



Content Is King:

A How-To Guide for Writing Valuable Email Communications

Constant Contact®, Inc.
1601 Trapelo Road, Suite 329
Waltham, MA 02451
Phone: 1-866-876-8464



Good content comes from within

When it comes to ramping up an email marketing campaign, one of the biggest challenges small businesses and nonprofit organizations face is coming up with useful content to send out to permission-based mailing list subscribers. Yes, you could send the latest sales pitch or plea for donation, but if customers aren't ready to part with their money, what value does that newsletter issue bring them?

In this guide, we'll give you tools and ideas for creating compelling content that will provide value to your email recipients and keep them opening your messages each time they arrive in the inbox.

Share Your Secrets

As a business owner or organization leader, you have a wealth of secrets to success that have brought you to where you are. Everyone loves to be in the know, so share some of those insights with your subscribers. A few examples of "secrets" that could serve as valuable content:

- Restaurants or other foodservice businesses could share a few favorite recipes with their fans. The chef could share recipes of items on the menu or provide exclusive dishes to readers. Even general cooking tips — remedies for an over-salted recipe, perhaps — can keep an audience coming back for more.
- Craft stores could provide do-it-yourself guides to some of the finished products they offer. Crafty customers will love the new challenges and will come into the store to purchase the materials they need.

- Liquor retailers can list drink mixes or offer wine pairings for special meals, particularly around the holidays.
- Consultants can use their newsletters to share advice with fellow business owners on best practices for growing a business or growing a mailing list.

In these examples, the main content of the message will feature content the reader can use in his or her own life or business. But that does not mean your entire email has to be devoid of a sales pitch. You can add a "sell" piece with a coupon block that can offer a percentage off the products and service mentioned in the newsletter.

Share Knowledge

Those in other consumer-oriented businesses might be thinking, what kind of tips can I offer? There are plenty of opportunities for you to provide knowledge-boosting content to your subscriber base.

Good content comes from within

- Accountants can share their knowledge with customers. Finances and taxes are always a big concern for people, so share ways to get financially organized and better prepared to deal with the IRS come tax time.
- A boutique could offer up unique gift ideas for that hard-to-shop-for customer. Think outside the box (pun intended) for gift ideas, particularly around holidays.
- Spas can give readers home relaxation tips or ways they can keep that professional manicure looking good.
- Home furnishing stores can provide customers with great tips on how to better decorate their home or how to find great values to make their house look great.
- Consignment stores can offer tips for getting their used stuff cleaned up and ready to sell.
- A doggy supply store could offer tips on pet health, hygiene for dogs, and dieting ideas for the overweight pup. List special events to get people — and their pets — into the store.

The takeaway here: Think about your business and ask what benefits you provide to your customers and clients. Then use your email communications to highlight those benefits to your customers in an informative manner.

Rely on Your Customers' Expertise

Another option for content is to make your customers the experts. Sometimes, because they're not as invested in and knowledgeable about your products and services as you are, they have a simplified perspective. Often, they value things about your products and services, or they have uses or tips, that you might not even be aware of.

- **Let your customers give advice.**

Instead of giving subscribers *your* tips, ask a few of your best customers what advice they would give to fellow customers. For example, a gardening center might send an email newsletter with customer tips and ideas for creating indoor gardens. The gardening newsletter could include related offers for plants mentioned in the newsletter.

- **Be an expert interviewer.** Interview your customers about their experience or expertise and share the interview with your audience. For example, a travel agent might interview a customer who recently took a trip to a featured destination. In this case, including a few photos from the customer's trip would be a great addition (after all, a picture is worth a thousand words.)

Good content comes from within

Turn questions into content

Customer questions posed to you through email, over the phone, on social media, or through any other channel are a perfect base for creating content. Chances are good that more than one person has the same question, so your answer can benefit many. Take the question and answer and turn it into an article for your newsletter.

For business-to-business organizations, monitoring social media sites — particularly Twitter and LinkedIn — for industry-related questions and trends can provide similar content. Take a question posed to a group and answer it in your newsletter. Doing so can demonstrate your expertise in your industry.

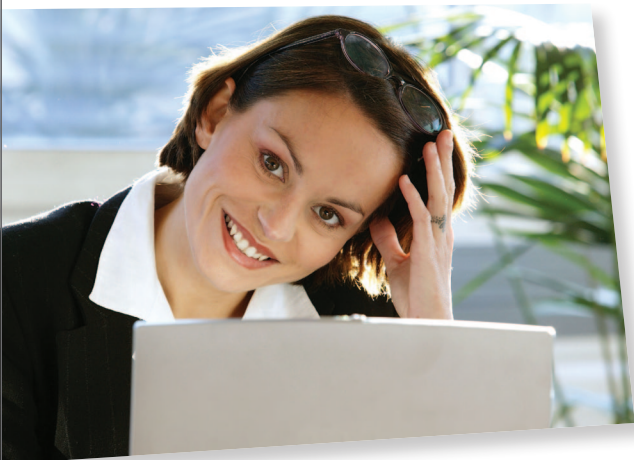
If you're going to use your questioner's name or any other identifying information, it's recommended that you get his or her permission before publishing the question in a public forum such as your email campaign.

Share your humanity

Nonprofit organizations can add content that takes the reader beyond just a plea for donations. Organizations should publish "mission statements" that bring the mission of the group to life. For instance, a local Leukemia Society could feature a child and family dealing with the disease. Doing so puts a real face on the issue for readers.

Profile staff members as well and share their story of why they're involved in the organization. People like reading about other people, even if they don't know them personally. And anytime you do a story about a person, make sure to include his or her picture. That makes the story come to life.

While the main body of your newsletter should be an article that ties to your mission statement, nonprofits can add a soft sell by listing ways subscribers can help without donating money. For example, they could donate used clothing, time, or goods. Make it obvious that there are many ways they can help.



Share content from others

Content from third-party sources

Not everything you offer in your email communications has to be original content. Sharing third-party expertise that can benefit your audience is a great way to deliver value without having to write it all yourself. Of course, when using third-party content, make sure to properly attribute where the content came from and link back to the original source. And don't just repost another article. Explain why you like it, and what you hope your readers gain from reading it.

There are three kinds of third-party content: **Collectible Content, Pre-written Content, and Ghostwritten Content.**

Collectible Content: Gather a handful of articles from the web that are related to your industry and the interests of your subscribers. In your newsletter, provide a brief description of each article followed by the link to the piece. This is a fast and easy way to put your newsletter together with quality content. All you have to do is share your opinion. It's that simple.

A quick way to find content when you need it: consider saving articles from your favorite email newsletters and blog posts in a folder in your email inbox. This way you won't have to look far for content.

Another great place to find articles to share with your audience is Google News (<http://news.google.com>). You can enter a search term such as "small business marketing" and the news database will pull up all articles related to small business marketing posted within the last few days. Just pick the ones that work for your audience.

You can automate this process as well by having Google News email you a list of the latest articles on a particular subject each day. Just enter a search term into Google News and then scroll to the bottom of the web page to sign up for instant, daily, or weekly alerts.

And of course, your favorite social media sites can provide great suggestions for articles. If you see someone tweet or post an article, save that URL in a document and refer back to it later.

Before linking to a website, keep in mind that some online publications may have a reprint policy that includes linking. Generally, though, in this age of interconnectedness, it should be more than alright to link to an article you've found, just as long as you don't claim to have written it yourself.

Share content from others

Pre-Written Content: There are many articles written by experts that are available for you to reprint (for free!) in your email newsletter. In fact, the web is filled with these types of articles. You just have to know where to look for them. Two recommended sites:

- <http://www.ezinearticles.com>
- <http://www.ideamarketers.com>

If you use an article from these sites, you will need to publish it in its entirety and include the author's name. At the end of these articles the author always includes a paragraph promoting his or her business along with a link. Usually these links are harmless and just lead to the author's web page for products or services. Be sure to check out these links before publishing the article so that you'll know what content your audience will see.

Ghostwritten Content: The third option is to hire someone else to write your articles for you. It's not as expensive as you may think. Best of all, with ghostwriting you retain all rights to the article and you can put your name at the top as the author. Just give the writer a subject, word count, example of what you believe good writing to be, and a firm deadline.

Wondering where to find quality writers? Here are a couple places to start your search:

- <http://www.elance.com>
- <http://www.guru.com>

Keep in mind that you'll want to consider in advance what themes and ideas you want the articles to cover. This way the content will be higher quality and will truly stand the test of time.



Share your content through social media

Repurpose your content across social media

Hitting Send on your email communication does not signal the end of your content's lifecycle. You can continue to use it across multiple social media channels in an effort to reach more customers, members, and prospects by linking to it on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, or whatever social media site(s) you use.

Conversely, you can use social media to promote upcoming email content and drive subscribers. A day or two before your email is scheduled to go out, tease what the email is going to be about and direct fans, friends, and followers to sign up if they want to get this valuable information.

There are many ways a business or nonprofit can generate compelling content that will keep customers and members opening and interacting with their email campaigns. Once you have a handful of ideas, you'll find the process is easier than you thought and you may even have more ideas than space to use them, which is a good problem to have.

