

## Boost your newsletter subscription rate

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Email newsletters are still one of the main distribution and loyalty-building strings in a marketer's bow, but acquiring quality opt-in addresses is key to email marketing success, says Volker Wiewer, CEO of eCircle.

An e-mail marketer's number one concern should be the number of emails actually reaching the inbox and being read by their subscribers. Whilst creative layout and attractive content are often extolled as the most hardworking components of the email newsletter, email marketers cannot live by art alone. The volume of subscribers that actually see your newsletter in the first place is largely determined by the quality of your subscription process. Ultimately, marketers themselves have the most influence over their email deliverability by following best practice. In order to keep this rate as high as possible, here are my subscription optimisation tips.

### First things first: confirmed or double opt-in?

We are always asked which subscription procedure is better. From a legal point of view both confirmed and double option are satisfactory. It might be true that via the confirmed opt-in more subscribers can be generated, but you will notice that the unsubscription rate is much higher and complaints about spam may occur more often. Using the double opt-in process you can clearly prove that the user has subscribed to your service in the unlikely situation that a complaint is made. The subscription rate is slightly less than via the confirmed opt-in because of that extra step to confirm the registration, but you usually generate high-qualified addresses that deliver high response rates, little complaints about spam and low unsubscription rates. I would therefore recommend you choose the double opt-in process.

### The power of design

Your email opt-in page has one purpose: to convert as many visitors as possible to subscribers. Its design, layout, and copy should therefore be similar to that of a landing page. Keep it clean and simple, include samples of your newsletter, and make your value proposition attractive. I would also recommend including a brief email policy located near the "submit" button and a link to your company's more-detailed privacy/email policy.

### **The perfect subscription form**

Streamline it. Generally, the subscription to your newsletter should be made with as few clicks as possible and the completion should be possible without any scrolling. Forms with only one column can be understood much easier so they are much more user-friendly. You should pay particular attention to the choice of words when obtaining the agreement to general terms and conditions or any other regulations. When comparing the phrases: "I have read & understood the general terms and conditions", and "I agree with the terms and conditions", the latter is the clear winner. The important point here is to inform your clients without irritating them. Also, to ensure that subscribers enter their email address correctly, include a script that checks for syntax errors upon submission to minimise invalid addresses.

### **Don't ask for too much too soon**

It is important to identify the right balance of information that you need to send, personalise, segment and optimise your email program for each subscriber. For personalised newsletters this would be the email address, the gender and the last name of the subscriber. Whilst you may ideally like to get to know more about a prospect from the subscription process, don't be over zealous - you might scare them off. Don't forget, there will be plenty of opportunities to accumulate the profile of your users in the course of a regular communication after subscription. By the same token, plan for the future. Whilst only asking for someone's email address makes the sign-up process extremely quick, you will not have obtained information that will help you deliver more relevant emails to your subscribers. Consequently, those customers may unsubscribe all too quickly.

### **Onwards and upwards**

Remember, optimising the subscription process does not finish at the subscription form. Now that you've these new subscribers on board, your first task is to begin to engage them – and quick. New recruits are more likely to open and respond to your email messages than even those who have been on your list for just three months. A welcome programme is vital; immediately after the subscription you should send confirmation, the latest newsletter, or offers that are specially tailored for your new subscribers. By doing this, you are confirming to your customers once again that they have subscribed to a service with a real value and that you appreciate their interest.

Generally, the more compelling and relevant your "offer" is to visitors, and the easier it is for them to complete the process, the better opt-in rate you will enjoy. Implement these permission-based email marketing best practices, and watch your subscription confirmations soar!