50 Ways to Grow Your Email Marketing Database

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A journey of a thousand miles starts under one's feet.
- Lao Tzu

To accelerate communications, improve service, strengthen relationships and cut costs, organizations large and small are clamoring to utilize email with their customers, prospects and stakeholders. There's just one hitch. Most in-house databases are woefully lacking in email addresses, despite the fact that 60% of U.S. households (and a greater percentage at work) have Internet access.

Increasing the number of email addresses in your database can't be accomplished overnight. Like the thousand-mile journey of Chinese sage Lao Tzu, gathering email addresses starts "under one's feet" and takes action.

It doesn't matter whether your audience is students, subscribers, business-to-business buyers, members, retail consumers, donors, prospects or attendees. Whatever the constituency, your organization no doubt has daily interactions with people whose email address you want in your database. Every one of these "touch points" is an opportunity to gain an email address for further communication and relationship building. If your target audience is especially "wired" and already relies on email, they may prefer it over other forms of communication.

Use the following 50 ideas to stimulate your own thinking on where and how to capture more email addresses. You may have to ask, you may have to persuade, you certainly will have to make it worth their while for someone to share their email address with you. But when you take action to implement and institutionalize methods for gathering more email addresses, you'll be surprised how quickly your database will grow.

Now, take the first steps under your feet and . . .

1 Require an email address on all order, offer and information request forms.

2 Incentivize prospects to give it to you on your web site by giving away something (t-shirt, white paper, enewsletters, information and product updates).

3 Print a blank line for email address on your remittance slips right next to "Amount of Payment Included."

4 Match your snail mail lists against a database of known email addresses (known as email "appending," this somewhat controversial practice can yield match rates as high as 15%+).

5 Ask for it at the conclusion of inbound customer service and inquiry calls.

6 Plead for it on every seminar, conference and trade show sign-up form.

7 Trade for it at every speech and presentation you give ("Give me your email address and I'll send you my speech/PowerPoint/speaker notes.").

8 Call your prospects and customers and ask them to help you update your database and their preferences for receiving information.

9 Petition for it on complaint forms.

10 Insist on it for reservation and appointment confirmations.

11 Beseech customers for it at your walk-in payment or service centers and kiosks.

12 Compel people to write it on warranty and other registration cards.

13 Suggest it be included on all change of address forms.

14 Reward those who leave business cards or complete inquiry cards at entrances and exits of your retail stores ("Enter to Win!").

15 Petition for it on "customer visit" cards and sign-in sheets for waiting appointments.

16 Solicit it on frequent flyer/buyer membership sign-ups.

17 Include a space for it on Business Reply Card "hang tags" when you start or stop any kind of utility service at a business or residence or make a delivery.

18 Seek it on all comment cards ("Tell Us How We're Doing" – and give us your email!).

19 Necessitate it on all order-acknowledgement forms.

20 Appeal for it on surveys and service evaluation forms.

21 Implore givers to give it on gift registries.

22 Urge prospects to write it on the coupons they return from your newspaper and magazine ads.

23 Cajole readers to note it on sweepstakes and contest submissions.

24 Press buyers at Point-of-Sale terminals and check-out to tell you (and make it worth their while with special offers and sale notices).

25 Capture it from business and inquiry cards dropped at a trade show or recruiting booth (and notify card leavers they are opting in for relevant marketing emails).

26 Oblige redeemers of coupons to include it.

27 Beg for it on rebate redemption forms.

28 Obtain it on "rain checks" for out of stock and backorder items.

*Target*X

29 Share it with affinity organizations in a permission-based co-registration deal (where you notify customers and prospects they are opting for additional marketing messages from your partners).

30 Get it on every attendee list for every recruitment fair, seminar, workshop, tutorial and presentation you give.

31 Pray correspondents will include it on your return envelope address area (but you've got to provide a place for them to write it).

32 Entreat readers to send it along with information for a free-trial product, service or subscription.

33 Request it on after-hours customer service voice mail.

34 Expect it for "delivery confirmation" customers (cut your expenses on snail mail and increase service at the same time).

35 Wheedle for it on a "bounce-back" business-reply card with every information fulfillment request sent out ("return the enclosed, postage-paid card and we'll send you . . .").

36 Stipulate that service-alert customers must give it to you ("it's time to: change your oil . . . update the dog's shots . . . re-inspect the furnace").

37 Order, with a smile, that your price-watch and sale-notification customers use it to receive this news.

38 Sway catalog and viewbook requesters to give it up.

39 Involve complainers by providing it if they want a response.

40 Own it by renting quality opt-in lists and creating an offer that requires prospects to give their email (once you "own" the name and have their permission, you can communicate as long as you keep your messages interesting).

41 Command it of those who want notification their merchandise is ready for pick up.

42 Induce discount and coupon club members to hand it over.

43 Secure it from stored-value and gift certificate card holders.

44 Charm it out of personal shopper and VIP customers.

45 Institutionalize it on renewal and re-order forms (and every form you can think of).

46 Coax anyone returning a bill-stuffer offer to include it with their order.

47 Plea for it from pay-by-phone and auto-debit payment customers.

48 Pursue it from birthday and anniversary club members.

49 Inveigle customers to have pass-along and referral customers surrender it on tell-a-friend coupons.

50 Persist in asking for it of web site visitors (and give them a reason to give it up).

Remember . . .

To utilize email addresses you'll need to secure permission for future communication with a simple opt-in check box or notification to the recipient that their email address will be used to communicate with them. That's not as hard as it sounds if you remind recipients upfront how they will benefit by sharing their email address with you. Communication can be faster, simpler and more relevant to their needs. Make sure you give recipients a way to opt-out of future emails with each one they receive. If you keep the information relevant, you'll lose very few. And your organization will be far along in this journey of a thousand miles . . .