-mails will not even make it to the intended addresses, whether they are legal or not.

Nick McDuffie at Franklin-based Sum Effect Software

warns that spam-filtering programs search for key words in the body and subject of an e-mail like "free" or "two for one," as well as for all capital letters, each a hallmark of unsolicited e-mails. E-mail format should be as personalized as possible, "and whatever you do, don't purchase lists," McDuffie warns.

Constructing a list of e-mail addresses may appear like a daunting task, but Clint Smith points out that "many companies are surprised by the speed at which it grows." The key, Smith says, is catching the customer at every point of contact with your company. Keep prominent links on your Web site for a customer to sign up to receive e-mails. Leave space on a restaurant check for an e-mail address—even a fishbowl at the cash register can be used to collect addresses.

Once the customer has expressed an interest in receiving more information, send them a verification e-mail. McDuffie calls this the "double opt-in" approach. Once the customer verifies having supplied the address in the first place, you can add them to the list confident you will not be flagged. This is also your chance to issue a warm welcome to new recipients. Make sure that the initial welcome e-mail is timely; it will feel more personal for the customers as well as establishing a link before you slip from their minds.

Even if someone opts out of receiving e-mails from you, tracking software can inform you of addresses that are bouncing back. Occasionally, an e-mail address will be incorrect, and if you continue to send messages to it, the local service provider might flag you as a spammer. Tracking these bounce-backs lets you keep your list clean of dead ends, and "the last thing you want is a bloated list that's costing you money," Smith points out.

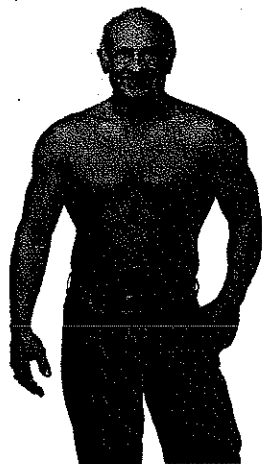
Once you figure out how to build your list, determine who you want sending the e-mails. Small businesses can buy off-the-shelf software that lets them handle e-mails themselves. Good software helps you tailor e-mails to your recipients and stay within the bounds of the CAN SPAM Act. Good service providers do the same, handling all your lists while performing the task of getting e-mails out to customers for you. McDuffie advises that both options have advantages, as service providers take away the hassle of maintaining and updating software, while off-the-shelf packages ensure

that no one else can misuse your lists. Price is always a consideration, and you should keep in mind whether you want to make one major purchase or pay for a monthly service.

Whichever route you take, the cost of e-mail marketing relative to direct mailing is a matter of pennies versus dollars and, when used to full effect, can capitalize on the more personal relationship with clients and partners that small businesses tend to have. Treat it like a line of communication with valued people, and you'll reap the rewards of a customer base that is well-informed about your company, while reinforcing the bonds you already have. **tn**

▶ feedback: [ruble@businessn.com](mailto:ruble@businessn.com)

## How Does This 67-Year-Old Doctor Have The Body Of A 30-Year-Old?



Jeffrey Life, MD, age 67, after Cenegenics as featured in *GQ* magazine. This photo is not digitally enhanced.



Dr. Life, age 57, before Cenegenics.

**CENEGENICS**  
medical institute

*GQ* suggests it's the path to **reversing the signs and symptoms of aging**. It's also gotten the attention of *Today*, *60 Minutes*, *Nightline* and *Vogue*.

Find out more about the Cenegenics program, a unique and balanced combination of nutrition, exercise and hormone optimization.

### BENEFITS MAY INCLUDE:

- Improved Muscle Tone*
- Decreased Body Fat*
- Increased Energy*
- Increased Sex Drive/ Libido*
- Sharper Thinking*
- Improved Outlook On Life*

At Cenegenics<sup>®</sup>, patients are successful business people and professionals. In fact, more than 1,500 of their 15,000 patients worldwide are physicians and their families. **Call today to speak with the Memphis physician affiliate, Dr. C.B. Daniel. Strictly confidential, no obligation. Register online to receive the *GQ* article featuring Cenegenics and *The Complete Guide to Healthy Aging*.**

**C.B. Daniel, MD**

**901.653.8880**

**[www.cenegenics-biztn.com](http://www.cenegenics-biztn.com)**

No Insurance and No Medicare Accepted.