

# An Optometrists' Guide to Email Marketing

How often do you use email as part of your marketing mix? If you're waiting until e-mail marketing becomes more "main stream," your wait is over. Consider that,

- 87% of consumers' online time is spent reading their emails, according to David Daniels, vice president, *JupiterResearch* (Dec. 2007).
- 73% of adults in the US use the Internet as of April 2006, which is up from 66% in 2005 according to Pew Internet & American Life Project.
- 91% of college graduates use the Internet, according to the same Pew Internet study.
- 82 percent of the marketers surveyed by Datran Media indicated that they plan to increase their use of email marketing in 2008. - *Datran Media*
- In 2004, email generated \$15.50 in sales per dollar spent, which was 17% more than postal direct mail according to Winterberry Group.

Studies suggest that that the split between email and postal marketing is about a 20% to 80% split. According to an August 2007 DM News article, list-based postal mail accounted for 6.8 million postal pieces in 2006 as compared with about 1.9 million pieces circulated through email. However, email marketing is growing fast. In study after study, marketing managers are reporting plans to allocate more funds to email marketing.

Think about your patient demographics. Based on recent studies, the only practices that may NOT want to use email marketing are those whose primary patient base is largely over the age of 70 and / or is of low-income.

## Why Use E-Mail to Reach Your Patients

Optometrists use email because it's cost-effective and when used appropriately, can increase patient satisfaction. Consider that – with printing, postage and handling -- the cost to send printed post cards to 500 patients (using first-class, bulk rate postage) may be \$400 - \$600. However sending 500 emails can cost less than \$20.

## Using Online Email Marketing Services

Rather than attempting to become an expert at email marketing, you might want to use an online email marketing service (EMS) such as ConstantContact.com. There are many EMS providers who offer services such that sending a professional looking email requires no in-depth computer skills. Most of these EMS providers offer free-trial versions of their service so you can upload a list you create in Excel and send out an email to a hundred or more patients for free.

These services offer many benefits. They offer online tools to help you maintain your list, track your results and convey a professional image. EMS companies are experts when it comes to the technical and legal aspects of email marketing. Their business depends upon maintaining good relationships with ISPs (Internet Service Providers).

ISPs that suspect a company of breaking federal laws when sending unsolicited email or “spam” will put the company (or its offending server’s IP address) on a “black list.” So because these companies have much at stake, they maintain an understanding of the technical issues and current laws governing email marketing.

### **Good Rules for Effective Email Marketing**

- 1. Don’t try to become an expert yourself;** go online and select an EMS provider.
- 2. Send only to people who have given you their email address** or have “opted in” to your email program or with whom you have a prior business relationship.
- 3. Always identify yourself or your practice as the sender.**  
Never try to be anonymous or hide behind a fictitious or misleading identity. Use an actual working email address that identifies your optometry practice or you as an individual (e.g. [patientrelations@abcoptical.com](mailto:patientrelations@abcoptical.com) or [drjim@theopticalcenter.com](mailto:drjim@theopticalcenter.com) or [jameswalters@hotmail.com](mailto:jameswalters@hotmail.com) ).
- 4. Don’t use deceptive or “gimmicky” subject headings.**  
You never want to send out mass emails with gimmicky subject lines such as, “You’ve won the lottery . . .!” or “Emergency: Reply Immediately.” ISPs use software with “looks like spam” algorithms that include such logic as, “if there are too many exclamation marks or use of the word, ‘free’ in the subject lines, it’s spam.” If an ISP suspects a message as being spam, they block it.
- 5. Offer an “opt out” option and follow up on any “opt out” request.**  
ESM provider tools make it easy because their services have built in “opt out” processes and tools to help you maintain your lists. Even if you are mailing to existing patients, you need to include an “opt out” link. Failure to remove someone from your list could result in a fine. So you’ll want to see that the task of maintaining your list is well managed. However, don’t be put off by this requirement. Unless you send email too frequently or send email to non-patients, you will probably receive only about 1-2 opt out requests for every 100 – 500 emails sent.
- 6. Include your phone number, email address and postal address** in the email message so the recipient can get in touch with you however he or she prefers.
- 7. Include links to your email box, your website or your other online offers.**  
Studies show that the more links that are imbedded into the email message, the higher response or “click through” rate.

Once you begin to use group email to communicate with your patients, you’ll soon build up a wealth of knowledge based on your own results and experience. So the best time to get started is now. Think how experienced you’ll be in six months.

By Jackie Engel,  
Management & Marketing Consultant, for TLC Laser Eye Centers