



This article has been contributed by Nancy Smyth, CQA, President Sunburst Software Solutions, Inc., and Managing Editor IDNAC Newsletter
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The Importance of Keeping in Touch With Current Customers/Clients and How to Attract New Customers/Clients

We all have a current list of customers/clients that we deal with, and a fairly standard list of “support” issues that we deal with; but how often do we regularly “really” communicate with our customer/client base? What really makes us stand out as an expert in our field in order to attract new business? By “really communicate”, I mean:

- Notify them of new services you offer
- Notify them of product updates
- “Teach” them how to effectively deal with that “standard list of support” issues
- Talk to them about items of interest to their business
- Let them know that you are expanding your business

How do you stay in touch with your clients/customers? I mean it’s virtually impossible to literally pick up the phone and call each and every one of them; especially if you have a large client/customer base.

Email is one of the most effective and cost-effective ways to communicate with your existing customers/clients and attract new clients.

Creating a newsletter is a great way to stay in touch with your current customers/clients, and extending that newsletter to visitors to your site will allow you to build your credibility, establish your expertise in a certain industry, and to project a credible image.

All of the **really good** marketing courses or articles I’ve read in the last five years convey the same message; that if you want to attract new customers you need to establish credibility with your prospects. One way to do this is to publish articles and/or tips in a newsletter (that you offer free of charge). Publishing these articles is a good way to project a credible image with website visitors and a means of building a relationship with them. Some of the marketing courses I’ve read even go so far as to suggest that you add 4 – 5 new pages of content to your website on a weekly basis! Yikes....

How can I accomplish this? Excellent question! Let’s take a look at why email communications/email marketing is a good idea for your business.

So, Why Email Marketing?

It's Inexpensive

Email marketing is an affordable way to stretch a tight marketing budget - and whose budget isn't tight these days? Unlike direct mail, there is virtually no production, materials, or postage expense. Email marketing is 20 times more cost effective than direct mail, and can cost as little as a fraction of a penny per email.

It's Effective

Email marketing enables you to proactively communicate with your existing customers and prospects instead of passively waiting for them to return to your Web site or storefront. It is a highly effective way to increase sales, drive site or store traffic, and develop loyalty.

It's Immediate

Email marketing typically generates an immediate response. The call to action is clear: "Click here to take advantage of this offer", or "to learn more about this service." Initial campaign response generally occurs within 48 hours from the time the email campaign is sent.

It's Targeted

You can easily segment your lists using a variety of criteria or interest groups so that your promotions go to the individuals most likely to respond to your offer.

It's Easy

There are Web-based email marketing products for small and medium businesses. Most include professional HTML templates, list segmentation and targeting capabilities, as well as, automatic tracking and reporting. So, you are free to concentrate on your unique message.

Sounds good, how do I get started? Another excellent question! Actually there are a couple of methods...

Getting Started:

The Hard Way

- Create an HTML Template to use for your newsletter or create a Word Template for the Newsletter to send as an attachment.
- Create sign up links on your website promoting the newsletter and manually building your newsletter mailing list.
- Find a means of tracking the number of times an article was viewed (so you can see what types of articles your readers are most interested in).

All of these can be time-consuming and still leave you without good information in which to move forward. You'll also have to manually deal with bounced emails, perhaps having your newsletter blocked by spam or junk mail filters, or even worse....someone could report you as a "spammer" and then ALL of your email could be blocked.

The Easy Way

Sign up for a **Constant Contact** account at

<http://www.constantcontact.com/index.jsp?pn=idnacorg>

With Constant Contact you can send 50 emails per month at no cost, and still take advantage of all their "free tools" like:

- ✚ The Wizard that creates a signup box for your website (it produces all the html code and you simply copy and paste it to your web pages)
- ✚ The ability to customize a visitor signup form (where you can gather as much or as little data about the individual as you'd like)
- ✚ Manage your subscriber list automatically
- ✚ Handle bounced emails

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- ✚ Automatically handle opt-outs (people who no longer wish to receive your newsletter)
- ✚ Report how many times each article was viewed, and by whom
- ✚ Allows you to schedule what day and what time you wish to send the newsletter out, and then forget it
- ✚ And best of all, allow you to create awesome looking newsletters on-line using templates that you customize with your company logo, contact info, graphics, etc. all without having to know one bit of HTML!

Once your newsletter list contains 51-500 names the charge is \$15.00 per month.

Ok, maybe you are wondering *why* it seems like I'm "pushing" Constant Contact; so let me tell you.

For the last 5 years I've been publishing a quarterly newsletter for our own customers – that's been pretty easy because I have all my customer contacts synched with my email client; but almost a year ago I decided to make that same newsletter available to site visitors and I've done that list entirely by hand... which has NOT been a fun process, so I'll share what I've learned along the way:

- ✚ Initially I did some HTML Code with a "click here" that would open the email client of a visitor, complete the subject with "Newsletter Signup" and all they would have to do was hit "send". Unfortunately the spammers who "harvest" email address from web pages snatched that email address and all of a sudden I was being inundated with spam. It got so bad that they were using that email address to send spam to me.
- ✚ Then I had a "Flash form" for the newsletter signup which "hid" my email address from the "harvesters", but that meant that site visitors had to type their name and email address into a form and I had to copy and paste that information into the newsletter list – you wouldn't believe how many people don't know what their own email address is...and managing the "bounces" became unbearable.
- ✚ Then I did a "script" which worked like the initial method, except that it would still hide my email address from harvesters, but keeping that list updated was also becoming a real hassle.
- ✚ The newsletter itself is HTML format, so I can keep an exact copy of the newsletter on the site in an archive; so I created a template, updated it for each issue of the newsletter and then would copy and paste all the HTML code into my email client and then upload the original HTML page to the site.
- ✚ By now my list is getting so large that I can't send all the newsletters at once; so I have to break up my "newsletter" email address list; imagine the fun when it comes to making sure that you aren't sending duplicate emails because people signed up twice....
- ✚ More and more people are using Spam Arrest and the like to reduce the amount of junk mail that they receive (which is great)...*but...don't you think if you sign up for a newsletter that you should **ADD** that email address to your "safe" list? So now I'm spending hours responding to "these requests".*

Does any of this sound familiar to you? If so, you know this is **NO** laughing matter! It's really time-consuming, really frustrating, and makes you wonder "why" you are doing this in the first place....

I started looking into email marketing products (research is **so much fun** – not!), comparing prices, comparing services, comparing features, etc. Eventually I signed up for a 60-day free trial of *Constant Contact*. In no time at all I had my **entire** newsletter subscription list imported and categorized between customers and website visitors, had the new code for the signup box, copied and pasted the code into my existing web pages, uploaded the changed pages to the website, configured the “opt-in” auto-responder that’s sent to everyone who subscribes, and in no time at all I have created a very crisp looking newsletter template; all without having to hard code it myself! Next, I update 3-4 places for each newsletter...set a date and time that I want the newsletter to go out and I’m done.

The day that the newsletter was due to go out, I was a little nervous – to say the least; after all I had *given up control*. The next thing I knew I received an email that said:

Your email campaign, named June e-Newsletter, was sent on 06/01/2006 around 8:55 AM EDT. Don't forget, you can easily monitor the effectiveness of your campaign by visiting the Email Campaign Tracking area of your Constant Contact home page for real-time metrics and stats.

Below is a copy of the stats by 3 pm EST that same day: Unfortunately, what this table doesn’t show you that the real statistics page does, is that by clicking on the number in the Unique Click-throughs column you’ll see a list of all the people who opened that article, that way you can really “see” who is reading your articles!

Click-through Statistics

Campaign Link	Unique Click-throughs	Click-through Distribution
http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com	2	3.6%
http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com/	0	0.0%
http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com/newsletters/article1.pdf	6	10.9%
http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com/newsletters/article2.pdf	12	21.8%
http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com/newsletters/article3.pdf	6	10.9%
http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com/qb4conresources/article4.pdf	24	43.6%
http://www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com/trial.html	5	9.1%
Total Click-throughs	55	100%

All in all, this product rates a **very cool!** I would recommend it to each and every one of you who is reading this article. Try it for yourself for 60 days....*you have nothing to lose!* <http://www.constantcontact.com/index.jsp?pn=idnacorg>

Want to see the template I designed? Here you go:



May 2006

"QuickBooks for Contractors Newsletter" by Sunburst Software Solutions, Inc.

Dear (Subscriber First Name),

You may want to include a personal greeting, a note or editorial written by the owner of your company. By including a photo, you can make your greeting even more personal.

Know your target audience. Who are your most important customers, clients or prospects, and why? Know what is important to them and address their needs in your newsletter each month.

Business Productivity



Article Subheading

Make your newsletter a valuable source of information and advice and you will successfully position yourself as an expert.

Include strong call-to action links to various pages of your website to drive traffic and open up additional possibilities to convert browsers into buyers.

QuickBooks Tips & Techniques



Article Subheading

Try using case studies, success stories, testimonials or examples of how others used your product or service successfully.

Stick to simple words, short phrases and paragraphs consisting of 1-3 short sentences. Your recipients should not have to think too much, parse long sentences or read big sections of text.

QuickBooks Training



Article Subheading

Provide an attention-grabbing headline or summary for each article.

Include articles on topics of interest to your readers, relevant news and events.

Important Note



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Our products and proven QuickBooks advanced job costing methodologies help contractors achieve their business goals by providing full-featured, high-end functionality at a fraction of the cost; with excellent customer service.

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We would love to hear your experiences; I am positive you will find this program of great value!

Nancy