

There are generally three ways to deliver an email marketing solution, in-house email software, database and content driven email marketing solutions, and online email marketing systems like MailChimp.

In-house email software

In-house email systems such as Microsoft Exchange and Lotus Notes are usually satisfactory for an email campaign to less than 100 contacts. Email systems such as these are generally poor at mass email marketing, not least because they cannot handle high email volumes and are not able to easily manage, for example, the legal requirements of handling email unsubscribe requests.

The other challenge is that systems such as Microsoft Exchange tend to add extra formatting into emails, meaning that the fonts, layout and formatting of the initial well-designed email that you have created may not always render correctly once it arrives in a recipient's inbox. You will probably still need to create your html email so it formats correctly using products such as Dreamweaver or SharePoint Designer.

Database and content driven email marketing solutions

To build an integrated online and long-term profitable relationship with your customers, partners and suppliers, a logical conclusion for larger organisations with large customer databases is to integrate your chosen email marketing system with a single centralised contact and online content database.

This allows you to manage email campaigns without having to duplicate or migrate contacts or content. You can also avoid having to maintain and synchronise multiple sets of data in different locations and databases.

In addition, having your contacts in one central database means you can select particular audiences or groups to receive individual emails populated with bespoke content for their needs, and by having a range of central email templates you are able to create and manage email campaigns easily and respond to leads directly through one central system.

Clearly a central database driven email marketing strategy will require more initial time and effort than a simple email system. However, organisations of all sizes are increasingly recognising the benefits of having a long-term integrated email marketing solution at their disposal to improve awareness and develop and process high quality new business leads cost effectively.

Online third party email marketing systems

A solution often considered first is the multiple low cost online email marketing systems that are available in the market, which provide a readily available, easy to use and often free solution to the need for a rapid business service awareness, product launch or retail sales driven email campaign.

Most of these systems like MailChimp are cheap or free to set up, free or low cost per email, and easy to use, and can also handle email bounces and unsubscribes within their software. However, in most cases you will find that, whilst there are some built-in email templates for simple needs, to create a clear brand identity and your own email personality, you should consider creating emails from your own templates.

As the majority of third party online email systems are stand-alone systems, it is much more difficult for them to be easily integrated into your in-house contact database, CRM system or business sales process.

Create your email marketing plan

An email marketing plan might sound complicated, intimidating, and time-consuming to put together, but it's not as hard as you might think. Below are the most important steps you need to know to get started.

Define your audience

Before you start designing, writing, and sending campaigns, you should define your audience. Once you get a grasp on who will be reading your emails, it will be much easier to decide what to say to them. This will depend on whether you are selling direct to consumers (called B2C) or to businesses (called B2B).

If you already have subscribers on your list, their signup method can be used to help identify them. For example, if they subscribed during the checkout process through your online store, they're customers. A collection of subscribers that found you through your website or at a public event (like events, trade shows, exhibitions etc), would be classified as more of a general audience.

If you don't have subscribers yet, think about exactly who is your target audience. How will you find these people, and what do you envision they'll want to read in your emails?

If you are an author or a blogger, subscribers may be interested in your written content. If you're a retailer, subscribers will want to know about your new products or offers or how they can better use what they have already purchased from you. If you're a business, your audience is likely made up of enthusiasts of your product, service or brand, or you may want to target new clients or partners:

- **Geography** – do you want to target a local area, country wide, a region or global audience?
- **Type** - what are the best sectors of business most likely to buy your products or service?
- **Size** - if you sell to businesses, how big is the most likely client for your product or service?
- **Job role** - again for other businesses you may want to target a likely department or job title

Determine your content

Now that you know who you're talking to, it's time to think about what you're going to say to them. Think about why this audience signed up for your emails in the first place, then focus on delivering that to them.

It can be helpful to outline general content types that you might include in each email campaign. Later, as you're putting together your eNewsletter, you can refer to this outline to make sure you stay on track.

For instance, an example company here keeps a content list:

- Upcoming events being attended
- Recaps / photos from recent business wins
- Popular posts on Facebook or news
- News coverage in your sector with links
- Trends in your sector (perhaps linked to a Blog)
- Recruitment section

Each month, a good guide is to choose one to four pieces of content from the list to create a campaign.

Think about what content you're already creating that you might want to share with your subscribers. A popular product, blog or Facebook post, or a website news article about your company are things your readers will likely find interesting. Also think about what content you'd like to create for your audience.

Tips for creating and gathering content

Your content is the most important part of your newsletters. These tips will help as you start to create and gather compelling content that will speak to your readers.

Treat your readers like VIPs

People who subscribe to your email list are so into you that they've given you permission to their inboxes. Honour this privilege by letting them be the first to know about new products or sales. Give them access to special benefits as subscribers. Or go one step further by sends exclusive sales offers to your readers.

Make the email useful

Think about which emails you open and which you delete right away. You don't open an email that doesn't benefit you in some way. Make sure your newsletters are giving your subscribers something they don't already have. Without loyal readers you have a weak publication, whether it's a magazine, eNewsletter or promotional email. Email content strategists will tell you that 'the reader comes first' so try and delight them with your content. The majority of email newsletters are all about linking to a company's own projects, products and news, which can become dull unless written and presented well.

Show personality

No one wants to read a dry, boring newsletter that drones on with too much text, long sentences, few pictures and no media links. Try to write in the same way you would speak to one of your customers. By injecting some personality into your emails, your tone and sense of humour will come through, and these are all important reasons why your customers probably signed up for your emails in the first place.

Keep it short

Most people are bombarded with emails every day so keep yours to the point. Make it easy for your readers to scan an email quickly, if they want to or need to. If you'd like to share a longer piece of content, feature one element as an excerpt or key quote, and put a 'click to view more' link to the rest.

Determine your sending frequency and goals

When you should send your emails out can be tricky to decide. There is research that suggests that Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings are good for B2B emails, as people have cleared out their Monday email inboxes and are not winding down and less receptive, as can happen on a Friday. However, if your product or service is consumer related, sending your email out just before people leave work could encourage them to spend more time reading it on their way back on the train, or at home with their favourite glass of wine. Put yourself in your audience's shoes and decide when they are most likely to have both the time and inclination to read your email content.

Ultimately, it's up to you to decide what works best for you and your subscribers. We recommend that you email at least once a month, but don't feel the need to commit to that immediately. Feel free to skip a month if you don't have anything truly useful to say. Remember, interesting content always comes first. But be careful not to skip more than a couple months in a row, however, as some subscribers may forget they opted in and report you for spam. Remember also to plan ahead to avoid holidays or special events.

Make a schedule

Not everyone is going to send on a regular schedule but, for a lot of senders, having a timeline is helpful. Timelines give writers, designers, and managers who create email content a deadline to work toward.

Your email marketing schedule will depend on your industry, type of content and sending frequency. With that in mind, here is an example of how you might plan out your campaigns:

- Jot down content topics, art ideas, and other basics for your upcoming eNewsletter.
- Write out what you'd like to say about each topic, pull photos into a folder and note links etc.
- Create your campaign in your chosen email system. Proofread for errors and grammar and send a few test campaigns to make sure everything comes out formatted correctly on a range of devices.
- Send your email campaign. Track the opens and clicks as they come in (80% usually in 48 hours).

Managing a successful email campaign

Email marketing is often seen as an 'easy fix' to get new business, but careful consideration is required to get email campaigns right and ensure success. The core principles for email success are relatively simple:

Creating an effective email marketing strategy requires consideration of the following points	
Decide on your target audience and if you want to create highly focused or general broadcast emails.	✓
Clarify the message you wish to communicate, and if you want a single email or a cycle of messages.	✓
Decide if you will focus on awareness of your organisation, interest in your services or new business.	✓
Decide on the best and most appropriate 'call to action' required from your target email recipients.	✓
Create a robust, automated email lead management process that feeds your sales process directly.	✓
Decide how to handle email bounces and the process to manage email unsubscribes (a legal need).	✓

Once you've decided on and implemented your email system, prepared your email data in a structured format and developed your first email. Now you need to decide how your email campaign will work.

First you need to decide what you'd like to get out of your email marketing. Are you looking to direct readers to your website? Help promote sales? Increase traffic at events?

These reader decision points are often known as a 'Call to Action' or CTA, the things that you want your readers to do after they've read a section of your email. Always set CTAs for your campaigns, then keep track of their progress over time.

Key considerations to make your first email campaign a success

- Estimate the level of email response you expect, and review what level your business processes can handle.
- Decide what is a successful email campaign and whether you use email opens, website clicks or leads.
- Review if your campaign will go to all the contacts in your database, or if you will request email opt-in first.
- Decide on your email time plan and how you will manage email bounces and email unsubscribe processes.
- Set up an email campaign success monitoring process to help ensure you can improve future campaigns.

Other email system considerations

Whilst it is often not the primary consideration, it also needs to be borne in mind that maintaining an ongoing email campaign with any volume of potential customers is likely to require a member of staff dedicated to email marketing. You will also need an email marketing budget for both email data and email distribution. When deciding on the best email method, consider the following requirements:

- Ensure you have your contact and email data in a structured column format in a central database.
- Establish an email process and frequency and a staff member to run and follow up your email campaigns.
- Create an email template, email database and email marketing plan and follow-up email response process.

Suggested best practice email guidelines

- email campaigns should be 'opt-in' based, meaning sending an initial email to your contacts to get them to agree to future email contact from you, before you send out your first email campaign.
- Consider email size and layout carefully and ensure it is well laid out to make it a sensible size on-screen.
- The best time for emails is Tuesday to Thursday, between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. (avoid Monday and Friday)
- Don't send emails out too regularly. A good guideline is that once a month per contact is most suitable.
- The 'from' line and email 'title' are the most important parts of the email. Use a real name to appear on the 'from' line and an email 'title' that is short, succinct and relevant to the email 'call to action' (CTA).
- Most email CTAs aim to get recipients to click to relevant web content, with any leads driven from there.
- Your title line should grab attention and appeal to your target audience. To avoid your email getting treated like spam the title should be less than 30 characters. Avoid 'free', 'money', £, !, and capitals
- Review success of opens and clicks from each email campaign and change titles and content as required.
- Most email campaigns get an 'open' rate of 10% to 30%, depending on content and contacts. Web 'click' rates also vary, depending on the email campaign, but a guideline is between 1% and 3%. For an email campaign to 10,000 recipients, you would therefore expect to get 10 to 90 website clicks.
- All email unsubscribe requests should be dealt with immediately or automated, to avoid legal issues.
- Keep your email list up to date and ensure that all email contacts are contacted and reviewed regularly.

How HTML Email Works

Devising your email marketing plan is a great first step, but before you can actually start designing, coding, writing, and sending HTML emails, it's good to know how they work and what tools you'll need.

Multipart / alternative MIME format

The most important thing to know about HTML email is that you can't just attach an HTML file and a series of images to a message, then click send. Most of the time, your recipient's email application will break all the paths to your image files by moving your images into temporary folders on the recipient's hard drive. You can't just paste all your code into your email application, either. Most email apps send messages in plain-text format by default, so the HTML won't render. Your recipients would just see all that raw source code, instead of the email you designed for them.

Instead, you need to send HTML email from your server in multipart-alternative MIME format. That means your mail transfer agent bundles your HTML code, plus a plain-text version of the message, together into one email. That way, if a recipient can't view your beautiful HTML email, the reliable plain-text version of your message is displayed. This is why a lot of people mess it up when they try to send HTML email themselves. You either need to outsource email creation, program a script to send email in multipart-alternative MIME format, or use an outside vendor like MailChimp to deliver email for you.

Delivering HTML email

A classic email marketing mistake is to set up forwarding lists, CC'ing copies of a message to all customers. This causes lots of problems, especially when a recipient clicks 'reply-all.' There's no way to track analytics or personalise content for a big group and, as recipients can see the entire list of recipients, the email may come off as unprofessional or impersonal. Exposing all those email addresses also raises privacy concerns.

That's why email marketing services like MailChimp send your message rapidly to each recipient on your list, one at a time. Unlike your work computer linked to your local ISP, which probably has a standard monthly bandwidth limit, email marketing vendors use dedicated mail servers capable of sending hundreds of thousands of emails every hour.

Email delivery considerations

Sending mass emails has delivery considerations. If you use your own server, your ISP may throttle outgoing emails or shut your account if you send too much too fast or exceed a monthly bandwidth limit.

Email firewalls and ISPs that receive your campaigns typically don't like receiving lots of emails from a single IP address at once. So if you only send occasional email campaigns from your IP, you may want to throttle your delivery or spread them across multiple IPs, to avoid accidental blocking. Email marketing services usually split your campaign into pieces and send it out over lots of different IP addresses to avoid this issue. If you send emails from your desktop email program, you're likely connecting through a local ISP. If you don't have a dedicated IP address set up with your ISP, you're probably sending emails from a dynamic IP address. ISPs and spam filters don't like receiving lots of emails from a dynamic IP address, because it looks like a hijacked home computer, so you should always send from a dedicated IP address.

Common mistakes

There are a lot of common mistakes people make when creating HTML emails, from sending without permission to confusing transactional emails with email marketing to purchasing email lists.

Designing and coding

Keep your design simple and straightforward and focus on your message, not your cleverness. Focus on typography first. Type is the one thing that's consistently rendered across different email clients. Most email clients block images from first-time senders by default, so your subscribers will almost always see the text of your email before they see anything else. Your message should still be conveyed clearly and effectively without any images your email might include.

Keep in mind that your email's layout should stay right around 600 pixels wide. This is because when people have their email inbox set to 'preview window' mode, and this window is about 600 pixels wide. Many email clients provide a preview window that's rather narrow, and this helps to ensure your entire design will be visible. Even with the limit of 600 pixels, there are plenty of ways for you to lay out your content to create a clean-looking design for viewing in standard email clients or on mobile devices.

Avoiding spam filters

According to ReturnPath, 80% of permission based emails sent by legitimate email marketers fail to reach a recipients inbox, as they are classed as unsolicited email 'Spam' or junk mail and blocked. Spam is both annoying and against UK law, and new European legislation is arriving in 2018 that affects email. Even legitimate email marketers sending to permission-based lists can sometimes get into spam filter trouble.

Spam filters consider a long list of criteria when judging the 'spamminess' of an email. They'll weigh each factor and add them up to assign a spam score, which helps determine whether a campaign will pass through the filter. If the score exceeds a certain threshold, your email will get flagged as spam and go straight to the junk folder. Each spam filter works differently, and 'pass' scores are determined by each server administrator, so an email could pass through Spam Filter A, but get blocked by Spam Filter B.

Testing your email designs

Once you've designed and coded your first HTML email template, you may be tempted to write your content and start sending. But first make sure your template will work in as many different email clients as possible. Once you've found and fixed the inevitable bugs and typos, then it's time to send.

Test in different email clients and ISPs

All email clients are created differently and can render content in HTML email in different ways. Some clients will strip your BODY or HEAD tags, or all content below a certain line. Flash should generally be avoided as it doesn't work with some clients, while other clients will block images by default. These inconsistencies make it very important to test your campaign in as many different scenarios as possible.

Send tests to friends and colleagues

It can be difficult for some users set up test computers or test in many different applications. By keeping your designs simple and sending a number of test emails to a few friends or colleagues, who have different email clients and devices, you can be sure to catch broken images, typos and other bugs.

Measuring email performance

Once you've designed, coded, written, tested and sent your first email marketing campaign, maybe now you're wondering if it was worth all the effort. How can you measure your performance and figure out what's working and what could use some work?

There are particular metrics and data you can observe and questions to ask to make these decisions.

Clicks

How many people clicked links in your email? Which links did they click the most? Did they click on product links, or research links? Did you see a rise in purchases? How long after you sent the campaign do links keep getting clicked? Your click rate can help you determine the success of your campaign and reveal general trends in the behaviour of your subscribers.

Unsubscribe rate

What's your unsubscribe rate after each campaign? Less than one percent is average for lists that are contacted regularly, and well-maintained. If you send very infrequently or if it's your very first send, your unsubscribe rate may be much higher.

Check your rate after each campaign. If you see it spike after a particular campaign, consider whether it had anything to do with your content. Maybe you're sending too frequently, or maybe not enough.

Bounces

Review bounce rates after each campaign. Any email system will break down your bounces into 'hard' vs. 'soft' and clean your list accordingly. Soft bounces are emails that exist but couldn't be delivered for some reason. For instance, their server might have been too busy at the time of your delivery. Hard bounces are completely undeliverable, possibly because the email account doesn't exist anymore, or there could have been a typo in the email address. Hard bounces should be removed from your list immediately.

Website traffic

Check your website traffic logs after each email campaign. Does traffic pick up? Do orders increase? Was the spike in traffic immediate, or did it come gradually? How long does the new traffic last, and how long should you keep the graphics and pages that your email points to hosted live?

Systems like MailChimp integrate with Google Analytics to illustrate how your emails affect website traffic and drive revenue. Get Consultants can advise on how best to use Google Analytics with MailChimp.

Signups since last campaign

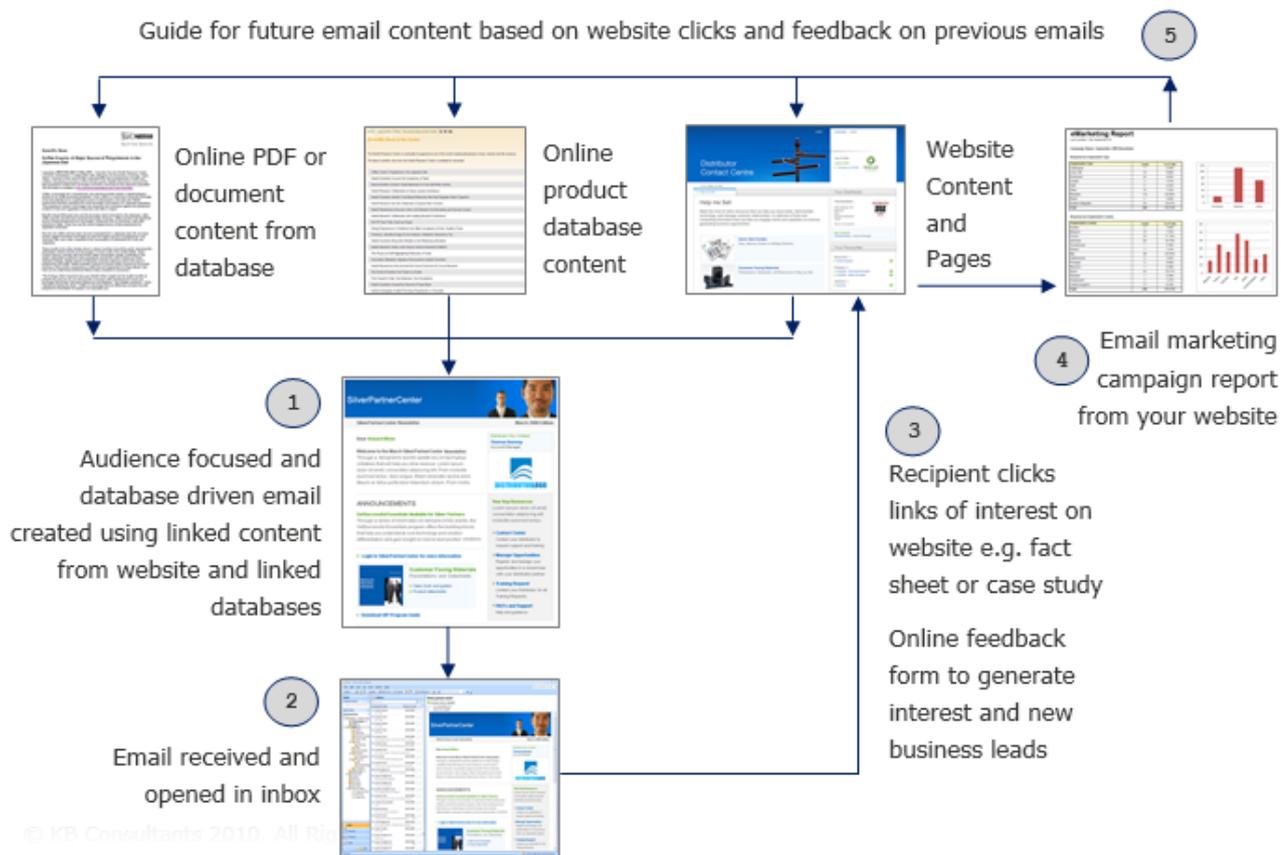
After each campaign, do you get lots of new subscribers? That could mean your loyal readers are forwarding your emails to friends. Don't see any list growth at all? Maybe you need to make your content more interesting or relevant to your customers. By reviewing signup trends you improve future emails.

Integrate email marketing with your website and client database

Probably the biggest factor in the re-emergence of email as a favoured eMarketing tool is the increasing integration of email systems with websites as a primary new business generation mechanism.

Many organisations are now able to create integrated and low cost web based email solutions with a central customer client and partner database directly linked to a central website. These email marketing systems are able to send out automated emails at regular intervals with bespoke content from a range of linked online sources, to defined customer audiences.

Modern email systems can be combined with inbuilt website response mechanisms and workflow, to define what your customers are most interested in. You can filter out and process the best new business leads to provide sales teams with warm leads to follow up, all generated via email and your website.



Email creation cycle example using an integrated audience filtered content and feedback reporting

Another benefit of integrated and database driven emails systems is the ability to filter out particular audience groups to receive variations of emails in an automated process. Emails can be created with specific content for each target audience or from feedback from previous emails, with additional content populated from your current website or links to product or service data and related online documents.

What to do next?

So you now understand emails, but want to know more. To find out what online, software based or bespoke email system is best for you, as well as how to design your perfect email, call GET Consultants.