

E-mail vs. a traditional campaign isn't either/or

By Tara Marion

E-mail marketing is a growingly effective tool for increasing Web site traffic, building client relationships, prospecting, announcing new campaigns and/or soliciting sales from a self-identified target audience, some industry experts say.

People opt in to e-mail lists when they voluntarily register to receive information from an organization or its affiliates. If people on a list have not opted in to it, they are likely to treat any message they receive as unsolicited e-mail or spam.

"The challenge, like any kind of direct advertising, is just getting it read," said Charles McGrath, director of creative services at **Structure Interactive** in Grand Rapids.

Permission and privacy are hot topics in e-mail marketing. The most common method of permission, according to McGrath, is an opt-in newsletter, which instructs users to "click here" to subscribe, for example.

The ability to get out is just as important as the consent, however.

"The opt-out is a must-have," said Jon Suarez-Davis, vice president of digital strategy at **Biggs Gilmore Communications** in Kalamazoo.

Organizations need to treat their customer list as an asset, he said.

"The need to maintain the integrity of it and respect it—meaning that if you decide to opt out, you won't be receiving any more e-mails."

Starting an e-mail campaign can take organizations years of collecting e-mails of individuals who are willing to receive offers via e-mail. An alternative is to purchase e-mail addresses from independent list brokers, which can be expensive.

"A company that was just starting out and wanted to buy a reputable list—as opposed to one of those spam lists—could easily pay tens of thousands of dollars," McGrath said.

As most small businesses probably don't have the in-house expertise to launch a professional and successful e-mail marketing campaign, some advertising agencies can help with list compilation, creative services and execution.

No marketing campaign is complete without analyzing the results. With real-time tracking reports, organizations are able to view critical elements such as e-mail opens, click-throughs, undeliverables and sales, if applicable.

"That's the beauty of traditional versus e-mail marketing," Suarez-Davis said. "With e-mail, you have instantaneous broadcast out, and then you literally could look by the hour and get immediate online reporting."

E-mail marketing can also be one of the most cost-effective mediums to land a message in the hands of the people who are most likely to respond to it. But the question of whether to go with e-mail or conventional advertising is not an either/or issue. McGrath said there's value in cross marketing.

It's rare to see an ad, whether in print or on television, that doesn't have Web address attached to it, he said.

“What it really comes down to for most businesses is that they want to drive traffic to the site because it can reduce their marketing costs, and it can reduce their support costs if they do it correctly. It can drive follow-up sales, and to do that, they’ve got to get people to go there,” he said.