

How To (and How Not To) Build Your Email List

In an era when we are all inundated with excess email, how can you convince people to subscribe to your newsletter and announcements?

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

Email is a crucial aspect of your dermatology practice marketing. It helps you maintain a personal connection with your existing clientele and convert new leads into new patients. The greatest challenge lies in building your list. Where do you start? In an era when we are all inundated with excess email, how can you convince people to subscribe to your newsletter and announcements?

THE PROBLEM WITH POP-UPS

No one will subscribe to your list unless you ask. The more convincing and visible your subscription form is, the better. In fact, one of the most popular methods is a pop-up window. It usually appears within seconds of the page loading, and blocks the viewer from seeing content. If they want to read the content, then they must either close the window or subscribe to the list. A surprising number of people will choose the latter, but this method isn't as good as it sounds.

A popular blogger recently ran an interesting experiment, adding a popup subscription form to the homepage and comparing the "before" and "after" metrics. The effectiveness of pop-ups was immediately evident, as the blog's conversion rates increased from 0.85 percent to 1.23 percent.

The experiment also highlighted a serious problem with pop-ups. They annoy people. Some visitors become so annoyed that they leave your website. The same blog saw bounce rates (the number of people who leave a website immediately after arriving) increase from 59.08 to 64.51 percent after adding a pop-up subscription form. That means, for every 10,000 pageviews, the pop-up generated 138 mailing list subscribers, while chasing away 1,993 website visitors.

MORE EFFECTIVE, LESS INTRUSIVE FORM PLACEMENTS

If acquiring email addresses is your primary goal, you

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might not care about the lost visitors. However, your mailing list is simply a means to an end. The primary goal is acquiring new patients or new appointments from existing clientele. How many people visit your website, and call your office—without subscribing to the newsletter? How many of those people would be among the "bounced" users?

Fortunately, there are a number of ways to give your subscription form heightened visibility with minimal annoyance.

- *Try exit pop-ups.* This simple variation from the standard pop-up window can actually reduce your website's bounce rate. The subscription form loads when someone is about to leave a website, rather than immediately after they arrive.
- *Use a "sticky" header or footer.* Include your subscription option in a large, highly visible bar that stays at the top or bottom of the page as the user scrolls. This does not interfere with viewing content, but it is impossible to miss.
- *Include subscription options in content.* This is especially effective on a blog or educational pages. If the viewer finds your content valuable, he or she will likely want to read more. Make it easy by embedding a button or form, or even a text link within your content.
- *Add a sidebar subscription form.* Like the sticky header and footer, this is likely to catch the viewers' attention without impeding their browsing experience.

OFFSITE LEAD GENERATION

Your website is not the only place to find new mailing list subscribers. Facebook is an excellent resource, via their customizable lead generation ads. Like other Facebook ads, you can choose from image, video, carousel, and other formats. If your image meets Instagram's specifications, you can run the ad on both networks.

These Facebook ads will display a call to action button, taking the viewer to a simple form. Name and email are the default fields, but you can add custom questions, allowing you to gather data about your subscribers. Try to keep it short, though, because people will abandon the form if it looks complicated or time-consuming.

Any social media network can be an effective means of building your mailing list, even if the platform lacks the ability to capture addresses with your post or advertisement. Start by creating a landing page on your website, and then use social posts to drive traffic. The challenge is getting people to click the link, and then converting those clicks to subscribers.

One of the most popular and effective lead generation strategies is gated content. This may be in the form of downloads, or articles, videos, and other resources on your website. The landing page will require the viewer to subscribe in order to access the content. Promote it on social media using enticing headlines such as, "Your guide to choosing skin friendly cosmetics" or, "Use this customizable rosacea diary template to discover your triggers."

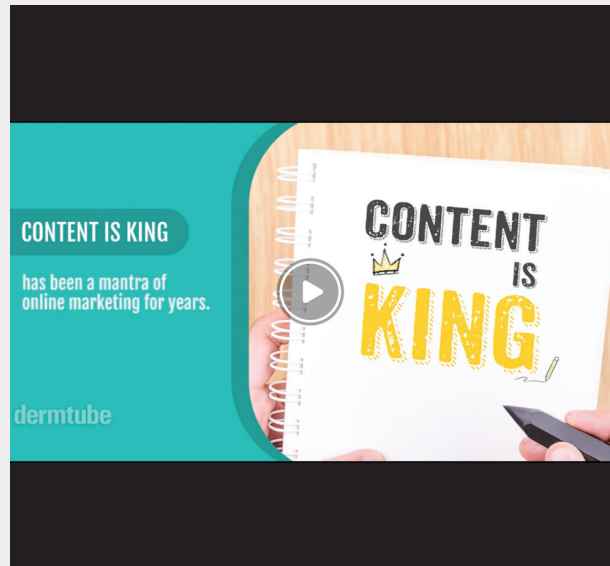
OPTIMIZING EMAIL CAMPAIGNS

One of the most frequently overlooked sources of new readers is your existing mailing list. The healthcare industry has an average email open rate of 21.93 percent, the beauty industry is just slightly lower at 18.48 percent. That means your readership is probably about one-fifth of your subscribers. The rest never open the messages. These are people who have already shown an interest in your practice and in your newsletter content.

Why aren't people opening your emails? One of the most likely reasons is the subject line. About one third of email users decide whether to open an email based solely on its subject line, according to research from Sidekick by HubSpot .

- Messages with subject lines containing "you," "quick," "newsletter," or "meeting" are less likely to be opened.
- Subject lines with "tomorrow," "alert," "sale," "new," "video," or "free" have an above average open rate.
- Personalization can increase the open rate by 22.2 percent.
- Messages are more likely to be opened if the title creates a sense of urgency.

Rule the Content World



Content is king, and Google defines content quality. Well-written, error-free text is essential, but credibility, originality, and relevance are also important.

Watch now:

DermTube.com/video/quality-content/

The worst way to increase open rates is with an enticing, but misleading, subject. Content that is low quality, or fails to deliver what was promised in the subject line seems "spammy" to the reader. Those who open it are unlikely to read it or act on any offers, and it reflects badly on your practice. As a medical professional, you need to establish trust and credibility.

A well planned and implemented email marketing strategy can both bring new patients to your dermatology practice and build the loyalty of current ones. ■

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