

Start 2008 right with e-newsletter content that grabs and retains readers all year long

By Brian Epro

The beginning of another year is always a good time to evaluate and fine-tune your marketing programs, including your e-newsletter. The ease and efficiency of an e-newsletter makes it an optimal way to stay in contact with customers and prospects, yet as the popularity of e-mail grows, so do the number of companies sending e-mail marketing messages. A recent U.S. E-Mail Marketing Forecast study from JupiterResearch found that spending on e-mail advertising will grow from \$1.2 billion in 2007 to \$2 billion by 2012. The glut of e-mail correspondence is already leading some consumers to opt-out of e-mail communications simply because they cannot keep up with the volume, but quality of content is also a major reason to opt-out. In their study, JupiterResearch found that one-half of recipients who stopped subscribing to opt-in e-mails did so because the content was no longer relevant – it wasn't boring or poorly written, it just didn't meet their needs.

Irrelevant content is a pitfall of e-newsletters because many consistently push the hard-sell with a barrage of special sales and promotions. This can be especially deadly for a dealership because a customer who purchases a vehicle from you may not be in the market again for a few years, and they won't need a vehicle service every month. Continually sending an e-newsletter promoting only vehicle and service specials that are not applicable to recipients will push many to opt-out. This is not to say that you shouldn't include specials – of course you should – but you need to pair those promotions with lifestyle articles for a soft-sell approach that keeps recipients reading.

Lifestyle articles appeal to the interests or needs of your readers and are fun and interesting to read. Examples of lifestyle articles include: a review of a local restaurant, details about upcoming community events, or an article highlighting local family activities. Depending on your location, a spring e-newsletter may include a review of the perfect weekend wine country trip or give information on the best farmers' markets in your area. The idea is to consistently deliver stories that are fun to read and informative, so that a reader who is not currently in the market for a vehicle or service will look forward to receiving your news, and think of you first when a vehicle need arises. Engaging lifestyle articles also increase the chances that a recipient will forward on your e-newsletter to family and friends, facilitating viral marketing for a significant increase in your brand recognition and bottom-line.

In addition, by using an article as a jumping off point for a vehicle video, coupon, or customer reward, you can include soft-sell promotions without alienating readers. For example, let's say you include an article about backcountry trips in your area. Next to the article you can include a video of a SUV, or another vehicle that would be suitable for outdoor adventures. The video heightens the appeal of the vehicle, is entertaining to watch, and has the power to push consumers to the next step: asking for a test drive. In another example, pair a local restaurant review with an opportunity to win dinner for two. You may require customers fill out a simple contact form, or that they come in for a test drive, to be entered to win the dinner.

Your e-newsletter is the optimal way to reach today's email-loving consumers, but barraging them with one-fits-all specials is a sure way to up your opt-out rate. Start 2008 out right by packing your e-newsletter with interesting, informative lifestyle articles paired with on-demand specials to retain more readers for years to come.

IMN specializes in e-communications services for sales and distribution networks, enabling auto dealerships to communicate to their customers with multi-media capable email and e-newsletters, which are designed to drive measurable brand impact and product visibility, leads and sales for the dealership. IMN also provides all of the content as well as reporting and analytics. In 2005 IMN launched the Auto Services Group with its flagship product, IMN Loyalty Driver™, the leading fully managed e-newsletter created specifically for auto dealers to not only increase loyalty but to capture new business in vehicles, services and parts. Over 750 auto dealers now benefit from IMN Loyalty Driver's consistently high results, month after month. IMN serves customers worldwide and is headquartered in Waltham, MA. Additional information can be found at www.imnloyaltydriver.com or by calling 1-866-964-NEWS.