



MasterCard Working™
FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Susan-Says®:

Stay connected to your customers with an e-newsletter.

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It's much easier to keep an existing customer than it is to acquire a new one. However, as you build your customer or client base, it becomes more difficult to stay in touch with each one on a regular basis. An e-newsletter can be a great way to keep connected. But publishing a regular email newsletter can be a heavy chore so if you are going to expend the resources there are some things you need to keep in mind.

First, whenever you launch an e-newsletter, you want to be consistent and present a professional image. In other words, how often do you want to publish? Quarterly? Monthly? Weekly? What elements do you want to include? What name are you going to give it? What will it look like? Before you get started it is important to answer all these questions. You'll look unprofessional if you deliver an inconsistent, sporadic product.

Next, take stock of your editorial resources. In order to manage the development of the newsletter in-house, you'll need someone on staff who can write compelling content. If you don't have anyone within your organization there may be outside sources that could contribute. For example, one of the industry associations to which you belong may be able to provide content. Also, consider asking one of your vendors for relevant material. Many companies find outsourcing the newsletter to a marketing firm or freelance writer is money well spent.

Content in your e-newsletter should be useful and informative. The worst thing you can do is make it an advertisement for your business. Your customers are bombarded with marketing messages so you want to give them something that will help them in their businesses. Give them a reason to look forward to reading what you have sent.

A newsletter can be a good public relations tool. You may want to feature one of your customers in every newsletter. That's a great way to build rapport and loyalty.

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Additionally, use your newsletter to obtain customer feedback. In every issue, ask your readers to hit the reply button and supply feedback so you can make the newsletter relevant to their needs. Occasionally, you can ask for feedback about your products and services.

Make the information in your newsletter interesting. Keep the tone conversational and upbeat. Don't bore them with technical language or industry jargon they may not understand. And keep the articles short and to the point. No one has time to read through 10 pages of content no matter how compelling it is.

Proofread every issue very carefully. You don't want to distribute something full of typos and grammatical errors. If you are writing the newsletter yourself, ask someone else to edit it for you. You can lose points with your customers if your content is sloppy.

You can manage your e-mail list in house or hire a professional list host such as SprakList.com, BigList Inc or Constant Contact. If you choose to send it out yourself, you may want to break down your list into groups of 50 names or less so your mailings won't be kicked out by the ISPs as spam.

E-newsletters need to be an "opt-in" choice for your customers. Don't buy lists explicitly for an e-newsletter and don't assume that just because you have your customer's contact information, they want your e-newsletter. This is not only good business practice, but in the United States it is governed by the "CAN Spam Act". On the flip side, clearly provide an "opt-out" option for the recipients. Finally, make sure your web site has a clear privacy policy so customers and potential customers know how you will use their information.

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