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Chicago Web Marketer Helps Restaurants Grow Their Businesses Through Email Marketing

“Successful web marketing is all about content now,” says Tom Casale, President of Chicago-based Simplified Solutions. The eight-year old company offers small- and mid-sized business-to-business companies and non-profits integrated web services—including website development; content tools such as podcasting, blogs, and RSS; search engine and email marketing; and specialized software which Casale and his team develop on a custom basis.

Casale started his company in 2001 with the simple idea of offering the most value-based solutions and tools on the market. “Before I started my company,” Casale says, “I sold enterprise software that included an email marketing module. This software was cost prohibitive for smaller companies—yet they are the ones who benefit from this type of tool. I discovered Constant Contact® about a year after opening my business.”

What attracted him to Constant Contact is its power and affordability—the same functionality larger companies enjoyed with their enterprise software.

“Constant Contact offered just as much functionality but at a far lower cost, he states. “And, Constant Contact’s value-add is that in addition to providing an engine for easily sending out email, they also provide expertise on how to be a better email marketer. This sets them apart from other companies.”

Casale’s email marketing services include promotional emails and e-newsletters that tie directly to his clients’ websites and other online marketing tactics. (For example, a client can take an e-newsletter and turn it into a podcast.)

When he started his business he would get pushback from clients regarding e-newsletters, but nowadays his clients come to him already knowing they need to get their story out there.

“Most of my clients choose ‘à la carte’ options with regard to my services,” he reports. What this means is that some use only his e-newsletter or podcasting services while others use a combination of



Partner at a Glance

Company: Simplified Solutions

Location: Chicago, IL

Services Provided:

Website Development
Web Marketing Services:
Podcasting / Webcasting
RSS
Blogs
Search Engine Marketing
Video
Email marketing
Customized Software

In Business: 8 years

Employees: 6

More Information:

www.simplifiedsolutions.biz

Business Partner Since:

April 2002

Constant Contact Accounts: 19

Business Model:

Web Development and
Web Marketing Services



Constant Contact
Connect. Inform. Grow.

Simplified Solutions

“If a restaurant is having a slow week for one reason or another, we can quickly put together a promotional email designed to get patrons to the restaurant.”

e-newsletters, podcasts, and blogs. One of Casale’s clients, for example, is a financial columnist whose podcasts are one of the top downloads on iTunes®.

Constant Contact an integral part of Simplified Solutions’ offerings

Casale reports that 25- 30% of his clients use Constant Contact—whether to send out monthly e-newsletters or other promotions. And, of those clients using Constant Contact, 90% use custom HTML newsletters. Casale and his team manage about a dozen accounts “start to finish”—meaning they add content to the template each month, upload it to Constant Contact, and then review the campaign once it has gone out.

The remainder of his email marketing clients oversee their own campaigns. Casale does “shoot emails” periodically to these accounts to touch base, but he tries not to interfere too much.

Rather than quote project fees or charge per service, Casale charges a monthly retainer where clients pre-purchase 6 – 8 hours per month at \$90 per hour. He then uses this time to sit down with clients to help them craft their message and to prepare, schedule, test, and send the campaign. The retainer also covers campaign reporting and list cleanup.

“Whatever time is left over,” reports Casale, “is used for website updates. We’re really big on ensuring our clients’ websites are updated on a monthly basis because it’s fresh content that helps sites rank well in the search engines.”

For self-serve clients who need a custom e-newsletter template, Casale’s base price starts at \$400 and goes up from there, depending on the project.

Integrated email marketing programs for restaurants

While Simplified Solutions’ client list includes corporations, non-profits, and consultants, the company has found its niche with restaurants and offers these clients customer loyalty programs designed to help them fill seats and increase the bottom line.

Although each program is customized to the client, they all follow a similar format and include: website development, email marketing, offline customer sign-up programs, and online reservations.

“We tell prospective clients that they can communicate their unique personality via a well-designed website,” states Casale. “For restaurants we steer clear of corporate-y sites and instead design fun, upbeat sites with personality.” These sites feature Flash movies with music, “VIP mailing” sign-ups, current promotions, and the ability for patrons to make online reservations.

Once the website is in place, Casale then implements the following components:

Email marketing – Casale has found that restaurants do really well with email marketing



Simplified Solutions

– either by sending newsletters or daily/weekly promotions. For example, a restaurant can send out an email offering a discount to anyone who makes an online reservation—either that day, week, or month. Says Casale, “If a restaurant is having a slow week for one reason or another, we can quickly put together a promotional email designed to get patrons to the restaurant.”

Refer-a-Friend programs – For restaurants that need to build an email list fast, Casale develops incentive programs. For example, a restaurant can offer someone a free dessert if he or she signs up three friends. “Anyone can add a friend to the list,” he says, “but we always send a separate email asking these people if they want to opt-in.” Using this type of program, a new restaurant signed on 600 people in six weeks. “They were thrilled,” says Casale. “They would have had to spend thousands of dollars to reach these people otherwise.”

VIP programs – For those patrons who do hand over their email addresses, the rewards are high. VIP members receive event notifications and exclusive discounts—for example, 10% off their meal if they book an online reservation.

Affordable online reservation capabilities – Simplified Solutions partnered with Prime Reservation in order to offer restaurants an affordable, customized hosted solution for managing online reservations. “This capability, coupled with email promotions, is the backbone of our loyalty program,” he states.

Wait staff incentives – The key to a successful customer loyalty program is offering the waitstaff incentives for collecting email addresses. Simplified Solutions provides their restaurant clients with pre-printed capture cards and then educates managers on how to train their waitstaff to collect patrons’ email addresses.

“It’s not enough to simply give waitstaff these cards,” he says. “You have to educate them on the importance of email marketing, how the loyalty program works, and how it ties into the bottom line. And let’s face it, you have to make it worth their while.” Which is why Casale recommends restaurant managers offer wait people an incentive—such as \$1 per name or a gift card—for meeting nightly or weekly targets.

Online press releases – To increase an establishment’s “buzz” factor—especially when the restaurant is new or expanding—Simplified Solutions uses its proprietary RSS tool that allows the company to send out press releases across the web. (Even if you don’t know what RSS is, you’re using it anytime you read news on the Internet. RSS stands for “Really Simple Syndication” and it’s how sites like Yahoo! offer updated news and other stories.) With this component, clients can get the news out about their establishments and help improve their search engine positioning, too.



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Anthem Restaurants Reaches Customers Through Email Marketing

“We’ve used Constant Contact since 2002—when we opened the Furio restaurant,” says Stephanie Eglin, Marketing Director for Anthem Restaurants, a company that owns Furio, a fine Italian restaurant located in Scottsdale, Arizona, and two Salty Seniorita Authentic Mexican Restaurant and Cantinas, also located in Arizona. “Tom recommended Constant Contact as part of his loyalty program—and now we can’t live without it.”

Anthem began using Constant Contact for its Furio database in 2002. Using refer-a-friend programs and waitstaff incentives, Furio began sending promotional emails and a monthly e-newsletter to 1,014 patrons. Their list has grown to almost 5,300 names.

Ditto for Salty Seniorita Cantina. Anthem began sending out promotional emails to 3,847 patrons in October 2003. This list now holds 6,700 names. Anthem maintains separate databases for each restaurant. A marketing and email best practice, maintaining separate lists allows Anthem to keep customers’ data private (i.e.: it’s not passed between restaurants) and clean. It also makes it easier to target patrons with the right promotions—a Salty Seniorita patron, for example, doesn’t receive promotions about Furio.

Eglin reports that 60% of Anthem’s marketing efforts are now web-based. “We credit Simplified Solutions with the growth of both our lists,” says Eglin. “Tom makes sure we maintain a strong value in the emails we send out. We don’t send out any junk or low-value email and all messages benefit the customer in some way—whether through offering them a redemption coupon or news about an upcoming event.”

She goes on to add that they also put a lot of work into educating their waitstaff about the importance of email marketing. “We tell our staff we’re not spamming our customers and that email marketing helps keep our restaurants filled—which in turn ensures they have a job. They’re instructed to make sure capture cards sit on the tables at all times and to carry them in their apron pockets. We give gift cards to whoever can collect the most email addresses.”

The company also adds approximately 10 – 12 names per 1,000 emails sent using its refer-a-friend programs.

Eglin reports that Furio is currently running a “Martinis and Manicures” promotion tied to Simplified’s Prime Reservation system. Run on Monday nights, the promotion offers patrons a manicure and a martini for \$10. “Monday nights are typically slow,” says Eglin, “so this is a fun way to get people in the door.”

By sending out an email promotion, the restaurant can fill 40 seats at an average cost of \$30 per seat—which works out to approximately \$1,200 in revenue. “We make a good profit after accounting for our Constant Contact and design fees,” states Eglin.

Other promotions include offering 50% off bottles of wine on Sunday nights and “boutique” wine nights the first Thursday of each month.

“Simplified Solutions has helped us keep our restaurants filled,” sums up Eglin. In fact, we’re opening two more Salty Senioritas right now. I have no worries that we’ll keep our staff busy waiting on patrons—thanks to Simplified Solutions, our web marketing efforts are in good hands.”