A Step-by-Step Guide to
Email Marketing for Beginners

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Grow your online business
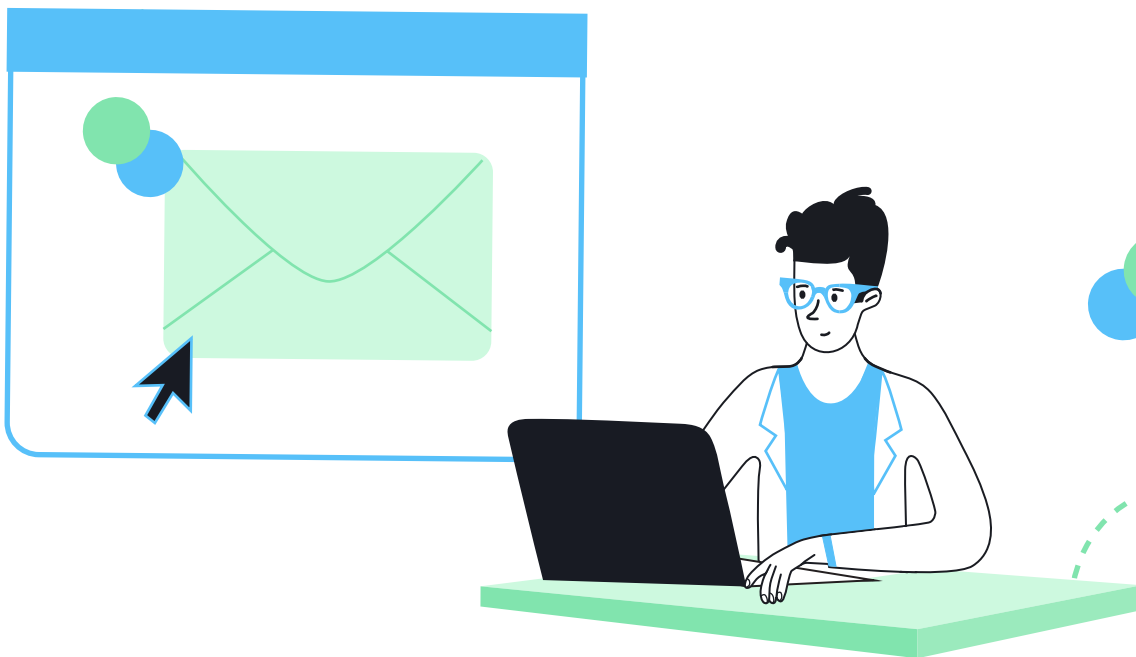
with email marketing.

Online Stores Bloggers Freelancers Small Businesses

Introduction

We know you don't have time to sift through dozens of tutorials, which is why we've made this complete guide to email marketing.

In an age where it's increasingly difficult to compete for your potential and existing customer's attention, you want to stay ahead of the competition and make use of the many digital tools available to you.

But where to start, and which email marketing tool should you go with?

This guide has been created based on years of experience in the field of email marketing. We have extensively and continuously tested all the tools ourselves, and pride ourselves on providing people like you with unbiased recommendations.
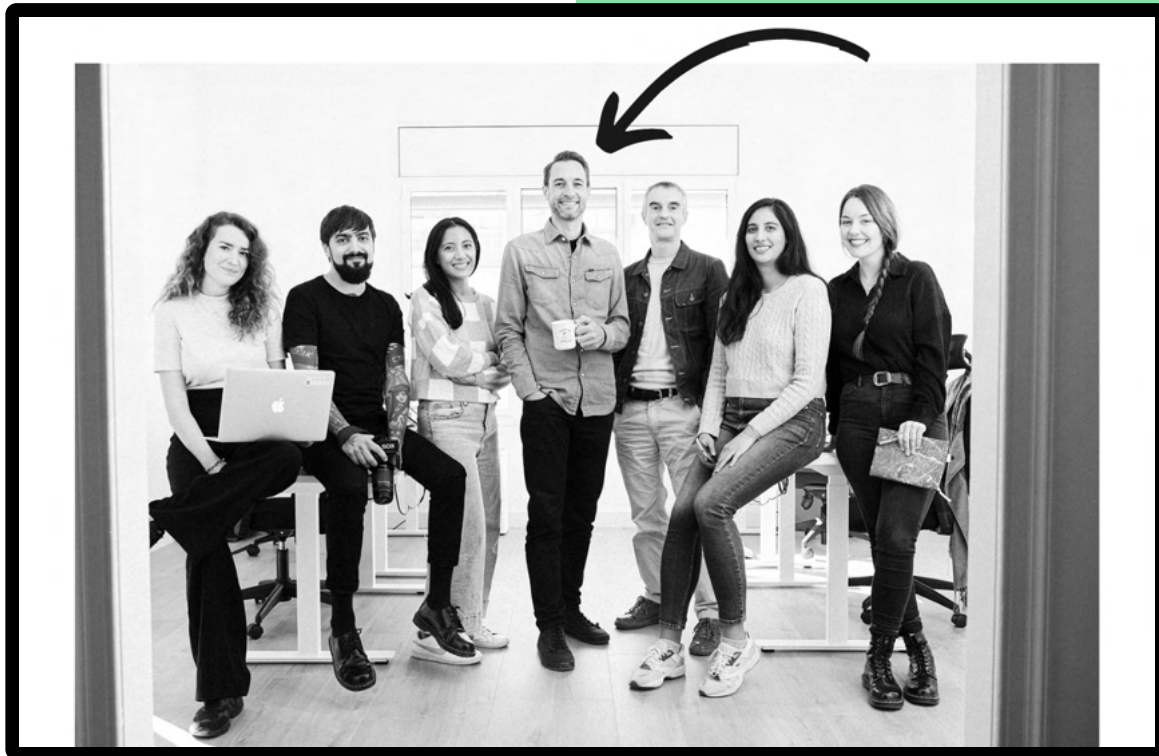
My name is Robert Brandl, and I run EmailToolTester and ToolTester (www.tooltester.com).

I used to work in a digital marketing agency where I managed website and email marketing projects for enterprises.

During my time there, however, I kept coming back to one question: "How can smaller companies benefit from email marketing?" – and that's exactly what this ebook is about.

I hope you find it helpful!

Robert

Contents

Why Email Marketing is Important

Considering the number of different communication channels available (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, just to name a few), maybe you're wondering whether setting up a mailing list is even right for you?

Don't get me wrong, I don't want to suggest that social media can't be an asset of its own, quite the opposite. Building a brand is much easier with social media due to their visual and personal nature.

Email marketing, on the other hand, is a powerful tool due to its incredible reach and acceptance – young and old, everyone has an email address these days. What's more, if someone trusts you with their email address, then they're interested in your products or your content. So communicating with them is exactly what you want to do.

Here are some additional advantages

You're less dependent on Google

Your website is search engine optimized and sends hundreds of additional daily visitors your way? Excellent! Use email marketing to create an additional channel that allows you to collect subscribers. After all, who knows when a Google update will negatively impact your rankings and therefore your organic traffic.

Relationship with customers

Give your newsletter recipients preferential treatment: offer them the best information, early access to the newest products, or invite them to exclusive events. This will help you turn some of your customers into loyal fans.

Email marketing is inexpensive

With a good deal of email marketing platforms offering unlimited emails for $10–$30/month, you'll be hard-put to find another form of marketing at a similar price point. In fact, many tools even offer a freemium plan. Obviously, print newsletters are much more expensive.

Here are some additional advantages

Email tools offer best tracking

Who clicked on which link? Your newsletter tool will tell you, allowing you to find out who is genuinely interested in your products.

Direct call-to-actions

Unlike print newsletters, email recipients can visit your website or register for an event with just a single click.

Disadvantages of Email Marketing

While email marketing has many advantages, you shouldn't overlook a well-known fact: all that glitters is not gold.

— Unlike print media, there is no physical experience.

— Emails are deleted faster and read less thoroughly than print media.

— Email addresses are private, many people don't like handing them out the way they used to.

— Because of spam emails, the legal framework is very strict – therefore, sending emails without express permission is forbidden (see more on this subject later on in the book).

Never forget: Your message is more important than the medium you use, so make sure to produce high quality, interesting content.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Unfortunately, many of the newsletters sent by companies are irrelevant to their recipients. The companies almost always follow the exact same bottom line: increase revenue.

That's why many newsletters follow a simple goal: **sell more stuff or spread company news (that is often boring, unfortunately).**

If a user gives you their email address, they expect authentic, tailored communication with useful information that answers their questions.

So remember: try and establish meaningful relationships with your customers. Your company will benefit in the long run because satisfied customers will recommend you. Obviously, the entire company has to move in that direction – otherwise, people will find you unconvincing.

"The most important tool in a salesperson's arsenal isn't their ability to speak. It's their ability to listen."

So remember: start off by listening to your customers, and find out what they really want to hear from you.

Wow, that almost got a bit philosophical. Let's move on to something more practical!
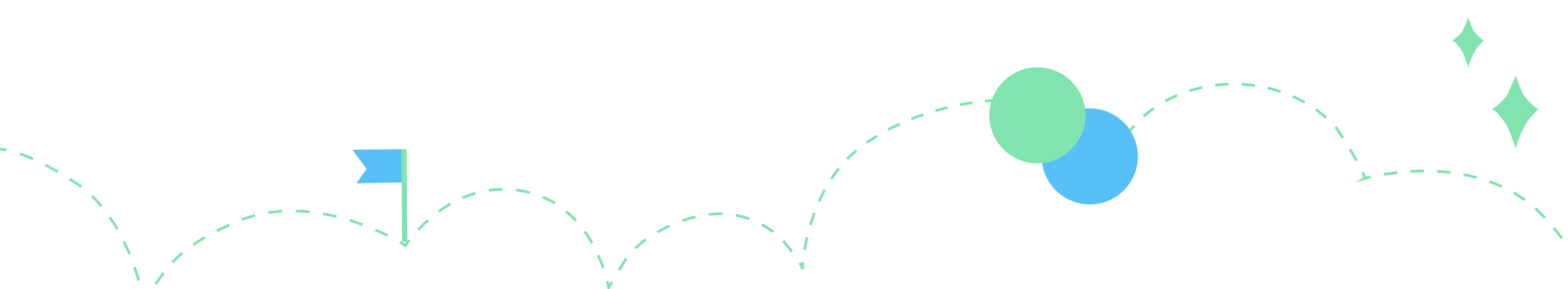
What You Can Do With A Newsletter Tool

Eager to learn more? Let's move on to the technical possibilities of email marketing tools.

Generally speaking, sending an email newsletter is very simple, e.g. by using Gmail. The advantage to using webmail is it's free. **However,** you'd be missing out on a whole series of important features that will make your life much easier:

Automated subscription forms: this gives your subscribers the power of adding or removing themselves from newsletters, which reduces your workload. And you're on the safe side, because you can use double opt-in procedures to ensure that subscribers really want to receive your newsletters.

Double opt-in: the recipient is required to click a link in a confirmation email in order to actually join the newsletter. Otherwise, a competitor might add someone's email address into your mailing list. And complaints from recipients can cause problems down the road.

List management: instead of using Excel, the newsletter tool includes a recipient database. This includes segmenting options (e.g. send emails only to customers who clicked a certain link in the previous email and who live in Florida). Depending on the provider, built-in contact relationship management (CRM) software might be available as well, or at least a direct integration with a third-party tool.

Personalized delivery and personalization: compared to private newsletters, you can't just send emails in carbon copy or blind carbon copy (CC or BCC) in a professional context. Newsletter tools make sure that each newsletter is delivered to the corresponding email address. And if you like, individual greetings for each subscriber are possible too.

Editor for HTML emails: modern newsletter tools offer blocks of content (texts, images, elements from social media) that you can arrange as you see fit. All while being optimized for mobile devices, of course. And you don't need any knowledge of HTML.
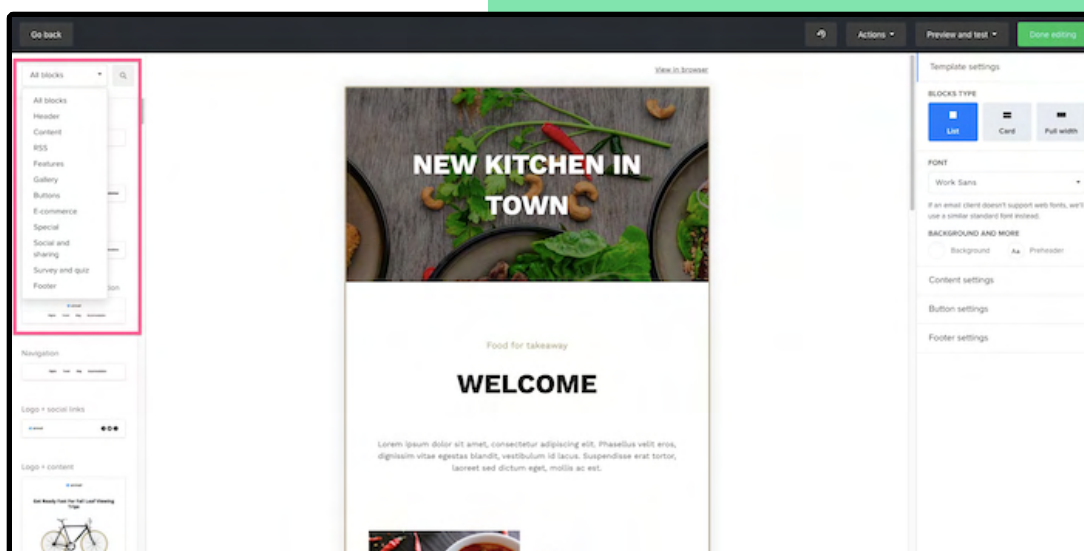
Automatic handling of undelivered emails (Bounces): email accounts may be deleted or addresses misspelled. Your newsletter tool will automatically keep the mailing list clean.

Reporting: this is one of the most interesting email marketing features. You can track every click and see whether the recipients consider your newsletter interesting enough to follow up by visiting your website.
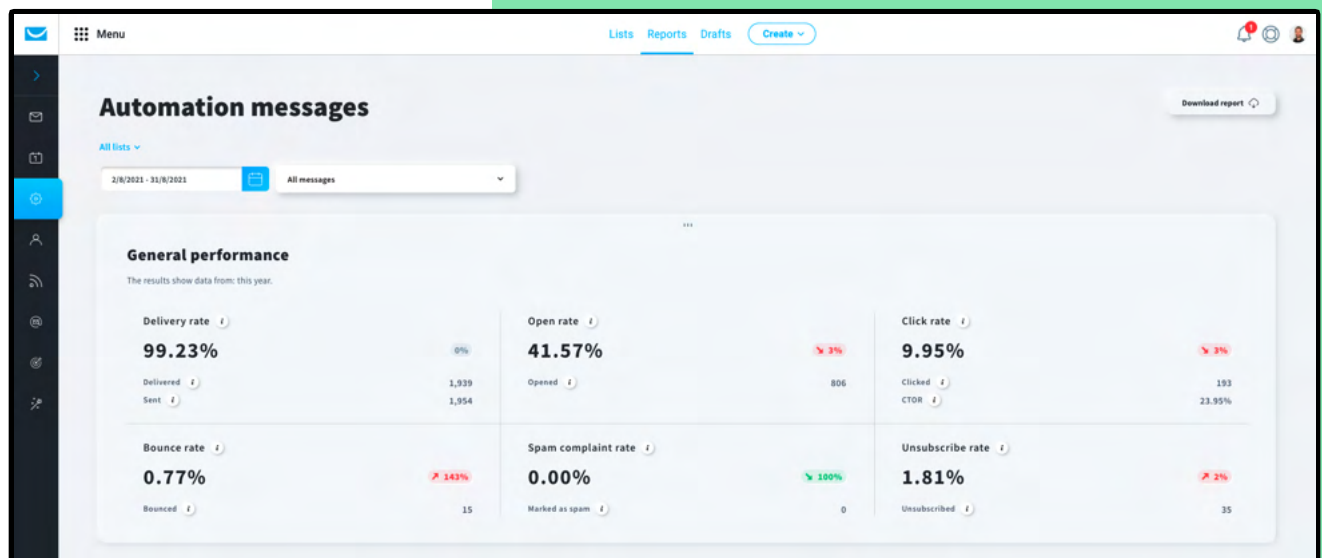
And these are just the standard features every modern newsletter tool should offer.

Another important point are the kinds of emails you can send. These include, but are not limited to:

- The **classic newsletter** - covers a variety of topics, regularly scheduled releases

- The **promotion** - covers only a single topic (irregular releases, e.g. Black Friday)

- The **autoresponder** – a series of emails sent automatically after registration, regularly scheduled releases (e.g. course materials)

- **Follow-up campaigns** - emails with additional information based on previous reading behavior

- **A/B test campaigns** - by switching certain elements for a pre-defined group, you can test which variation has the higher success rate

- **Transactional emails** - automated notification emails, e.g. when someone makes a purchase in your online store

# Choosing A Newsletter Tool And How Much it Will Cost You

I'll assume that you're looking for an inexpensive but powerful solution that can be scaled to match needs. The user interface should be self-explanatory and intuitive, otherwise the tool isn't of much use to you.

First, you need to decide whether your email tool should be hosted by the provider, or whether you prefer installing it on a server of your own. In general, self-hosting is hardly ever worth the effort for smaller and medium-sized companies due to both the cost and work involved in maintenance and security, and the required amount of technical know-how.

That's why our review compares only hosted email marketing tools that can be used by anyone, even without a deeper understanding of the technology behind the scenes. The advantages and disadvantages of both approaches are discussed here.

In case data security is important to your organization, the servers hosting your newsletter tool might be of relevance as well. Most of the larger newsletter providers usually host their servers in the United States. More detailed information can be found in our reviews - including EU-based providers.
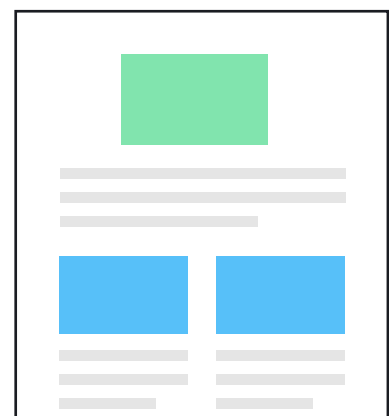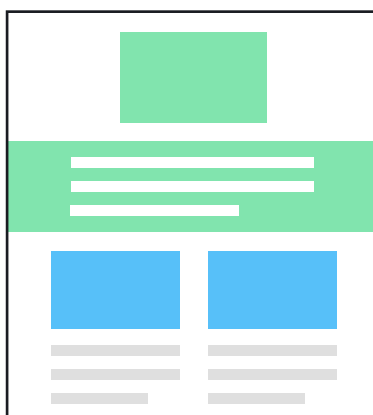
Newsletter Templates
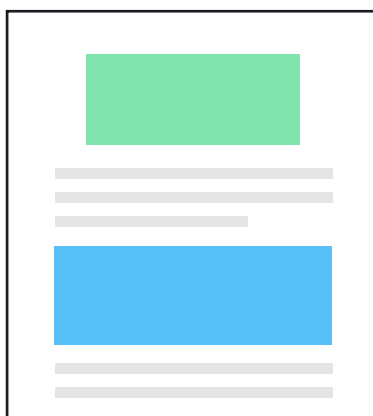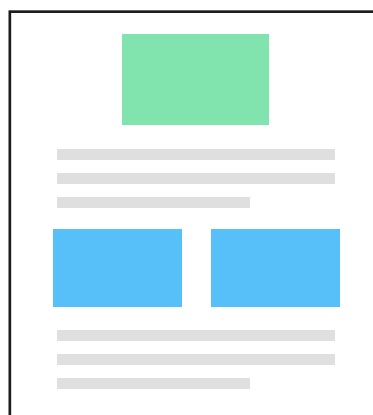

1 Column
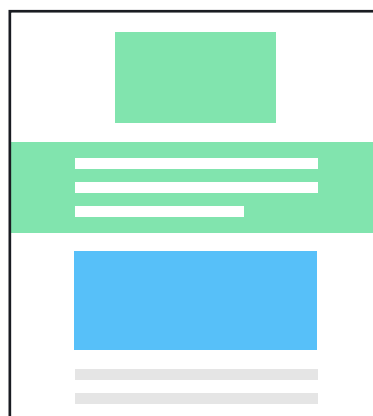
1 Column - Full Width
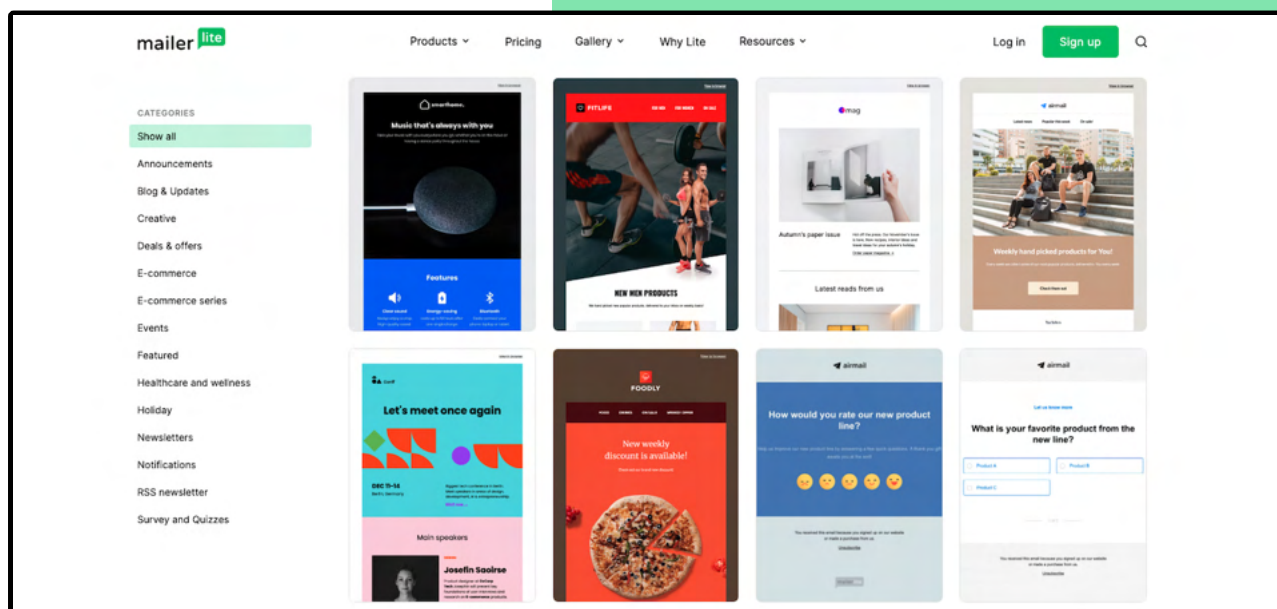

1:2 Column

1:2 Column - Full Width

1:2:1 Column


1:2:1 Column - Full Width

A **"template"** is a kind of "design frame" that dictates the newsletter's layout. The main advantage of a template is that you can create a newsletter without specifying every element all over again every time you want to send one.

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11

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Good Do-It-Yourself providers make template creation easy – just select the general layout, adjust the colors to match your website, and upload a logo or banner for the header. Nowadays, such templates will automatically be ready for mobile devices, also known as "responsive".
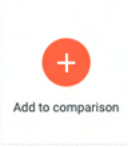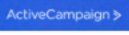
What Will it Cost Me?

The particular advantage of newsletter tools recommended by EmailToolTester.com is their price. The majority of tools offer a freemium plan and are very affordable. Many paid plans even come with unlimited emails.
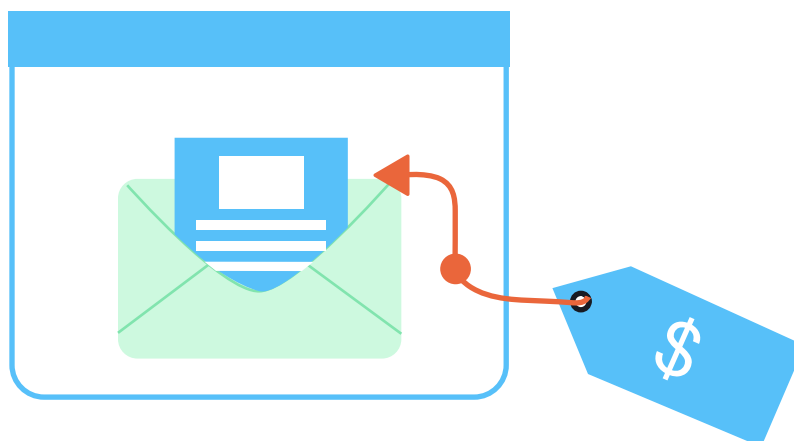
Our advice: compare the providers' prices with our Newsletter Cost Calculator.

We have compiled a list of the most important cloud-based email tools for small-to-medium-sized businesses. Check out our in-depth newsletter software reviews to compare the evaluation criteria in more detail.

Our advice: Freemium plans are becoming more and more popular with many providers. They are free to use, but the number of subscribers is usually limited, and some features might not be available. In general, that's a good way to try out a provider. But even if you like it, be sure to check the actual plans very closely – otherwise you'll move past the freemium mark and be forced to purchase a potentially expensive plan. Changing providers once you have everything set up is a bit of a hassle.

▶ Click here for a comparison of the best providers with free plans

Email Marketing:
Some Things To Be Aware of

There are three topics you should be aware of when looking into email marketing, especially if you're new to the subject.

Legal Issues

Depending on the country you live in, laws may be very different. The **United States** is the most lenient with spammers. According to the CAN-SPAM Act, you can send emails as long as the recipients don't specifically ask you not to.

However, many newsletter tools still require details on where you got your email addresses and whether you have a valid opt-in from the owner. Outright spamming is never a great idea!

Canada and the **EU** see this a bit differently. You should only send emails to recipients if you have an explicit opt-in, and if in doubt, YOU will have to provide evidence that the recipients actually wanted to receive your newsletter. Exceptions may be made for long-standing customer relationships.

And don't forget the procedure of unsubscribing – this has to work, too. Luckily, good newsletter tools will include an unsubscribe link for you, and have a security mechanism that checks whether everything is in order. After all, if recipients can prove that they unsubscribed and continue to receive your newsletters, things might get expensive for you. More details on legal issues can be found here.

The Problem With Spam: How to Avoid Getting Filtered

As long as your emails don't break any of the legal terms listed above, it's likely that your emails will end up where you want them to: the inbox, rather than the spam folder. The high number of unwanted emails remains a problem for reputable senders because they lower the acceptance of the medium as a whole.

The following measures can help:

+ Offer the best content: if you do, your recipients will mark emails as "not spam" if they accidentally are marked as spam by the system, and the ISP will be notified accordingly (e.g. Gmail or Yahoo).

+ Ask recipients to add you to their address book.

+ Avoid dubious blinking banners, ALL CAPS, typos and neon colors (in general, use common sense).

+ Don't attach files (e.g. PDFs) to the emails, but offer them as a download instead.

+ Authentication measures: use SPF, sender ID, DKIM and DMARC in order to minimize the risk of being caught by some kind of filter (more on this below). Check our reviews for more details on which newsletter tool uses which method.

+ Avoid buying addresses! If you send emails to an address that you bought off of some list, the recipients might mark your message as spam. This will impact your deliverability in the long run.

However, don't forget that you can optimize your deliverability on your own, too. Go to Mail-Tester.com or Glockapps.com and send an email to the address shown on the page. Afterwards, you'll get a report listing some suggestions to help you get more out of your email marketing.

Issues Characteristic to Displaying Emails in HTML

Another particular point you need to be aware of in email marketing are the kinks found in many email clients such as Microsoft Outlook or Apple Mail. Simply put, this means that a newsletter may look very different depending on the email client you use. Some clients will allow you to download background images, while another might not – and that's just one example.

That's why many of those amazing style sheet effects (CSS) remain a pipe dream for email, even though we see them on websites on a daily basis. By the way, email HTML is still based on table structures, while websites have almost completely moved on to other technologies. Check out Campaignmonitor at http://www.campaignmonitor.com/css/ for a detailed overview of which styles are supported by which email clients.

Luckily, **most newsletter tools offer optimized templates** which work flawlessly in common email clients, without adjusting the source code.

This means that you can send out newsletters without any knowledge of HTML or other programming skills.

If you prefer to be safe rather than sorry when it comes to your newsletter design, most of the recommendable newsletter tools offer a design testing feature for the most popular email clients.

This feature generates screenshots that show you what your newsletter will actually end up looking like. Be especially careful when reviewing the design for mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets.

Now that you know about the three major pitfalls involved in email marketing, you can prepare yourself – after all, if you know where problems can occur, you can react better and more quickly, too.

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Email Hosting and Authentication

Whatever your business, it's important to use a business domain (john@mybusiness.com as opposed to john@gmail.com). If you already have a website, then you will have already purchased a domain. An email service provider allows for the domain owner to send and receive email on a domain name across a single or multiple public email addresses.

The benefits of using a custom business domain are:

+ Increased brand recognition and trustworthiness

+ The ability to separate email addresses for contact forms, support, and other departmental needs

This service is offered by Google, Microsoft and Zoho, amongst others.

Authentication is important as it tells email clients like Gmail and Microsoft that the sender is authentic and not a bad actor.

SPF stands for Sender Policy Framework and compares the email sender's actual IP address to a list of IP addresses authorized to send mail from that domain. The SPF record is added to a sender's domain name system (**DNS**) and contains a list of authorized IP addresses.

You can further protect your sender identity, authenticate your email, and reduce phishing by using Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting & Conformance (**DMARC**). This is a protocol that uses the above (address domain, SPF, and DKIM) so make sure to set those up first.

Most email marketing services make it very easy to authenticate your domain. This is what it looks like on MailerLite:
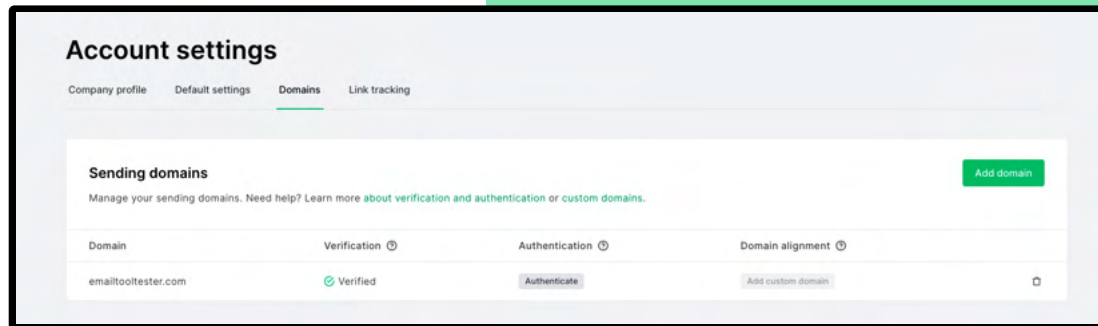
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How To Structure A Newsletter

These days, most newsletters follow a certain structure that has become common practice and is similar to websites. The general idea is that people who read on screens will tend to skim the text rather than taking it in word for word.

The common individual building blocks are usually structured as follows:

Headline

Optional image

Text block Text block

- You could add some bullet points

- You could add some bullet points

▶ **Link to additional information**

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You can repeat segments like these several times over in a newsletter.

This structure has several advantages:

+ By placing the headline in a prominent position, the reader can immediately tell whether the topic is even relevant to them.

+ The text block works as a teaser and makes your readers curious for the details.

+ By linking (also known as "Call to Action"), the reader can get additional information, e.g. on the company blog or website.

+ Afterwards, the statistics will tell you how many readers actually clicked on the link, which will help you to continually optimize your newsletter topics.

Here is an example of one of our newsletters:
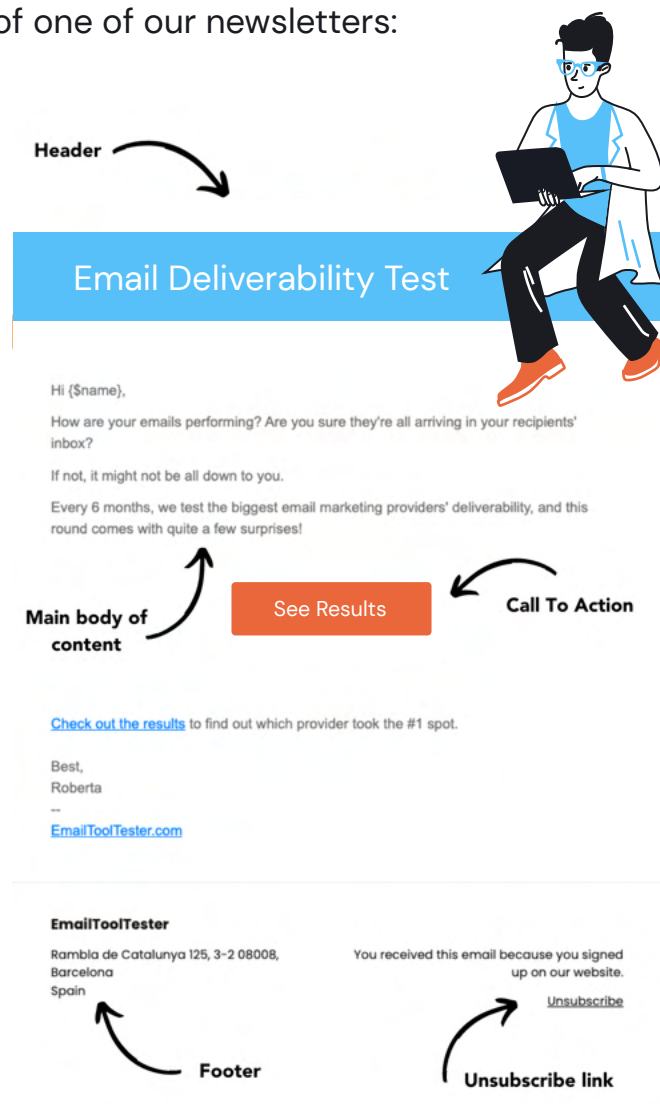
Obviously, this structure isn't the only one that works. For example, if you work in the fashion or media industries, images will be of much higher importance and, accordingly, should receive more prominent placement within your newsletter. Here's an example of a Netflix promotion (the original contains an animated GIF):

Should you want to address your readers very directly, you can skip images altogether and send plain text emails.

There really isn't a universal solution: you'll have to find out for yourself what works best for your target audience. Here are some more newsletter examples from a variety of industries.

Some More Advice to Keep In Mind:

- **Keep your width close to 600 pixels:** most email clients have narrow, low preview windows (this is especially true of smartphones). So put your most important statement at the very top.

- **Choose a good sender name** and a meaningful subject line without sounding too much like an advertisement. Startups, for instance, like to use something like "Alex from CompanyXYZ", to give the email a more personal feel. Example:

  Nick from Hotjar   **Hotjar now works on Single-Page Apps** - Hi Robert, It's of

- If at all possible, the "To:" field and the salutation should be **personalized**. Most newsletter tools will provide you with a custom field for this, like the name field in our email example above

- **Use images that match the text** for maximum impact. Don't forget to keep the image to text ratio in mind – less than a third of your space should be taken up by images. After all, images are often blocked by the email client.

- Specify **alternative texts** for images, otherwise a blocked image will simply show up as an ugly red "X" until the recipient specifically downloads it.

- Embedding **videos** is still not reliable enough in order to be able to play them directly from the mail. Instead, create a screenshot of your video (ideally animated) and use it as a link to the video somewhere online.

- **Avoid attachments:** instead, provide a download link in the email. This reduces the amount of data traffic and the risk of being blocked by a spam filter.

Some Practical Tips

In Case You Don't Have Any Subscribers Yet

Not everyone can rely on a large list of subscribers from day one. But that's not a problem, you can still get started right away.

Make sure you embed a newsletter registration form into your website as soon as possible, this will help build up your list of recipients. As an **option**, you could offer a small, free, digital goody such as an ebook or a PDF checklist. It seems to have worked for you, otherwise you probably wouldn't be reading this ebook right now :-)

And here's the trick: send these new subscribers a series of autoresponder emails, starting from the moment of registration. Remember: this is a series of predefined emails which are automatically sent at certain intervals.

The Autoresponder

Welcome Series (Autoresponder)

Useful Email 1 → Useful Email 2 → Useful Email 3 → Useful Email 4

Regular Newsletter
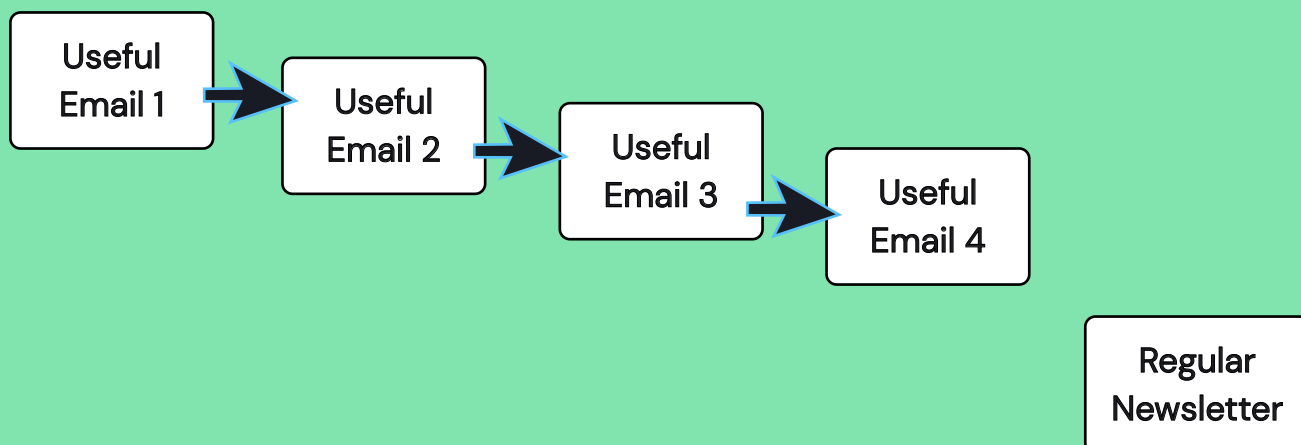
You can pick any topic that could be useful to your subscribers. Obviously, a product that requires some explanation (such as a car) makes this much easier than something trivial (such as an umbrella). To be honest, I wouldn't know what to do for an autoresponder series on umbrellas...

In most cases, however, you'll find something that will be of particular use and interest to people who just **started** their customer relationship with you. And normally that's the time when most customers want the most information anyway.

Asking your customers to provide their email address has another advantage: often times, potential customers will find your website via Google, browse around a bit, and leave. If you're unlucky, they won't have saved your website address nor remembered your company's name.

So it's a lot better if you have the email address in your mailing list and can remind the potential customer to come and stop by for another visit.

If you're a retailer, you could send out a service email after a successful sale, too. For example, we created an automated email for a shoe store which, on the day after the sale, gives the customer some advice on how to best keep their new shoes in good shape. The customer's email address is provided by the customer and added to the mailing list during the checkout process.

Another example of autoresponders is our own – if you got this ebook by registering on our website, that is. If not, you can go ahead and subscribe here.

Aside from the welcome email series, you may want to consider setting up some of the following autoresponders:

- Abandoned cart recovery (in the case of online stores)

- Birthday emails that include a discount code or some other nice surprise

- Upselling automation (send buyers products based on their purchase history)

Most email marketing tools offer a range of automation templates, where you can get ideas from.

Finding Topics For Your Newletter

Sometimes it's not that easy to find topics to cover in a newsletter. While I've said this a couple of times before, I'll say it again: try to deliver useful content! Your newsletter will be shared and read more often, and, as a result, you'll be more successful.

Don't force yourself to meet a weekly or monthly newsletter deadline even though you have nothing of interest to say. Once too few is much better than twice too often.

A great bit of advice for finding topics: ask your support staff what your customers wanted to know in the past few weeks. Often times, these questions are an ideal basis for the next newsletter topic, and they're sure to be genuinely useful for your customers.

Additional suggestions:

- News on your company blog
- Tutorials
- Support videos (including existing ones)
- List articles such as "Ten Tips on Subject XYZ"
- Notices on legal topics (e.g. in cooperation with a lawyer)
- User reviews/testimonials based on practical experience (e.g. from customers)
- Reviews (not about your own products, of course)
- Stories from your day to day working life as long as they're relevant to your customers
- Infographics
- Interviews with experts

Then there might be bloggers or other news sites that cover topics that relate to your area of expertise – you could add links to those sites in your newsletter.

Bonus tip: if you do this, tell the author! They might reciprocate, and you might be mentioned in their newsletter next time.

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Your Checklist to Get Started With Email Marketing
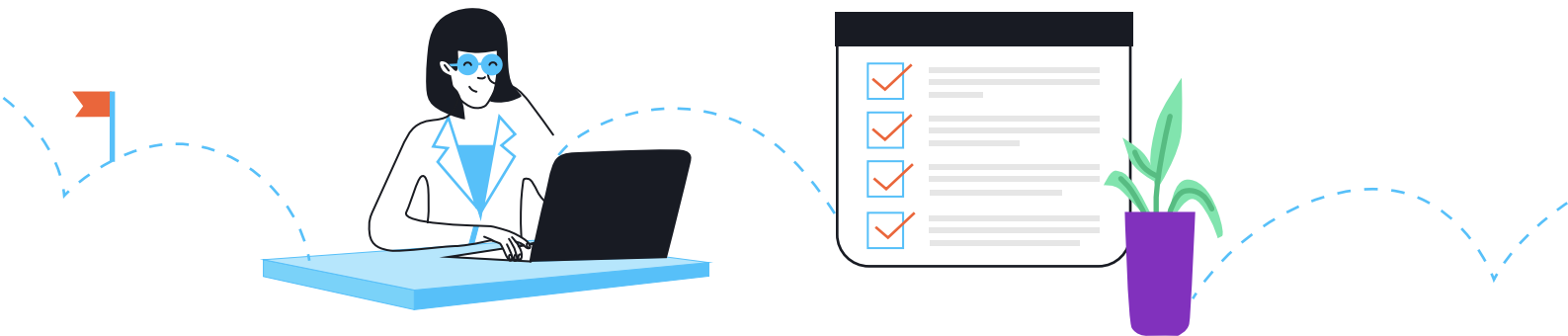
1. Find yourself a suitable **email provider** and make sure they can meet your requirements. You can use our provider comparison chart to make things a bit easier.

2. Create a **free test account** and get to know the tool and its features.

3. Now you can create an **email template** in line with your branding. Think about which elements your email template needs to include, e.g. a logo, a banner graphic, links to social media profiles, legal notes, a link to a contact form, etc. Should you plan on sending plain text emails only, you can skip this step.

4. Now set up your **sender email address**. As this is usually the email address that responses will be addressed to, someone should check this address on a regular basis and respond to any incoming emails.

Optional: Should you be versed in name server settings for domains (or have access to an IT expert), you can implement authentication settings, too. While these steps are **not** crucially important, they can improve your deliverability rate. Depending on the tool you use, authentication can be handled via SPF or DKIM. You can also use special domains or subdomains for the trackable links within your newsletters, though this depends on the tool you use as well. Check the provider's documentation for more information on the subject.

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26

5. Now you can get the **subscription process** up and running. Create a registration form for your website and specify the confirmation emails used for double opt-in procedures. And don't worry, that sounds a lot more complicated than it really is.

6. Optional: **import any existing contacts** that have already opted in. If necessary, you can start sorting contacts into segments, too. That way, you'll be able to increase your reader's engagement.
Should you have carried over contacts from a previous system even though they've opted out, you can add those addresses to a blocklist in most email tools in order to prevent accidental delivery of unwanted emails. But be sure to check whether these additional email addresses affect your monthly cost, as some platforms such as Mailchimp include inactive subscribers in your subscriber allowance.

Attention: keep in mind that most newsletter providers will ask you to provide information on where you got the email addresses you enter. This mechanism is intended to prevent customers from uploading lists with bad information purchased from shady sources – after all, such lists cause spam complaints to go up, which, in turn, adversely affects email server performance.

Congratulations!

You have successfully completed the email marketing crash course. Now you should be ready to start working on growing your business with email marketing. I hope you learned lots, and had some fun along the way.

If you found this information useful and would like to show your appreciation, here are some ways you can do that:

- Visit the newsletter tools via the links on EmailToolTester.com. If you decide to sign up with a provider and have clicked through from our site, we get a commission. This is our only source of income since we prefer not to use banner ads. Of course, the price remains exactly the same for you.

Learn more at: **emailtooltester.com**

27

● Visit the newsletter tools via the links on EmailToolTester.com. If you decide to sign up with a provider and have clicked through from our site, we get a commission. This is our only source of income since we prefer not to use banner ads. Of course, the price remains exactly the same for you.

● Subscribe to our YouTube channel, which is full of useful reviews and resources.

● And of course, please share this ebook with anyone you think might find it helpful! Here's the link again.

In case you have any unanswered questions after reading this ebook, please contact me directly at contact@emailtooltester.com.

Why not visit our other websites?

Tooltester.com: create your own website using drag and drop instead of HTML chaos.

AppToolTester.com: create an app without programming skills? Yes, please!

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