

No More Homeless Pets Forum

Date: June 10–15, 2007

Topic: Get Results with E-mail Marketing

Would you like your in-box to be flooded with offers from eager donors, adopters and volunteers? Amy Black of Constant Contact answers your questions about how to find, inspire and engage your e-mail contacts.

Introduction from Amy Black

Could you use a fast, affordable and effective way to communicate about the furry friends you love? Do you want to:

- Spread the word about dogs and cats available for adoption?
- Tell people about an excellent product for their pets?
- Get people to take action for animals?
- Share the adventures of you and your pet?

You can do it all with e-mail marketing. For a fraction of the cost of postage mailing, you can choose from hundreds of professionally designed templates and send attractive, colorful e-mails with images of pets (as many images as you want), descriptions, and more to those on your e-mail list. You can also see how many people open your e-mails and what they click on.

I work for the leading e-mail marketing service provider for small businesses and nonprofits. This week I will be on hand to answer any of your questions about using e-mail marketing to reach out and communicate. I am excited to help you discover how you can use the power of e-mail marketing to help the animals to have happy, healthier lives.

Bio for Amy Black

Amy Black works for Constant Contact, the leading e-mail marketing service provider for small business and nonprofits. She is the editor of the Marketing Hints & Tips e-newsletter, which is sent to 300,000 small business owners and nonprofit marketers each month. She frequently answers e-mail marketing best-practice questions asked by subscribers to the newsletter and speaks to groups about the power of e-mail marketing. Amy was an early adopter of e-mail marketing in her past life as marketing director for nonprofits and as a small business consultant. She is a strong believer in the benefits that e-mail marketing brings to the marketing mix of business or organization.

She and her husband live in Massachusetts and recently adopted a two-year-old black Lab mix named Sophie. Amy loves her new buddy and especially enjoys taking Sophie on long walks in the local town forest.

How can I grow my contact base without spamming?

Note from moderator: Amy makes some great suggestions below! Additional discussion about growing your contact base can be found in the archived Building a Mailing List discussion with Faith Maloney and Bonney Brown.

Question from Vickie: My husband and I started an animal sanctuary. We send out newsletters every 3 months, but always to the same people. How would I get more names for the newsletters without causing spam? Is there a way to get names of people who are animal lovers by buying a list? I am new to this and sorry if this is a dumb question, but all the help I can get would be great.

Response from Amy Black: Hi Vickie. Good questions. First, let me start by encouraging you not to buy a list. The best and most effective e-mail marketing is permission-based. You only want to e-mail people who want to receive your e-mail. Otherwise, you will be perceived as spam. People are very protective of their inboxes and don't want to receive e-mail they didn't ask for. With that said, here are some ideas for growing a permission-based e-mail list:

- Tell everyone you meet about your e-mail newsletter. I'm guessing you talk to a lot of people about your animal sanctuary. If they appear interested, ask them to join your e-mail list. Carry a little notebook in your purse or car so you can easily write down their addresses and add them to your list.
- Ask everyone on your list to forward your e-mails. No doubt those on your list know other animal lovers. Let them know you are trying to grow your e-mail list and ask them to help by forwarding the newsletter to friends and family. Also, make sure there is a place for new readers to sign up in the e-mail.
- See if a local pet supply store or other business would let you "advertise" the sanctuary. You could put up a poster with information about the sanctuary and invite people to join your e-mail list.
- Do you have a website? Add a "Join My Mailing List" box to your website. If so, make it easy for people to sign up when they visit.

One other thing to keep in mind is that the more interesting your newsletters are, the more people will want to receive them, read them and send them to others. Consider including content that any animal lover could appreciate ... even if they live too far away to visit your sanctuary. You could give updates on protected animals, tell a story about a heartening rescue (include a photo!), educate your readers with wildlife stats. You know your readers. Think about what would be most interesting to them. Hope this helps. Best of luck!

Attractive, dynamic, affordable e-mails

Question posted by yolandamorris: Since our main mode of communication to our supporters is through e-mail, I am very interested in creating an e-newsletter or at least having more attractive and dynamic e-mails. Which e-mail programs are best to work with for sending e-newsletters and creating eye-catching e-mails? Additionally, we are all volunteer and accomplish our work on a small budget with not a lot of money to spend on technology.

Response from Amy Black: An e-mail newsletter is an excellent way to communicate with your supporters. With an e-mail marketing service provider, you can easily create great-looking newsletters without having any HTML experience. All you have to do is pick a template you like and add your content and images. You can change the colors as well.

An e-mail service provider, such as Constant Contact, has more than 200 template designs to choose from and is very affordable. Many small businesses and organizations use us for that reason. For as little as \$15 a month, you can send unlimited e-mails to your list (of 500 or fewer e-mail addresses). You also get reporting (you can see who opened your e-mails and what they clicked on), simple list management tools and unlimited free support.

I hope that helps. If you want to try it out for yourself, you can take our 60-day free trial. Best of luck to you!

An example of an e-newsletter

Question posted by Barbara: Do you have examples of newsletters and surveys from animal rescue groups? I am curious to see how they use Constant Contact. We use Yahoo!Groups to periodically send out e-mails (newsletter) to our members to highlight pets that need foster homes, events, and resources of interest.

– Barbara Lapointe, Pet Foster Network, www.petfoster.org

Response from Amy Black: Hi Barbara. I have a great example for you. The group Guardian Angel Basset Rescue in Illinois uses Constant Contact frequently. They send announcements out to their list to ask for help finding new foster families or to let people know about an upcoming activity. They also send event invitations for their annual fundraiser, the Basset Ball.

With e-mail marketing you can make your e-mails look great so they get the attention of your readers. And you can include photos. Click [here](#) and visit the Get Results with e-mail Marketing folder for an example e-mail sent by Guardian Angel Basset Rescue.

Pictures take time to download!

Question from pcanimalcoalition: What recommendations do you have to balance an attractive, e-mailed newsletter so that it is dynamic and eye-catching, yet doesn't take an hour to download for our recipients who are still on dial-up? I've had newsletters sent to me that took 35 to 40 minutes on my dial-up connection (nothing else available). Thanks.

Response from Amy Black: The slowness is usually a problem when there are a lot of images or very large images. They use more bandwidth. So, if you want to make sure your e-mail doesn't take a while to download, minimize the number of pictures you include and make sure that the image files you are using are on the smaller side. You can resize in Microsoft Photo Editor or just about any other photo editing program. A good rule of thumb is no more than about 200 pixels square.

The good thing about using an e-mail marketing service provider is that you get access to great-looking templates that are professionally designed. Even if you decided to send an e-mail without a photograph, you are still sending something that looks as professional as your organization.

Attractive and readable e-mail calls to action

Question from John: Can you give some tips on exactly how to make the e-mailing attractive and readable? Something that will make readers say not only, "That's nice," but, "What can I do right now to help?"

Response from Amy Black:

1. **Have a clean look and feel.** Don't be afraid of white space. The words you are writing and the images you are using need room to breathe or they will lose their impact. Try eliminating 30-50% of your text. Look for ways to be more concise. For example, you could link to your website to finish an article or to give further details about a promotion. The misuse of colors and fonts can make an e-mail campaign look messy. Using a bright or dark color as a text background is generally not a good idea. Lighter colors, for a background, not only contribute to the clean look and feel, but they make the text much easier to read. Limit yourself to two fonts, possibly one for titles and another for body text. Also, feel free to use bold and italics when needed. A hodgepodge of colors and fonts make one sloppy-looking e-mail.
2. **Make e-mails visually interesting.** Choose colors that are not jarring to look at on the screen. Muted tones work better than vibrant colors. As a rule, pick two contrasting colors or pick one color and use other shades that correspond (for example, different shades of blue). If you are selling a product, including an attractive and interesting image will make a big difference. In your case, you would do well to pick a campaign that allows for a number of images. If you are a nonprofit thanking your donors for giving to a recent fundraiser for animals, include the smiling face of a dog or cat who was helped by their donations.
3. **Give a clear call to action.** What do you want your receivers to do as a result of reading your e-mail? Do you want them to visit your website, buy a particular product, or perhaps attend an event? Make sure that whatever you are asking them to do is clear, concise, and prominently displayed in the campaign. It's most effective to have one call to action per communication.
4. **Preview your campaigns before sending.** Always preview your e-mail in the "text only" (non-HTML) format. There are still those who only receive text e-mails and, additionally, there are more and more people who are now checking their e-mail via a handheld PDA. Finally, preview your campaigns without images. Not everyone who receives your e-mails will be able to see the images. Some consumer e-mail systems, like AOL, have default settings that block images. You should know what your e-mail looks like when your images are hidden or blocked.

How often should we make contact?

Question from Brittany: Can you provide some guidelines about how often and when to make contact? There's a balance between letting our member base forget about us, and being annoyingly over-communicative!

Response from Amy Black: When people first join your list, it's good to contact them right away. If you wait too long, they may forget that they joined and wonder why they are receiving something from you. Adding a permission-reminder at the top of your e-mail (a brief statement that reminds the recipients why they are on your list) is always a good idea.

How often you contact them really depends on what types of e-mails you send and who your audience is. On average, a monthly newsletter along with a few additional e-mails each month (event announcements, updates, etc.) is ideal. Understand what information your audience values. If your e-mails are interesting and relevant to your contacts, then they will want to receive them.

If you don't know what they think about your e-mails, you can ask them with an online survey. Get their feedback and incorporate it into your e-mail marketing program.

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To post comments, please visit this discussion on the Best Friends Network at <http://www.network.bestfriends.org/Blogs/Detail.aspx?b=1257>