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## 1 Could e-Mail be the New Telemarketing?

How to use  
e-mail to market  
your business

By Carl Davidson

Now that water dealers have had suitable time to grieve the passing of telemarketing as a viable marketing technique, it is time for us to get on with our lives and look for a new “automatic” marketing plan. This article will discuss some ideas on how to use e-mail to market and sell.

#### e-Mailing Current Customers

Many of us do not stay in touch with our customers, which is no wonder considering the cost and trouble of postage. e-mail makes communication inexpensive and easy. The only requirement to get started is to have every employee (including the owner) trained to ask for e-mail addresses in every conversation. Make sure every form asks for an e-mail address as well. Be sure to explain the benefits of receiving the e-mail, such as free information, online service appointment setting, safety notifications and more. You can't just say, “Give me your e-mail address so we can sell you stuff;” you have to inform customers of the benefits.

Imagine the sales you can generate. Let's assume you have 1,000 e-mail addresses for current customers. If you were to send an article on the importance of resin cleaning, along with a special on the service or filter changes, it would generate revenue. The cost is nothing, but the benefits are great.

#### Privacy Policy

It is a good idea to have a privacy policy posted on forms and your website before you begin collecting e-mail addresses. Your policy might include a statement that you will not sell, rent or lend their information to any other company or person. If you promise this, be sure to uphold it.

#### Finding New Customers

In addition to staying in touch with current customers, e-mail is great for marketing and finding new customers. It requires a bit of time and money investment to generate a database, but the return is immediate and the cost is small. The best way to assemble a database is very low-tech—doing it by hand. To do this,

we suggest you hire your children, family members or people who want to work from home. They can find e-mail addresses in their spare time and pass them to you. You can also make it a one-hour-per-day type of job for someone on your staff. The cost will be low. We suggest you pay these e-mail prospectors a flat rate per address. To determine a fair amount, see how many you can collect in an hour and design your pay plan accordingly.

These workers can use search engines like Google or Yahoo to find associations such as the local chamber of commerce and other groups who post lists of their members. They can also use [www.superpages.com](http://www.superpages.com) to find companies in certain industries or businesses, which are a great source of leads. Remember that although businesses may be interested in point-of-use coolers or bottled water, they are also people who need help at home with water.

#### Basics of e-Mail Marketing

E-mail marketing is a long-term investment. Responses will grow if you continue to send reasonably spaced e-mails. We recommend starting with an e-mail every 30 days. As with any advertisement, the effectiveness of your ad will be determined by the attractiveness of your offer and the structure of your e-mail. We suggest you pay particular attention to the Four Fs:

**Frequent.** As we mentioned, decide on a frequency and stick with it. One e-mail will not do the job.

**Fast.** You only have a few seconds to get their interest. Make sure the “regarding” field and the opening sentence are interesting.

**For them.** Make sure everything in your e-mail is for them. They don't care about you and what's new for you. Be sure your e-mail is written from their point of view; they will delete it if you talk about yourself.

**Free stuff.** One of the basics of Internet selling is offering free stuff. This can be an article or a free sample or something they get just for sending back an e-mail or calling. This also gives you a way to tell if people are reading and responding to the e-mails.

#### Using Common Software to e-Mail

Once you have your list and your copy written, you can use the “mail merge” feature of common programs like Outlook, Outlook Express or MS Word to send customized e-mails with the customer's name, equipment, area and other personalized information. It is easy and fast. Best of all, there is no printing or postage.

#### Is this Spam?

Yes it is. But just as we get mad when we receive mail and calls we are not interested in, people will appreciate e-mails that are of interest. It is only spam if they are not interested. Be sure to follow the latest federal and state laws regarding spam, which include:

- No hiding the source of the e-mail
- No misleading statements in the “regarding” field
- Allowing customers an easy and effective way to unsubscribe
- Disclosing your company name and address
- Announcing somewhere in the e-mail that it is an advertisement

#### Make your Website Interesting & Current

One use of e-mail is to send people to your website for more information. Built-in counters can let you know how successful you are in generating traffic this way. When creating a website, keep in mind that you need to tell people about it. Create a website that is easy to use and sells. Don't make it too artsy. Many people do not have high-speed access, and studies show they will only wait a very few seconds for the site to open before they move on.

#### Using Professionals to Write your Newsletter

Finally, we suggest you use a professional to write your newsletters and website content. The main benefit is to get it done on a regular basis. Dealers who do it in their spare time often don't get to it.

Try some of these suggestions and you will be pleasantly surprised at how e-mail can be a part of your marketing and success. *wqp*

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