



Strategic E-Mail Marketing

By Jennifer McGuigan, Owner, The Word Cellar

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson presented the topic “Strategic E-mail Marketing” during his second session of the “eMarketing and eSales II: Top Line Growth” conference presented by the Center for eBusiness and Advanced IT (eBizITPA) in Erie, Pa. on April 27, 2005.

Wilson, widely recognized as one of the top international authorities in the area of Internet marketing, is the founding editor of [Web Marketing Today®](#), the grandfather of the Internet marketing e-zines. He is also the author of hundreds of articles and numerous books, including *Planning Your Internet Marketing Strategy* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002), *The E-Mail Marketing Handbook* (2003), and *The Shopping Cart Report* (2004).

Wilson noted that as with all marketing campaigns, the best e-mail marketing campaign is based on permission. For a discussion of this topic in a broader sense, Wilson recommended Seth Godin’s book *Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers* (Simon & Schuster, 1999). Basically, permission marketing builds on the principle that people respond better to your marketing message if you first gain their permission. After all, said Wilson, asking permission is “just polite.”

As marketers, our goal is to “be so trustworthy that people will grant us a higher level of permission than we already have,” said Wilson. Build trust by using an opt-in or opt-out e-mail campaign. Increase your credibility with an easy to understand privacy policy that clearly states what information you collect and how you use it. Avoid confusing mumbo-jumbo; the policy should be written in plain language. (Read the privacy policy for one of Wilson’s sites: <http://www.wilsonweb.com/admin/privacy.htm>.)

E-mail Newsletters

Wilson said that he is a big fan of e-mail newsletters because they allow you to do several important things:

- collect a list of names and e-mail addresses;
- conserve contacts;
- nurture prospects;
- keep your business in front of your customers; and
- promote your products.

Build Your List

Once you’re ready to offer an e-mail newsletter as part of an online marketing campaign, how do you build a subscriber list? Although you can purchase lists, the “free” way is to allow people to subscribe directly from your Web site. Wilson suggested putting a link to the sign-up form on every page of your site. The form should include a link to your privacy policy and should not require too much information from visitors.

According to Wilson, a great way to promote subscriptions is through the use of pop-up boxes—if they’re used correctly. While pop-ups can be annoying, there are ways to make them less bothersome and more effective. Set your site’s cookies so that visitors do not see a pop-up window more than once. Also, do not have the pop-up appear as soon as someone lands on your site; Wilson has his timed to appear after five seconds. After adding this pop-up feature to one of his sites, Wilson said that his subscriptions increased by 40 percent. And while pop-up blockers are making this approach less useful, Wilson believes that pop-ups are still worth trying.

Manage Your List

Make unsubscribing from your e-newsletter as easy as subscribing. Not only does this show respect for your readers, it keeps you within the bounds of the law. The CAN-SPAM Act requires e-mail newsletters to follow various guidelines, including having a working unsubscribe system.

Wilson recommended the following types of e-mail listservers to help you manage your lists:

- Desktop listservers
 - Gammadyne Mailer (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/gammadyne.htm)
 - Infacta Group Mail (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/groupmail.htm)
 - Arial Campaign Enterprise (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/arial.htm)
- Listservers hosted on your server
 - AutoResponse Plus 3 (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/arp3.htm)
 - Lyris (www.lyris.com)
- ASP hosted applications
 - Topica E-mail Publisher (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/topica.htm)
 - GotMarketing Campaigner (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/gotmarketing.htm)
 - Constant Contact (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/roving.htm)
 - Lyris (www.lyris.com)
 - AWeber (www.aweber.com)
- Free listservers (a good way to get started with a newsletter)
 - Yahoo! Groups (www.yahogroups.com)
 - Topica Exchange (www.topica.com)
- Listserver and e-commerce solution rolled into one
 - 1ShoppingCart (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/cart.htm)

Formatting Your Newsletter

Wilson discussed three basic ways to format your electronic newsletter: text, HTML, or multi-part MIME, which uses both text and HTML.

- **Text:** While text newsletters may not be as visually pleasing as HTML newsletters, they do have their benefits. According to Wilson, 25 percent of e-mail users prefer text e-mail messages. Plus, text is much easier to format than HTML. To correctly format your text newsletter, Wilson advised using 60 to 65 characters per line to prevent sloppy line breaks; maintain this formatting in MS Word by choosing File > Save As > Text with Line Breaks.
- **HTML:** One of the most obvious advantages to HTML newsletters is that they make better visual statements. According to Wilson, they also improve click-through rates. On the other hand, HTML e-mails take longer to load, are harder for recipients to save on their hard drives, and have a greater tendency to be caught by spam filters. If you choose to create HTML-formatted newsletters, Wilson suggested using a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Web page editor such as MS FrontPage 2000+ or Macromedia Dreamweaver. And if you're design-challenged, Wilson advised finding a designer to help you with the color scheme and layout.
- **Multi-part MIME:** A multi-part MIME e-mail uses both text and HTML in the same message, so recipients can view whichever version their e-mail program will read. Wilson noted that while he thinks these are now growing obsolete, some e-mail marketers still use them.

Keys to Newsletter Success

Wilson discussed several additional issues that are key to e-mail newsletter success.

- **Frequency:** "The idea is that you want to retain mindshare," Wilson explained. To do so, you should send your newsletter frequently, but not so often as to become obsolete or annoying. Wilson recommended sending monthly or at least quarterly; he said that a weekly newsletter is probably too much unless you have extremely compelling content.
- **Length:** The rule of thumb, said Wilson, is to send a short newsletter to your regular audience. The newsletter can be longer if you're sending to "hardcore" subscribers, such as people who have paid for a subscription. But overall, Wilson's advice is to "keep it tight, focused, and brief" if you want people to actually read it.
- **Archives:** Archive past issues of the newsletter on your Web site. Human visitors will consider you knowledgeable and informative, and search engine spiders will look favorably upon the keyword-rich content.

Your Newsletter Team

Creating a successful e-mail marketing campaign may mean enlisting the help of some specialists. Wilson suggested the following professionals to help you create and manage your campaign:

- **List Manager:** A list manager represents and manages multiple lists.
- **List Broker:** A list broker works for an advertiser, finds appropriate lists in which to advertise, and coordinates the e-mail sending process.
- **Designer:** A designer inserts text and images into HTML design and incorporates tracking codes into the newsletter's links.
- **Copywriter:** A copywriter writes the message text and uses direct marketing techniques. According to Wilson, a copywriter can make or break your e-mail campaign.

As with any marketing campaign, you must continually monitor and tweak your e-mail marketing efforts. Wilson acknowledged that there is a lot to learn about e-mail marketing, but said, "There's a big upside if you learn to do it well."

About eBizITPA:

eBizITPA is a Pennsylvania resource initiative begun in 2002 and designed to help your company apply e-business technology to business processes, increasing efficiency and making you more competitive. Learn more about eBizITPA at <http://www.ebizitpa.org>.

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