



Email Enticement

E-newsletters have the potential to boost bookings, sales *and* loyalty. *By Rachel Kossman*

In recent years, as social media surged into popular culture at full force, the humble email newsletter seemed pushed to the back burner. Some people even predicted that using email as a marketing strategy would go the way of the fax machine. But trends can be unpredictable, and business strategists are gradually transitioning back to an email marketing mentality.

This shift can be attributed to the “filter bubble”, a term coined in a TED Talk by Eli Pariser, CEO and co-founder of online content curator Upworthy. “In the Darwinian environment of the hyper-relevant news feed, content about issues like homelessness or climate change can’t compete with goofy viral videos, celebrity news and kittens,” reads his explanation. Or, more to the point, how can you expect serene spa images or offers of discount services to capture your clients’ attention (or their patronage) when these products are buried among thousands of other, competing ones that offer free, effortless entertainment?

Email newsletters perform the sorting for us, filtering the web’s endless information through a discerning

lens. Your challenge as a spa owner is to figure out how to become a trusted, and engaging, source of information for your clientele.

“I think people are exhausted from being ‘sold,’” says Los Angeles-based brand and content strategist Leah Komaiko (leahkomaiko.com). “As a business, you have to offer information or insight that’s of value. It’s about your audience, not about you.”

REELING IN READERS

Email marketing should focus on customer retention and upselling to existing clients. You might, for instance, use it to convince a one-time guest to come in for regular facials, or convert the semi-annual client into a bi-monthly one.

But before you can do that, you must develop an effective email list. One of the primary strategies at LocBox (locbox.com), a business marketing platform, is to ensure email contact lists are both robust and up to date. “You should be collecting the email address of every single customer that enters your spa,”

recommends Rick Kawamura, the company's vice president of marketing.

Won't that leave you with a giant, unwieldy list of contacts? It would, if you didn't take the time to update it regularly. Komaiiko advocates for refining your audience to a concrete list of loyal clientele. "Unless you're Amazon, you don't need a million people on your distribution list," she points out. "In fact, you don't want a million people." The more untargeted email addresses you send your newsletter to, the lower your email campaign's open rate will be.

A refined email list is also crucial for directed marketing. "The more intelligent you are about creating your lists, the more targeted your emails can be and the better open and click-through rates you'll see," says Kawamura. Segmenting clients based on demographics such as age, go-to treatment or retail purchase preference helps you send pinpointed messages that are more likely to be opened.

COMPELLING CONTENT

Ensuring your message is delivered to your clients is only half the battle—click-through rates are another key component to email marketing success. What compels consumers to open an email from your business is subjective, and can vary greatly by market.

Overall, LocBox has found that the title of an email is one of the dominant factors for successful click-through rates. "The terms 'discount', 'save' and '50% off' result in excellent open rates for some businesses, and much lower rates for others," says Kawamura. "It's different for every spa, so the primary concern is getting to know your audience and understanding what they want."

Many spa owners differentiate between newsletters and email blasts, the former offering wellness news and skincare facts, and the latter comprising content dedicated to sales, deals and promotions. Having experimented with both, Traci Pletcher, co-owner of State College, Pennsylvania-based Dragonfly Therapeutic Massage (dragonflymassages.com), has discovered that strong, focused content often guarantees more than just high click-through rates.

"At one point toward the end of 2013, I noticed that a lot of our regular customers weren't bother-

Spa promos hit their marks via email.



ing to open the email promotions we were sending them," says Pletcher. The spa revisited its marketing strategy, and in 2014 switched to two email blasts per month—one email highlighting skincare news and the other a service-related promotion. "Now that there's valuable content, customers are more

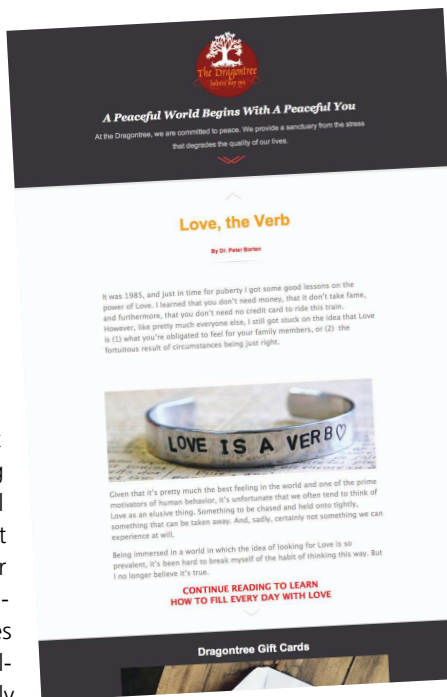
DON'T GO STALE

If you're a savvy business owner, you've probably been gathering email addresses from your clients for nearly a decade. Although your first instinct may say that the result of this effort—a sizable distribution list—is a gold mine, it's important to remember that contact information can quickly become outdated. Clients move, switch jobs, or even abandon email addresses because they've started accumulating too much spam.

"Statistics show that people change their email addresses on a more consistent basis than one might think," says LocBox vice president of marketing Rick Kawamura. "Over the course of a year, probably 20% to 25% of your contact list goes stale."

To see if this is true of your distribution list, Kawamura suggests checking the bounce rate of your newsletters or e-blasts. If your bounce rate is 2% or more, your contact list is probably stale.

When clients come in for appointments, ensure your receptionist confirms their email address and other contact information. This extra step not only guarantees you're actually reaching customers' inboxes, but also reminds them to keep an eye out for the valuable information and discounts you'll soon be sending their way.



The Dragontree Holistic Day Spa combines content and featured products in regular email campaigns.

inclined to open those emails, and in many ways that client education is more profitable to my business than when I advertise a certain promotion, because I'm building loyalty for my spa's brand," she says.

This type of robust content can be essential when developing your dedicated audience. "Email blasts should be of value, not just a ploy to get people to buy your products," says Komaiko. Whether that value is longer-form articles about a single subject, or email-only special offers, can vary widely depending on your audience. Talk to your clients and ask what would encourage them to open an email from your spa, then use their answers to help hone your email marketing content.

Or, turn to your own staff for ideas, suggests Annie Fallon, manager at Blue Medi Spa (bluespa.com) in Sherman Oaks, California. "As a team, we use our personal experiences about what encourages us to open emails in our own inboxes," she explains. "Using that as a gauge, we determine what's going to make our *clients* open our messages."

In another instance, Spa La Posada (spalaposada.com) owner Edna Posada, who manages locations in Harlingen, McAllen and Brownsville, Texas, has found success with aesthetically appealing emails.

"Our newsletters are visually driven, and we try to keep the format enticing, but not overly wordy," she explains. "For instance, our summer special was a pineapple body scrub, and we ran a promotion where we offered complimentary margaritas with each treatment. The email read 'Friend + Pineapple Margarita = Fun' and featured an image of a woman relaxing with a cocktail in her hand." Catchy, alluring content, says Posada, "is the type of marketing that makes clients say 'Let me call my BFF and plan a spa date!' or 'How cute! I'm going to screenshot that and post it to my Facebook page!'"

Many spa owners are major proponents for emails that contain quality graphics. "If it costs me \$200 to hire a graphics designer to create my template—to me that expense is worth every penny," says Posada.

"Graphics and photos are a sure way to retain your audience," says Phil Ackley, marketing manager for The Dragontree Holistic Day Spa (thedragontree.com), with locations in Portland, Oregon, and Denver and Boulder, Colorado. He feels that successful marketing is a balance between valuable content and retail offers, plus

occasional photos with social media "share" buttons.

Blue Medi Spa has a dedicated marketing department, complete with a graphic designer. The team has recently experimented with animated, eye-catching graphics. "Our web traffic and booking calls increase three-fold when those animated emails go out," says Fallon.

A recent formatting change at LocBox echoes these sentiments. Reports Kawamura: "We made some changes to

our templates—improving graphics and updating the layout—and we saw a 70% increase in conversions."

MONETARY VALUE

With all the effort that goes into building a solid email marketing campaign, how can you tell if it's worth your while? The truth is, if you're looking for a

CALCULATED CONSISTENCY

Establishing an email relationship with your clients requires **regularity without bombardment**. To avoid becoming an annoyance, keep this thought from Leah Komaiko, brand and content specialist, in mind: "In some instances, when you first send an e-newsletter, you're invading someone's mailbox. They don't necessarily want it, and they're probably not looking for it."

To evade the title of "inbox invader", work on setting and maintaining expectations. This is a fundamental aspect of achieving consistency. "Ideally, train your customers to anticipate an email from your spa," says Phil Ackley, marketing manager for The Dragontree Holistic Day Spa. "They should think 'It's Tuesday, so I know I'm going to read the Dragontree's email today!'"

Marci Delaney, owner of Spa One Thirty One (spa131.com) in West Columbia, South Carolina, sends out her newsletter once a month, and if she misses one, her customers are well aware. "I've gotten calls from people asking, 'What's going on?! It's nice to hear that clients look forward to the content we deliver to them,'" she says.

Initiate email campaigns regularly, but sparingly. Says Komaiko: "You risk becoming 'the boy who cried wolf' if you keep sending emails saying 'This is the best thing ever' or 'This is the best deal ever,' because by the sixth email, clients just won't believe you any more."

specific return on investment (ROI) formula as a result of email marketing, you're likely out of luck. "We never promise ROI figures to our clients, because this type of marketing is so subjective and unpredictable," states Kawamura.

"I don't have statistics, but I do have conversations," says Pletcher, who notes that customers regularly

mention her newsletters to staff. Subjects such as the health benefits of vitamin D or a spotlight on a certain type of essential oil have often provided retail boosts to her spa. "We sold essential oils more than six years before I started my newsletter marketing, and they always did okay. Recently, I began to highlight an oil in my newsletter, and now,

without fail, I always sell more of that type," she reports.

Even if it can't be calculated with accuracy, quantifying the general fiscal success that email marketing may bring *is* feasible. For instance, LocBox's largest client is a medical spa with a distribution list of nearly 8,000 contacts. "If the spa owner sends out a blast about laser hair removal, offering three sessions at several hundred dollars each, even if he only sees a 10% click-through rate that ultimately only brings in 100 clients, he's still making thousands of dollars from a single campaign," says Kawamura.

Posada has noticed a distinct upswing in appointment bookings since integrating Booker's "Book Now" button into her email promotions. "People are really embracing technology in a major way—they want to book their appointment using their smartphone's browser, and that's why I love using booking software," she says.

Even if your booking platform doesn't provide a "Book Now" button, email campaigns should lead a client directly to a point of purchase. "If your email is advertising a couples' massage, it should have a link that goes directly to a page where readers can purchase that package," states Kawamura. The fewer hoops a client has to jump through—making a phone call, logging in to a website, waiting for an email response—the more likely you'll have a high conversion rate from clickthrough to purchase point.

"That's one of the benefits of these emails—they're doing the selling for you," Kawamura says. "Because, let's face it, a lot of people don't want to talk to someone. They just want buying something to be an easy, one-step process." ■

Rachel Kossman is DAYSPA's associate editor.

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