EFFECTIVE EMAIL CAMPAIGNS

Effective em@il campaigns

Electronic media can be a cost effective way to market your business. Elizabeth Ziemba explores how to use email marketing in conjunction with other marketing communications to maximise business exposure and reach potential clients.

Given the current economic climate and the limited cash flow available, care homes are turning to email marketing to reach potential customers including private pay clients and those with individual budgets or direct payments. Older people and their adult children increasingly use the internet as an easy and reliable source of information about available social care services.

According to the *Telegraph*: 'An average of 50 websites are visited and 32 emails sent per person in Britain every day'. A 2007 study conducted by thinkbroadband.com reported that the UK has the highest average number of daily visitors (21.8 million), the highest usage days per month (21 per user) and the longest average time spent online per month (34.4 hours per user) of all European countries. More people are connecting to the internet every day. These numbers should convince you that email is a powerful way to connect with customers. How does a business go about creating and launching an effective, engaging email marketing campaign?

An email marketing campaign consists of regular communications with a targeted audience to convey consistent information about your business and the services it provides. The emails can be delivered in various formats such as newsletters, invitations to events and personal messages from senior management.

Have you received emails that you find to be effective? If so, analyse their appeal and emulate their success. If an email caught your attention, chances are it did the same for other people.

Step one in developing a campaign

The first step in developing a marketing campaign is to create a plan that identifies the who, what, where and how of the project. Who is your target audience? What content is relevant to them? Where are you going to obtain email addresses? How will you deliver your messages? These and other questions must be answered before the first email is drafted.

Identifying and understanding your target audience is the initial step in any marketing campaign. In general, you will want to attract clients who can afford the types of services being offered. Care homes have three primary audiences: potential service users; family members of potential customers, especially adult daughters, and business referral resources such as local authorities.

Knowing your audience guides the content to be developed for your email campaign. A simple way to find out what is relevant to potential customers and their families is to ask what information they use to make decisions about selecting care services. Keep track of the questions that people ask most often when calling to enquire about your business. Develop a list of topics to create the content for your emails.

Your emails should be informative without being clinical so add your own ideas such as events taking place to which the public are invited as well as human interest stories. Ask your staff for ideas and engage their creativity and interest in promoting your business. Think about ways your business is different from your competitors and develop content that reinforces those positive characteristics. Focus on three main messages that you want to convey about your business and include them in all marketing communication not just emails so that they stick in the minds of potential clients. Aim for the delicate balance between promoting your business and providing valuable information.

The nuts and bolts

With some basics questions settled, focus on the nuts and bolts of an email campaign. Who is going to be responsible for writing it? The person responsible for marketing is the natural choice but for smaller businesses it may fall to the overworked owner/operator. Someone on your staff may be an aspiring author who would enjoy the challenge of preparing interesting and creative communications. A person who loves to write will welcome the assignment and the by-line attached to it.

How many times a year will the email be sent – monthly, quarterly, semi-annually? Quarterly emails are fine, perhaps with a seasonal focus, but monthly emails keep your name in front of people who will remember you when your services are needed. Sketch out the content for each email, leaving room for flexibility as situations change. Schedule each email communication as a 'To do' and make sure it gets done. Marketing campaigns succeed when there is solid commitment within the organisation to making them succeed.

An email campaign can be put into effect if you have email addresses for the people with whom you want to share your information. If you have not been collecting email addresses from people contacting your business, start now. Ask everyone who calls for an email address, send postcards to people who have contacted your business asking to update their contact information including email, and look online for email addresses for referral sources including local authorities. Build up a database of these email addresses and keep it growing.

List brokers

Working with a list broker can help you reach a wider audience right away. You can rent the use of a list of people who have characteristics that reflect your typical customer. For example, if the person who calls your care home most often is a married woman between the ages of 45-60 who lives within 10 miles of your home, a list broker can provide you with a list of email addresses for people who meet these criteria. While there is added expense, your message is sent immediately to more potential customers than you can reach on your own with your limited contacts.

Spam is a concern for all of us and antivirus software programs have ways to identify potential spam to block it from landing in your mailbox. Your email system may have an anti-spam device that prohibits you from emailing large numbers of people. There are companies that provide services such as templates, contact management, reports and technical support for email campaigns so that you can avoid the spam problem. ▶

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▶ For a relatively modest monthly amount, your business can set up an account with such a service that will enable you to send professional emails without them being tagged as spam.

Creating your communication

With all the bits and pieces of your plan assembled, you are ready to create the first communication in your email marketing campaign. There is an art to designing an effective and attractive email but here are some tips in the adjacent box for developing a successful email.

Track the success

Track the success of your email campaign. Email services provide reports to show you how many emails were received, how many failed to deliver, how many people opened the email and how many people clicked through to links. Use the report to improve your database as well as improve your content. When you are ready to move to a more sophisticated level of marketing skills, develop separate emails for your different audiences and track over time which emails are more successful than others. Analyse the differences and continue to improve your communications.

The overall look of your email campaign should be consistent with other marketing materials such as brochures, print advertising, website, direct mail and business cards. Use the same logo, font style and size, as well as colours so that people recognise your materials and the brand you are creating in the same way as you recognise

Coca-Cola without having to read the actual name. Reinforce the three main messages about your business throughout all your marketing efforts so that the messages will stick within the minds of your audience, helping your business grow. After all, that is the measure of success of any marketing campaign.

In the next issue Elizabeth will explore the benefits of website marketing alongside traditional advertising. **CMM**

Useful contacts
www.e-shot.net
www.eshoutz.com
www.montpellierinteractive.com
/email-marketing

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Tips for effective email communication

1 Create an intriguing message for the subject line. A question is often a good way to get people to read your email.

2 Place your logo in the upper left hand corner. It is the spot where our eyes naturally begin looking at a page.

3 Personalise your message. Use 'Dear Mrs. Last Name' instead of 'Sir or Madam'.

4 The top two to four inches of the page are the most important as they are most often viewed so use them well with a high impact message and image.

5 Keep messages simple. Short paragraphs with short sentences are quick and easy to read. Avoid paragraphs that look dense.

6 Use two or three smaller images rather than one larger image. It is more visually interesting and reduces the chance your email will be tagged as spam before it reaches your audience.

7 Create a 'Call to Action', asking the reader to undertake an immediate specific action such as 'Sign up today for our free seminar by clicking here'.

8 Include an 'unsubscribe' link in case individuals do not want to receive additional emails.

9 Once your email is created, be sure to test it by sending it to yourself as well as two to five 'critics'. Ask for help with proofreading as well as comments about content. Test links to make sure they work including links to your own website. Edit and retest your revised email before scheduling it to be sent to your contacts.