



How to Build a List of Responsive and Loyal Email Subscribers

LESSON 2

The Keys to Using an Autoresponder Effectively

*M*any marketing folks refer to your Email Service Provider (ESP) as an Autoresponder Service. And while this is correct, that sometimes creates confusion because we also talk about using autoresponders to market your business. So for clarity, I'll be calling the service you use to send your emails as an ESP and the automated messages as "autoresponders."

What is an ESP?

An Email Service Provider — ESP — is a web-based software program that allows you to collect names and email addresses from people who are interested in what you are offering, keep that list of subscribers organized, send your broadcast messages to them, and then monitor the results of your email marketing.

ESP's are subscription-based services. You sign up for the service and make a periodic payment in order to use it. The most common autoresponder programs for the every day entrepreneur are Aweber, MailChimp, Constant Contact, and GetResponse.

NOTE: We'll be covering how to create and use effective autoresponder *messages* in a future lesson. Today we are discussing, primarily, the services you will use.

Shop Around Before Buying

Aweber, MailChimp, Constant Contact and GetResponse, and the many other programs available, are all different. Each has its own pros and cons, as well as special features and capabilities. Some services are even tailored to just a certain type of business. If you Google the phrase “Email Marketing” you’ll get a broad listing of the many service providers available if you go deep enough. If you stop at just page one of the results, you’ll likely find only the providers mentioned here, as they are the most popular.

But just because they are popular, does not mean they are right for you and your unique business. If you have the budget and the time to learn it, you may find that a program called *Infusionsoft* would make sense for you. For folks just starting out with email marketing, though, you will likely want to stick with the less expensive, easier to use, services for now.

As with just about anything online these days, there are also free ESP programs. Of course, their functionality and support are limited. Some premium services allow you a certain number of subscribers for free, but you have to start paying when your list grows larger. If your budget is extremely limited, this is a good way to get started without incurring fees. But as in all things, you need to be aware and know that you often “get what you pay for.”

Functionality of the program — meaning, it will do the things you want it to do — is an important consideration, but what’s just as important is the kind of customer support you’ll get. You need to make sure you can get help when you need it or it could mean disaster. Read reviews of the various ESP programs and also try contacting the one you’re trying out to see how responsive they are.

NOTE: Be sure to watch the Bonus Webinar included in this package on *How to Choose the Right Email Service Provider*. Check your lessons page sidebar for details about the bonus webinar recording or to find when the webinar is being offered again in a live presentation where you can ask and get answers to your questions.

Scheduling Is Everything

The key to using an ESP program effectively is to get your timing right. For each list or segment of a list, there is a ‘sweet spot.’ There are certain times of day and days of the week when your list is the most receptive and you need to discover what these days and times are for YOUR list.

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There is a certain frequency that works best with your list. Some lists are responsive to daily emails. Some will tune out or become annoyed with too many messages and might prefer just one weekly message.

Unfortunately, there is no standard for all lists. You have to experiment with your list, sending messages at different times and frequencies to see which messages your subscribers respond to best — and when. There are suggested guidelines to get you started and we'll be covering those as we go along in future lessons.

One way around this is to offer your subscribers delivery options. For example, they can choose to get each of your messages as you broadcast them or they may opt for a weekly 'round-up.' Most autoresponder programs will allow you to do this.

BUT, and it is a big BUT, offering options will *complicate* what you're trying to do and you may not really want your subscribers to be in charge of how you communicate with them. I've found that those subscribers who are finicky about how and when they receive emails are really not worth having on your list. Chances that they will ever buy from you will be slim to none, and they will likely be the ones that complain a lot. You don't need that hassle nor do you want it.

So I believe that YOU are in charge of your email marketing, not your subscriber, and that if they don't like what you do and when you do it, then they have the option of unsubscribing.

I hope you will come to *love* the unsubscribes you'll eventually get because those people are really self-qualifying — or rather, *disqualifying* — themselves as being not your right-fit prospect.

You want to spend your time and money and efforts only on those people who will ultimately buy from you.

Let me pause a moment and ask...

Have you done the foundational work for your own email marketing program as set forth in the previous lesson and bonus lesson? If not, I will gently suggest that you stop right here and go back and complete the foundational assignments.

Without knowing why you are using email to market your business or practice, and without knowing who you want to reach and the results you want to get, everything that follows in the next few weeks will kind of be a moot point. I can help you if you need it.

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So if you're continuing here I'm assuming that you have done your foundational work, so let's move forward.

Let Your “Autoresponder” Make It Easy for You

One consideration when choosing your ESP is whether or not it offers “autoresponder” capability. Not all of them do, and you have to choose carefully if using an autoresponder series will be important to your marketing efforts.

Most free services do not offer autoresponder capability, and even MailChimp, with its generous free option, does not include autoresponders, or what they call *automation*, until you sign up for their paid service.

So just what is an autoresponder series?

You can load up your ESP with all of the messages you'll need for a whole series of messages and then set a schedule for it to send out these messages on a timed basis. This is a most effective option because you don't have to be constantly creating content to send to your list. You can have it all loaded up and ready to go.

Of course, you'll have a bit of work to do on the front end, but once its all in place, you can literally “set it and forget it” letting the autoresponder do all the work from here on out, day in, day out, 365 days a year, any time of day or night that your prospect decides to get on your list, and then hopefully, bringing you cash with little additional effort on your part.

Most ESP programs offer other features to make your email marketing easier for you, too. For example, most have ready-made templates where you can simply plug in your content, hit send and go.

A template, or standard format for your messages, is good for branding because your subscribers will come to know what to expect. And they'll begin to associate you with the look and feel of your brand. A template also makes writing messages easier since all you have to do is plug in your content each time.

Of course, these templates are usually set up as nice looking — what I call, pretty — email messages by using HTML coding. You can have a great looking email without having to have any coding skills whatsoever. However, using HTML poses its own set of risks to deliverability of your email marketing messages. We'll discuss this more in a future lesson.

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I'm of the opinion that Constant Contact has the nicest looking, easiest to use templates available, but I also caution you that Constant Contact, just like any other program, may not have all the features you need. So you need to look beyond just the "look" of your emails.

In fact, these days, with so many people reading their email messages on their smart phones and other mobile devices, sending pretty HTML messages may be a detriment. We'll be discussing HTML vs. TEXT in depth in a future lesson.

ESP programs also offer features to help you link your email messages with your regular online presence. You can link your messages directly to your social media profiles, website, blog, affiliate program, and so on. Then, when you schedule an email broadcast, you can choose to have it *autopost* to all of your social media, too — a great way to use automation to save you time.

Monitoring Through Your ESP

One of the most important things your ESP does for you, from a marketing standpoint, is to provide analytical data. Now the math-phobes among us may glaze over at this point, but that's exactly what's so cool about this. YOU don't have to do any math! The service does all of it for you and displays it so you can understand it.

Every time you send out an email marketing message, your ESP will analyze your subscribers' behavior — things like how many messages they open, which messages get pitched into the trash folder, and so on — and then report back to you.

This is direct feedback from your subscribers that you can use to refine your marketing. And not just for email marketing but for ALL of your other marketing, too.

But only if you are paying attention to it.

Within minutes of sending an email you'll start to get back data from it. People generally open and read your messages — if they are going to read them at all — soon after you send and within the few hours that follow.

NOTE: This is the main reason you want to discover when is the best time to send to your list. You can only figure this out by paying attention to the data analysis that comes back to you and refine accordingly. You want to land in their inbox when they are most likely to read AND take action from your messages.

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For example: you send an email on Tuesday at 1:00 in the afternoon, assuming your subscriber will see it when they return from lunch. You may want to check back in with your ESP about an hour after sending and see what is happening. Write down what you discover so you can go back to it later and find the trends. Then you may want to wait another day or two or three — but before you schedule your next email — to get a better picture of your subscriber's behavior. (Some folks don't get to your message until hours or even days later.)

I suggest that you create a spreadsheet either electronically or on paper to track these things:

- How many opens you get (you can even see WHO opens your messages if you want to look that deep).
- How many click-thrus on links you get (most ESP's will show you each individual link so you'll even know at which point in your email that people clicked).
- At what time of day did they open or click?
- How many direct sales did you get from that message? (Assuming you are asking for a sale in the email.)

I suggest that you choose specific days and times of day that you will email and do that for 30-90 days, writing down the data each time, and watching for trends. If you are satisfied with the results you are getting, then don't change anything, but if you discover, say, that on Thursday at 1:30 pm more people click-thru and buy, then you'll want to make sure that every Thursday at 1:30 pm you are sending an email with something to buy.

You'll only be able to know this if you are paying attention, being actively engaged with your data, and writing it down! Do you see how this can be really important to your bottom line?

It is important that you spend some time getting to know the analytical features, and how they work, of your particular ESP.

You're going to have to test constantly to see what works, so make sure that the program you choose offers plenty of data to guide you in your marketing efforts.

But you also have to allow enough time for testing. And you can't change a bunch of things all at once, else you won't know which changes made a difference.

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You may be able to use your ESP's segmenting or A/B testing function to try out two things at once. The really cool thing about email marketing is that you can test things out quickly, get results really fast, and make better decisions quicker than with more traditional forms of marketing.

So in your testing, I suggest that you test and keep track of several things, at different times and ONE at a time, and only change accordingly:

- ▶ Day you email
- ▶ Time of day you email
- ▶ Wording of links
- ▶ Subject lines
- ▶ Offers and Pricing
- ▶ Content

You'll find your **Action Assignment** on the next page.

In your next lesson, we'll begin talking about how to get people to sign up for your list. I hope you're keeping up with things as we go along. From here on out things are going to speed up, there will be more to think about and more to do. But the payoff, in the end, will be that you will have an effective email marketing program in place that you'll only need to tweak and keep going.

Remember, the journey of a thousand miles begins with that first step. One step at a time. That's why I've designed this course so that you get one lesson each week instead of all at once. It goes in an order that is going to make it easier to get your email program in place without a lot of hassle.

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Action Assignment:

- ▶ **If you don't already have an Email Service Provider in place, go shopping for one.** Read online reviews. Read threads on online forums. Take advantage of free trials. Weigh the pros and cons of each and choose the one that is going to do everything you want it to do.

Remember that once you choose an ESP you will want to stick with it for the long term. It is not an easy process to change from one provider to another if your needs change later. So look ahead. Another good reason for doing your foundational work is so you'll know what you'll need in the future. You may not be ready for segmenting your list now but one day you will be. So choose carefully.

*Attend the Bonus Webinar, **How to Choose the Right Email Service Provider** so you can hear me discuss the pros and cons of the big name players in the ESP world. One thing, too, you never want to choose based on price alone. We'll talk about all of that in-depth on the webinar.*

- ▶ **If you're already using an ESP, look at your current activity.** How often do you send out messages? When do you send them? What percentage of your messages are opened? Are you using a standard layout? How often do you check your stats? Are you really getting the results you want?

If you think you may need to change service providers, there are certain steps you'll need to take to make sure that is a smooth transition. Changing ESP's often results in the loss of 50% or more of your current subscribers if the change is not made properly. So tread carefully here.

I'm available to discuss strategy and tactics with you and to help you create a plan for your email marketing and for moving your list if you need to do that.

Don't go it alone!

I'm available to help you:

Send an email to marty@martymarsh.com

Call me on the phone: 206-290-7901

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