



How to Build a List of Responsive and Loyal Email Subscribers

LESSON 5

Providing Valuable Information to Your List

The strength — the heart and soul, really — of your list lies in the value that you offer your subscribers. This value is their *only* reason for signing up, staying subscribed, reading your messages, and ultimately, taking action when you ask them to.

You need to consistently deliver this value so that they will stay tuned in. The more valuable content you provide, the more loyal your readers will become as they grow to trust you and see you as their go-to source of reliable information and as the solution to their problems.

Research the Competition

If you're not sure exactly what is meant by 'value,' a great way to find out is to simply conduct an experiment. Sign up for several email lists in your niche and see what kind of content your successful competitors share. (This is a good idea anyway because it gives you a sense of what the competition is doing so that you can let your own difference shine.)

It also serves to show you what value means in your niche. You'll find that you stay tuned to certain lists, while others you'll quickly start ignoring. Ask yourself what the crucial difference is between the lists you enjoy and those you quit reading.

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In that answer you'll begin to discover the kind of value that you want to provide and that your readers will respond to.

Timely and Relevant

The information you share with your list should always be timely and relevant, of course. You don't want to share outdated tips from years past or other information that's no longer useful. Your content should relate to what's going on now in the world and in your subscribers' lives.

Timely messages may refer to current trends, news stories, new technological developments, new products that are just coming out, changes in your market, major upcoming events, or even a simple holiday message. Try to consider what's most important to your audience.

Always be on the lookout for ways to tie things going on around you into your email marketing messages and to bring elements of your own life into what you're sharing in order to make a point related to your topic.

For example, recently I've been out of town a lot and so I used that fact to make a point, in a year-end tip email that I sent, that talks about the benefit of getting out of the office once in awhile so you can think more clearly about your business.

Because I'm in a business-to-business marketing and selling situation, the topics I choose to write about relate to the business owners I'm trying to reach. My aim is (and yours should be too) to create a rapport with the people on my list with topics and situations where they can also see themselves.

The next time you go see a movie, look for something that you can share about the film that you can then relate to your subscribers to make a point you are trying to get across.

For instance, if you are a fan of the movie *The Matrix*, could you use the idea of choosing the blue pill or the red pill to make a point about a problem you solve in your business?

What about current events? Pay attention to the headlines of the day and see if your marketing message can relate to something in the news.



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Caution: Writing about your market within the context of the day's news, however, is best when you really know your audience and their likes and dislikes. Topical topics can sometimes be controversial. While being a bit controversial is an okay thing you want to be sure that what you are writing about still remains relevant to your subscribers.

**And relevance almost always pertains somehow to your specialty
and to the problems you solve.**

Don't make a mistake like this...

I receive emails from a guy that I regularly follow who offers fitness tips for folks who are getting a little on the older side (that would be me for sure). I saw him in person and he was amazing. So, naturally, when he offered the chance to get on his list, I jumped at it.

And all was well for quite some time. He'd send an email about once a week with health and fitness related content that I could really relate to. I would think, "this guy really knows his audience." So I was eager to hear what he had to say.

Then one day recently he sent out an email about buying and selling gold. I thought, just like any good marketer, he was going to relate buying gold somehow to his fitness content, but no, the email was only about buying gold and pushing me to contact this guy who could set me up.

Total turnoff, to say the least.

But I understand why he was doing this. He had discovered something that he believed in and a person he liked and trusted well enough to promote and was eager to share his new found experience. But he seriously misjudged his audience and what they had come to expect.

Unfortunately, I was really disappointed in him, and it has made me think twice about opening his emails that have come since. You see, it really does take only one time of sending a non-relevant email to turn off your readers completely.

You also see this happen from time to time with someone who, out of the goodness of their hearts and out of the blue, want to support someone who may have fallen on hard times or suffered some type of misfortune, so they send out an email asking for donations.

Total turnoff.

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Not because your list is insensitive, or a bunch of boors, but you see, your email list is not there for you to make a beg for your favorite charity or cause. Not even once. Reserve that kind of solicitation for friends and family only. Not your email marketing list.

Offering a tip or a top 5, 7 or 10 list is a great way to connect with your readers quickly and easily. Easy for you and quick for them.



People love tips. They take only seconds to read and if you choose to send just one tip in each message, you can cover a lot of future messages without having to do a lot of extra thinking.

A series of tips is an excellent way of using your autoresponder. Load each one up, space them apart and then let your email service provider make sure they get delivered.

Choose who your perfect-fit or favorite client is and then write every email as if you were writing a personal email to them — as if you are writing to *only* that one person.

Use the word “you” a lot. Never start an email (the first paragraph) with the word “I” if you can avoid it. Never refer to your subscribers as a whole group.

For example: “Wishing all of you a happy holiday.” Right away the person reading feels like they are diminished to just another number within a group (even though intellectually they know you are writing to a group).

Better to say “Wishing you a happy holiday” or “Wishing you and yours a happy holiday.”

Re-read *every* email you write to make sure you are generally addressing just the one person, looking for ways to make it sound more personal, and always keep the reader in mind, not yourself.

Tell a story in your emails. People love stories and will relate more to you if they can see themselves in the story. And leave them hanging, soap opera style, so they’ll be eager to hear from you again with the next chapter in the story.

When I work privately with my clients, I teach them how to write these compelling stories and give them little tricks they can incorporate into their emails to maintain interest.

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Promotions and Deals

Remember earlier in this course series I asked you what kind of email marketer you wanted to be? The more aggressive, selling type, or the more laid back, sell occasionally type?

Most “soul proprietors” that I encounter generally want to take the more gentle approach, but still, I want you to keep in mind that the ultimate aim of email marketing is to eventually **sell something** to your subscribers.

So from time to time you should offer valuable promotions and deals. People generally don't like getting only promotional messages. Just look at yourself. You probably don't like promotion only emails coming at you day after day, week after week.

When you only promote, it seems like you are just filling in their inbox because you just want something from them. (Like their money.) Instead, you need to be a helpful provider of both information and deals.

And remember: Offering your products and services is just as useful to the reader as the informational content you provide. It's usually in the sale where you solve their problems! Who wouldn't want and appreciate that?

Every list's tastes are different, but a general guideline is to offer at least 80% informational content and no more than 20% promotions. In general, tone down the marketing. People don't like to feel like they're being marketed to, unless that was the main purpose of the list they signed up for.

This is what happens so often once you've purchased something from someone. The general practice, and the public has grown accustomed to this practice, is to add anyone who has purchased something from you to your emailing list.

This, in and of itself, is quite okay but works best if you are only selling one particular product or service or related products and services where it is clear that there IS some kind of relationship amongst your offerings.

I make purchases all the time and then get inundated with new offers for other products. And most of the time, I forget why I am on this list because the new offers have no relevance to what I bought from this person before.

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Now, it is just good marketing to try to sell to *current* clients or customers because we all know by now that someone who has purchased from us once will likely buy from us again. If you are providing a good mix of educational and informational content with your promotional content, then your subscribers will likely be more apt to buy from you whenever you do offer something, different or not.

Solve Problems

Your informational content should be geared toward helping your subscribers to solve their problems or answer their questions. Look at areas of their lives where they have trouble and need help. Use your expertise and experience in your niche to provide them with solutions. The focus should be on solving problems, not only for your informational content, but your promotional content as well. (See above.)

Generally you will use your informational content to firmly establish the type of problems that exist for your subscriber, and that you are the expert in these problem areas. Your promotional offer then is most often the “solution” to their problem, and having primed them with your educational content, they will be much more amenable to taking out their credit card when you ask them.

It is important, as I’ve mentioned before, that you begin to “prime” your subscribers with some kind of call to action in every email you send. Remember, your CTA does not have to be selling something, it is just asking them to DO something. So when you do ask for a sale, it is just another natural and reasonable CTA as far as the reader is concerned.

How-To

You can create valuable content by writing how-to guides as your marketing messages. Think of the ‘how-to’ section of your local bookstore. You know how to do things your subscribers don’t, so use your messages to teach them step-by-step to do the things they need to do. You can also teach them how to use your products. This works as a kind of under-the-radar promotion.

And don’t worry that you’re giving away too much if you share how to do something. Most gurus will tell you that you should only share the what and the why, never the how. But the reality is that most folks, even when given step-by-step directions, won’t usually follow through.

That’s what your business is there for! To pick up that slack, to be their personal guide to achieving something or to creating something or solving that nagging problem we’ve been talking about.

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Those who REALLY want to solve their problems know that they likely need help to really get the results they desire. And they will then hire you or buy your products. (But only if you ask them from time to time.)

This is why I offer my services as an email marketing consultant and a stay in touch marketing strategist along with done-for-you options for those who want to know as much as they can about email marketing and following up without being pushy, annoying or too salesy, but don't necessarily want to do the mechanics themselves.

You will be doing the same thing with your own email marketing.

Purposeful and Actionable

Try to make every email message purposeful and actionable. In other words, each message should have one very specific purpose. It should have just one important point that it teaches. The message should also be actionable, leading the reader to some sort of action. After reading your message, they should be able to do something they couldn't do before or they should know exactly what they need to do next.

If you include too many subjects (topics) and too many different offers in your email it will only confuse the reader and they won't have any idea what to do. So they'll likely do nothing.

And they should know that they can call on you for help to get them to the next stage if they don't want to go it alone.

Save Time and Money

Another way to provide value is to give the reader advice that will save them time and/or money. This is a direct way to provide value since everyone values their time and money. If the information you provide saves the reader money, this is a direct benefit they can feel.

Easy to Read

All your messages should be easy to read and just as easy to understand. Keep in mind that not all of your email subscribers are going to be avid readers. In fact, these days, many people do not want to take the time to read much of anything.

Remember, too, that it's more difficult to read large chunks of text on a computer but especially harder on a mobile device. And a lot of people today read emails on their cell phone. This will become more and more common, especially as cell phone screen sizes get a bit larger.

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SPECIAL NOTE: This is an appropriate time to remind you that you may better off these days in creating emails as text (or fake HTML disguised as text) so that your messages are easier to read on the fly. If a subscriber has to wait on graphic images to download and display, they may not have the patience for it and will move on to something else. This, of course, depends a great deal on the email service provider you are using and whether or not your HTML emails are optimized for mobile use. You need to ask them about that when deciding which provider to use.

Your English teacher will tell you to use complete paragraphs grouping thoughts together as one, but in email marketing you just need to throw that thinking out the window.

Your email messages should be made up of paragraphs consisting of just one or two sentences.

This has a two-fold effect on your subscriber. One is that these short chunks are far easier to read, and two, it looks like there is less there to read when your reader opens your message. If they don't anticipate a long read, they will more likely engage with your email rather than save it for later or just dump it in the trash unread.

Stay On-Brand

Keep all of your email message topics "on brand." What this means is that each message is consistent with your brand image, tone, language, and even the order in which you write things. Your emails should also be consistent with what you initially promised subscribers they'd receive. Don't discuss topics that are out of left field (like the example I share about the fitness guy and selling gold) or you'll alienate readers and disrupt the consistency that's so important in branding.

Rather than being boring, staying on brand keeps you top of mind. Every time a subscriber gets a message from you they should recognize immediately that it is from you and that they can know what to expect.

Curate Content

You don't need to create all of your own content all of the time, although doing so certainly ensures that you, who knows your business best, is putting out the message you actually want received. But, you can, from time to time, share content with your readers that was created by someone else.

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This is called “content curation.” You become a content aggregator, pulling information from different sources, presenting it to your list, and adding a little commentary of your own. You’re saving your readers the time they’d spend seeking out this information on their own thus saving them both time and maybe even money.

Content curation, however, can be trickier than it sounds. You have to know your subscribers well in order to find information that’s valuable to them.

I subscribe to a list where every Friday, the list owner sends out an email containing just links of things that he knows his readers will find interesting and useful. Things he’s discovered while surfing the web during the previous week. While I don’t click through on every link he includes, I do open his emails every Friday to see what is in there. Most times I find some very interesting leads to follow.

There are a lot of great bloggers out there who would love a little more exposure to a new set of eyes. Be sure that whomever you choose to include as a guest writer in your emails is not a direct competitor of yours but offers something of complementary interest to your readers. Be sure to let your readers know that it is someone else, and not you, writing the email on that day.

You can definitely add content curation into your mix so that you don’t have to create all of your content yourself. But approach it from the mindset of *providing extra value*, not just because it provides a shortcut for yourself.

Make It Personal

Make your messages highly personal. Share your personal stories and give your personal opinion on things. As mentioned before, write as if you’re writing to a friend or a favorite client or colleague. People love to feel this personal connection with the lists they subscribe to; just make sure that the value is there for them in the message.



Sometimes just a slight mention of what you were doing just before you wrote your email is all it takes to add a little something personal in your message.

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For instance, if the weather has been bad in your area, you might say that you were so thrilled to wake up to sunny skies and that as soon as you get this email off to them that you're going to head out and revel in it.

For example: "This morning I woke up to a beautiful blue and sunny sky after having been stuck inside enduring days of non-stop rain. And just as soon as I get this important email off to you I'm heading out with the kids to play in the park for a few hours."

Note that I could have started that email with "I woke up to a ..." but adhering to my rule to not start any leading paragraph with the word "I" see how I changed it up a bit so that the word "I" comes later? This is how you can rework paragraphs when you read over them again even if you think you've already written something the best way you know how.

Another way to personalize email is to use the subscribers name in the email itself. You don't want to overdo this, but certainly including a "Hi [their first name]" or a "Hello..." or "Dear..." at the beginning of each email is a good idea. It's how you would likely start a letter to a friend, right? So it's a good practice when writing an email to greet the person you are writing to by using their first name.

From time to time, you may also want to personalize your email by using the merge tags feature of your email service provider and putting the recipients name in the subject line, and sometimes within the body of the email itself. You really don't want to overdo using this technique but in certain situations it works amazingly well.

Inform and Entertain

Another way to augment the value you're providing and make it more personal is to mix in some humor or something that is entertaining. So you want to seek to entertain as well as to inform. It's a known fact that people learn and retain better when they are being entertained. This gives your list a special personality that people will enjoy along with the unique value you provide.



Provide Valuable Information to Your List

Research the competition

Make it timely and relevant

Offer promotions and deals

Solve problems

Provide how-tos

Be purposeful and actionable

Save them time and money

Make it easy to read

Stay on-brand

Curate content

Make it personal

Inform and entertain

How often should you email your list?

This is the big question that I always get and I'm afraid to say it is one of those that has to be answered as "it depends." It really does depend on your list and what they expect.

Of course, you can solve the problem of how often to send by deciding what your send schedule is going to be and then letting the subscriber know up front how often they can expect to hear from you.

The problem comes when your list has been hearing from you infrequently or only once a month (even consistently every month) and suddenly you start sending weekly messages. The solution, of course, is to alert them to any changes you're going to make to the frequency.

It is important that you email more frequently and not less frequently for a variety of reasons including the fact that with short attention spans and overwhelmingly full inboxes, your subscriber may quickly forget who you are from one email to the next.

So you should email to your list at least once a week and do it consistently. But mailing 3 times a week is also fairly common. If you're going to email three times a week, I suggest sending some great informational content twice a week and then at least one promotion each week.

You can let your subscriber know up front that they'll be hearing from you once a week or twice a week (whichever you choose) and also that every now and again they will hear from you with something special in between. But mix it up. You could send two informational messages and then a promotional message, or send an informational message, a promo message, and then another informational message.

But for those of you groaning that you will be lucky to get a message out once a month let alone once a week, take heart. You can always combine your informational message with an offer and then email just once a week. (I really want to impress upon you that you cannot email just once a month. That is just simply not often enough today, and mailing more often is essential if you actually expect to sell some things.)

So make a decision about how often you want to email, put a system into place to make it easy on you or your VA, and then test the waters and adjust accordingly. Remember, you are tracking everything, and if you write things down you'll see the trends that will guide you in making decisions.

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Action Assignment:

- Research competitors by joining a few lists. See what kind of content they're sharing with their subscribers.
- Brainstorm a list of valuable content you can offer your email readers. Decide on the types of messages (promotions, how-to's, stories, news roundup, etc.) and set up a schedule of how much of each you'll send.
- Create an editorial calendar covering at least the next 90 days.

EXTRA...

Setting up an **Editorial Calendar** for your email marketing is a great idea as it will keep you on track, you won't repeat yourself, and you'll always know what you're going to be writing about and promoting and when the best time will be to promote.

With an editorial calendar in place you'll always be able to make better decisions about marketing and joint venture opportunities when they come along.

Say your colleague asks you to participate in a list building special promotion or summit because they want to reach the people on your list and her audience is also a good fit for you and you'd love to be able to say yes, but you look at your editorial and promotion calendar and realize that you already have your own promotions scheduled for that same time. You can either drop your own promo plans or delay them and say "yes" so you can participate or you can comfortably say "no" if you want to proceed with your own plans.

Without a calendar that you can check you may wind up saying "yes" to something that you ultimately either won't be able to do or that will mess up your own plans. The calendar will save you from regret every time.

A great resource* for learning how to create an editorial calendar, not just for emailing, but for blogging or article writing or your social media as well, is Sue Allen Clayton's excellent book:

How to Create an Editorial Calendar: Social Media Planning for Your Small Business

Sue will guide you through an easy process for creating your editorial calendar. I can't stress how important the time you spend creating your calendar will be in the long run.

* No I don't get anything in return for telling you about Sue's book. I want you to have the best tools possible and this is one tool/resource that pays you back in spades!