

email marketing

# resolutions



# Email Marketing Resolutions for 2011

The holiday season is officially here and before you know it the world will be waving hello to a brand new year. If you are like most email marketers there are probably some goals you were not able to accomplish in 2010 for one reason or another. The good news is that 2011 gives you another opportunity to reevaluate your marketing strategy and make significant improvements.

In this report you will discover some important New Year's resolutions that can be made to increase the focus on your audience and greatly enhance your overall marketing efforts.

## Grow Your Email List

The biggest resolution you should focus on in the New Year is [growing your email list](#). No matter how much success you have enjoyed throughout the year, there is always room for positive growth. Building your audience can be a full-time job in itself, but it is most effective when taking your efforts both on and offline. Here are some ways it can be done:



### ■ Take Full Advantage of Your Website –

As you probably know, your website is one of the best list building tools you have at your disposal. What you may not know is how to use this tool to its full potential. Your website and all its related points should be used to capture data and [collect new subscribers](#). This goes for every page of the site itself, as well as purchases made through your shopping cart system.

■ **Offer Incentives** – Offering incentives is a very effective way to get people to subscribe to your list. You have tons of leeway here as you could offer [email-only discounts](#), free gift wrapping during the holiday season, or access to a [free PDF report](#). Make sure that your offers are relevant and valuable and incentives will do their job in helping you grow your list.

■ **Leverage Your Place of Business** - The store or establishment you have out in the real world is another point of intake that can be used to collect new subscribers for your email campaigns. Keep sign-up forms at the desk or cash register and instruct employees to ask visitors if they would like to subscribe before leaving the building.

■ **Network at Industry Events** – The next time you attend a trade show, convention, or sales conference related to your niche, come with the mindset of walking away with a bigger list. Bring along the sign-up forms you keep at your place of business or a laptop to allow people to conveniently subscribe directly online.

■ **Advertise with Print Media** – While some may consider print media a part of more primitive marketing tactics, it still works and can go a long way in helping you grow your list. Whether it is business cards, flyers, posters, or customer feedback forms, make sure all your printed media contains a link to your sign-up page online and a brief explanation of the benefits that come with entering into an email relationship with your business.

The key to growing an email list with success is taking full advantage of all the resources that are available to you and making signing up a convenient process for the consumer. Keep this in mind and list building will prove a much easier task than you once assumed.

## Understand Your Reports and Put Them to Use

One reason email marketing is more effective than most traditional methods is that virtually [every aspect of your campaigns can be tracked](#) and measured for success. This is a luxury that has been made possible by the seamless integration of [web analytics](#), a breakthrough technology that enables the efficient reporting of internet data that can be used to analyze and optimize performance. However, the data your reports provide will be of no use if you do not understand what they are telling you and, more importantly, if you don't put that information to good use.

You can learn a lot from reading your reports, and all of it can be used to improve the execution of your marketing strategy. For example, your open rate can tell you which subject lines are compelling people to open your message or whether timing is a problem. If this rate is low, it can be a sign that you need to tighten up your subject lines or send on different days or times to encourage more people to open your message.

The click-through rate is another vital measurement as it tells you how subscribers are interacting with your message. If this rate is extremely low it is usually an indication that your call to action or the message content itself needs to be fine-tuned to generate better responses. Because opens and clicks are critical steps in the customer cycle, these are two areas that you want to pay close attention to when analyzing your reports.

Understanding your reports is vital, but what you actually do with that data is even more important. A good resolution to make in the New Year is one that involves printing out these reports and sharing the info they contain with your marketing team for strategy purposes. It also includes segmenting that data as a way to determine what strategies work best in terms of [targeting customers based on their geographical location](#), which keywords are boosting traffic through the search engines, and what type of content appeals to individual segments. Efficient use of your data makes for a strategy that results in better responses and increased conversions.

## Segment and Target Your List

As email marketers, there are a few things we could all be doing better, and targeting is at the top of the list. It is fairly easy to get so caught up in the day-to-day aspects of running your business that you overlook the fact that your audience is comprised of unique people with different wants, needs, and preferences. Unfortunately, failing to realize this could leave you with undesirable marketing results.

Instead of targeting all your subscribers as a single group, [break down your master list into smaller lists or segments and target them individually](#) with relevant message content. This could entail creating content designed to get your new subscribers involved right off the bat, customizing exclusive offers for your loyal customers, or even crafting messages that address the potential concerns of subscribers who have lost interest in your campaigns.

An ability to identify and target these segments is vital to increasing interaction and, more importantly, understanding your audience. The better you become at segmentation, the better you will be at understanding how they think, what they want, and how you can better service their needs.

## Cleanse Your Email Lists

The importance of list hygiene is something that even some of the most successful email marketers take for granted. You can spend so much time focused on actually developing your campaigns and the people who are interacting with your message that it becomes easy to ignore inactive subscribers and consequently ruin the quality of your lists. The truth is that each and every one of your lists deserves a good cleansing to improve targeting, lower marketing expenses, and provide better results.



Following are some actions you can take to make sure your lists are always in good shape:

- **Remove Invalid Email Addresses** – [Old or otherwise obsolete email addresses should be removed or corrected immediately](#). Examine your reports and identify the addresses that result in failures. Determine whether those domains no longer exist or if they are due to data capture errors. Invalid email addresses that result from a misspelled domain can easily be fixed on your end.
- **Invest in a Data Checker** – A data checker can help you clear up some of those data capture problems and improve the quality of your lists. These programs are very useful as they can be easily integrated into your website and instantly catch errors at the point of entry. If errors are identified, you can notify your visitors and give them the opportunity to make the necessary corrections before their information is filed into your database.

■ **Remove Dormant Email Addresses** - Inactive email addresses should also be removed from your lists, but not without first analyzing the data in your reports. If your reports show that mail sent to a specific subscriber has been bouncing, not opened, or the subscriber has shown no sign of interest over the last six months, it is probably a good idea to cut your losses and remove that individual from your list. If you believe that inactivity is due to a lack of interest, you could move them to another segment and try to appeal to them through a re-engagement campaign.

List hygiene is not something you can just do once and go on your merry way. It is a task that should be performed regularly to ensure that your campaigns are as focused as possible. Keeping a close eye on your reports will give you a better idea of how often this task needs to be performed. Having a list is only the beginning of an email marketer's job and list hygiene is an ongoing role within that job.

## Make Better Use of Your ESP's Features

Email has come a long way since the days of text-only messages and dial-up internet. The same can be said for the email marketing industry as a whole. Today, email service providers are equipped with a host of features that can help marketers greatly improve deliverability, better gauge their performance, and engage their audiences more effectively.

For example, Benchmark Email offers video email capabilities that enable marketers to communicate with one of the most powerful engagement mediums in the online space. This feature gives you the ability to take the videos of product demonstrations, tours and special messages you shoot for customers, to post on sites such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Blip, and share them in the email channel.

It is the savvy marketer who stays up to date on the latest apps and tools in the industry. This should be an incentive to avail yourself of all the features your ESP provides and to take advantage of them. Keeping yourself in the know not only gives you an opportunity to make drastic improvements but also identify which features are worth the time and offer something that can truly benefit your marketing efforts.

## Take the Social Plunge

From direct mail to mobile, email marketing has the reputation of being an excellent fit for a variety of other marketing tactics. One method it has shown to match up with extremely well in recent times is social media. If you have yet to add a social element to your email campaigns, this is definitely something that should be on your list of resolutions.

Following are some ways you can integrate social media with your email marketing efforts and expand your reach:



**Create a Presence in the Social Networking Space** – There are literally hundreds of social networks live on the web, and many of them can be of great value to your marketing efforts when used correctly. Whether it is with Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or a combination of the three, create a profile and build a presence for your business in the social networking space. This presence will grow your audience and connect you with new contacts.

**Integrate Your Sign-Up Form** - Remember earlier when we talked about taking advantage of list building opportunities by making an effort to acquire new subscribers wherever possible? Well, the same mentality should be applied when establishing your presence in the social space. If you have a fan page for your brand on Facebook, [create an opt-in form so people can easily sign up right on the network](#). If you are networking via LinkedIn or Twitter, make sure all your published posts have links that direct readers to the sign-up form on your website.



**Be Consistently Active** – Having a successful run with social media calls for you to be active and consistent on whatever network you have chosen to establish a presence. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of social networking, but it also works to your advantage by giving you the opportunity to market your products or services, initiate conversations with your audience, and showcase yourself as an expert in your niche.

**Share Your Email Content Socially** – The sharing concept that started with social bookmarking sites such as Delicious, Digg, and Reddit has recently spilled over into the email marketing sector. Benchmark Email and other ESPs now have features that make it possible for your readers to share your email content with their respective communities on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social networks by simply clicking a button. These [social sharing buttons](#) are easy to use and offer too much potential to not include in your marketing plan for the New Year.

Social media is arguably the hottest commodity on the modern internet. Facebook alone has well over 500 million active users, while [Twitter](#) sees more than 50 million tweets going through its network on a daily basis. Even [LinkedIn](#), which is the lesser known of the major social networks, now reportedly has more than 75 million users. These numbers are proof that consumers are deeply embedded in the social web – all the more reason for you to take the social plunge and use these services to expand your marketing reach.

## Use Technology More Effectively

Technology becomes more advanced each year, and each year it delivers more innovative concepts businesses can leverage to take their marketing efforts to the next

level. As a marketer looking for ways to improve your position in the market and enhance the customer experience, it is essential to capitalize on new technology as it is introduced, and take advantage of some of the trends that may have passed you by.

There are all sorts of technologies available to help you bolster your marketing efforts inside and outside of the email arena. Some popular examples are the Get Social app currently being used to connect the blogosphere to the social networks, the TweetDeck service that allows users to integrate their social networking activities, and a variety of iPhone, iPad, and Android apps designed to help businesses increase productivity and work more efficiently.

Not all innovation is right for everyone, so whether it is mobile apps, cloud computing or virtualization, make sure the technology you adopt is suited for the business before investing the money and time on implementation.

## Get to Know Your Customers Better

How well do you know your customers? Are they truly happy with your products or services? Do they view your business as a dependable resource they can count on time and again, or merely as a means to an end? If you are having trouble answering these questions, one of your resolutions for the New Year should be a plan that involves taking time out to get to know your customers better. This is a feat that can be easily accomplished by simply [incorporating a survey or poll in your email message](#), or including a link that directs them to the same type of questionnaires on your website.

Surveys and polls offer an easy way to acquire valuable feedback and improve the experience for your customers. It can help you uncover important information such as:

- How customers feel about your business.
- Where and how customers are using your products or services.
- What products or services you should be offering.
- What days, times, and frequency work best for the individual members of your audience.
- Which areas of your business or email campaigns are in need of improvement.



Understanding your customers is critical to improving retention, increasing conversions, and boosting your profits. The feedback you obtain from an [email survey or poll](#) can work wonders in terms of gathering opinions and measuring the satisfaction levels necessary to make sure you are maintaining strong relationships with your audience.

## Seek Out and Make Use of Free Information Sources

Over the past 15 years, the internet has proven to be one of the most valuable resources known to man, in some ways rendering the traditional library branch obsolete. With improvements in network technology and bandwidth capacity, it is now capable of placing a wealth of information at your fingertips in a matter of seconds. And while there are several marketing experts and gurus using this enormous platform to give away their vast knowledge for a fee, there are also more than enough free resources at your disposal.

From list building techniques to [writing effective email copy](#), just about everything you need to know about running your business successfully can be found online at absolutely no cost to you. Below are just some of the many educational resources up for grabs:

- Niche blogs
- Discussion forums
- Q&A sites
- Video sharing communities
- Ezines and newsletters
- Article directories
- Search engines
- Support documentation published by your ESP

If the internet is the vehicle you rely on to drive consumers to your products or services, why not use it to stay educated and improve your business? With a little patience you can uncover information that helps you better understand your audience, what the competition is up to, and the marketing strategies that can enable you to maintain an edge in your industry.

## Put More Emphasis on Your Content

There is a popular saying in the internet world that goes a little something like this – “content is king.” Although the phrase has been used to the point of abuse over the years, it remains a sound axiom. Content is vital, as it relates to your website and email marketing campaigns alike.

Placing a stronger focus on your content should be among your main objectives going into the New Year. You can make dramatic improvements in the content department by putting emphasis on the following key areas:



**Topics** – Coming up with interesting topics for your email campaigns on a consistent basis is hard work, but it is something that must be done if you want to keep engagement levels up. Providing quality topics may not always generate the responses you want in terms of direct sales or feedback, but it will keep your readers in tune and coming back for more.

**Sales Offers** – A good sale is more than a deal that gives the customer an opportunity to save money; it should also deliver benefits that translate to undeniable value. For one of your New Year's resolutions, consider creating irresistible sales offers on some of the products you have been selling at top-dollar prices, or developing new offerings that allow customers to get the absolute best value for their money, time, and loyalty.

**Product Education** – You can also improve your content by placing added emphasis on information that educates readers on your products or services. This could be information instructing users how to properly use your offerings, their specific benefits, or statistics that add to their credibility. Video email can be a very powerful tool for creating this type of content in a way that makes a real impact.

Content is an element that can never undergo too much fine-tuning, especially when the primary goal of that tuning is for the benefit of your audience. If you keep the focus on providing value, you will eventually become a natural at creating great content people look forward to receiving.

## Strive for Better Subject Lines

Consistently writing good subject lines is perhaps one of the hardest parts of email marketing to perfect. This is one area you cannot afford to slack off in as your message is essentially up against the recipient who must decide whether or not they will open your email and the spam filter that now plays such a huge role in whether or not it even makes it through.

The unofficial rules of subject lines seem to change like the weather, but you can ensure that your message is represented well by always sticking to the best practices. This means your subject lines should:

**Adhere to Character Limits** – Most email clients cut off subject lines at around 50 to 60 characters. Since one of the famous mantras of email marketing is “short and sweet,” you should try to keep your characters well below this to encourage opens from the time-pressed recipient who feels like they don't have all day to read what your message is about.

**Avoid Spammy Headlines** – Spammers have made it harder for genuine marketers to reach the inbox and get their message opened. If your subject lines resemble something a spammer would write, chances are your subscribers (or their spam filters) will group you with the rest of the bad apples and immediately delete the message. For this reason, you should [avoid headlines using the terms and scare tactics spammers often employ to encourage opens](#).

**Be Specific** – Straightforward and specific is the best approach you can take when writing subject lines. Although a headline such as “The Social Media Marketing Newsletter for 2011” may be directly related to your content, something like “Three Tips to Improve Your Social Media Marketing in 2011” is likely to appeal to more recipients as it tells them exactly what they will find when they open your message.

There is no magic formula to writing subject lines. However, there are techniques that have been proven to work, and others that make it impossible to have any success with your campaigns. Make yourself familiar with these techniques and give your subject lines a chance of having a greater impact in 2011.

## Seize Holiday Marketing Opportunities

If there is one resolution you must follow through on during the course of the New Year, it has to be making the most of the opportunities that will allow you to create awareness and boost your profits. These are opportunities that can be realized by taking advantage of all the holidays that take place throughout the year. From Martin Luther King Day in January to Christmas in December, there is a special occasion occurring just about every month that can be leveraged as a marketing opportunity.

Consumers like to see that the companies they support recognize and value the same occasions as they do. It shows that your business has a human side, and this is a trait that could strengthen the bond you have with your audience and result in increased loyalty.

Taking advantage of the holidays with [holiday email templates](#) also serves as a great excuse to engage your subscribers with updates, newsletters, and special deals – definitely opportunities you do not want to miss out on.

## Don't Be Afraid to Think Big

Have you ever wondered why large and successful companies such as Apple, Google, and Microsoft are in the positions they are today? It is because they were not afraid to think big, set huge goals, and then go out and accomplish them. So you don't have the massive user base of Facebook or the IT infrastructure that enables a company like Yahoo! to thrive. This could be a



disadvantage, considering how you want to look at the matter, but it doesn't mean that you can't think outside the box and enjoy enormous success in your market.

Believe it or not but the internet has leveled the playing field, offering easy access to the resources and tools that can enable you to operate with the efficiency of the major corporations. While you may not be able to blow the big fish out of the water entirely, you can very well wrestle away a slice of the market share from some of the bigger companies occupying your niche. Remember – your marketing plan can always be scaled down to accommodate the business, but you should never start out with limitations that cap your potential.

## **New Year, New Opportunities**

So there you have it - a list of resolutions that can help you [improve your email marketing practices](#) and, in turn, enhance the experience for your audience. With a little commitment, these are resolutions you can easily stick to, and if you do you should start witnessing noticeable results in a relatively short amount of time. Having said that, you should not put pressure on yourself to make dramatic changes overnight just because you will be hanging up a new calendar in the office next month. Be realistic about your expectations, put your best foot forward, and you will be able to start 2011 off on the right track.

## About Benchmark Email

Take powerful features by the dozen, sophisticated list management, hundreds of email templates, ultra-precise reports and dazzling email and video email. Now, package all that together for an extremely affordable price. Sound appealing? That's us.

There's a reason – or 100 – that more than 73,000 clients trust us with their email marketing campaigns. With a second-to-none feature set, headache-free tools that make every campaign a snap and extremely reasonable price plans, we're the email marketing service for businesses of all shapes and sizes.

At Benchmark, we're more than email marketing experts, we're innovators. Our main aim is to perfect our email marketing service, but we also follow social networking, search engine optimization (SEO) and Web 2.0 just so our 100% Web-based software is completely compatible with the ever-changing Internet world.

No other service gives you this robust, standard range of features for just \$9.95 a month to start. Find out for yourself by enrolling in our free, 30 day trial [www.benchmarkemail.com/register](http://www.benchmarkemail.com/register).

## Contact Benchmark Email

We welcome your feedback and would love to talk with you about your email marketing needs. Please contact us at the addresses below.

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