



# Find your on line customer

Guest author **ALEXANDER MEYER** reveals the secrets of online data acquisition.

**M**OST COMPANIES NOW recognise the benefits of email marketing: it's cost effective, easily evaluated and is a great way of engaging your customers and prospects.

But what if you haven't been capturing email addresses?

What if they aren't fully opted-in? What if you aren't aware of the legal requirements?

The next logical step is to grow your permission email database with forethought while keeping a thorough eye on quality and start seeing some real acquisition returns.

So how best to choose from the plethora of email acquisition options out there?

**Offering a relevant competition prize matching the profile of the prospect you are trying to attract always works best.**

The first part of call must be the subscription process on your website.

All the golden rules apply; make it prominent, make it easy, make it quick. It's astonishing how many companies bury their lengthy subscription forms deep into their website – the fastest growing databases usually stem from a prominent capture box on the homepage.

Traditional offline marketing works well in driving people to sign-up online to e-newsletters, mailers and print advertising. Even TV campaigns can attract new subscribers. However, the numbers are generally low as people forget to sign-up. Also, the slice of the population who spends most of their time using email and websites to inform their buying decisions will not find a flyer a particularly intuitive medium.

## Buzz effect

So how do you capture people while they are sitting online?

An option is to create a viral email campaign asking your email database to forward to a friend. Through ingenious creatives or fantastic offers, this 'buzz' effect can be a great way to grow your database. But unless your database is already of a substantial size, the number of referrals generated will be low and the risk of duplicates may be fairly high.

The key is to see what works best in your industry. Companies all have the same desires to grow their email database, but how best to go about it varies from sector to sector.

Quality is just as important. Obviously you could collect newsletter subscribers very fast, but only professional list growing assures that these potential customers stick with you for a longer time and don't unsubscribe immediately after the first email you send.

eCircle has been working with companies from retail, travel, gambling, charity, utility, publishing, mobile, automotive, leisure, media and medical to tailor their acquisition strategies for email addresses.

## Correct audience

For example, for retail and travel sectors (where most of the population is a potential customer), competition prize draw email campaigns are very successful. The important thing here is to get the theme of the campaign and the prize offerings right to appeal to the correct audience.

So, if a travel company would like to attract subscribers likely to buy a holiday, it makes sense for the prize to be vacation-related. Similarly, retailers will do well to offer relevant offers or prizes.

Using this prize-draw method will

help companies grow their opted-in email databases by a whopping 600,000 subscribers per year. They are fresh, double-opted-in and are all new potential buyers willing to receive newsletters.

By increasing the breadth of an email marketing campaign, the number of conversions goes up in correlation.

Of course, the new subscribers need to be moved from a 'cold' status up the scale to become customers; but an email newsletter is a great way of making this transition through a personalised message, relevant news stories and attractive retail offers.

## Email-savvy industries

It is not just the more email-savvy industries of travel and retail that are growing their email databases.

The industry is now seeing companies across all sectors accelerating their email growth which is approaching the 5-10 million subscriber level.

This makes email a very powerful

## Top tips

Growing your own permission database requires extensive knowledge of traffic sources and online registration processes.

The first email is important! You can keep unsubscribe rates pretty low by tailoring the first email a user receives from you to the subscriber's expectations.

If you've generated an address online (eg via puzzles) never just send your newsletter. Remind the addressee of the puzzle they have participated in so they know why you are sending them email.

branding and sales tool when you're able to communicate your company's messages, brand and campaigns to this number of people every month, or even week, the increase in business can be staggering.

Other industries, like utilities, automotive, publishing, etc, have the added difficulty of a very narrow target audience. For example, the automotive industry will only want to generate subscribers who are interested in their cars, so campaigns asking for only people interested in a test drive or receiving

more information about the car would generate the highest response.

Publishers will only want to grow their audience by people who want to subscribe to their specific magazine titles, which would mean even more creativity is used in developing an offer that interests people and encourages them to subscribe. Puzzles and click-through emails prove to be particularly successful for these industry sectors. Again, offering a relevant competition prize matching the profile of the prospect you are trying to attract always works best.

There are various methods that companies can use to grow their opted-in email databases, ranging from simple capture boxes on homepages to organic methods like viral email and off-line campaigns.

However, for companies who experience high ROI from email newsletters, it makes sense to grow the database quickly and see even greater returns.

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