

Driving Sales with Email Marketing that “Clicks”

A Guide for ProStores Web Merchants

Email marketing can be tremendously effective for driving sales from your best prospects—your existing customers. But how do you avoid the work and hassle of creating, gathering and assembling just the right content to make things “click”? Here’s a new approach to the process.

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A new visitor, Cindy, comes to your web store on Monday. She browses a bit, finds what she is looking for, and makes a purchase, in the process entering her contact information. Your site provided Cindy with a straightforward, problem-free shopping and ordering experience. Your product arrived in a timely way, and it was exactly what she wanted. No longer a stranger, Cindy is now a customer—more than that, she is a satisfied customer.

If you're like many busy web store owners, you are spending your precious time managing inventory and supplies, filling orders and fighting fires. You spend time thinking about merchandising issues—which new products should you offer? how should you price them? why isn't product X moving at all while product Y is flying off the virtual shelves? why is the order from your chief supplier overdue? You focus on bookkeeping, inventory, taxes and, oh yes, marketing. How can you drive new visitors to your site without spending too much? And should you run that seasonal promotion?

You filled Cindy's order and by Tuesday you've forgotten her. Of course, you haven't really forgotten. She's in your customer database. The real problem is Cindy may have forgotten you. Sure, she ordered from you. She's enjoying her new product. But she's also on to her next concern of the day. The next time she needs or wants something you offer, she may remember to come back to your site...then again, she may go elsewhere.

The e-commerce world is full of thousands, millions, of Cindys—satisfied customers who could easily make many more purchases, if only...if only what? If only you reached out to them from time to time.

Consider your own experience. You are not just a web store owner, you are a customer who buys from more than one company on a regular basis: your office supply store, your favorite clothing store, your preferred airline, a specialty food store, your drycleaner or your car dealership. You buy from brick-and-mortar establishments and from web sites. Which ones come to mind? Probably those who contact you regularly with invitations to check out their new products, send you special discount coupons, publish a catalog that's especially interesting or send you an engaging email newsletter.

By now you're saying, “Yes, I know I *should* reach out to my customers on a regular basis, and maintain relationships over time. I've thought about publishing an email newsletter. But that takes work. I'm busy running this business and I also need to find new customers.” Fair enough, but you're making an assumption—that you will need to invest a lot of time and effort to keep your customers coming back to your site and buying. Wrong. You don't. Read on to learn why. (And by the way, Cindy probably has friends.)

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Don't Forget Your Customer

Whether you run a web store or a brick-and-mortar shop, and whether you sell to consumers or businesses, customers are your best prospects. Satisfied customers are likely to buy again...and again. Marketers estimate that the return on investment in marketing to people who are already your customers is five to ten times that of acquiring new customers. Of course, finding new customers is also important, and if you're a new business, it's very important. But if you ignore the customers who have already purchased, you are leaving money on the table. The problem is they won't just come back on their own. To encourage them to buy, you need to remind them of your offerings and ask for their business. It's that easy.

Now that shopping and selling take place online, you have a simple way to keep customers coming back and buying—through a low-cost, high-impact vehicle that works—email.

The Rewards and Risks of Email

When your customer buys from your web store, you collect an email address, a very valuable asset—if you use it carefully. We're all familiar with spam, the overwhelming volume of unsolicited junk email that has made consumers weary with offers for products they don't want, and too-good-to-be-true special deals, while carrying viruses that can infect our computers.

While you delete spam immediately, you eagerly open the emails from friends, family and colleagues. You probably also give the benefit of the doubt to an email newsletter from a business with whom you already have a relationship. After all, you might need the information they're sending you. If something catches your attention, you will click through to learn more. That's the behavior you want from your customer.

The company sending the email can provide you with something interesting...or can quickly lose your trust and confidence by:

- **Sending too many emails**, showing a lack of respect for your time.
- **Sending only hard-sell, short-term promotions** that don't tell you anything new, convincing you that all they care about is your wallet.
- **Communicating sporadically**, sending many messages followed by long periods of silence, letting you know it is their agenda that's important, not yours.
- **Sending communications with an inconsistent look and feel** that makes you wonder who is actually communicating with you, or confuses you about what they actually offer.

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Customers receive emails from businesses every day, and their time is precious. A customer who decides your communications are spam will opt out of receiving anything more from you. When this happens, you lose a truly valuable asset that you probably won't recover. That customer is unlikely to return to your store.

So when you've lost the right to email, you've lost the customer.

To avoid this, many business owners play it safe and don't send emails at all. They won't anger their customers, true, but they also take a risk—because before long, that customer has forgotten them and is just as likely to buy from someone else.

Keep in mind it's normal for some customers to opt out of emails. You are shooting for an opt-out rate in the low single digits—ideally 1% or less. With that percentage, you will keep most of your valuable customer list working for you.

The Right Approach to Retention E-Marketing

Out of all the possible businesses and individuals who could be sending email to your customers, you want them to perceive *your business* as a friend. Here are a few simple recommendations for achieving the results you want:

- **Respect the customer's time.** Communicate on a regular, periodic basis. Research has shown that a *monthly* email newsletter is both frequent enough to keep you in your customers minds and infrequent enough to avoid turning them off and causing them to opt out.
- **Respect the law and follow accepted industry practices.** Comply with CAN-SPAM regulations and follow generally accepted email practices.
- **Respect the customer's intelligence.** Provide timely, topically engaging editorial content that your customer might really find interesting.
- **Reinforce your brand.** Communicate using a professional look and feel that is consistent with your web store and your brand. You'll put your best foot forward and your customers will know they are working with professionals.
- **Reinforce your merchandising strategy.** Promote products that support your strategy—perhaps the ones most likely to lead to repeat sales, or the ones most appropriate for the season.
- **Reward loyalty.** Give your very best customers more reasons to come back and purchase your products.

The Balancing Act

As an online business owner, you spend time and money to *acquire new customers*. Maybe you start with word of mouth, and then find ways to obtain free publicity. Your local newspaper writes a feature on your business, or a magazine highlights a product for its readers. Over time, you begin to use search engine marketing (SEM) programs such as Google AdWords to drive new visitors to your site where you turn some of them into customers. All of this is good marketing. But it's also important—and lucrative—to turn customers into *repeat customers*—people who come back to your store again and again. Rather than focusing all your marketing resources and attention on customer acquisition, think about how you can *retain your existing customers*—and keep them buying from you. It will be no harder—actually a lot easier and more cost-effective—than finding more new customers.

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The Magic in the Message: Three-Part Content

How do you send a message your customer will value? First, forget the hard-sell approach. Short-term promotions ask for the sale too directly and too often at the expense of alienating your customers, perhaps for good! This alienation manifests itself in two ways: either customers learn over time to ignore you like the boy who cried “wolf” or they simply opt out, a phenomenon known to marketers as list burnout. Either way, you lose.

But there is an effective way to demonstrate respect for your customers while getting the results you need. You can even ask for their business with a strong call to action—if you place it in the right context. You do this by providing three different types of content that might each be valuable to your customer in the context of a monthly email:

Engaging editorial content designed to pique your customer’s interest.

To be engaging, the content must be fresh, of high quality, and relevant to your audience. For example, if you sell cosmetics, you might provide a article on fashion, on makeup application or on skin care. Think magazine. Your customer may really find these articles interesting and valuable. But there’s another message as well. When you provide great content, you are saying, “I’m thinking about your needs, not just my sale. I want to share with you something that I found interesting, and I took the time to deliver it to you.”

A soft-sell invitation to shop. Picture a customer walking through a shopping mall. She may not have even thought of looking for clothes today, but something in a store window catches her eye and she goes in. On the Web, we don’t walk by, but we can be reminded gently that a store exists. Your email can provide a simple set of links to the different categories of products in your store that make it easy for your customer to shop. Again, you’ve offered value. You have reminded your customer about the products you offer and also increased her shopping convenience without being too pushy.

A strong call to action. Your business runs on revenue, and your goal is to encourage a purchase. Now that you’ve created a buffer of interesting content and soft-sell invitations, you can feature a couple of specific products likely to be purchased on a recurring basis. Or you might feature a new product, a product for which you are offering a promotional price, or one of your more popular products. The specific product content does three things: it provides information, it puts your products at the top of the customer’s mind and it encourages the customer to buy by asking for the sale—in a respectful, low-pressure way.

This Month

Keeping up with fashion

by Janet Francis

Elegance vs Fashion

Wearing the right thing, having the right look and trying to fit in is all part of the lifestyle of most modern women. We constantly get different



Shop

[Blissful Winter SALE](#)
[Sheer Miracle Mineral Foundation](#)
[Sterling Silver Jewellery & Gifts Ideas](#)
[Cheek Color](#)
[Classic Basic Skin Care](#)
[Color Collections & Gift Sets](#)

Featured Products

Sheer Miracle Mineral Brush Set
New Product!



¹A common average opt-out rate for promotional-only email is 9%. Over the course of twelve such mailings, about 2/3 of your email list will opt out. So if you took this approach every month you would be throwing away most of your valuable email list every year! Shoot for opt outs at 1% or below.

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Results that Matter: Sales and Revenue

The three-part content approach works. A monthly email with these three elements strikes just the right balance, keeping you in touch with your customers, engaging them for the long term, while reminding them about what you offer today and asking, politely of course, for the sale. Years of experience honing this formula has convinced us it works for a wide variety of businesses—and it will work for you.

Let us be more specific—this email formula *generates sales*.

Web merchants who have adopted monthly emails for their stores have seen a reliable increase in orders each time the email is delivered.

Regular email communication with your customer generates sales in two ways:

- By prompting immediate sales, when your customer clicks through the email to your site.
- By influencing sales after the fact, when the customer who received your email keeps you in mind and comes back to your store later. If that customer buys from you soon after receiving your email, you can assume your communications are playing a role.²

While revenue from existing customers is the most concrete benefit of your email newsletter program, it also accomplishes other goals for your business; it:

- Keeps you connected to your customers and keeps them connected to you
- Provides you with a way to communicate specific information, such as a new product
- Reinforces your brand identity
- Increases store visits overall
- Provides an easy way for your customer to tell a friend about what you offer, simply by forwarding the email

The Content Connection

Great, engaging content is the key to keeping your customers interested and coming back to your web store. But like other online business owners, you may be assuming you need to create all of this content yourself. You don't. Your retention e-marketing service can gather and incorporate great, topically engaging editorial content in your newsletter. You'll have the option to review the choice and select something different, and of course you can add your own content if you wish, but *you do not have to create your own content to get the results you want*. The email newsletter can go out automatically each month with no work from you.

IMN has been achieving results for its customers with engaging content and streamlined e-marketing services for nearly a decade. We're the experts in content-driven retention e-marketing, and that's good news for you—because we do it right, and we make it easy—minimal cost, minimal time, measurable results.

²Common industry practice in web affiliate marketing networks is to attribute sales that occur within 60-90 days of an exposure. IMN Sales in a Click uses a more conservative estimate of 60 days.

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Your Retention E-Marketing Can Be *Effortless*

By now you may be thinking this is a good idea, but you don't have time to do it. That's not a problem. You can work with an e-marketing service provider who understands the value of email communication, knows the rules of the road, and can create communications that deliver results for your business. Best of all, they can do it very efficiently so it doesn't have to be expensive.

With today's technology, your service provider can automate most of the process for you. As a business owner without a big staff, you can't afford to invest time and money in a complex and expensive email-marketing tool with many features you will never use. Instead,

look for a service that can accomplish most of the valuable work of creating and sending your email newsletter—without taking up the precious time you need to run your business.

We suggest you look for a solution that incorporates many of these features:

- **Integrates with your web store platform.** As web merchant using the ProStores platform, ask your service provider whether they offer a solution integrated with that platform. More integration means more automated steps and less time required from you.
- **Provides you with a choice** of valuable, engaging content that *you don't have to write or edit*. Look for a provider who is experienced in content sourcing and content management.
- **Makes it easy** for you to add your own articles if you want, offering you enough control without complexity.
- **Automatically designs a high-quality, good-looking email** that showcases your brand in a professional way.
- **Easily creates communications that follow the proven three-part content approach**, offering engaging editorial content, a soft sell invitation to shop and a specific call to action for featured products.
- **Puts all the pieces together, so you don't have to**—combining content sourcing, content management, publishing, list management, and email delivery in a single solution.
- **Gets you started quickly**, allowing you to try out the service with little or no upfront investment—generating and sending your first email newsletter in a matter of minutes.
- **Complies with CAN-SPAM regulations** and manages opt-outs for you.
- **Tracks and displays revenue** attributable to your emails—so you know exactly how much your emails are accomplishing for you.
- **Fits your budget**, and pays for itself on an ongoing basis.

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When you work with a service provider whose solution meets these requirements, you can quickly implement a customer retention e-marketing program that delivers results while respecting your customer, your valuable time, your brand, and your bottom line.

Conclusion—It’s Easier than You Think!

Many web store owners today are leaving money on the table by ignoring their existing customers. Your customer’s email address is one of your most important assets. Don’t abuse it—but don’t waste the opportunity it presents. A monthly email newsletter is a proven vehicle for keeping your web store in your customer’s mind—and capturing more sales. Successful email newsletters combine relevant, engaging editorial content, a soft-sell invitation to shop and a more concrete call to action. Your monthly email newsletter program can be easy and inexpensive. Your retention e-marketing service provider can find great content for you, assemble the newsletter automatically, and automate the entire process, while ensuring that you have the choice and control you need. It really can be as simple as *Sales in a Click!*

To learn more and get started driving more sales from your customers, visit www.salesinaclick.com.

“We wanted to start an email newsletter and had spent time with one email marketing vendor building a template. Then I found Sales in a Click. What a difference! Easy, easy, easy—simple, simple, simple. And I know it’s working because I see the spike in orders each month.”

— Kelly Hall, Co-Owner, Salt Traders (www.salttraders.com)

Cindy has just received your monthly email. She really enjoyed reading the article you sent and, noticing your featured product, she begins to think about a birthday present for her friend Alicia. Cindy clicks into your site and makes a purchase. It occurs to her that the article might be interesting to one of her colleagues. She quickly forwards the email and is on to the rest of her day. Cindy has become a repeat customer, and she’s now also marketing for you.

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About IMN

Founded in 1999, IMN is an application service provider (ASP), specializing in content-driven e-communications services. IMN enables companies to communicate with their customers through multi-media email and e-newsletters designed to drive measurable brand impact, product visibility, leads, and sales. In 2008 IMN launched Sales in a Click™, a fully automated monthly e-newsletter enabling web merchants to increase store traffic and drive sales by communicating more effectively with existing customers. Its unique content-driven approach grabs reader attention, promotes the store owner’s brand and generates product visibility and sales, while tight integration with the web store platform enables a high level of automation and eliminates most of the work for the web merchant. IMN serves customers worldwide and is headquartered in Waltham, MA.

About Sales in a Click™

If you are a web store owner who has thought about creating a customer email newsletter, but are daunted by the prospect of investing time and money to write, publish and deliver quality custom emails, *Sales in a Click* from IMN is just what you need. Designed for busy web merchants, *Sales in a Click (ProStores Edition)* is a Retention E-Marketing service that completely automates the process of publishing, sending and tracking monthly newsletters—with almost no time from you. Full integration with the ProStores platform means almost no set-up time and a painless process each month. We’ve put the pieces together so you don’t have to: content sourcing, content management, template creation, email publishing, delivery and opt-out management—it’s all there, and it’s all automatic. You can choose different content, add your own, or just let it run. Set it up in minutes and watch the orders come in each month. Based on proven retention e-marketing techniques, *Sales in a Click* is a fast, easy solution that respects your customer, your valuable time, and your brand, while delivering the sales results you deserve.

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Glossary

acquisition marketing

The set of marketing activities devoted to acquiring new customers—attracting new visitors to your web store and getting them to buy from you.

attributable sales

The amount of sales revenue that can be attributed to a given marketing program such as your monthly newsletter. Knowing attributable sales numbers helps you decide which marketing programs are valuable for your business and how valuable they are. It can be difficult to attribute sales to certain types of programs (publicity, for example), but for others the connection is very easy to track.

call to action

The part of a marketing communication that suggests what the recipient should do next, such as “sign up for your free trial.”

CAN-SPAM Act

A 2003 United States Law that established standards for sending commercial email. Among other requirements, marketers must offer the recipient a way to opt out and must clearly identify the sender.

content sourcing

The process of acquiring and controlling quality of content from diverse sources.

content management

Processes and technologies that support the life cycle of digital content.

customer

Someone who has already purchased from you and provided you with his or her contact information.

customer lifetime value

The amount of revenue or profit you receive or expect to receive from an individual customer over the entire time span of his or her relationship with you. Customers who regularly come back and buy from you typically have a high lifetime value.

email delivery

The process of sending an email to a list of email addresses.

email marketing

A general term for any form of marketing conducted via email.

email newsletter publishing

The process of assembling and laying out a high-quality email that includes your branding, multiple articles and product descriptions, and links to your web site. The term *newsletter* generally implies a regular publishing and distribution schedule (e.g. monthly).

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hard sell

Techniques that ask people to buy or evaluate your product in a very direct way, often pressuring them with time-sensitive offers and generating fear that they might miss out on something valuable. (compare with *soft sell*)

list burnout

A marketing term for the result of sending too many communications to the same list of people, a practice that over time causes them to ignore your communications or opt out of receiving any further communications from you.

opt out

To ask an email sender not to send any further communications. In order to comply with the CAN-SPAM act, email senders must provide an easy way for recipients to opt out. This term can also be used as a noun; the number of opt outs is one measure of how recipients perceive your emails.

ProStores

A web-based platform from eBay that provides many of the features you need to run a web store, including domain hosting, shopping-cart management, and payment processing.

retention marketing

The set of marketing activities devoted to retaining and growing relationships with existing customers and encouraging them to return to your store and buy.

retention e-Marketing (REM)

Retention marketing via email.

Sales in a Click (ProStores Edition)

An automated retention e-marketing (REM) service from IMN, designed for business owners whose web store is hosted on the ProStores platform.

search engine marketing (SEM)

Any form of Internet marketing that seeks to increase the visibility of web sites in search engine result pages. This term most often refers to paid advertising on search engines such as Google (e.g. Google AdWords), where ads are displayed based on specific search terms entered by the user.

soft sell

Techniques in which you gently invite your customer to examine your web store and products, reminding them of who you are and what you offer, but not asking directly for their business. (compare with *hard sell*)

spam

Unsolicited, unwanted, and often malicious or offensive email. Email recipients have a number of strategies for dealing with spam, including using a spam filtering program to automatically filter out suspected spam or simply deleting the messages manually.