



How to Market Your Practice with an E-mail Newsletter

By Kayce Bramble

E-mail marketing is a very effective and efficient way to get the word out to your prospects and patients. An e-mail newsletter is used to keep in touch with existing patients. Put simply, it is relevant content sent (via e-mail) to subscribers on a regular schedule (monthly, quarterly, etc.). E-mail provides the most direct line of communication. It is also very flexible. These two points make it a very powerful platform. E-mail newsletters offer an ongoing, continuous conversation with your patients and prospective patients in a very cost-effective and measurable format. E-newsletters can demonstrate value and also positively change perceptions of your readers;

they are very commonly employed but you want to do them correctly. List creation, distribution options, and content writing are all integral components to e-mail newsletter success.

Creating a Mailing List

You cannot start sending out your e-mail newsletter to just everyone. You need to ask permission first. This process is called “opting-in.” If you already have a list of e-mail addresses for patients that you have been doing business with for years, you cannot suddenly blast them your e-mail newsletter. Instead, you want to start by asking them for permission. E-mail a very brief and

straightforward letter announcing your newsletter, asking them if they would like to receive it.

You want to do everything possible to avoid having recipients mark your e-mail as spam. If the e-mail is marked as spam, then the recipient’s ISP (Internet service provider) will start watching you, because you’ve aroused their suspicions. Once enough people on their network report your e-mail as spam to them, they’ll block all future e-mails from you. ISPs all have different thresholds, but 0.01 percent is the number that is most often referred to by people in the e-mail deliverability business (Campaign Monitor, 2014).

A few other tips:

- Never send e-mail marketing to a purchased list.
- Do not send e-mail to a list of people you just assume would want to hear from you.
- When people sign up for your e-mail list, use the double opt-in method.
- Throughout your opt-in confirmation process, ask subscribers to add your e-mail address to their contacts list or address book.
- Know your spam rules. Read up on the CAN-SPAM Act (GPO, 2003) to avoid any trouble.

Selecting Distribution Options

You have two basic options for distributing your e-mail newsletter. You can buy software to manage your e-mail newsletters and the list of recipients you've built, or you can join a subscription format service with a Web-based application, often known as an e-mail service provider.

Software that allows you to import and export data would be ideal. The software is installed on your own server or a shared server. One negative to consider when going this route is that you may be restricted in the amount of mail you can send out at once due to your Internet connection and ISP provider limits. There is also a higher risk of your newsletter being labeled as spam or junk e-mail. This is because many junk e-mail filters look at the software that is used to send the e-mail. Be sure to thoroughly investigate the reputation of any e-mail software you're considering.

A second option is to use a free or paid e-mail management service. These services typically allow you to track your subscribers, donors,

supporters, and clients in one single database. An e-mail management system will help automate the entire process of building subscriber lists, designing and delivering messages, and measuring the success of campaigns. These services can have a range of monthly costs that might quickly escalate as your needs increase.

Developing Patient-Focused Content

If you want your e-mail to stand a chance in a bustling inbox, you have to get your audience's attention quickly via the subject line. In many ways, your e-mail subject line is more important than the e-mail newsletter itself. Keep your subject line short and sweet, limited to 50 characters or less. Once you have your readers' attention, it is time to deliver quality content.

It helps to have a standard format where you can easily and quickly copy and paste in your latest content. The header and general sections should remain the same from one issue to the next.

Here are some tips for writing newsletter articles.

- **Problems and solutions:** Identify common problems your customers face and provide ideas on how to solve them.
- **Top 10 lists and steps:** Provide actionable lists and tips with titles such as "Seven Steps to..." or "The Top Five Ways to..."
- **New technology:** Let your patients know how they can take advantage of recent technological developments.
- **Hearing industry news:** Write about new developments in your industry.

- **Testimonials:** Include patient success stories or even letters sent by patients (with their permission, of course).
- **Keep it short:** Use between 500 and 750 words of text. One of the biggest problems with e-mail newsletters is that they are often cluttered and unfocused because they are supporting every aspect of your business.

Generating Calls to Action

Even though the focus of your e-mail newsletter is to educate patients and prospective patients, this is a great opportunity to present them with relevant offers to generate appointments and sales, or even encourage Web site visits. Try using the 80/20 rule. The newsletter should be 80 percent educational and 20 percent promotional. The majority of the e-mail newsletter should be useful educational information, while the sidebar is presenting your readers with an attractive offer that is relevant to the article content.

Measuring Your Success

You should measure success to see how well you performed in the past and also to help improve your results going forward. An e-mail newsletter management system will likely have access to several reports. These reports typically allow you to track the key metrics to measure the success of your e-mail marketing campaign. Some basic statistics you will want to track include open rate, click-through rate, bounce rate, list-growth rate, sharing rate, and spam-complaint rate. Another way to find out how your e-newsletter is performing is to simply ask your readers for feedback. Many times, your own patients can be remarkably candid and helpful.

Conclusion

A newsletter is a useful tool for educating patients when they choose to be educated. If the newsletter is focused and well targeted, it can make a huge difference to practice-marketing efforts. Newsletters can be useful in getting attention from potential patients, but their primary importance is in maintaining ongoing connections with existing patients. 📧

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Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.

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