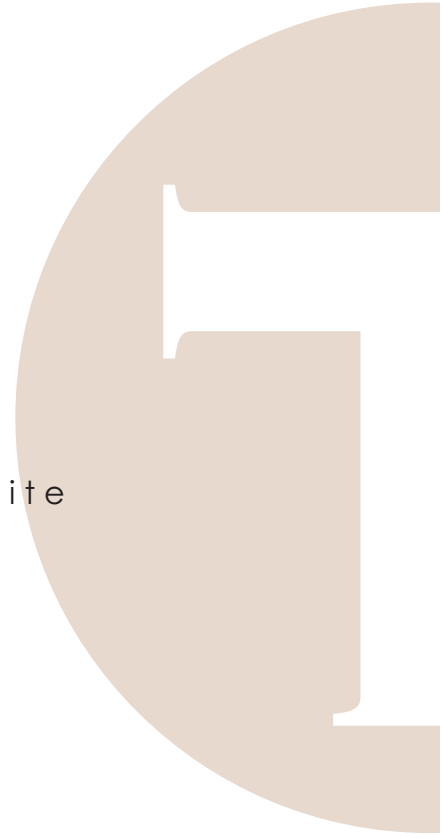


Boomerang Marketing:
Getting Return Visits to your Website

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Since the worldwide web sprung on the scene just a few years ago, companies have been spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to construct web sites and attract visitors to them. (Well, those are the conservative ones; many have invested tens of *millions*.)

A recent measure indicated that we had collectively published one trillion web pages, just in the time since Netscape went public in 1995 (and which is considered by most to be the advent of the Internet age.) One TRILLION web pages!

For most marketers and brand-builders today, the question is no longer, “how do I get on the web?” but “how do I compete for attention and keep visitors coming back to my site?”

Unless you’re the *Wall Street Journal Online*, CNN or some other news portal with continually refreshing content, the answer may very well be, “you don’t.” Another very compelling and effective answer is, “you take your site to them.”

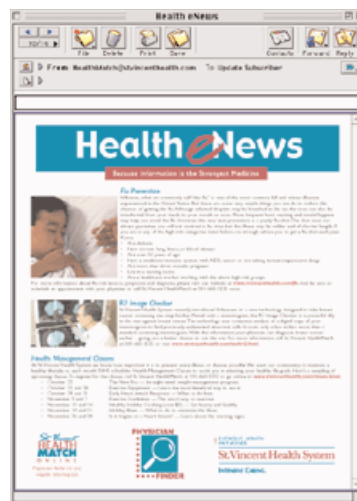
Taking Your Site to Them

For the smaller company with a site that doesn’t change daily or weekly, a very effective method to spur ongoing interactive communication with your customers and visitors is the **opt-in email newsletter**.

Using such graphical, HTML-based email allows you to send a “web page” to your subscribers. You essentially take a bit of your web site to them. It can include text, graphics, clickable links and even animation. And with current HTML-compliant email clients, the page has all the interactive functionality of a page viewed through a web browser.

Anybody with an email box knows that messaging has exploded. In fact, Jupiter Communications predicts a 40-fold increase in email volume between 2000 and 2005.

Even with this growing volume, email marketing works. A 2000 study completed by IMT Strategies, a technology consulting firm, showed the following response rates for online and offline direct marketing efforts:



Average banner ad clickthrough	0.5-2.0%
Average direct mail response	1.0-2.0%
Average email clickthrough	16.0%

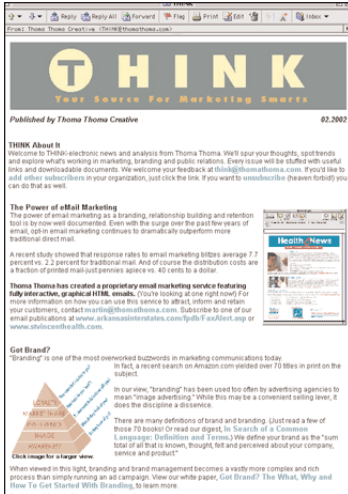
A bank study showed an average conversion rate of 7.7% for email versus 2.2% for direct mail. (Conversions being those who requested more information or purchased the offered product.)

Why Email Works

There are a number of factors that contribute to the effectiveness of email:

- **Urgency.** Email demands attention. It’s more like the phone ringing than the postman calling. With an intriguing subject line, it begs to be opened.

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- **Curiosity.** You can't really tell what it is until you open it, so most emails are at least worth a glance. Traditional mailers frequently just get tossed.
- **Information.** Effective email newsletters offer high-value content to the reader. They create an opportunity to exchange information and further a relationship, without being sold to.
- **Permission.** Seth Godin of Yoyodyne (subsequently purchased by Yahoo) started the whole concept of "permission marketing." With opt-in lists, you have permission—invitation, really—to communicate with your customers and readers.
- **Frictionless.** Response is frictionless. Readers simply click a link to respond to an offer, acquire more information, or connect with your company. Going to the next level of discourse is simple, painless and instantaneous.

The Economics of Email

Beyond very attractive response rates, email has some tremendous economics to recommend it. In fact, email can be distributed for pennies apiece as compared to 50 cents to a dollar or more for printed mailings.

In addition, as development costs are amortized over increasing numbers of subscribers, the per-unit costs fall off dramatically. (The same economics are at play in physical mailings, but printing and postage costs will keep the unit cost from getting as close to zero as is possible with email.)

Keys for Effective Email Marketing

Several tips should be kept in mind when you're constructing your email marketing program in order to maximize effectiveness and minimize readers' trips to the "unsubscribe" button:

- **Provide value.** Make sure you're sending time- and content-relevant material. If you're going to be invited to send email, you're going to have to make it relevant, interesting and informative.
- **Keep the "conversation" going with two-way interaction.** Every email should offer opportunities for further engagement with your company and your website. Create links to deeper content, offers and information on your website, and create response links by which readers can email your customer service department or sales department.
- **Leave your customer in control.** Let them control the pace of the developing relationship by choosing what and when to respond.
- **Permission must be granted.** Don't spam. Allow easy "outs" with unsubscribe functions.
- **Avoid heavily sales-oriented or pushy messages.** You weren't invited to use the hard-sell; don't.

How To Do It

Getting started with email marketing is easier, faster and less expensive than entering nearly any other medium. Here are a few pointers.

Acquire your list by culling your customer database, prospect database and posting subscribe links on your website. Create physical mailings to your prospects inviting them to visit your site and subscribe. Ask every sales rep



to end every call with, “May I subscribe you to our monthly e-newsletter of fact, insight and analysis?” Ask every guest when they check in or customer when they check out. Your model will depend on your business, but the bottom line is to encourage visitors to your site and every personal interaction to yield an email address.

To broadcast your messages, you can create a list and manage it manually, sending blind copies to a distribution group. This is labor-intensive however, and cumbersome for lists that grow beyond a few hundred subscribers.

Better is to utilize a service offering automated subscribe/unsubscribe function from your website. Your customers manage the database. A number of commercial services exist to support this. Our company built a proprietary email marketing engine for our clients’ use because monthly retainer fees for the commercial emailers were simply prohibitive for those who weren’t mailing tens of thousands of copies.

Email is a cost-effective and high response-rate vehicle by which companies can acquire and retain customers, sell and promote products, drive loyalty and reinforce branding efforts. Because of the swift time-to-market and strong ROI of email, the medium is on a dramatic upswing. Make sure you implement your email marketing program well, and you too can share in the rewards.

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