

LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

The Marketing Guide for Local Business Owners

October 2017

5 Tips to Plan for a Successful Holiday Season

10-Step SEO
Method for
Writing Optimal
Blog Posts

7 Leading Tools
for Generating
Quality Leads

*The Importance
of Using a
Professional
Email Marketing
Platform*

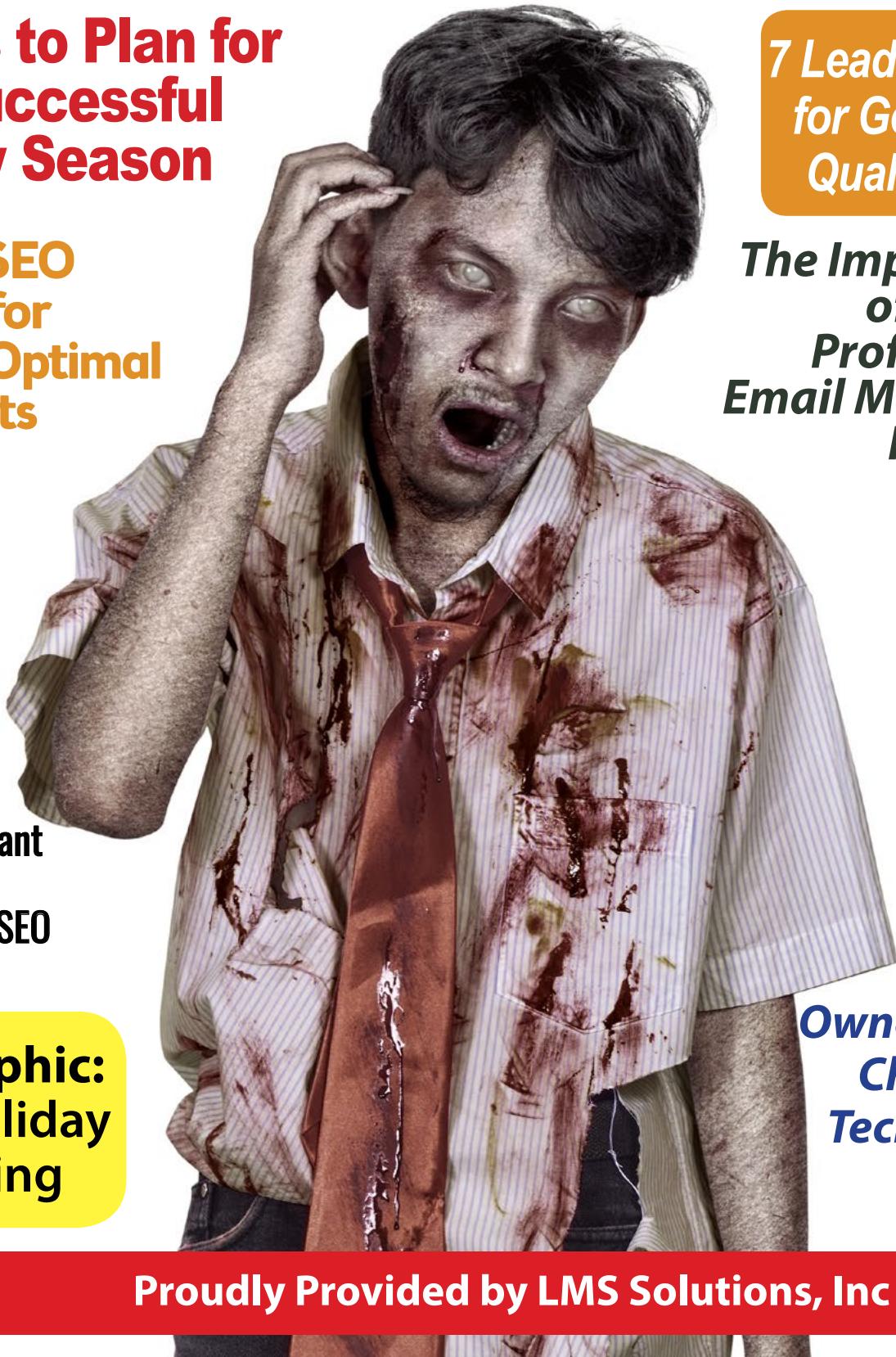
The 5 Important
Benefits of
Outsourcing SEO
to an Agency

Infographic:
2017 Holiday
Planning

Why Do
Business
Owners Resist
Changes in
Technology?

FREE!

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Welcome!

While performing research for this month's infographic, we found it interesting that 25% of consumers begin researching potential holiday purchases in the month of October. As a local business owner, the time is now to start planning and implementing your holiday marketing strategy.

In this issue, you'll find a selection of articles covering many topics that we hope will help you execute successful marketing campaigns and take advantage of the holiday seasons.

We really believe you'll enjoy the information in this month's infographic; 2017 Holiday Planning.

If you're not already receiving this magazine regularly, we suggest you add your email to our subscriber list. We have some exciting articles already in the works for the upcoming issues. Don't miss out!

If you like the magazine, and know other local business owners that could benefit from receiving our magazine each month, please do us (and them) a favor by forwarding a copy to them.

We welcome any comments or questions you might have, as well as the opportunity to explain how we've been able to help businesses just like yours.

David Akers
President / CEO
LMS Solutions, Inc.

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Marketing Calendar

Plan your marketing messages around these upcoming holidays and proclamations.

October

Adopt A Shelter Dog Month
Breast Cancer Awareness Month
Bullying Prevention Month
Blindness Awareness Month
Celiac Disease Awareness Month
Domestic Violence Awareness Month
Down Syndrome Awareness Month
Dyslexia Awareness Month
Emotional Wellness Month
National Dental Hygiene Month
National Pizza Month

Oct 9 - Columbus Day (U.S.)
Oct 31 - Halloween

1st - Homemade Cookies Day
2nd - Name Your Car Day
3rd - Techies Day
4th - Taco Day
4th - Vodka Day

5th - Do Something Nice Day
6th - Noodle Day
9th - Kick Butt Day
11th - Coming Out Day
11th - Stop Bullying Day
13th - Train Your Brain Day
14th - Motorcycle Ride Day
14th - National Dessert Day
15th - Grouch Day
16th - Boss's Day
19th - Get to Know Your Customers Day
17th - Pasta Day
18th - National Chocolate Cupcake Day
18th - National No Beard Day
22nd - Mother-in-Law Day
28th - Make A Difference Day
28th - Chocolate Day
29th - Cat Day
30th - Candy Corn Day
31st - Knock-Knock Jokes Day

November

Adopt A Senior Pet Month
Aviation History Month
Epilepsy Awareness Month
Historic Bridge Awareness Month
Lung Cancer Awareness Month
Military Family Appreciation Month
National Adoption Month
National Alzheimer's Disease Month
National COPD Month
National Diabetes Month
Family Literacy Month
Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

November 11 - Veteran's Day
November 23 - Thanksgiving
November 24 - Black Friday
November 25 - Small Business Saturday
November 27 - Cyber Monday

2nd - Men Make Dinner Day
3rd - Housewife's Day
4th - Candy Day
5th - Doughnut Day
5th - Daylight Saving Time Ends
6th - Nachos Day
10th - Marine Corps Birthday
11th - National Sundae Day
14th - National Pickle Day
15th - Clean Out Your Refrigerator Day
16th - Fast Food Day
16th - Great American Smokeout
17th - Take A Hike Day
18th - Mickey Mouse's Birthday
18th - Adoption Day
26th - National Cake Day
28th - French Toast Day
30th - Computer Security Day

Happy Holidays

5 Tips to Plan for a Successful Holiday Season

It's never too early to start preparing for the holidays. Online and traditional brick-and-mortar businesses earn a hugely disproportionate amount of their annual sales during the holidays. There's no type of product or service that you can't leverage for holiday promotions.

Holiday marketing is extremely competitive, however. You need to do everything possible to stand apart from your competition, so people choose your holiday offerings, which requires a lot of strategic planning. Here are five tips to help make this your most successful holiday season ever.

1. Plan for a Two-Month Holiday Season

Traditionally, the season runs from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. Recently, however, it's gotten quite a bit longer. In fact, the period from Halloween to the end of the year has morphed into one long holiday season as far as shopping is concerned.

As everyone knows, the biggest shopping day of the year is Black Friday (although Amazon has recently challenged this with its own Prime Day).

Black Friday is gradually turning into something even bigger: "Black November." Businesses are

moving from pre-selling customers for Black Friday to offering special promotions throughout the month.

Halloween, which conveniently lands on the very last day of October, also provides a connecting link to the major holiday season. Arguably, the first few weeks of the New Year are also an extension of the holidays as people look for extra good deals.

The upshot of these trends is that the season now effectively takes up at least two full months, or one-sixth of the year, making it more important than ever to plan your strategy well in advance.

2. Have Enough Inventory and Personnel

When planning for the holidays, make sure you have sufficient resources in place. If you deal in physical products, do your best to anticipate how much inventory you'll need. You surely don't want to run out of stock on popular items.

On the other hand, don't go overboard and order too much. You don't want to get stuck with unsold merchandise you'll have to mark down sharply at the end of the year.

If you sell on Amazon, keep in mind that it charges for unsold inventory in its FBA. Base your calculations on past performance as well as industry trends.

The holidays are also a time when you have to think about hiring extra help and setting up work schedules. Some people go away this time of year and may not be available.

If it's appropriate for your business, you might hire seasonal workers or, for digital tasks, virtual assistants.

3. Divide the Holiday Season Into Segments

It's better to segment the holiday season into distinct periods rather than treat it as one undifferentiated two-month affair. Creating separate campaigns for specific holidays and events gives you a chance to target various customers as well as reach the same customers at different times. You can run distinct campaigns for:

- Halloween -- Even if there's no obvious tie-in between your business and scary movies, trick-or-treating, and parties, you can always run a "scary" sale.
- Thanksgiving -- For companies that sell food-related products, Thanksgiving itself is a good chance to increase sales. For everyone else, it's a good time to connect with your customers and express your appreciation for them. You can do this with blog posts, social media messages, or paid ads.
- Black Friday -- This one is obvious and includes every type of business.
- Cyber Monday -- The Monday after Thanksgiving is a new shopping tradition for online sellers. Keep in mind, though, that lots of people shop online on Black Friday as well, so it's Black-Cyber Weekend.
- Christmas/Hanukkah/ Kwanza - While these holidays are when people exchange gifts, once you get close to the actual dates, your focus should be more spreading good will rather than selling, unless you sell products that people consume on these days.
- Winter -- Apart from the festive and religious holidays, December marks the beginning of winter (or summer in the southern hemisphere). For certain items, such as winter clothes or sports, there are obvious promotional tactics, but any business can tie the season into their content.
- New Year's -- This includes New Year's Eve celebrations as well as looking ahead to the new year itself. New Year's resolutions provide a variety of marketing

opportunities, such as students about to begin a new semester at school. Some people take winter holidays, others buy new cars; both give you a chance to bridge the holiday season into the coming year with your marketing.

These are just some examples of how you can emphasize special holidays and segments of the season.

4. Offer Shoppers Simple and Convenient Solutions

The holidays can be a joyous time, but many people also find them stressful. One reason for this is the hectic rush to find the right gifts and the best deals while staying within a budget. If you want to increase your holiday profits, think of ways to make holiday shopping easier and less stressful for people.

For example, gift certificates provide a convenient solution that doesn't require the buyer to choose a particular item. Bundling products together for a good price gives people a chance to get several gifts with one purchase. Give customers as many options for shopping as possible,

whether from your website, mobile devices, by phone or in person.

5. Uplift and Engage With Your Customers

Even as people buy gifts and spend more than usual during this season, holiday burnout is also common. As the holidays get ever more commercial, there's a certain backlash as some people scale back their spending and try to focus on the original spirit of the holidays.

As a business, this presents you with a paradox. You are, after all, trying to sell products and make as much money as possible. You can, however, maintain a balance by also using this time to connect with people authentically.

Don't make all of your holiday content about products and sales. Tell anecdotes and display photos and videos of yourself, your family, your employees, even pets. Invite your customers and followers to submit their holiday photos on your social media pages. Another idea is to raise money for a worthy cause and donate a portion of your profits.

The holidays are a good time to share helpful and uplifting content, even if it's not directly related to what you sell. By positively engaging with your audience, you're also indirectly marketing. While it's always nice to make fast sales, you should also be thinking about building long-term relationships with customers.

Merge Your Holiday Marketing Into Your Year-Round Marketing

While the holiday season is often the most profitable time of year for businesses, you shouldn't put all of your hopes into it. Even as the season gets more drawn out, it's still only a small fraction of the year. That said, many of the marketing tactics covered above help you build your business year round. For example, it's always helpful to connect with your customers genuinely, offer them convenient solutions, and target campaigns based on holidays (including smaller holidays throughout the year) and seasons. You can take many of these holiday marketing tips and merge them into your marketing all year long.



7 Leading Tools for Generating Quality Leads

Almost every online business needs to generate leads. However, finding traffic sources and leads can be a frustrating process if you aren't getting results. An effective lead generation system can reduce this frustration, though, by reliably converting a high proportion of visitors into leads and then sales. A central aspect of this system is a tool that entices visitors to take the next step.

The following lead

generation tools are all proven ways of turning traffic into qualified leads who help grow your business.

Ebook

Ebooks are established lead generation tools, offering relevant information in a digestible format. You could create an ebook that delivers a broad look at a topic. Alternatively, an ebook could be focused on a single issue or technique. In most

cases, providing a single strategy or concept will deliver better conversion rates, as the information is more immediate and attractive compared with a long book.

Email Newsletter

An email newsletter is a popular method of generating leads. You will need to consistently message leads via email, so it makes sense to promote the benefits of your

newsletter. The deluge of messages most people face on a daily basis has made it harder to solely promote an email newsletter. However, if you can articulate why your newsletter is essential to your industry, you can still get a good conversion rate.

Video Tutorial

There will be many occasions where video is the best method of giving information. Certain visitors won't be willing to read an ebook, so a video tutorial will be more appropriate. It is also possible to combine the two methods, offering an ebook version of your video. Video has the added benefit of showing personality, helping leads put a face or voice to the brand.

Webinar

Webinars are similar to video tutorials, but they typically last longer and include audience participation. If you can keep someone on a webinar that lasts an hour or more, they are highly likely to be a qualified lead. The added length of a webinar lets you provide

quality information, show some personality, and pitch an offer to an attentive audience.

Blog Post

A blog post is a great way of capturing leads as you have an interested audience consuming content. You can add an opt-in form during and at the end of the post, but it is important to actively sell the subscription. Consider offering a downloaded version of the blog post or an add-on that can enhance what has just been read.

Social Media Contest

Social media contests are excellent ways of increasing engagement, particularly when the prize is relevant to the niche. Broader prizes tend to attract cold leads, but you still get the opportunity to move people into your sales funnel. To get the most reaction to a contest, use some paid advertising to greatly increase visibility.

White Paper

A white paper will typically

involve some new research and an authoritative viewpoint, so there is some greater initial work involved. The finished result will, however, provide your business with more legitimacy and authority, encouraging targeted leads to seek out more information.

A white paper won't be necessary for many industries, but it does offer the chance to elevate your reputation and stand out from the crowd.

Lead generation will be one of the primary marketing tools of a business, so it is important to test the process. Not every tool will work for every business, with certain strategies being more effective based on the industry you operate in.

When you settle on a few tools and optimize the process, you can streamline your entire business. Knowing your lead conversion rate then enables you to invest more into traffic generation, safe in the knowledge that you will return with a profit.

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10-Step SEO Method for Writing Optimal Blog Posts

Ranking in the search engines used to be dominated by backlink building. While links are still important, there is now far more focus on quality content and on-page optimization. For sites willing to create excellent content that draws in readers, the updated algorithms have only benefited them, allowing them to rank for competitive keywords. Creating a good post is key, but there needs to be a proven system in place to maximize every piece of content you create. The following 10-step

method can be used to create an ideal blog post for the search engines.

Keyword Research

Finding the right keyword ensures you target terms achievable with enough search volume. The Google Keyword Planner, Ahrefs, and Moz can all be used to find keywords, but there are many more options available. When using your target keyword in a blog post, add it to the title, URL, and briefly within the text, but avoid including it too regularly.

Competitive Analysis

Competitive analysis has a couple of benefits in the early stages of planning. Firstly, you get to see the type of content currently ranking in the top positions.

Understanding the type of content the search engines are including, whether long articles, videos, images posts, or a combination of these, will help you plan. Secondly, you can decide whether the competition levels make it worth your while to develop a post.

Content Research

Using the top-ranking sites in the previous step, you can see the level of content with which you are competing. Your target should be to better the efforts of your competitors, ensuring visitors find what they want on your blog. When you understand the competition levels, research the topic thoroughly looking for ways to improve the overall experience when people visit the blog post.

Add Media

The most engaging blog posts will include media that enhances the experience. A relevant video could help explain aspects of the post differently, while the average dwell time should also increase. Images, particularly infographics, are excellent ways of describing detailed information simply. You can also see increased social sharing when the media has some value.

Optimize Post

Along with adding different types of media, you can optimize a post in a variety of ways. Adding a relevant title, description, and tags

help the search engines and visitors know the content's subject matter. Alt tags should be used on all images, while sub-headings and bullet points can improve readability.

Preview Content Before Publishing

Check the important elements of your post before publishing. Firstly, ensure there are no spelling errors and the formatting is correct. Social sharing is a vital part of blogging, so make sure the social buttons are active and linked correctly. Finally, consider how a new visitor would view the post, thinking about the title and the first impressions your above-the-fold content will give.

Contact Network

Successful bloggers have a network of people they can rely on for support. When they present an important piece of content, their network will promote the post on their site or social media accounts. After publishing your post, or even beforehand when the content is high quality, let your network know there is a new piece of

content available. Reciprocal relationships of this kind help all parties to grow continuously.

Promote on Social Media

Promoting a post on social media can lead to re-posts and an active conversation about the subject matter. This conversation, along with the added backlinks, can help your SEO endeavors as the search engines see you have a relevant and topical post. Social media posting won't usually bring about quick results, but consistency can help to grow an active following.

Follow the Reaction

Publishing content shouldn't be the end of the process. A successful post will create a buzz that leads to ongoing conversation, requiring additional promotional work. Responding to blog comments leads to more relevant content being added to the page, showing the search engines that the post has value. Additionally, other bloggers might respond to your content, helping to create powerful backlinks.

Update When Required

If you want to maintain consistent rankings, it is important to keep information updated. Search engines want to provide up-to-date content, focusing on freshness and relevance. You don't have to change a post entirely, but adding some new content can stop

it going stale and help drive new visitors to the site.

Following this method gives you a good chance of ranking for your target keywords. Creating good content is an essential part of the process, but it is not enough to hope your blog post will do all the work. A combination

of research, optimization, and promotion will ensure you give yourself the best opportunity of success, reducing the need for your content to go viral. The search engines will get what they want, while readers will be encouraged to promote you, with a host of new visitors arriving as you start to rank.

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The 5 Important Benefits of Outsourcing SEO to an Agency

While SEO might not be the trendiest online marketing solution anymore, it is still among the most effective options available. The research company Borrell Associates estimate that SEO spending will reach almost \$80 billion by 2020, with small businesses being a major driver of the growth. An important factor in this growth is the fact that SEO gets results, helping businesses of all sizes find their ideal audiences. Every business should have an optimization strategy in place, but the smart option is often to outsource the work to an experienced SEO agency. So what are the main benefits of outsourcing SEO?

Benefits of Scale

An established SEO agency will be running campaigns for a broad selection of businesses. The size of the operation means they can benefit from scale, reducing the cost to perform activities in bulk. Starting an account with a quality press release service, for example, will be more expensive if you are only sending out occasional releases.

Enterprise accounts at many software services offer bulk discounts, but these won't be available for individual businesses running small campaigns. When you can benefit from scale, the buyer can see reduced prices.

Cutting Edge Knowledge

SEO is evolving at a rapid pace, but it is not always clear what is going on at the time. Industry professionals keep a keen eye on the best blogs and speak with their industry contacts. An SEO agency will ensure they are working with the most cutting-edge knowledge and techniques, making it easier for their clients to benefit. A small business that runs its own SEO campaigns is far more likely to be using outdated information, eventually leading to declining results.

Software

Software is a key part of the SEO process. SEO is used to perform market research,

competitive analysis, and rank tracking. While there are plenty of software options, the best tools come at a premium. An agency will have a collection of the best tools, using the most advanced products to run their campaigns. Small businesses could purchase the same quality tools themselves, but the monthly costs can quickly eat into profits. The larger agencies even have their own software created for them, offering bespoke solutions to their work processes.

Consistency

One of the major keys to successful SEO is consistency. You cannot complete some initial

work and hope the results stick. Not only will your competition be working on their own optimization, but the search engines can quickly drop a site if they are not experiencing any promotional activity. Without a dedicated SEO department work can gradually slip, so employing an agency will ensure focus is maintained to a strict schedule.

No Staff Training Required

The nature of SEO means you cannot simply provide some initial training and never worry again. Changes in the industry, algorithm updates, and unexpected search results will need to be addressed through

training and analysis. A quality agency will make ongoing training a priority, ensuring all staff is working with the correct information. Training is an aspect that is not often considered in the planning phase, but will become an essential part of the SEO process.

For most small businesses it will be more beneficial to find an agency that can control your optimization efforts from start to finish. While finding the right agency can be time-consuming and the ongoing costs will add up, the ROI should ultimately make the process worthwhile.

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The Importance of Using a Professional Email Marketing Platform

When you are new to email marketing, it's easy to underestimate the importance of a good platform on which to base it. After all, the list is small to start with and sending an email once in a while is not an issue. WordPress plugins with rich features are also available to manage your email marketing. You can use your web host's SMTP service or a free email provider like Gmail. None of these options are good enough, however, if you are serious about email marketing.

The drawback of using free SMTP services

Your emails are useless if they don't make it to your subscriber's inbox. Due to the volumes of spam people get, mail service providers try to filter junk mail and route it to spam folders. The reputation of the sending server is critical. You may do all the right things, but your messages may still end up in the spam folder. When you use a shared SMTP server, you have no control on server reputation or the behavior of other users. Even one spammer using the same email server could compromise deliverability.

Most responsible email service providers and web hosts discourage mass

mailing and also impose restrictions to prevent abuse. Usually, there is a limit on the number of emails you can send in an hour, in a day or both. Traditional email marketing plugins can work with these restrictions. However, things can get difficult with large mailing lists. The plugin will send emails in small batches over several days, making it neither desirable nor convenient for time-sensitive messages.

Setting up your own email server is not a good idea

If your domain is hosted on a VPS or dedicated server, you can set up your own

mail server. This option may help you avoid some of the shortcomings discussed in the previous section. That said, installing, configuring, fine-tuning and maintaining a mail server is not easy. It's a challenging, technical and time-consuming job. If you take this route, here are the additional things that you must do to improve deliverability.

1. Implement SPF (sender policy framework)

It's possible for spammers to spoof (fake) the sender's email address. Email spoofing can be detected by the receiving mail server if you implement SPF. The SPF is a DNS record that specifies which email servers can send mail using email addresses belonging to your domain. It also tells the receiving server what to do with spoofed emails. When you send emails without SPF information, they are likely to be marked as spam.

2. Obtain sender accreditation from a third party

Some agencies offer sender accreditation and publish lists of accredited senders. ISPs rely on these records, and if you are on it, your mail

is likely to get past spam filters. To get accredited, you must follow guidelines and meet standards set by the accreditation agency.

3. Respond to changing email laws and technology

Email technology is continuously evolving. Spammers also keep coming up with fresh tactics to beat spam filters. As a result, ISPs have to keep improving their strategies. Laws related to mass mailing also keep changing. You must keep track of these changes and adapt to ensure continued email deliverability.

4. Start slow before you go full speed

You can't build trust with ISPs overnight. Start by sending a small number of emails. As recipients start opening and interacting with them, you will earn the confidence of ISPs. You can then gradually increase the volume.

5. Keep an eye on your sender reputation

Your mail server's sender reputation depends on what customers do with your email. If many people delete



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your emails without reading or report them as spam, it can lower your reputation. If many people open and interact with your mail, your reputation is likely to go up. Sender score, a number assigned by Return Path Inc., is a good measure of your server's status. If your sender score falls below a certain value, your emails probably won't make it to the inbox. Keep track of your sender score. You can check it at senderscore.org.

6. Have a schedule for sending bulk mail

Randomly sending bulk mail will lower your sender score

and hurt your reputation. To avoid this, have a regular schedule for sending bulk emails.

7. Ensure that your domain or server is not blacklisted

Blacklists help ISPs identify servers and domains notorious for spam or fraud. If your server IP address or domain is on a blacklist, your emails are unlikely to make it into the recipient's inbox. You must periodically check if your domain or email server is blacklisted. You can look up blacklists at senderscore.org. The same things that lower your

sender score can also land you on a blacklist. If you are blacklisted, it's possible to fix the problem, but it will take time and technical expertise.

Start your email marketing on the right foot by using a good email marketing platform. The other options don't make sense because they are either not scalable or are too cumbersome. It makes no sense to struggle with email sending limits, mail servers or server reputation. Even if you are a beginner, you would be better off spending your time on things that will grow your business.

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Why Do Business Owners Resist Changes in Technology?

Keeping on top of new technology can help business owners stay on the cutting edge of their industry.

Technology can help save time, cut costs, and improve communication, but many small and medium-sized business owners often tend to shy away from the latest advancements in tech.

It seems counter-intuitive, so why do business owners do this?

Expense

The cost of buying new equipment or software can prohibitive, even when the purchase can save money in the long-term. However, many online business tools offer different levels of membership, so businesses can customize services to get just what they need at a price they can afford.

When creating a budget for the year, it's important to include things like software,

hardware, and technology tools to help you stay on top of your game.

Time

It's hard to avoid the fact that it takes a lot of time to keep up with all the technological advances that are happening in today's society. It can be difficult, especially if you aren't tech savvy. This shouldn't be a reason to ditch technology, though. It's not hard to teach yourself when you can

find helpful tips on YouTube and in forums. Many online business tools have 24-hour customer service or groups on social media where you can get help with your problems instantaneously.

Too many changes

Technology changes so rapidly that sometimes it doesn't seem worth it to keep up. Learning about a new tool now doesn't mean it will necessarily be relevant in six months.

However, the more effort you put into learning new

technology, the more you will get familiar with how things work, and the easier it will be to keep up with advances. Putting the time in now means you'll have less to learn later.

Why Business Owners Need to Stay on Top of Tech

Resisting technological change can put you at a disadvantage. New businesses who employ the latest technologies will leap ahead of their competition. Old-school businesses can lose their

position in the marketplace and even see a drop in profitability. In addition, not staying updated can have a detrimental effect on your business' security as well. Websites that aren't regularly updated can be hacked, which creates breaches in personal information.

It's clear that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages - technology can help businesses work smarter and faster.



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2017 HOLIDAY PLANNING



How consumers shop Based on 2016 Holiday Shopping

44%

took gift ideas
from family and
friends

54%

utilized
recommendations
from retailers

54%

begin researching
in October or
earlier

Shoppers do their research

% of shoppers to typically conduct
research prior to making a purchase

66%

research
products less
than \$50

85%

research products
between
\$50 and \$100

89%

research products
greater than \$100



When shoppers begin the holiday shopping cycle



Begin Researching

Begin Purchasing

30%
Prior to
October

25%
October

33%
November

11%
1st 2 weeks of
December

2%
Last 2 weeks
of December

36%
November

27%
1st 2 weeks of
December

5%
Last 2 weeks
of December

Feature that convinced holiday shoppers to make a purchase

66% 50% 25% 24%

Free Shipping
Offer

Limited-time sale
or promotion

Free gift with
purchase

Helpful customer
service



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WHY?

WHAT?

WHO?

WHEN?

WHERE?

HOW?

