



Email marketing is a powerful and proactive way to keep your company in the minds of people who you have connected with during the lifespan of your business. It's easy to measure and it brings results. But you want to ensure you are respectful of your reader's time and only send them emails you feel they will benefit from or be interested in.

I will be sharing tips on effective regular communication with your email subscribers via formatted emails. In this e-book we will call them "email newsletters" though some people call them "emailers" or "e-zines"



This handy guide is prepared by me, Keren Lerner, designer and the owner of Soho based design and marketing agency, Top Left Design. I am thrilled to be able to help you along on this exciting email journey!

## Who are you sending to?

You will be able to add people to your mailing list who have purchased a service from your business in the last few years, or people who have given you their business cards and are happy to be receiving your newsletter. It's better to have a list of people who WANT to hear from you than a purchased mailing list of people who don't know you or your business. This way, the people who know you a little can get to know you more with each email newsletter they receive. People can unsubscribe and you just have to let them go - but always try and improve your communication so you keep people interested for longer.

## Getting subscriptions

You can also have a form on your website where people can subscribe to your mailing list.

If you want to encourage people to subscribe to your mailing list, you need to give them a compelling reason to do so. Why should they bother?

So, for example, if you have an IT business, instead of saying

"Sign up for our newsletter"

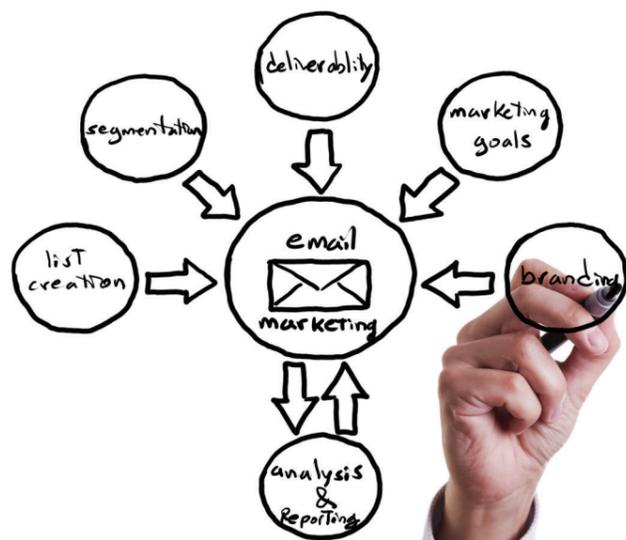
You could put something that clearly outlines what they will GET.

"Sign up for our newsletter and receive free quick tips every month on making you work faster and more efficiently on your PC"

See the difference? Give people a reason why they should subscribe.

Once people have subscribed they should be sent an "autoresponder" with welcoming text saying something friendly - for example "You have subscribed to our mailing list - well done! We will be sending you weekly tips and advice about our service, all in the name of improving your life. If you have any feedback or something you want to know more about, please let us know!"

This gives them an instant feeling that they have done the right thing to subscribe to your list.



## How often?

You can send your newsletter Weekly, Monthly or Quarterly. It really depends on the business you have, how much content you want to include, what the purpose of your email newsletter is, and who it's aimed to. Are you giving regular advice? Or just sharing your company news? Are you selling products? Or showcasing your work?

Whatever you choose, you HAVE to be consistent. If you promised weekly, then you have to send your email weekly. If you suddenly stopped, then you would have made an empty promise, which as you know doesn't bode well for your business's reputation!

The main thing is this is a way for you to market to your audience, but you need to be giving them information that is useful and interesting to THEM. If you aren't sure, we can advise on an individual basis. Just email [keren@topleftdesign.com](mailto:keren@topleftdesign.com) and we can discuss what works best for your business.

## Planning your content

Many people are very reactive when it comes to writing and finding images for their newsletters. It may seem more time consuming at first to put time aside to make a proper content plan, but believe me it saves so much in the long run. Now that it's 2012, book an hour with yourself and print out a monthly calendar. Brainstorm the types of information you will be sharing. Some ideas:

1. A regular "quick tip" for your subscribers
2. An update on your company's recent work
3. Any news that relates to your industry that you think your subscribers will want to know about
4. Headlines and introduction blurbs about your latest blog posts (which you of course need to write good headlines for, and useful content)
5. A clear call to action - for example, to attend an event, fill out a survey, read your latest blog post, share your newsletter on Twitter, etc.

You need to find the right balance between "entertaining" and "educational". Your subscribers will read your newsletters if they talk about what THEY are interested in, what they want to learn and hear more about. Really be strict with yourself about this!

## Your newsletter sending system

You can send your newsletter via any of the popular email sending systems. There are many benefits - including that:

1. You can send out to thousands of people and then see the statistics of who has opened each newsletter, how many times, and which links they clicked on. Marketing gold!
2. You can track the previous newsletters you have sent and compare the open rate/click through rates - and see if they have improved over time.
3. They usually have templates which means you don't have to worry about the design of the layout from scratch - just about customising the existing templates.
4. You can manage mailing lists (this works differently depending on which system you try) so you can target your email newsletters to different audiences.

## 3 of the most popular and widely used systems:

**Constant Contact** - [www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com) - this has lots of templates too and is very popular, but we don't like the designs of these templates. Saying that, they do have a design service which means you can get a more professional look quite cheaply. With this you pay a monthly subscription rather than a per person sending fee.

**Mailchimp** - [www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com) - this comes with some nice templates, but you have to have good attention to detail to make sure you don't mess them up. We would say it takes 2-3 hours to learn how to use and we do provide training if you are interested.

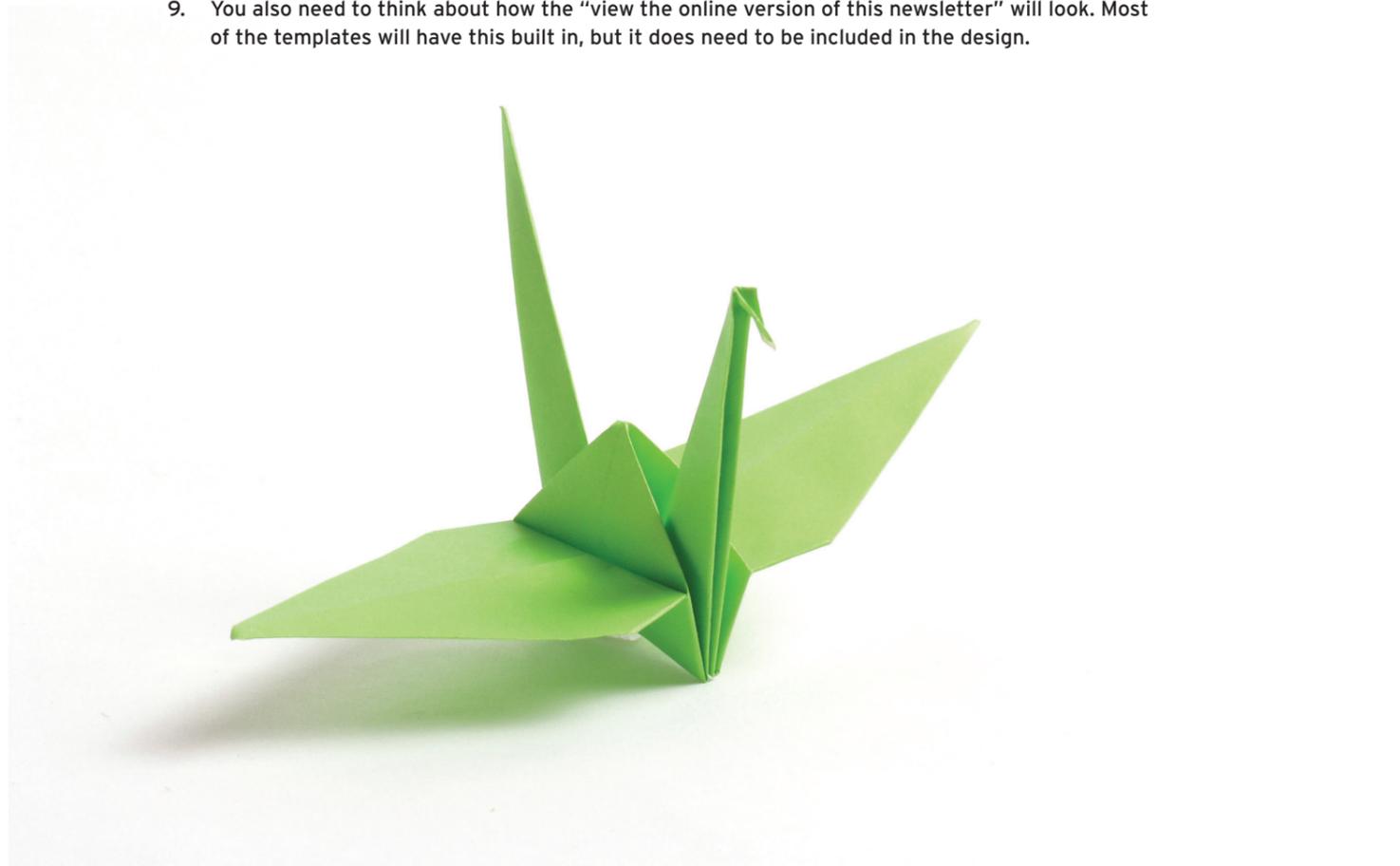
**Campaign Monitor** - [www.campaignmonitor.com](http://www.campaignmonitor.com) - At Top Left Design, we use this system the most for our clients and for ourselves. It allows us to use our own bespoke designs and doesn't add its own branding to the bottom like the others do, and we have full flexibility here. If clients want to use a template they have nice ones and this too would take 2-3 hours to figure out - or we do the setup and train our clients if they prefer. The stats are very comprehensive and this one is our favourite system!



## Your newsletter design

The popular email sending systems provide templates and you can choose from many different layouts. I would recommend looking at these and choosing one you feel suits you. You may want to go for a bespoke design (we at Top Left Design create bespoke designs for our clients - see examples here: <http://www.topleftdesign.com/portfolio/e-newsletters-examples.htm> ) For this, you're best getting a professional designer to help you, but not a bad idea to be a little bit more aware and design savvy when it comes to design, so you can better brief your designer.

1. Think columns. For example, you could have your email newsletter in 2 columns, one which is 2 thirds with the main content, and then a 1/3 column with brief information about who you are, or how to get in touch. Make sure this is neatly formatted.
2. Design in your calls to action. What do you want people to do? Clear objectives will help you have a better conversion rate, as there won't be any ambiguity about what you want from your readers.
3. Rather than having long articles, think short snippets (80-130 words for example), which can link to more information on your website, blog or on other websites online. Limit the amount of stories to between 3-7 different ones so it doesn't get too long. This will make your email easy to read.
4. If you include an image with each snippet of information, make sure you choose good quality images - bespoke illustrations or pictures of you and your company's team are far more well received than stock images.
5. If you have a banner image or your logo in a banner at the top, just look at the design with a critical eye, and make sure it looks balanced and not too top heavy.
6. Using a maximum of 2-3 colours means you are on the "safe side" with colour usage!
7. When the email is received often images are by default NOT showing, and then people choose to "show the images". So the images should be something that adds to the experience, but not crucial for them to get value from reading your newsletter or for the newsletter to look professionally formatted. Having the text start sooner - as in higher up on the page - has been proven to increase the number of people reading the newsletter.
8. You need to include an unsubscribe link in your newsletter. This can just say "Unsubscribe" or "Unsubscribe from this list" or "Unsubscribe from this newsletter" or even something more customised like "We wouldn't like it if you unsubscribed but it's your choice ultimately"
9. You also need to think about how the "view the online version of this newsletter" will look. Most of the templates will have this built in, but it does need to be included in the design.



## How your newsletter is built

Here is where we get a little bit technical! But hopefully not too much. Don't be afraid!

Email newsletters are like website pages in a way, in that they are built using simple formatting language called HTML. This language has progressed over the years - old HTML used "tables" to construct web pages, and modern HTML is supported by something called "CSS" which stands for "Cascading Style Sheets" and allows elements to be placed next to each other in columns and defines the colours and font styles of headlines, paragraphs, image borders etc.

Email newsletters are read not by web browsers (like Internet Explorer and Firefox) but opened in email programmes like Microsoft Outlook and Apple Mail. These programmes work differently from web browsers and actually need a more "basic" type of code. So, for email newsletters, you need to ensure they use the less modern type of HTML.

So, if you are getting help from a website developer, make sure they are aware that building a newsletter is not like building a website, and they have to go a few steps back and use "table based HTML" rather than relying on CSS for the way elements are placed.

If you are using a template from any of the main sending systems, then the people who built those systems have made sure they do comply with the recommended guidelines for building newsletters. This means the email will show up properly and people who get the email will be able to open it, read it and view the pictures.



## Test test test!

The most common mistake people make is not testing their email. It's madness I tell you!

Things to watch out for:

1. Headlines - are they compelling? Are they easy to understand? Do they make you want to read?
2. Blocks of text - these shouldn't be too big - make sure you break up text with subheadings, bullets or images.
3. See how the images show up - are they loading quickly? The images in newsletters are all stored online, so they don't come as attachments on the email but are referenced in the code.
4. Check that all the links you have are working and going to the right places.

If you are going to be sending out your email newsletter to thousands of people you want to make sure it's 100% or as close as possible to this. So this means test test test!

## Measure the results

Once you send your newsletter out, you can look at the statistics within the email newsletter sending software. You can see how many people clicked on your newsletter, how many people opened it, and which links they clicked on. This is another reason to include a few different snippet stories so you can see what people are most interested in. If you then use this information to inspire your future newsletters then you will continue to improve - and it's always good to aim high!

### Need more help?

In spite of all the above advice, you may still want our expertise to help you with this. We are a friendly bunch and happy to answer any questions. Just get in touch - call 020 7036 0560 or email [keren@topleftdesign.com](mailto:keren@topleftdesign.com)