

Rebuilding Email Marketing

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INTRODUCTION

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Many companies start an email newsletter with good intentions. They want to use it to help their existing customers, attract new customers, and promote their goods and services.

But sometimes things don't go as planned.

What was going to be a monthly newsletter doesn't get sent until five months later.

Educational topics give way to straight promotions and sales pitches.

List growth is destroyed in the latest website redesign, which happened to not include any opt-in forms.

But just because all this happens doesn't mean you have to start again from scratch. You still might be able to save and rebuild.

WHAT ASSETS DO YOU HAVE?

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First, you need to take stock of what assets you have.

Do you still have a list of email subscribers?

Do you have a standard email template you've been using?

Did you create email training courses or autoresponders to follow-up with potential customers?

Do you or does someone in your team have the skills to write, edit, and publish an email newsletter?

Take a good, honest look at the condition of your email marketing system. You might be in better shape than you thought.

WHERE DOES IT STAND NOW?

WHERE DOES IT STAND NOW?

The next step is to see where your entire campaign stands now.

- > Are your email software, template, and designs still valid?
Or are they about a *past you*?
- > Does the autoresponder still make sense and lead the potential customer by the hand through your sales process?
- > When was the last time you emailed your list? What was the email about?

HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION CHANGED?

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Knowing the last state of your campaigns will help you evaluate what you need to change, but that's only the beginning.

The next step is to evaluate your organization. Has it changed since your last campaign? Is your product mix different or has the fundamentals of the company changed?

Balance refreshing & replacing

The extent of the changes needed will affect how much work and which process you use to rebuild your email marketing.

Add major changes or many small ones, and you might need to rebuild everything from scratch.

If it's just a minor change or business-as-usual, and you just need a refresher.

HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION CHANGED?

Balance refreshing & replacing

Let's start with what to do if your campaign only requires a touch-up.

REFRESHER

Refreshing your campaign has four parts.

1. Plan what you're going to do
2. Refresh your templates
3. Review your autoresponders
4. Warm up your list

1. Planning

The absolute first step is to create a plan for your recently resurrected campaign. Your plan will need to address several important topics as well as the problems that stopped your campaign the last time.

1. Who is the target audience?
2. What do they want from you?
3. What do they need?

REFRESHER

1. Planning

4. How open are we with testing?
5. What stopped us from using email marketing last time?

Asking who they are is pretty self-explanatory. The better you know your subscribers, the better targeted and useful emails you can send them.

Asking what do they want and need are important questions. On the surface they sound similar but there is a huge difference between them: there is what someone consciously thinks they want, and what they need physically/emotionally.

For example:

Your organization is a charity who helps animals. Your subscribers might **want** a way to donate money to your organization and they'll use your email marketing as a way to remind themselves about it. But what they **need** could be:

REFRESHER

1. Planning

- > a tax-deductible haven for their business
- > the good feeling from helping animals
- > a release from the guilt of not doing enough “good” in the world

Any and all of these needs might be true. In many cases, you’ll find several needs within one subscriber. They can be difficult to narrow down but ultimately this comes from knowing your target audience.

How open are you and your organization to testing? Knowing this upfront will make the campaign easier to build. If your organization is resistant to change and testing new ideas, you’re going to have to plan a conservative route and try to get good results early on. On the other hand, if your organization embraces change and testing then you can quickly try new ideas to see what works the best. You’ll have a much greater variation

REFRESHER

2. Refresh your templates

in your results, but you'll also end up in a stronger place (not to mention you'll be able to move faster and adapt).

Finally, what stopped you from using email marketing last time? Was it the time commitment? Writing? Confusing software? Addressing this in your planning is important.

2. Refresh your templates

After planning, you'll want to take a look at your email templates.

If you don't use any and only send plain text emails, that's okay. You can either use this opportunity to develop a template or you can skip this step entirely.

REFRESHER

2. Refresh your templates

(Personally, I use a very clean HTML template. It looks like plain text but the font size is a bit larger and simple HTML like bold, italics, and links look good)

When reviewing templates, try to send a test email to yourself so you can see exactly how it looks to a subscriber.

In detail, you'll want to check:

- > Does the template look good in email? Is it formatted correctly?
- > Are there any assets or attachments like your logo or photos that are out-of-date?
- > How does the template appear on a mobile phone? Is the text too small? Is it hard to zoom?
- > Does the template make it clear where you'll insert your information?
- > Can you see enough content before scrolling?

3. Review autoresponders

Sometimes updating your existing template is too expensive or time consuming. Only you can make this decision, but if the worth of your time is high, you might consider using a template off-the-shelf, buying one, or forgoing a template completely.

3. Review autoresponders

The next step to rebuilding an existing email marketing campaign is to review your autoresponders, or your automatic follow up sequence.

Since autoresponders are sent to people on a recurring basis, you always want to keep them up-to-date. They will have the biggest responsibility for your email marketing because:

- > The first email, commonly called the welcome email, will have the highest open rate.

REFRESHER

3. Review autoresponders

- > Everyone subscribed will see your autoresponders, while only the current subscribers will see the latest broadcast email.
- > Autoresponders can keep your performance high over time and lend themselves to optimizing.

The best way to review your autoresponders is to send a copy of each one to yourself and read through them carefully. But don't read them as yourself, read them as your ideal customer would read them. Read them as someone who has never heard of you before and this is their first exposure.

What I like to do is to weave a story in my autoresponders. It doesn't have to be complex or award-winning, but if you can write about your organization and what it does in a way that is interesting to outsiders, then you'll create a memorable experience.

REFRESHER

3. Review autoresponders

For example:

If you manufacture clothing, talk about how you find supplies and source the finest quality material. Talk about how many different versions of a garment you have to create before it's ready. And talk about the care and thoughtfulness you put into every product.

”

These stories in your autoresponder will create good first impressions with your customers. This helps them understand you and actually want to open your emails. Which is what you want, right?

4. The defrost

Finally, once you've updated and refreshed everything above you can start to warm up your list again.

The warm up process can be tricky, but there are techniques you can use to avoid upsetting your subscribers.

The best one to start sending valuable emails again. Fill them with content, education, and other tidbits. Don't try to sell too early at this stage, your subscribers are trying to remember who you are.

You'll get some unsubscribes. It happens. Some people may be upset at you, some may have forgotten they gave you permission to email them, and others might have moved on and no longer need you. That's okay.

REFRESHER

4. The defrost

The important thing is to get through the warm-up period with the least amount of friction and damage as possible.

And don't send an email that only says "We're updating this newsletter and will be sending you updates". That's worthless to your subscribers. Just send the updates.

START OVER

START OVER

Now, let's say there has been a major change to your organization and it makes more sense to rebuild everything from scratch. Trying to reconnect and rebuild the relationship with your previous subscribers will be too difficult.

What you'll need to do is to create a new list and follow the standard setup directions. Create welcome emails, add autoresponders, opt-in forms to your website, etc.

(I recommend reading my free Guide [The Absolute Minimum Email Marketing for Software Companies](#) if you're looking to rebuild your email marketing quickly)

Before you do completely start-over though, there is one thing you can do to make the transition a bit better.

Write your old subscribers a short email explaining that:

START OVER

- > your organization is going/has gone in a different direction
- > you have a new newsletter
- > they are welcome to subscribe
- > then give them a link

Don't expect to have the majority of people move over. But depending on the size and type of changes, you might be able to get a significant portion of subscribers to move.

THE P.S.

Email marketing can be a powerful strategy but it does need to be a regular strategy to work. Unfortunately that means you might need to rebuild it if you've stopped. But fortunately, this also means that your competitors might not be using email marketing themselves.

When you're rebuilding your email marketing, it's also a good opportunity to review your existing practices and systems for optimizations. Eric Davis runs [Little Stream Software](#), a one-man Ruby on Rails and web development consultancy. He helps software companies create custom email marketing to engage with their customer, automate their marketing, and grow their business. For more information and advice about email marketing (or to hire him to help you), contact edavis@littlestreamsoftware.com.