



Better Email Marketing

In the pantheon of marketing tools there is a relative newcomer, the e-promo. This tool has become arguably at least as important as the printed promo, but there are few examples of it being done really well by photographers. Most photographers report low click-through rates (low single-digit percentages) and even the open rates aren't very promising. And yet, this is a tool that can have a major impact on reaching targets; so how can it be used better?

First off, before you do any marketing, you need to target appropriately. Recently, a reader posted a comment on my blog about a friend who got suddenly inundated with email promos from photographers. The trouble was that the guy wasn't a photo buyer--he got put on the AD-BASE list incorrectly (his company rarely buys photography but was marked as frequently buying) and photographers who did not do the proper research included him on their lists. Now, you can't research every single contact name on your list (unless you have lots of interns with time on their hands), but you can do better than blindly using pre-selected lists from list services. If someone had checked out this guy's company website, for example, it would have been fairly clear that it probably wasn't a good choice to send to.

So, first step is to make your own best list(s). I've written a lot about that so I won't go into it here in great detail. The basic point is to know who you are going to send to, what their needs really are (ahem, do they use lots of images of people and you shoot still life?), and thus try to make sure that they are appropriate targets for your e-promo.

Segmentation is a great idea at this point, especially if you have a diverse set of buyers. For example, if you are an architectural shooter, you may have clients who are architects, others who are interior designers, and others who are client direct-type clients and those can be split into retail companies and universities. You could segment your list into these 4 categories and send 4 different e-promos instead of one to all. The architects could get a great image of an exterior, the IDs get an interior, retailers get something from a retail project and universities get something from a previous university shoot.

Now the meat of your e-promo will get you better results if it is something more than your image and a note to "click here to go to my site." Yes, that is better than nothing, but if you can figure out something to **give** your targets, you'll do better. For example, these Manuals I send are, essentially, e-promos for my business when you really think about it. You get them via email, you are on my list, and some of you hire me--yup, that fits the description! :-)

So, what can you offer your targets? Can you write a short article that they might be interested in? It could be something directly business related or maybe something quirky. If I shot food, I'd send a recipe or a restaurant review, for example. If you can't write well, how about sending links to info by others? For example, since everyone has issues with stress in the workplace, maybe you could send them a link to an article you read with some hints or some fun online

game for them to play. Try to make it connect with the image you are including somehow--if you show a great workplace image, then one of these stress ideas could match well, or if you show a personal image from your trip to Thailand, send links about Thai food or culture...you get the idea.

To improve your list, ask in your e-promos for recommendations. Near the end, include a line like "If you know anyone else who you think might be interested in this email or my work, please forward this email to them or send me their address." If you are using a good email promo service, you should get in your reports info about emails getting forwarded--a good thing to track.

Subject lines are always a difficult consideration. If you have an opt-in only list, like I do, then you can expect that people are going to have at least some idea who you are and why you are contacting them, so the subject line isn't as crucial. However, for most of you, your lists are, at best, only partially opt-in--mostly they come from some source like Agency Access--so you need to grab recipients' attention with the subject line. In that case, surveys say shorter is better and think about catchy ideas. If you shot a project in a prison, how about "PhotoBob goes to jail" or a food shooter might say "from lychee nuts to lingonberries" or if you shoot retail, how about "Thank you, come again."

These short subject lines can be followed up with a full headline at the top of the email main body. For example...

To: fabooAB@boffo.com
From: PhotoBob
Subject: Thank you, come again

PhotoBob shoots 7-11 employees as part of a personal project

I've been fascinated by 7-11s since my first Slurpee at age 8, so the idea of shooting their employees came as naturally to me as a post-Big Gulp burp. Here is an example of the project: (image, etc., etc.)

You shouldn't put your URL in the subject line and you don't even need your name there as long as it's clear in the "from" part of the email or it appears in the headline of your copy. Think about the e-promos you get and which ones work on you? That will help, too. Oh, and check out lists of spam-tastic words to avoid in subject lines, so the filters don't snag your promo (no exclamation points, either--those are *muy* spammish).

I could write a whole chapter on this subject (in fact, I am for my new marketing book due out sometime this year). But there isn't space enough in this Manual for everything so here are some resources with more e-promo hints (and mistakes to avoid) to consider:

www.mailchimp.com/resources/html_email_mistakes.phtml
wiki.apache.org/spamassassin/AvoidingFpsForSenders
www.myemma.com/askemma/

To sum up: target, make the content relevant, use a short subject line, avoid spammish stuff, and track your results; all steps to make e-promos work for your business.