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# Using e-mail as prospecting tool: do's and don'ts

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

E-mail is becoming the preferred way to communicate, especially by people who are busy and need to control interruptions.

Using e-mail for prospecting isn't about promoting your offerings or selling. As with cold calling, e-mail prospecting is about building trust and starting relationships.

Three ways to think of e-mail are spam, e-mail marketing and e-mail prospecting.

- We have all received spam, and we all hate it. Spam is unsolicited bulk e-mail or junk e-mail. It involves sending identical, or almost identical, unsolicited messages to a large number of recipients. Spam usually contains tricks to bypass e-mail filters and rarely can the receiver identify the sender or the originating address. Avoid spamming; it won't help your sales or image.
- E-mail marketing is different from spam in that the list is more refined and consists of contacts that fit specific parameters. Resistance is less because the fit of offerings to the audience is higher.

The best way to build an e-mail-marketing list is permission-based e-mail. Begin by asking current customers for permission to e-mail offerings to them. If you have a retail location, ask customers to sign up and drive people to your Web site with coupons, newsletters and promotions.

Advertise on local target search engines. Leverage existing relationships by having clients promote you to potential customers or other local businesses. Joint marketing is a great way for people to get to know you because the message is coming from someone prospects already know and trust.

- E-mail prospecting is different because it's a personal e-mail, sent to a specific individual with a specific message to the recipient. The sender's contact information is readily available, and the subject line is short, clear, not deceiving and devoid of claims.

More importantly, the brief content of the message is specific and relevant to the recipient. The sender is trying to initiate contact to discuss business.

Terri Lee, owner of Lively Marketing!, says, "Forget about long copy. If the message is too long, the recipient will not read it. Short is better. Relevance and ability to scan content quickly are key components of a successful e-mail, as many usability studies have demonstrated."

The purpose of e-mail prospecting isn't to sell or close deals. E-mail prospecting is simply another way to initiate conversations, generate interest, start relationships and increase awareness. Selling is still a contact sport and is most effective when done personally, so save it until the time is right.

E-mail prospecting is very effective in business-to-business sales that normally are lower in number and higher in price and value. Extensive research always precedes each e-mail and prevents e-mailing to a cold list. At a minimum, have a specific contact name, within a specific organization, with specific responsibilities and known needs that are likely to fit your offerings.

The more you know about your prospects, the better response you'll receive. Use a rigorous and thorough screening process to enable a high match to the recipients' specific situation. You can start by using company information resources such as Reference USA or Dun & Bradstreet along with SIC, NAICS codes and individual Web sites.

Information that's more detailed may be available with the more expensive resources such as Thomas Register, Hoovers and others.

Your message must be relevant. Don't forget to use events, news items and other occurrences as a bridge or introduction.

Here's an example: "I read about your involvement with ABC Association. I thought you might be interested in this related article about their convention in Boston next week. I am in a complementary industry. Are you open to a brief conversation regarding how we might be able to benefit each other?"

Or: "After visiting your Web site, and seeing the depth of your services, I realized there could be a potential win-win between our organizations. How can we work together?"

The message is short. It implies research and knowledge. It contains a compliment. It asks for action in the form of a response.

Here's another: "Your name was mentioned as a person I should know in your field. I have knowledge of your business and believe we could be a valuable resource to you. How can we discuss this?"

E-mail prospecting won't replace cold calling, referrals, networking and direct mail, but is another effective tool when used properly.

Using e-mail for prospecting isn't about promoting your offerings or selling. E-mail prospecting is about building trust, engaging others and starting relationships.

Remember, every time you touch someone with e-mail, an impression is conveyed that will be either positive or negative. Track what works for you and realize different industries will have different response rates.

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