DIRECT*newsline*

How to Keep Them Opted In

Want to hold on to your opt-ins? Then respect their channel preferences and learn how to take no for an answer.

That's the word from **Ernan Roman**, who was leading firms like IBM through what he called consensual marketing long before Seth Godin came on the scene.

In his new book, "**Opt-In Marketing**," Roman points to these depressing statistics from Bigfoot Interactive:

- 57.7% of US Internet users delete newsletters or other *requested* e-mail.
- 62.8% delete marketing or promotional messages that they *asked* for.

And the reasons for this are spam and a general erosion of consumer trust.

"Look at it this way," Roman writes. "If used irresponsibly, e-mail becomes a cheap, easy way to tick off far more individuals than ever before."

But customer preferences aren't hard to figure out. According to Roman, a Quris/ Executive Summary Consulting survey identified the following e-mail practices, and asked consumers to rate them on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being "very positive"):

Unsubscribe option in all emails..4.7
Explicit no-share-address policy..4.6
48-hour e-mail support answers..4.5
Personal preferences page that can be edited.................................4.4
Provide phone number in e-mails..4.4
Explicit privacy policy..4.3
Double opt-in confirmation...4.2

And at the bottom of the scale, we find these ratings:

Making assumptions about permission..1.5
Making assumptions about the right to share email addresses........1.4

So there's good news for companies that send e-mail newsletters.

"Deployed responsibly -- as a retention tool, as part of the integrated direct marketing media mix -- e-mail can bring relevant, timely messages of value that enhance and extend the consensual relationship and thus increase customer lifetime value."

What does Roman urge you to do? Here's a checklist:

1. **Set a privacy policy, publish it, and live by it**. The policy should be based on customer permission for virtually everything.

2. **Give customers plenty of opportunity to provide feedback, or to change their minds**. Don't just publish an e-zine. Let people respond to it.

3. **Send messages in accordance with customer preferences**. In other words, don't send e-mail to people who haven't asked for it.

4. **Be responsive**. If people do have a gripe, make sure you get back to them.

"There isn't any other way to say this: Marketers must meet customers' expectations for e-mail responsiveness," Roman concludes. "It's difficult -- but not impossible. Respond within 24 hours, even if it's to say you're delayed. And, of course, respect the customer's name and spell it correctly. Substitute trust for permission."

"Opt-in Marketing (Increase Sales Exponentially With Consensual Marketing), by Ernan Roman and Scott Hornstein, is published by McGraw-Hill. www.erdm.com

Ernan Roman Direct Marketing
3 Melrose Lane
Douglas Manor, NY 11363

718-225-4151
(f) 718-225-4889
www.erdm.com