

Publishing your own Newsletter

Based on Alexis Gutzman article <http://www.alexisgutzman.com>

(All PC software refs. has been replaced with equivalent Maxprog Macintosh products)

You have read over and over that it is less expensive to get an existing customer to make a purchase than to get a new customer to make a purchase. The most recent figures suggest that it is six times as expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to retain a customer. You have also read that the least expensive way to market to existing customers is via targeted e-mail.

Email Marketing is spreading around the whole world because of its high effectiveness, speed and low cost. If you want to introduce and sell your product or service, the best way is to use e-mail to contact your targeted customer. Targeted e-mail is no doubt very effective. If you can introduce your product or service through email directly to the customers who are interested in them, this will bring your business a better chance of success.

Yet, you have been reluctant to begin any marketing via e-mail because:

- ▶ You have yet to ask your customers or visitors for permission to market to them,
- ▶ You don't want to look like an amateur,
- ▶ You don't have any systems in place to actually send the mail, let alone deal with irate customers, handle unsubscribe requests, handle bounced messages, etc.,
- ▶ You don't have content other than the promotion you would like to send out,
- ▶ You don't have any e-mail addresses.

With this document, we are going to take you through the entire process of starting your own newsletter:

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You can do e-mail promotions without doing a newsletter. However, if you want to grab and hold the attention of busy customers or members, then you have to provide them with more than just the information about the products or services. You have to give them a reason to care about the product.

1.- How to start your own newsletter

Procrastinate No Longer

Every reason you've been putting off starting a newsletter is easily addressed. In brief, here's the list of tasks you need to perform to start your own newsletter:

- ▶ Get a list of e-mail addresses.
- ▶ Verify that these addresses are still good (valid).
- ▶ Get the addresses into a bulk mailing package.
- ▶ Design the newsletter.
- ▶ Develop or purchase content for the newsletter.
- ▶ Send the newsletter.
- ▶ Manage bounced messages, handle unsubscribe and subscribe requests.

If you're really ambitious, you might want to do the following, as well.

- ▶ Grow your list.

- ▶ Get sponsors for the newsletter.
- ▶ Find resources to stay abreast of newsletter trends.

Getting a List to Get Started

Getting a list together is actually much easier than it sounds. If you have a customer database then that should be the first place you start. If you have a membership database, use that. If you have been selling in the physical world — for example, a law firm or a dentist — and you hadn't been in the practice of asking clients or patients for their e-mail addresses, then the time has come to start.

If your business is not the kind that's inclined to having lists of interested parties — such as online publishing, consulting, or any site without a membership requirement — then you'll have to rely on other sources of lists. In fact, pack rats have an advantage over the rest of the world in this regard.

To Purchase a List or Not?

It isn't necessary, or even advisable, to purchase a list for a newsletter. There are good lists and good list providers, but purchasing a list is generally better for a one-time mailing. An alternative to purchasing a list is coordinating a mailing with the trusted list owner. For example, if I want to create a newsletter in order to market software that optimizes hard drives, then I might do a joint mailing with a hard-drive manufacturer, thereby having access to a list of customers who have demonstrated an interest in hard drives. If I were to purchase that list for direct marketing without the "social introduction" that the hard-drive manufacturer provides, I'd get a much lower open rate, click-through rate, and conversion rate, because many people would delete it based on the fact that they don't recognize me.

Other than being ignored, the problem with purchased lists — particularly when you purchase them from someone offering you one million addresses for \$99 — is the quality of the addresses. There may be one million e-mail addresses, but how many of them are still good? Since you may end up paying for list services based on how many messages you send, you will really regret paying for 500,000 messages that bounce.

Harvesting Addresses from Your Inbox

Our own recommendation is — if you're not the super-neat sort who only has 12 messages in your inbox at any given time — is to harvest all the addresses from your mail folders. Anyone who has ever written to you or to your company is fair game.

It's relatively easy to harvest addresses from an Outlook Express folder or from any text folder. When it comes to harvesting, you can either harvest only from the sender's address or you can harvest from the entire message. The advantage of harvesting from the entire message is that if someone sends something to you and eight other people, you'll get the sender's address as well as those of the seven other people. The disadvantages of harvesting from the entire message are that you'll get more junk addresses on your list, and you are more likely to have your newsletter seen as spam by people who have never corresponded with you. On the other hand, if your newsletter is going to be inspirational, for example, and you've received inspirational messages in the past that were addressed to 40 people, then those people might also appreciate your newsletter. This is definitely a judgment call on your part.

There is pretty good software available for harvesting from the entire message. Maxprog tool, eMail Extractor available at <http://www.maxprog.com/EmailExtractor.html>, is a very fast product for harvesting from the entire inbox. If you don't use Outlook Express, then you need to export all your messages into a text file and harvest from that. The harvested addresses go into a text file, with one address on each line and no duplicates. If you are harvesting from several files, be sure to save the harvested text files with different names or you'll overlay your previous file; by default all addresses go into output.emails.

By now, you should have a text file with one address on each line. Whether those addresses came from a database, your order-management system, or your inbox, you're ready to verify that the addresses actually work. Next week, I'll tell you how to do that.

2.- How to clean up and perfect your email list

For a lot of reasons, you don't want to try sending mail to every address you've harvested from your inbox. First of all, some addresses are probably personal, and you might not want to send your business newsletter to everyone in your family. Next, many addresses that appear on your list are administrative addresses. Finally, some of the addresses are no longer valid.

Verifying E-mail Addresses

Avoid sending newsletters to bad addresses else you will have to deal with bounced messages. A list of addresses harvested from your inbox, can roughly contain a third bad.

We suggest that the first thing you do is verify the addresses using a tool like Email Verifier available from Maxprog at: <http://www.maxprog.com/EmailVerifier.html>. With Email Verifier, you import your list of harvested addresses, and click "Start." The tool is fast, but not instantaneous. Speed depends on the size of your list, your connection, and the speed of the Web. If your list is really big, run it at night.

You need to have access to port 25 for this to work. If you're operating within a restrictive firewall, as most users of large ISPs are, then you won't be able to use this tool. You need either unrestricted access or a hole in your corporate firewall for port 25 access. This software does what your SMTP e-mail server does, which is confirm that the person exists before sending the message. Smaller local ISPs don't use to block port 25.

For some addresses, such as AOL, Yahoo, Hotmail, and other non-SMTP mail, you can't verify whether or not the address is good. The mail server won't cooperate, so you can set the options of Email Verifier either to assume they're all good or assume they're all bad. You won't know definitively until some bounce.

There is a demo version of this software available at: <http://download.maxprog.com>, but you can't save the results. When you've completed the verification using a licensed copy, you can export the good addresses to a file. This will be the list you use for your newsletter.

Unfortunately, verifying the addresses using a tool isn't enough. Unless your addresses came from a customer database, you probably want to manually remove all administrative addresses such as orders@ anything, support@ anything, listserv@ anything. There are more, but that's a good start. If you don't remove these, then you'll receive automated replies from a lot of places. When you're doing the manual clean up, you can also remove any personal addresses to which you don't want the newsletter going.

3.- The pros and cons of sending HTML vs. plain-text versions of a newsletter

HTML vs. Plain Text: Tradeoffs

HTML vs. plain text is an ongoing debate. HTML is better than text for a lot of reasons, but that doesn't mean you should use it. When you use HTML, you can lay out the newsletter exactly as you wish. You can include graphics (actually links to graphics), multiple columns, and various fonts and colors. By using multiple columns, you can include promotions for your own products in the margin, while still providing content of substance in the middle of the newsletter.

In-stream Survey

Typically, HTML mailings have a higher click-through rate than text e-mail. In addition to the formatting and presentation advantages of HTML e-mail, there are also the interactivity advantages. If you want to include a survey in your newsletter, you can include the FORM tags right in your HTML. When the user checks a box, a radio button, or types in an answer, and clicks "Submit," the script on your server is activated and receives the form information. You can include a subscription box right on your newsletter, in the hopes that it will be forwarded to a new reader who will want to subscribe. You can also format your newsletter to look exactly like your Web site.

HTML formatting also permits you to include links to tracking code, which enables you to receive reports about how many times a message is opened by the recipient, or what percent of the messages sent were opened.

HTML Gone Wrong

In short, HTML e-mails are ideal if you can be sure the recipients can open them. You might have heard (correctly) that the vast majority of AOL users (with some small exception for some AOL 6.0 users) cannot read HTML-enabled e-mail. This is true. You absolutely must do a plain-text version of your newsletter to send to AOL.com addresses. However, perhaps you didn't know that Lotus Notes can also be set by the administrator not to accept rich-text e-mails. It's impossible to know which mail reader recipients are using. Most people choose rich-text enabled mail clients, but many corporations prevent virus spread by delivering all e-mail as text only.

Most people who are constrained by corporate policy to receive only text e-mail messages are smart enough to look in the first line or two of a message for a link to the online version. This means that even those who get the gobbledygook of HTML in their messages can still pull up a rich-text version of the newsletter.

Plain-Text Done Right

Even your plain-text e-mail should be formatted as well as you possibly can. Since you can't really force white space - white space helps tell your eyes where to focus - in plain-text newsletters, make sure your newsletters include all of the following formatting conventions:

- ▶ Dashes, tildes or asterisks to separate sections of the newsletter
- ▶ Short sentences and short paragraphs
- ▶ Bullets or numbered lists to make points
- ▶ Headings and sub-headings to break up the text

Many newsletters send out only plain-text versions, that's like formatting your Web site for 640x480 display, or even for Palm Pilot display, since some visitors might conceivably miss something or be annoyed if you format for higher resolution.

Pleasing All of the People All of the Time

Ideally, you'd send the HTML version to everyone who can open HTML e-mail and the plain-text version to everyone who can't. How can you possibly achieve this optimal arrangement? By sending both versions to everyone!

The secret is to use a MIME type of multipart/alternative in the header of your message. Unfortunately, most e-mail software doesn't allow you to change the header. You'll have to use software that sends in multipart/alternative format like MaxBulk Mailer. In fact, MaxBulk Mailer gives full support to multipart/alternative format.

Outlook Express Is Not Enough

Don't spend the next week trying to make Outlook Express send multipart/alternative e-mail (it won't work), but start noticing how e-mail is coming into your mailbox. In Outlook Express, while you have a message open (not just previewed, but actually open), click File|Properties, then click the Details tab and Message Source. You'll see a line in bold that says "Content-Type: text/html," "Content-Type: text/plain," or "Content-Type: multipart/alternative."

4.- The ins and outs of designing your newsletter

Now that you've decided whether HTML or plain text would be more appropriate for your newsletter, it's time to do a mailing. The next three steps have to be performed together. Doing the actual mailings requires:

- ▶ Designing the newsletter,
- ▶ Sending the newsletter,
- ▶ Processing failed-mail messages, subscribe requests, and unsubscribe requests.

Going It Alone

In this part, we are going to assume you want to take on this task yourself. It's rather time-consuming to go it alone, but if you have the time you can save money. However, you may decide that you would rather sign up with a service to handle these things.

There is still another option, and that's to outsource creation and mailing to someone else - someone who really understands the ins and outs of e-mail marketing, is a great writer, and is creative about content and promotion. If you don't have the resources in-house to create content for a professional newsletter, then you might be better off letting someone else handle it.

Designing Your Newsletter

If you're going to use plain text, then design isn't much of an issue. However, if you've decided to use HTML, then the sky is the limit. The easiest thing to do is to use your site layout as your newsletter template. If your banner isn't too graphics-intensive, this can work. If you rely on flash or large graphics, then the load time of your newsletter may be a problem. Another option is to use seasonal designs in your newsletter.

You probably have certain navigational elements in your banner, which may not be entirely appropriate for your newsletter. I suggest you copy your banner, then add or modify the links in your banner to include whichever of the following are appropriate:

- ▶ Sponsorship information
- ▶ Link (or email) to subscribe
- ▶ Link (or email) to unsubscribe
- ▶ Link to forward to a friend

Letting people unsubscribe is very important. You are legally required to give people a way to unsubscribe from your newsletter right in the newsletter. You can embed the e-mail address in links, so when a reader clicks on the unsubscribe link, his address is automatically sent to the form on a site that removes addresses. There's no possibility that he will send a message from the wrong account, trying to unsubscribe an address that isn't even on the list, and then when he continues to receive the newsletter, get upset with me. So far, this system has worked flawlessly.

Forward to a Friend

The forward to a friend link can be handled two different ways. If you want to get fancy, you can have the link open a Web page, which allows the visitor to enter his own e-mail address and his friend's e-mail address. Alternatively, you can have the link open the e-mail software on his own computer so he can send the link himself. The disadvantage of the latter solution is that if he is reading your newsletter from a public or shared computer, it might not be configured to send mail from his account. Also, you can't keep track of how many times the message was forwarded.

The advantage of using a link that opens e-mail is that he will have access to his own address book, and be familiar with how to send the message. This is the code I use to permit readers to forward my newsletter to a friend (you will need to change a few things):

```
<A href="mailto:?Subject=I%20think%20you%20should%20read%20this%20Newsletter=http://www.domain.com/news/newsletter.html">Forward to a friend</A>
```

The first thing you probably notice is the bit of HTML code "%20." This represents a space to your computer. You can't include spaces in links, so you can't tell the software to use a subject line of "I think you should read this Newsletter." In order to avoid having your subject line be one long word, use "%20" everywhere you want a space. If you're familiar with HTML, you probably noticed that there is no "To" address in the link. The way a mailto link usually works is like this:

```
<A href="mailto:support@maxprog.com">Send me mail</a>
```

The reason the Forward-to-a-Friend link has no e-mail address is because it is not known. The reader will have to provide that, and he'll see, when his e-mail client opens up, that the "To" field is blank.

Including a Subject and a Body

Back to our big, hairy link up above. By including the "?Subject=" in the link, you provide the subject line for the message. Pick one that the recipient will want to receive. By including the "=" in the link, you tell the e-mail client what to put in the body of the message. If you click the Forward-to-a-Friend link up above, you'll see that it puts the URL of the newsletter into the body of the message. We don't recommend sending the entire newsletter, although you could do it. Of course, in order for this link to work, the newsletter needs to be somewhere on your Web site, so you can provide the URL.

None of this will work in plain text e-mail. You'll just have to rely on people hitting the forward button to forward your newsletter.

5.- Creating and sending a professional newsletter.

E-mail is simply the cheapest way to communicate with customers, and if you do it right, they'll look forward to receiving your messages. The important thing is to know that you're sending out something of interest to your customers, and should not do so more often than they want to receive it.

Let My People Go

Just in case you've guessed wrong about their interest in your newsletter, you must include a way to unsubscribe in your messages. People are very skeptical of unsubscribe information on messages, so ensure that whatever instructions you give work, and work in a visible way. For example, if your instructions say to send a message to unsubscribe@overtheweb.com, make sure that address works, and set it up in advance to send an automatic confirmation message stating that the unsubscribe request was successful. If you provide a Web form for readers to unsubscribe, don't make them click more than once or twice to get off your list. Your customers don't want to have to read the fine print to get off your list. We suggest you embed a link in every message that includes the e-mail address of the recipient so that one click removes it from your list.

Know What You Want

How to Send

There are three ways you can send e-mail to a group of people in such a way that each recipient doesn't see the addresses of the other recipients - absolutely essential for a reputable newsletter:

- 1.- Send a unique message to each recipient using your regular SMTP (simple mail transfer protocol) server. If you have more than about 200 messages to send, this will be quite slow. Some mail servers are configured to avoid unauthorized use and require you to check mail before sending. If yours is configured as such, then be sure to check mail on the outgoing account before you try to send the newsletter.
- 2.- Use SMTP server software to send a unique message to each recipient. Using SMTP server software circumvents

your regular e-mail server, so it is much faster. In order to use SMTP server software, you have to have access to port 25, which most major ISPs don't allow. If you have a direct connection to the Internet, then make sure your firewall has port 25 open. If you can't get to port 25 for whatever reason, then make sure the tool you select permits you to send via your ISP's SMTP server.

3.- Send a message to all your recipients at once (or in groups of 50) by blind carbon copying (BCC) them. I strongly discourage you from sending mail this way. Busy people who receive a lot of mail often have filters set up on their inbox. It's pretty easy to send all BCC mail to a spam folder or even directly to the trash. Ninety-nine percent of all BCC mail is spam with the remainder being press releases from companies that don't realize that BCC spells amateur.

HTML Design Tool Built In?

Some tools offer newsletter design functionality. The alternative is to use an HTML design tool such as Golive, Dreamweaver, or Freeway. If you are going to use the same design as your Web site, or planning to send plain text, then you probably don't need the built-in tool.

If you're going to be sending HTML email, make sure you understand how to make the tool you're using set the MIME type to HTML/text, or else everyone will receive a copy of the HTML, rather than HTML that is rendered as your newsletter. This is where testing comes in.

Multipart/Alternative

The multipart/alternative content type, permits you to send one message to everyone in such a way that rich-mail capable e-mail clients will get the good version, but text-only e-mail clients will still be able to read the text. None of the software permits you to send multipart/alternative mail in a way that replaces the need to send two different versions.

Remove Blocked Senders

Depending on how you maintain your list of subscribed addresses, you might need to keep a separate list of people who have unsubscribed. The alternative is to remove people from your subscribed list as they unsubscribe. Some of the tools permit you to mark some addresses as blocked or do-not-mail. eMail Extractor even permits you to check your unsubscribe and bounced accounts and harvests addresses from those. If you're willing to manage your mailing entirely with one software package, then this ability can help you avoid ever sending a message again to someone who has unsubscribed from your list.

Reply-to vs. From Addresses

We like being able to specify a different REPLY-TO address than the FROM address. The FROM address is automatically used to return failed mail to you. If you are sending to more than 100 addresses, and you haven't verified addresses as mentioned in part two, then you probably want to set up a separate account to use as the FROM address, such as newsletters@overtheweb.com. Bounced messages go to the FROM address, human replies go to the REPLY-TO address. You'll want to check the bounced account before you do the next mailing so you can clean up your list.

Embedding Unique Codes or Addresses into Messages

You can embed uniquely identifiable codes into the messages so that you can create unsubscribe links or track who opened the messages. This is an important feature, which you'll appreciate...

Before You Send ...

There's an old adage that it's easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission. While we generally subscribe to that philosophy, in this one case, we urge you to contact your ISP or whoever manages your e-mail server and/or domain before you do your first mailing, and explain what you're doing. If someone who receives your message really has it in for you, he can raise a fuss and potentially get your domain-hosting services cancelled. Some ISPs deal very harshly with what they perceive as spam. If you contact them ahead of time and talk to someone in a position of authority about what you're doing, how you got your list, your opt-out procedures, etc. before you mail, then any complaints from recipients will be seen in a more balanced light. Some recipients might be angry enough about having received an unsolicited message from you to really make trouble. Some might write to abuse@yourdomain.com, complaining of your message. Some might see who hosts your domain, which can be done via WHOIS on Network Solutions' site, and contact them directly to complain.

Chances are, no one will get that angry at your mailing - surely they can't waste this kind of outrage on every piece of spam they get. But the consequences of having your domain hosting cancelled are extremely severe. If you have a direct connection to the Web, you don't have to worry about this. If, however, you rely on another company to host your site or your e-mail, then by all means make them an ally before they hear about how unethical you are from someone who doesn't want to be on your list.

Test Before You Send

Start by importing (or creating) the message, then send it to yourself on two different accounts: for example, one Yahoo or Hotmail and account one that you check using Outlook Express or another standard e-mail client. Make sure they both look right and that all the links and graphics work. When you're sure it's perfect, send it off. While you wouldn't be the first person ever to send a newsletter only to have to re-send because the links don't work, you don't want to make a habit of it.

Monitoring Results

You can count how many people open your newsletter and even who opens your newsletter.

6.- Selecting the right tool: MaxBulk Mailer

Perhaps by now you've downloaded MaxBulk Mailer trial version if not get it now from Maxprog website at: <http://www.maxprog.com/MaxBulk.html>

We have created the ultimate tool for all of your e-mail marketing needs. MaxBulk Mailer allows you to design and send professional looking e-mails to your customers and prospects for as little as fractions of a penny...directly from your own desktop.

MaxBulk Mailer is a powerful mail-merge tool for Macintosh that allows you to send out customized press releases, price lists and any kind of text or HTML documents to your customers. MaxBulk Mailer is fast, fully customizable and very easy to use. MaxBulk Mailer handles plain text, HTML and styled text documents and gives full support for attachments.

Here is a breakthrough tool from Maxprog that will allow you to increase your profits, strengthen your customer service and send your messages to new markets.

With MaxBulk Mailer you will create, manage and send your own powerful, personalized marketing message to your customers and potential customers. MaxBulk Mailer is a software tool that you purchase once, no need to pay on a per-email basis to submission services. Now your promotional messages will jump off the screen with HTML mail! MaxBulk Mailer HTML allows you to include graphics, fonts and colors turning your messages into professional online brochures.

Any user can utilize their full lists of contact information with MaxBulk Mailer. You'll be able to reach everyone in your database without worrying about integration or compatibility issues:

► **Ease of uploading your list.** MaxBulk Mailer lets you upload either text files or comma-separated values (CSV) files with your addresses. You can of course type them all in by hand or edit / remove people from your list.

► **Ability to send HTML or text**, or even better yet, multi-part/alternative mail (see Part 3). If you let subscribers tell you which version they prefer, then you should be able to use that parameter to send out the correct version. AOL members should automatically receive either a text or an HTML-light version — meaning no images and limited to the small subset of HTML that AOL accepts. Ideally, the system you select will permit you to send both versions to everyone so that their own e-mail clients can decide to open the appropriate ones.

► **Ability to personalize the message.** If you choose to employ personalization, you can. In addition to the e-mail address, you can define fields relevant to your own newsletter.

► **Ability to send unlimited test messages.** Don't managed to get your mailing out without testing. Re-read every word of your newsletter once sent to yourself, so that it looks to you exactly as it looks to recipients. You need not only to be able to send test messages — to a POP client, as well as a Web-based client, and an AOL address — but also to have all links, including personalized links, working in the test messages.

► **Ability to schedule when messages are sent.** Once you're happy with your newsletter, you can schedule it to be sent whenever you want, so it arrives in conjunction with other activities such as a site update.

► **Reporting how many opened the e-mail, and tracking** desired links should be available. Of course, text versions of the newsletter cannot be tracked, which includes all AOL recipients. If you have a high proportion of AOL users, this open statistic will not be very accurate.

7.- Must-haves for a successful newsletter

Part of running a successful business is knowing what to do yourself, what to hire others to do, and what to outsource altogether. Payroll is an obvious candidate for outsourcing. Perhaps somewhere in the last six parts of this document, you decided that, while you really would like to publish a newsletter, you simply don't have the cycles free to do it in-house.

Five Must-Haves for a Successful Newsletter

Even if you decide to outsource your newsletter, you'll still have to handle many of the functions yourself. A successful newsletter requires all of the following:

- ▶ A purpose for the newsletter. What will you provide via your newsletter, other than your weekly specials?
- ▶ A voice. Who will be talking to your subscribers? The voice of Corporate America is not all that appealing. Personalize it by creating a likeable voice that will speak to your subscribers. Notice right now, that we are not giving you advice in the abstract, we are talking with you about this process. Don't have your newsletter talk at the recipients, have it talk to them.
- ▶ Constant promotion. Rare, indeed, is the newsletter that grows on its own. If you decide to publish a newsletter, you'll need to promote it everywhere your business is promoted. Add its name to your signature file. Offer people a way to subscribe "above the fold" on your home page and any other pages that search engines rank highly.
- ▶ Content. What will you say on the theme of your newsletter each week (or whatever interval you publish)? You'll need consistent, high-quality content that recipients can't get anywhere else or aren't likely to come across elsewhere.
- ▶ Distribution. How will you distribute your newsletter? Parts 5 and 6 of this series covered this in detail.

Of the five must-haves I listed above, only the last two really lend themselves to outsourcing.

Finding Content Providers

There are many places you can look to find people willing to create content and distribute it for you. We heard from a reader from India who runs Ezyne.com. For a price you won't match in the U.S., they'll write the content and do the distribution, or just write the content. For whatever market you're publishing, make sure the content rings true and sounds like it was written by a native speaker. That is one thing that impressed me about the samples this reader sent me. There was no discernable foreign intonation.

You can also look for writers at eMarketplaces such as eLance.com and Guru.com. Be sure to check references and writing samples. Make sure that the person or company whose services you enlist is able to meet your deadlines and speak with the voice that you want to convey. If you work with a company, get a guarantee that you'll work with the same writer every time. This way, you'll avoid having to train several writers in your voice.

If you continually see the type of content you'd like to provide on a news and information site such as internet.com, see if you can syndicate the content. One good thing about syndication is that you're sure the content will be high quality. That's one of the big "ifs" when outsourcing.

Content Expertise

Another place to look for writers is among content experts. To whom do you look for expertise in your field? Contact them and see if you can't arrange some combination of pay and barter in exchange for frequent contributions. You will likely pay more than if you obtained a writer from eLance.com or Guru.com, but you will also be far more likely to get content that your readers will be willing to open, read, print, and forward.

There is so much information available for free on the Web that yours will need to stand out both in terms of quality and in terms of relevance to keep from being deleted before being read. Tune in for Part 8, which will cover tracking who is reading your newsletters.

8.- How to manage undeliverable email messages

It is not until you send your first e-mail message that you begin to realize that even the freshest list will contain many undeliverable addresses. Most lists - even B2B lists - lose about 30 percent of their addresses in a year. Cleaning up after undeliverable mail won't just be a problem the first time you send - although it will probably be more of a problem with the first mailing than with subsequent mailings - it will be something you have to deal with every time.

Many Flavors of Bounced Messages

When you send your newsletter, you'll supply both a FROM address and a REPLY-TO address for your messages. All automated replies will be sent to the FROM address. These will include all of the following types of automated responses:

- ▶ Undeliverable mail - recipient is not in the address book
- ▶ Undeliverable mail - the domain does not exist

- ▶ Undeliverable mail - mailbox is full
- ▶ Out of office or vacation replies
- ▶ "John has left the company, please contact Jane for matters related to ..."
- ▶ "John has left the company, you can reach him at ..."
- ▶ "We have not been able to deliver this message for 24 hours. We will try for three days. You don't need to take any action at this point."

Unique Format for Each ISP

Every ISP generates slightly different subject lines and slightly different formats for their message. Worse yet, you might blindly delete messages that you thought were undeliverable, but that actually had forwarding information. To complicate matters even more, even though you provided a REPLY-TO address for people who wanted to respond to your newsletter, not all e-mail clients actually pick up the REPLY -TO address. Some people who had something to say to you might get their messages and addresses deleted, or might get filtered into the wrong box.

Even finding the e-mail addresses of those whose messages were completely undeliverable is difficult to do in an automated way because many ISPs return the original message as an attachment, and don't even include the undeliverable address in the message they automatically send you. This means you or your software has to open attachments to see whom to unsubscribe. This rapidly becomes a big, ugly job.

Save Time, Keep Your List Clean

It is definitely to your advantage to keep your list clean. If you're sending on your own behalf, using your own software, and you're not paying by the message, then you are still wasting time sending messages and cleaning out your FROM box.

Take advantage of bounce e-mails to keep your mailing lists free of bad addresses...

Maxprog has developed eMail Bounce Handler available at: <http://www.maxprog.com/EmailBounceHandler.html>, a bounce e-mail filtering and handling tool that recognizes bounce e-mails using a customizable set of rules and extracts the recipients addresses allowing you to use them again to try sending your mail or to take them off your list. eMail Bounce Handler simply connects to your pop mailbox in order to retrieve bounces letting any other message untouched. Once your mailbox is processed and all bounces removed from your server, you will get your list of "bad" e-mails addresses. Then you can export it in order to clean your original list or to try to send your mail again. If you use Maxprog Bulk Mailer, you can name your file "Delete" and then drop it over MaxBulk Mailer recipient list . All addresses from the file will be removed from the list in a snap!