

{30-Day Starter Guide to Email Marketing}

Copyright © [*iContact Corp*](#)

Introduction

If you are new to email marketing or to using an email marketing service, we created this 30-day starter guide with you in mind.

This guide will help you focus on the areas that are most important for getting your email marketing program off and running. We have even included a 30-day checklist, which will help you achieve the best results possible right from the start.

Day 1 – Determine Your Goals

Whether you are new to email marketing or have had a program in place for a while, formalizing your email goals before you send your first message is imperative. You truly need to know your audience in order to build and send relevant campaigns.

Take the time to understand your audience. Dig into why they will want to hear from you. Think through how your messaging will capture their interest. Will your campaigns provide a true value add? If the answer is not a definitive yes, then refocus your efforts to ensure your messaging is on target.

Always strive to be relevant. Think about how you will connect with your audience by doing the following:

- Highlighting what sets you apart from your competition and establishing your brand's voice within your campaigns
- Building a smart introductory offer for new prospects
- Sending a monthly newsletter that includes articles relevant to your product or service, company announcements, etc.
- Promoting new arrivals or a new launch
- Rewarding your best customers with exclusive VIP offers

Days 2 and 3 – Build a Smart Plan

If you do not currently have an email marketing plan, then today is the day to build one. A smart monthly or quarterly email plan includes your deliverable timeline and the major elements for each message you plan to send. Knowing these components in advance means that when it comes time to put your email marketing plan in action, its execution will be seamless.

By mapping out the following elements for each campaign before sending, you can truly focus on making each message as strong as possible:

- Determine your email cadence. Give thought to how often you are going to touch your list. Keep in mind that your cadence can vary depending on site promotions, special product releases, seasonality, etc.
- Think about when to send your first email. It is a best practice to send a welcome email when someone joins your list. This welcome email can be a short, simple thank-you that may or may not include a coupon or offer.
- Outline the key components—such as subject line, main call to action, and secondary call to action—for each message within your plan. Think about how these components correlate to your email marketing goals. If the call to action does not drive a click into your website, and your goal is to drive traffic, then you should reconsider that call to action.
- Capture the lists to which you will be sending each message.
- Determine send times. Decide when you want each message to land in your subscribers' inboxes.

Day 4 – Set Up Your Account

Setting up your account before your first send is not difficult. Your main focus should be customizing your account so that it reflects your business. To do that, you simply need to take a little time to do the following within your email marketing solution:

Make sure your account information (company name, telephone number, website, physical address, etc.) is correct and complete.

Build out your subscriber fields to incorporate the basics, like first name, last name, state, and even country (if you have international customers).

Also include fields for data that may be helpful for segmenting lists in the future: interests, birth date, anniversary date, gender, etc. You may want to incorporate some of these fields into your subscription sign-up form moving forward.

* Email
* First Name
* Last Name
State
Anniversary Date
* = Required Field
Submit

Determine the reply email address for your account.

The reply email address should be functioning and consistently monitored. Some subscribers will utilize the reply email address to request to be unsubscribed. By monitoring your reply email account, you can capture these requests and unsubscribe these contacts without any issue.

Update your time zone setting to ensure that you are scheduling your messages to be sent at the right times.

Day 5 – Import and Build Your Lists

The process of importing lists into your email marketing solution should be straightforward. Make sure your naming convention for each list is clear and concise so that you can organize your lists. Most email marketing solutions will give you the tools you need to keep your list healthy and pristine. For example, your solution may allow you to add contacts to existing lists via sign-up forms, cutting and pasting, importing, or manual entry. Your email marketing solution should also automatically handle unsubscribes and bounced messages.

If you do not have a contact list or if you want to grow your existing subscriber list, you need to know how to grow it the right way. Your contacts must give you permission in order for you to send them marketing emails. If they have not given you permission, then your emails will likely be ignored or marked as spam.

The following list growth strategy will help you grow your list the right way:

- On every page of your website, include a sign-up button or banner that encourages prospects and customers to subscribe to your email program. Make it very clear to customers that they are signing up to receive marketing emails.



- Leverage your point of sale by training your sales associates to promote your email program to each and every customer. Include a sign highlighting the value your emails will provide, such as special offers, sneak peeks, and new-arrival announcements. Use a sign-up book, postcards, or your register software to collect customers' information.

- Promote subscriptions to your email program through all online and offline marketing channels.

- Utilize social media channels like Facebook and Twitter to highlight the exclusive offers and unique content your email campaigns will provide customers and prospects. Do not forget to include a sign-up form on your Facebook page.



- Give customers an incentive for joining, such as a special discount or a limited-time offer.



- Never buy a list of email addresses. Purchasing an email file will only increase your complaint rates, which can potentially lead to your account being closed.

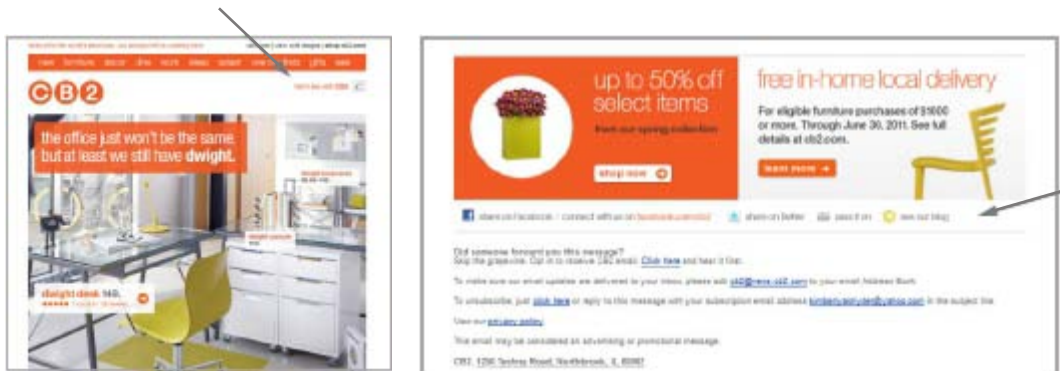
Days 6 and 7 – Build a Robust Email Template

Now, it is time to focus on building a robust email template. Most email marketing solutions provide ready-to-use templates, and some programs allow you to build custom templates. A good template should include the following elements to ensure engagement with your audience and strong email performance:

- The “from” field should be your brand or company name. Placing your company name in the “from” field means recipients will instantly recognize your email message. Do not confuse subscribers by using “no-reply@company.com” or an individual’s name, unless that person would be well known to the recipient.
- Subject lines should be clear and concise. Your subject should be between 30 and 50 characters

long with a compelling call to action that encourages recipients to open your message.

- Your message should include a link to view a web version. Sometimes your images and text will not appear in certain email applications. Including a web version link ensures that all of your recipients can see your message.
- Your company logo and a navigation bar should appear in the header section of your template. These elements reinforce your brand and encourage engagement with your website.
- The main image or text section of your template should have a strong call to action in which you clearly state what it is you want the reader to do. This call to action should use smart but creative copy to entice subscribers to click.
- Links to social media outlets should appear in your email template. These links will expand your brand presence and following. For example, consider including the Facebook Like button as



your call to action in order to increase your Facebook following. Or expand your reach by utilizing a “share” button call to action that encourages subscribers to share your message on Facebook or Twitter.

- An unsubscribe link, a physical address, and a link to an email preference center should appear in your message to ensure your compliance with CAN-SPAM laws.

Days 8 and 9 – Perfect Your Email Template

Many new email marketers and some seasoned pros make the mistake of not checking their email templates to ensure that they work in multiple email programs. Do not make this same mistake. Your subscribers may use different email programs and services, like Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo Mail, Apple Mail Services, Outlook,

and AOL. An email that looks great in one program using one service may not look great in another program using another service. For example, an email in Outlook via Firefox can render very differently than the same email in Hotmail via Firefox.

It is imperative to test your emails in multiple programs across multiple services. One way to make sure your email looks the way you intended is to set up accounts with multiple services using a variety of programs and to send the emails to yourself. You can also ask a few coworkers to act as test subjects and to tell you if anything appears broken. Another method for running these checks is to use an email preview service, which will run side-by-side tests in a variety of email programs.

If you are unsure about coding and testing your own email templates, many email marketing solutions have pre-coded, pre-tested templates that you may find helpful.

Day 10 – Check Your Email Content for Spam Triggers

Spam filters have compiled a long list of criteria to determine whether the content in an email is junk. Spam filter algorithms assign points to different items, including:

- Phrases like “CLICK HERE!” or “FREE! BUY NOW!”
- Excessive use of ALL CAPS or exclamation marks!!!
- Poor or sloppy coding
- Subject lines that include the word “test”

If your message receives a high spam score, your email marketing solution provider may refuse to send the message. Unfortunately, the point thresholds for every service vary, and they change as recipients mark messages as spam. Thus, you need to be very diligent in not using certain spammy words and phrases, which can add spam points to your score. This does not mean you have to avoid them altogether, but you should proceed with caution and avoid excessive use.

Spammy Words and Phrases

- Free!!!
- Once in a lifetime opportunity
- Earn \$\$
- You may have already won!
- Serious Cash
- Don't Delete
- Consolidate your debt



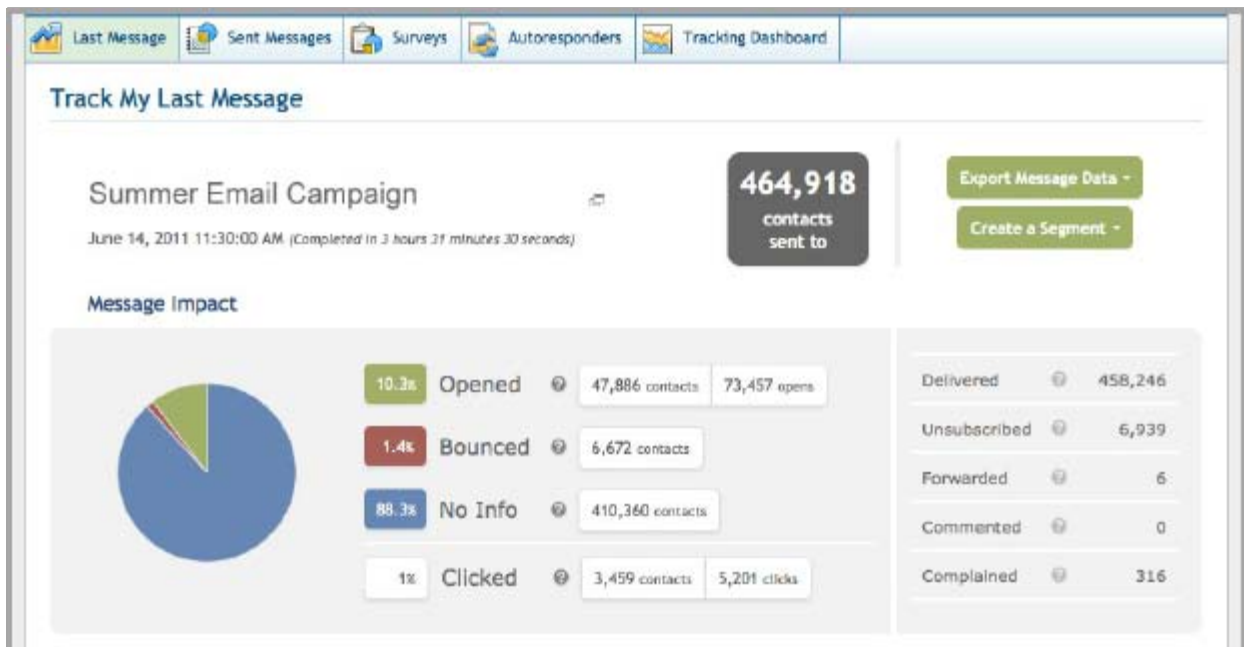
Day 11 – Send Your First Email

Now it is time to send your first email. If you already have a list from using in-house email in the past, you can send your first email using your new email marketing solution. You may even consider mentioning your new email design (if it changed when you moved to your new email marketing solution) in a customer service message.

If you are still gathering your list, you may not be ready to send more than a welcome email to customers signing up for your emails. You should, though, have a regular email ready to send within the first two weeks of starting your sign-up campaign. If you wait too long after someone has signed up to start emailing regularly, the subscriber may forget that he or she has signed up, and you may lose a potential customer. Do not worry if your list is very small; the goal is to grow that list, and you have to start from somewhere.

After Your First Send – Pull Reports

Measuring your results is vital to the constant improvement and increased effectiveness of your email marketing efforts. Your email marketing solution should give you comprehensive, easy-to-use reports that cover everything from bounces to clickthrough rates.



Initially, you want to focus on establishing your baseline email metrics for the following key performance indicators (KPIs):

- Open rate
- Clickthrough rate
- Conversion rate
- Bounce rate
- Unsubscribe rate
- Complaint rate

Once your baseline KPIs are in place, you can measure your email metrics week over week, month over month, and year over year to uncover trends in your reporting. By reviewing your email metrics a few days after each send, you will be able to constantly improve the effectiveness of your email marketing program.

Days 12 through 17 – Step Into Segmentation

Segmentation can be a very powerful email marketing tool. Through segmentation, you can send targeted, relevant email messages to specific segments of subscribers. Relevant messaging will ultimately result in higher engagement and lower attrition rates. If you send truly relevant content, your customers will feel that you are listening to them and that they are part of an experience customized to their specific needs.

Segment your list according to the following criteria:

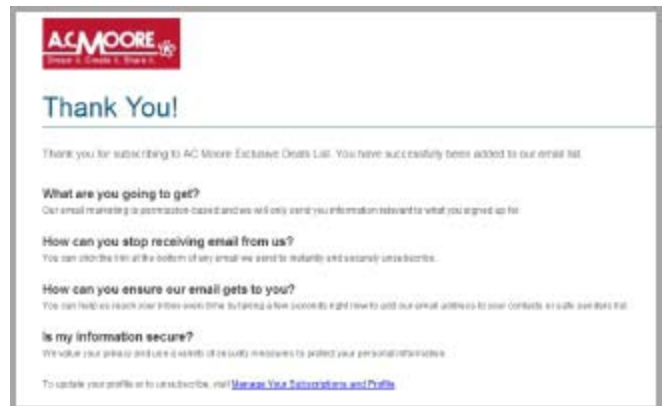
- Geographic Region – Highlight local events in a region or encourage subscribers to visit your local storefront
- Gender – Provide different image calls to action for subscribers of different genders
- Recent Purchase Activity – Thank last month's buyers with a special offer to come back and shop this month

If you plan to have multiple types of emails (e.g., monthly newsletters, deals of the week, daily tips), you should also offer customers a chance to choose which emails they want to receive. Segment your list according to your subscribers' preferences.

Days 18 through 24 – Build Autoresponders

Autoresponders are series of emails that you can schedule to be sent to subscribers automatically. Autoresponders help you touch your subscribers at the right time with the right offer or content. They can be action based or date based.

For example, you can set an action-based trigger to send a welcome message to any new subscriber who joins your program.



You can also build date-based triggers to send a special birthday offer a few days before or on a subscriber's birthday.



Days 25 through 30 – Run an A/B Split Test

A/B split testing can be an effective tool for optimizing your email marketing program. An A/B split test allows you to test different messages or email elements on a small section of your target audience to determine which is the most effective before sending to the remainder of the list.

Running an A/B split test is not difficult; it merely requires a little attention to detail. Start reaping the rewards of testing various email elements now. Follow these steps to build a smart and successful A/B split test:

1. Choose only one email element or variable to test at a time. If you test more than one element at a time, you may not get data that are clear enough to determine a winning message.
2. Randomly select 20% of contacts from your subscriber list.
3. Divide this test list in half, and name one half “Test List A” and the other half “Test List B.”
4. Build two email templates: Test Template A and Test Template B. For example, you could test the strength of an image call to action versus a text call to action in the main section of your email template.
5. Send Test Template A to Test List A, and send Test Template B to Test List B.
6. Allow three days for the message results to mature, and then review the send results. The determining metric, depending on the variable tested, will be your clickthrough rate or conversion rate.
7. Once you have definitive test results, send the winner of the tests to the remaining 80% of your list, and apply your learning to future campaigns.



30-Day Checklist

Begin building a successful email marketing program today with our 30-day email marketing checklist:

30-Day Email Marketing Checklist		
Status	Timeline	Action
	Day 1	Determine Your Goals
	Days 2 and 3	Build a Smart Plan
	Day 4	Set Up Your Account
	Day 5	Import and Build Your Lists
	Days 6 and 7	Build a Robust Email Template
	Days 8 and 9	Perfect Your Email Template
	Day 10	Check Your Email Content for Spam Triggers
	Day 11	Send Your First Email
	After Your First Send	Pull Reports
	Days 12 through 17	Step Into Segmentation
	Days 18 through 24	Build Autoresponders
	Days 25 through 30	Run an A/B Split Test

About iContact

iContact is a purpose-driven company based in Raleigh, NC, working to make email marketing and social marketing easy so that small and mid-sized companies and causes can grow and succeed. Founded in 2003, iContact has more than 300 employees and more than 700,000 users of its [leading email marketing software](#). iContact also provides the event marketing platform Ettend. As a B Corporation, iContact utilizes the 4-1s Corporate Social Responsibility Model, donating 1% of payroll, 1% of employee time to community volunteering, 1% of equity, and 1% of product to its local and global community as part of its social mission. iContact works hard to maintain a fun, creative, energetic, challenging, and community-oriented company culture.

