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## Are Your Prospects Reading Your Emails?



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Eight ways to ensure consumers look forward to your message

Keeping in touch with customers has always been a key way for insurance agents to keep their clients and attract prospects. While many producers may equate email marketing with spam and dismiss it, it can be an effective marketing tool that provides a great return on investment.

According to a recent Direct Marketing Association survey, email returns \$57.25 for every dollar spent — far more than traditional advertising or direct mail — while driving \$7.7 billion in consumer sales and \$8.8 billion in business-to-business sales. Email also has a number of advantages over traditional marketing methods — you can precisely target and personalize messages to recipients, as well as track detailed results such as open, click, and conversion rates.

The trick, of course, is to create emails that not only make it into your recipients' inboxes, but that people actually want to receive and read. Following are eight tips for creating an effective email marketing campaign.

### 1. Personalize your message

The more personal your emails are, the better they will perform. An effective email message will address the recipient by their first name. More importantly, make sure your emails come from you by ensuring your name appears in the "from" line; no one wants to feel like an anonymous email address on a list of thousands who are receiving your message.

### 2. Review your opt-in procedures

Insurance agents thrive on local relationships, but unsolicited email can break down trust and loyalty. Make sure you have permission to send the email to consumers. An easy way to build an opt-in list is to present clients with an opt-in form while they're in your office.

While obtaining permission, provide registrants with an expectation as to the frequency and content of your emails. Make sure your procedures for unsubscribing, changing an email address, and maintaining a user profile are user-friendly.

### 3. Grab their attention

The average person decides what to do with an email in just eight seconds. They can choose to open it, read it, delete it, or mark it as spam. To that end, your subject line should always honestly represent the content of your email — not doing so violates the CAN-SPAM Act. Be sure to keep it concise and include a call to action or brand name your customers will recognize. A good rule of thumb is that a subject line should be no more than about 50 characters long in order to avoid it being truncated by some of the most popular email delivery systems.

### 4. Provide valuable content

With every email you send, consider what types of information will interest your clients. You can use email to deliver information on insurance policies, details on new or expanded services, or tips on financial planning and products.

### 5. Don't forget the fundamentals

Far too many emails are sent with grammatical, spelling, and usage errors. Typically, this happens when agents and marketing executives rush to get something out there when they should focus on quality; remember that every email is a reflection on your practice. Typos and misspellings can also very quickly land your message in spam filters.

### 6. Avoid blocked pictures

Image suppression, a safety net used by email clients to protect recipients from unknown senders, can be a major stumbling block to creating effective, readable emails. If you rely too heavily on images in your email efforts, chances are your message isn't getting across. In places where you may typically use graphics, use HTML text instead.

### 7. It's all about timing

The last thing people want to read on a Monday morning is a sales email. Some industry research indicates that Tuesday and Thursday mornings, roughly between 10 a.m. and noon, are among the best times to send your emails. Test different combinations to find out when your audience is most responsive.

### 8. If all else fails, ask

If you want to know whether customers find your content valuable, why not simply ask them? You can include one simple survey question at the end of each email or ask customers when they visit your agency and let the results dictate your future content decisions.

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