

## **SEGMENTING YOUR EMAIL LIST AT SIGN UP- WHAT A CONCEPT!!**

Segmentation of your email list to create relevant experiences for your customers is key for higher response and deliverability. Do not skip over the *easy* part: applying a segmentation strategy to the registration process.

The best time to offer a choice of email types, content or frequency is at signup: that lets you build a larger list of engaged, active subscribers.

The first and last rule of registration is gaining permission. Regardless of which permission standard you use (double opt-in, validated opt-in, single opt-in or opt-out), it's imperative to eliminate any surprise when subscribers don't recognize what you've sent as what they thought was promised. Surprised subscribers do not respond, and they unsubscribe or report you as a spammer to ISPs, causing complaints that hamper inbox deliverability for all your email.

Tell your subscribers what they can expect from you-- in terms of frequency, timing, content and use of data. Disclose it during data capture, on the confirmation/thank you page as well as in the welcome message.

### **Sign 'em up, then segment 'em out**

For many people, it's a best practice to convert as many website visitors to your email list by using a one-field form-- collecting an email address only. So how do you segment based on just an email address? Well--you can't!

Use the landing page to gather more data. Don't make it mandatory, but be sure to present some benefit to the subscriber. Sometimes it's enough to let subscribers know that they can get more custom or relevant information if they provide additional data. You can offer a whitepaper. In some ways, offering content as the "thank you" is stronger than other incentives because it's relevant.

### **Capture data with logical flow**

If your form is multi-page, then it's easy to see how dynamic rendering of fields and drop-down boxes can be used to customize future pages based on customer input. Even simple data-enabled HTML forms can create custom experiences through the order of the questions and the language you use for each segment.

Keep your form short and easy to navigate. Always collect the email address first, and then ask for interests and demographics, letting the prospect know why you need the information at each step. Be sure to include a link to your Privacy Policy or a statement that "we will never spam you."

Use a "progress bar" to show how much longer the form is, or how far the participant has come in the process. This helps reduce churn.

### **HP Example**

Hewlett Packard's Technology at Work email program requires each subscriber to fill in a three- to four-page form. The value proposition promises subscribers a customized newsletter, specific to their hardware and product use. At each stage of the form, each selection dictates the next set of questions. Select a specific printer, and all subsequent questions should speak to the utility, software and accessories for that printer. If the subscriber indicates a future purchase is imminent, another set of questions is triggered to help Hewlett Packard send relevant promotions.

Give subscribers the option to self-select into segments that appeal to them, rather than assume that what you plan to send is most welcome. Highlight this option on the confirmation page and in a "New Subscriber" survey that you send out two to three email messages into your program. Include an offer: "Like what you're getting? Get more, less or change it completely here."

### **Customize confirmation, welcome**

Confirm the details of your email program on the confirmation page and in the welcome message. It's never safe to think that anyone will read it just because it's on the page, in the footer or a click away in the privacy policy.

### Offer appropriate next steps

The confirmation page and welcome message are not merely destinations, they are portals. Include segment-appropriate links and offer next-step navigation to speed new subscribers onward to relevant content, product reviews or contact information. A prominent site search feature on these pages can be very popular. *Omaha Steaks offers new subscribers "exclusive offers selected just for email subscribers." As soon as you sign up, you receive a "thank you" offer.*

Condense the distance between the registration and the value you send via email-- your welcome message is the first opportunity. Be sure it arrives in a timely manner (we recommend immediately, or within 24 hours) and is specific to the content and value promised.

### Promote change

It's a best practice to provide your email subscribers with an easy-to-access Email Preference Center and link to it from your footer. Be proactive, too. Encourage subscribers to visit the Center and update their content preferences, take a survey, sign up for more/different newsletters and update their email addresses.

Send a specific "Get More of What You Like" campaign every quarter, or include a promotion in the sidebar of your newsletter. Be sure your program keeps pace with your subscribers' lifestyles and life stages, to ensure relevancy and readership (and low spam complaints).

### Take credit for what you do

Many retailers, travel marketers and B2B marketers send offers only to their best buyers. Often, however, the recipient doesn't know how special they are, because it's not mentioned in the email that this is truly an exclusive offer.

If you are segmenting based on buyer status, and offering special incentives as a result, take credit! Let your VIP customers know they are special, and that you've sent them these great offers *because* they are valued customers. American Express positions itself as a partner to the small businesses that carry its business gold and platinum cards. Recently, the company offered a high-profile promotion opportunity to a select list of business cardholders-- and the email clearly notes *why* they were selected. The email also follows the best practice of asking for feedback at the bottom: "Tell us why you would or would not consider this opportunity."

**Key Takeaway:** It's easy to get customers to subscribe to your newsletter, but it's hard to keep them subscribed. Making your content relevant from the earliest moment in your email relationship -- registration - is one way of keeping those customers around--Food for thought.

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eMARKETINGWERX is a consultancy that helps clients develop winning email strategies and implement those campaigns to reach their desired CBI's.

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