

Josh Earl's Email Marketing Cheatsheet

The Email Marketing Mindset

Your email list is the #1 most valuable asset you have. Treat it like gold. The main goal of your website and social media activities is to grow your email list. And the main purpose of building your email list is to grow your business. That means SALES. Metrics like open and click rates are useful, but dollars in the bank are the final judge.

The One Immutable Law of Email Marketing

Don't be boring. Your email subscribers will overlook a lot of mistakes, but not this one. This means talking about what your reader is interested in, not your company, your products, or your services. (You can and should sell your thing, but always from the perspective of what it does for your subscriber.) 90% of what you say should focus on the READER—his goals, desires, beliefs and emotions. Give value, and make it fast and fun to read.

What Email Software Should I Use?

MailChimp—Pros: Cheap and easy to get started, integrates with everything. Cons: Gets clunky if you want to do automation and segmentation.
GetDrip.com—Pros: Powerful automation, growing fast and adding features every week. Cons: More expensive, might be overwhelming for new email marketers. **Infusionsoft**—Pros: most powerful option available, supports advanced CRM features and direct mail. Cons: Very expensive, hard to set up.
Other good options: Aweber, Ontraport, ActiveCampaign. I've tried all of these and now use GetDrip.com. Don't get bogged down over this; you can always change later, it's just a little extra work.

How Do I Grow My List?

Growing your list means investing time, money or (ideally) both. The less you pay (in time or money), the less responsive your list will be. (There's no free lunch.) **Blogging**—low cost, but it takes a lot of work and a long time to pay off. Doesn't work for every niche. **Guest blogging**—high effort, but exposes you to big audiences outside your own. Make sure they'll let you link to an email capture page. **Social media**—Great for laser-targeting people in your niche. Share good content regularly, interact, and invite followers onto your list frequently. **Giveaways**—Good potential to go viral, easiest way to add 50% or more to an existing list. Subscribers are lower quality. **Joint ventures**—Partner with others in your niche to get them to promote you. Great way to get high-value subscribers. Team up for a webinar, or offer a special deal for their subscribers. **Paid traffic**—Google AdWords, Facebook ads, paid email drops. Repeatable as long as you have the money. Subscriber quality varies inversely to cost—more expensive leads are often more profitable. Easy to lose your shirt if you're not careful. **Popups and welcome gates** work and often convert at 2-5%. Definitely DON'T buy email lists—it's often illegal and it doesn't work anyway.

What Should I Do About Unsubscribes?

Unsubscribes are completely NORMAL and expected. Minimum unsubscribe rate for a healthy, warm list is typically 0.5% every time you send an email. People unsubscribe for a million reasons, don't take it personally. You'll see rates of 2-3% or higher if you haven't emailed in a while. (Emailing more often usually LOWERS your unsubscribe rates.) ESPs get concerned when they see rates above 5%. Start to worry when: You see rates in the 2-5% range for an extended period; you hear from your ideal customers that they're unsubscribing. For your own sanity, TURN OFF the ridiculous unsubscribe notifications that every ESP wants to send you and only check your stats every few days.

How Often Should I Email My List?

Good rule of thumb is once per week, minimum. More often if you can keep it interesting—daily works well in many markets. One great approach with autoresponders is the "Fibonacci Fade," where you email every day for a few days, then start to space the emails farther apart, similar to the Fibonacci sequence, which goes 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21... (Geeky, but it works.) Emailing 5-10 times in the first 2 weeks helps "imprint" you in your new subscriber's mind—otherwise they might not remember who you are. Emailing less often actually INCREASES unsubscribes.

The Most Important Email

Your welcome email. The welcome email gets the highest open rates—often 60-90%. Use the opportunity to reinforce what a great decision they made joining your list, set their expectations, and give them ONE call to action: download a file, reply to a question, take a survey. I like asking an open-ended question. It's great for starting conversations, although the incoming responses can get overwhelming. The call to action trains them to respond to you.

What Do I Say?

Email is a relationship—continue the conversation that brought the subscriber onto your list. Be personal. Share stories from your own life and case studies from your business, but remember that it's all about the SUBSCRIBER and her interests. Ask provocative questions that prompt dialog. Send surveys. Ask for early feedback on big projects. Share what you're reading. Teach key concepts. Make regular deposits in your subscriber's "emotional bank account" with inspirational stories. If you're stuck for an idea, answer a question from a subscriber. Don't forget to pitch your product or service regularly.

How Long Should My Emails Be?

People WILL read (and buy from) long emails if they're interesting. A good range to shoot for is 200-300 words—enough to tell a good story if you choose your words carefully. Variety is good here. It's good to send some super short emails with a link to 2,000-word blog post, and some 600-800 word emails that really could have been blog posts. To maximize readership, put the full text in the email—at best only 5-20% of people will click through to a blog post.

What Should My Emails Look Like?

People look forward to getting emails from their friends. To get noticed, make your email look and read like a personal message. Use a real person's name in the From field. Avoid headline-style capitalization in subject lines (where the first letter of every word is capped). Don't use a fancy HTML template—make your email look like it's written in plain text. (Roundup-style emails with lots of short articles and links are an exception to this.) Keep your paragraphs short—5 lines is a good max.

How Do I Get People To Open My Emails?

Everybody focuses on subject lines, but by far the biggest factor in your open rates is the method you're using to build your list. **Cold traffic**—Facebook, AdWords, giveaways. Typical open rates are 15-25%. **Warm traffic**—high quality blog with strong content, webinars, joint ventures, book buyers, conference attendees. Typical opens of 25-50%. **Open rate formula**—*Open Rate = List Traffic Source + From Name + Subject Line + Message Preview*, in that order. Subject lines can have a big impact on open rates, so write 5-10 and pick the best one. Use a mix of “blind” subject lines (like “hey!” or “Quick question”) and good benefit-driven headline templates like (like “How to ____” and “The truth about ____”). Over time, the From field is more important than the subject line. If your list likes your emails, they'll still open messages with mediocre subject lines. The message preview is like a sub-headline. Make sure it does NOT say “Click Here If You're Having Trouble Viewing This Message.”

What Are The Most Common Mistakes To Avoid?

Being boring. The unforgivable sin. Stay in your reader's world, and talk about what they're interested in.

Not emailing frequently enough. Weekly is the minimum. Your subscribers quickly forget who you are when they don't hear from you.

Tracking the wrong metrics. Focus on sales first, not unsubscribes, open rates and click rates.

Teaching too much. Emails should be interesting and valuable, and meaty how-tos are just one way to provide value. Mix it up with stories and inspiration.

Bad writing. Emails should be personal, conversational and easy to read. Write like you talk.

Failure to SELL. People won't buy just because you're sending them great emails. You still have to pitch your product and ask for the sale.

Single Optin or Double Optin?

Email service providers promote double optin and claim it gives you a better list. That's NOT true. What it actually does is eliminate some technical headaches on their end... at the expense of YOUR list. 30-50% of people on double optin lists never confirm, so you never get a chance to talk to half the people who sign up for your list. Some don't confirm because they're not that interested, but a lot of them just forget or had the confirmation email go to spam. Use single optin whenever possible and then periodically “prune” your list to remove subscribers who aren't opening your emails.

Maintaining Your List

MAKE BACKUPS regularly. Even if you play by the rules, your ESP can shut down your account with no warning. With backups, you have options.

Prune your list. Emailing people who aren't opening your messages hurts your deliverability over time. Most ESPs let you segment people by activity. Pick people who haven't opened the last 10 emails, or who haven't opened an email in 3-4 months. Several times a year, send a series of emails to this segment and ask if they want to stay on your list. Delete subscribers who don't take action.

Terms

Autoresponder—Series of emails that goes out automatically to every subscriber (like an email course).

Call to Action—Asking the reader to perform a specific action, like replying or clicking a link.

Deliverability—The percentage of your emails that actually reach subscribers' inboxes.

Double Optin—Subscribers have to click a link in a confirmation email before they're added to your list.

ESP—Email Service Provider (MailChimp, Drip, Infusionsoft, etc.)

Popup—Optin form that blocks page content until the reader takes action.

Pruning—Deleting subscribers who are no longer opening and clicking on emails.

Segmentation—Dividing up a list into meaningful “buckets,” like their interests, activity level or demographics.

Single Optin—Subscribers are added to your list immediately with no further action required.

Squeeze Page—Landing page that promotes a free offer (like a PDF or email course) in exchange for the visitor's email address.

Welcome Gate/Welcome Mat—Full-screen optin page that displays when someone first hits your site.