

## Element 3 E-mail (Electronic-mail) Marketing

E-mail is one of the best and cheapest means of farm marketing. You can use e-mail to communicate with your customers, and they can use it to communicate with you. It is especially helpful for keeping in touch with repeat customers.

You will get an e-mail account from your ISP that you can use. There are also free, e-mail services that you can use.

**For free e-mail service providers, you can try two popular services:**

Hotmail at [www.hotmail.com](http://www.hotmail.com) (click the 'Sign Up' button to register)

Yahoo Mail at <http://mail.yahoo.com> (click the 'Sign Up' button to register)

### E-mail Newsletters

E-mail newsletters are a popular form of marketing communications.

If you want to use e-mail newsletters, **be aware of the difference between plain text and html formats:**

- HTML format allows you to "design" your message with photos, color, and formatting – such as bold or italic – applied to the text.
- Plain text format is just that: it doesn't have photos, color, or any formatting applied to the text. It looks just like any other email message.

HTML format is more eye-catching, but e-mails in HTML usually take longer to download because the file sizes are larger. In addition, e-mails in HTML format don't always display correctly on the recipient's computer. Although plain text emails are not as attractive as HTML, anyone can receive them.

If you use an html format to create your newsletters, try to keep it simple. Your customers who can only receive plain text will still be able to read your html newsletter, if it was created in a simple format.

Some customers do not use computers, do not want commercial E-mail, or wish to diminish the threat of viruses, and so do not subscribe to E-mail newsletters. You may choose to develop, or continue to use, printed newsletters that are mailed through postal service, in addition to E-mail newsletters. Both forms are valid parts of a farm marketing plan, and can target different clients, though printed newsletters are generally thought to be more expensive.



**Tips to Create Newsletters That Work** – a presentation, reprinted here by permission.  
(For printed newsletters, primarily. Adjust for e-newsletters as needed.)

## Creating Innovative Newsletters to Reach Your Customers - Part I 2000 National Farmer's Direct Marketing Conference

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**1. Develop a header / nameplate** that gives your readers something they can recognize (this sets the tone of your newsletter).

It needs to make an "impact" and convey your business type.

Include your company name in title, or in subheader. It does not need to say "Newsletter"

**2. Develop a Framework.** Keep your style simple. Create a template for your newsletter using Microsoft Word, PageMaker, QuarkXPress, or good old-fashioned pencil and paper!

- Standard sizes are letter size and tabloids (tabloids are harder to design)
- Keep column size consistent (1-3 columns for letter size paper, 4-5 for tabloids)
- Select 2 font styles - 1 sans serif, 1 serif (maybe 1 accent font)
- Choose easy-to-read fonts with a variety of weights such as Times, Arial, Palatino, etc.
- Font size 11 point or larger (9 point or 8 point is miserable to read)
- Pick an alignment
- Ink color options: 1, 2, full color
- Paper color: can add interest, but consider cost and effect of ink colors first
- Stick with your framework

### **3. Design Techniques**

- Headlines: importance determines size
- Don't underestimate the power of white space!
- Don't go overboard with clip art - less is more
- Highlight with boxes, gradations or screens for variety
- Background screens are excellent ways to highlight (20-60%, check with your printer)
- Reversed print and reversed graphics stand out well

### **4. A smile is worth 1000 words.**

- Picture needs to look fun and interesting.
- Strive for more "people pictures" and fewer "scenic pictures"
- Use photos from your customers (have a photo contest)
- Use at least one per panel



- Photos can be enhanced to change backgrounds (Printers can drop photos in if you are inexperienced)

5. **Create a formula for each newsletter.** An advance plan and outline will help you organize and stay on track (see example below).

6. Use your braggin' rights! Highlight what is unique to your business in every issue, and do it well!

### **Marketing Strategies and Distribution**

1. Direct Mail (establish database)
2. Distribute at your business
3. Enclose in newspapers by zip code
4. Distribute to local tourism offices, realtors, community centers, etc.
5. Anywhere else they'll let you!—schools, home shows, YMCA, etc.

### **Eckert's Newsletter Elements**

#### *Front Page*

1. Attractive Header and Title  
Issue #, season, your tag-line or mission
2. Seasonal front page stories  
Strawberry Season  
Garden Center
3. New item highlight or another seasonal story
4. Eckert's mailing address, hours, Web address, etc.
5. Mailing label space
6. Photos

#### *Center Spread*

1. Ripening calendar of fresh produce
2. Event listing / Calendar in box
3. New items in Country Store
4. Custard Shop / Restaurant update
5. Kids Fun Activity (crossword or riddle)
6. Spring Special Event Details  
Gardening Expo  
Rodeo
7. Photo contest information
8. Photos

#### *Back*

1. Map to the farm
2. Web address
3. Photo
4. Company Picnic article
5. School Tours offered



Preparing and producing a frequent newsletter is a tremendous task and commitment! I do not suggest this form of advertising for everyone.

At Eckert's we have been producing and mailing four newsletters a year since 1996, to coincide with our four retail seasons.

### **You must commit to build and maintain a database!**

We began to build our customer database in 1989. At all three of our farm locations, customers can complete a form to be added to our mailing list. This form asks for their name and address, crops they like to pick, special interest information (i.e. gardening, children's activities and other), plus we ask for their e-mail address if they would like to receive our e-mail updates.

Our newsletter is mailed to our database in advance of a coming season. The Eckert database is now approximately 18,300 names. The database also includes compiled names from our school tours, motorcoaches, gift basket buyers, and other specialized lists. The database is also used for smaller mailings to these targeted audiences.

### **How much does it cost?**

The cost of a newsletter and how it fits into your overall advertising budget is also an important consideration. The expenses related to a newsletter are writing, design and layout, printing and paper, mail house (if done externally), and postage. Our format is a newsprint tabloid 11" x 17" folded. Format size is a personal decision based on your newsletter design and number of articles. Our average cost of a printed piece is .062 cents each. Our average postage and mailing cost is .272 each. Total cost per customer is approximately .334 cents. The cost of printing our color edition was .129 cents.

### **Why should I produce a newsletter?**

I feel the benefits of producing a farm newsletter are as follows.

1. Frequent communication with a known customer
2. Direct delivery into their home (this is not junk mail—it has been requested)
3. Opportunity to tell your customer what's new, what's coming, etc.
4. Cost efficient advertising to reach your known customer
5. Opportunity to strengthen customer loyalty and connection to your farm and family

### **E-mail database—the next logical progression**

Our first year to acquire e-mail addresses was in 1999. I decided to do this after spending much time last winter on-line examining other retail and tourism Web sites. We now have an e-mail database of 1,400 names. I have been very pleased and disappointed with the sign-up response. **I was hoping that at some point in the near future that I might be able to eliminate the printed newsletter and go entirely to an e-mail newsletter. I don't see this happening for at least a minimum of five years.**

**An e-mail database is also a commitment. Currently I write a one-page newsletter weekly in the midst of our very busy season and cut back to a monthly frequency in the off season. The benefits that I have seen are enormous. Not only do they parallel the benefits as discussed for a printed newsletter, their additional benefits also make this a very rewarding endeavor.**

**I have found some of these people to be some of our most loyal and frequent customers.** The information and written newsletter is just not enough for them. I would call these e-mail customers the "Eckert farm groupies." They want to know the exact times of specific weekend events, who are the



musicians, times to enter contests, special offers in our restaurant and bakery, etc. This year I plan to add coupons to the e-mail newsletter so I can better track readership and response.

**A real benefit to the farm from this communication is we get immediate feedback.** If customers don't understand something I have written or perhaps omitted, they write me a sentence or two and hit "reply." It is truly the most beneficial and rapid form of customer feedback I have ever experienced. While most people never take the time to write you a positive letter, I have received many this year. Yes, we have made it easier to send us a gripe, but that's also what we want to hear.

Just as we made it easy to sign up for this database, the customer can be removed just as easily, and I think that is also very important. A requested newsletter is not "spam"; however, you should make it easy for customers to have their names removed from our list.

Make the commitment!

I am a big proponent of the farm newsletter, because I think that it is an effective advertising method to reach your intended audience. It certainly cannot replace all other forms of advertising in your budget, but I strongly suggest that you consider its place in your overall advertising mix.

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## Etiquette

Be sure to follow basic etiquette for sending e-mails.

- Send messages "To" the persons you are directly addressing.
- Use the "CC" option to copy someone, keeping them in the information loop.
- Most people prefer to keep their e-mail addresses private to avoid being "spammed" with unwanted advertising e-mails and/or computer viruses. When sending an e-mail to many people at once, use the "BCC" (blind carbon copy) option to hide the e-mail addresses of the other recipients.

Be sure that you clearly state what the subject of the e-mail is in the subject line. Finally, avoid sending too many e-mails too often. Example of online information on E-mail etiquette: [emailreplies.com](http://emailreplies.com)

## Viruses

You must install some kind of anti-virus software on your computer and make sure that it is updated at least weekly. Otherwise, you can easily send a virus to all your customers.

The most reliable anti-virus software is available for purchase on the Internet.

There are many free antivirus programs available for downloading. For a listing, see [http://www.thefreesite.com/Free\\_Software/Anti\\_virus\\_freeware/](http://www.thefreesite.com/Free_Software/Anti_virus_freeware/).

Once installed, set up the software to automatically scan all files, and incoming messages.



## Domain Names

The Internet's site naming system, called domain-name system (DNS), allows users to name their Web sites. Other resources also use easier-to-remember names (such as [www.myfarm.com](http://www.myfarm.com)) on the Internet.

Using your farm name, adapt the words to come up with a domain name that is clear and easy to remember. You want the domain name you choose to be yours, no matter who is your E-mail or Web site provider, so you must register it. Do it soon as many of the better, shorter names are already taken.

When you register a domain name, you are not paying for or creating a Web page or Web site. What you are getting is a unique name that no one else *in the world* can use. The domain name will be the "address" of your Web page or site if you choose to develop one. Even if you are not ready for your own Web page or site, registering a domain name now secures the name you want, and is a valid marketing strategy.

When you own a domain name, you can use it as your e-mail address so that you have a permanent address that is associated with your farm. While most ISPs provide e-mail as part of the service, you are probably going to be changing ISPs <http://reviews.cnet.com>, and thus your e-mail address will change. So, if you own the domain name "myfarm.com," your e-mail could be **me@myfarm.com**, rather than **me@yahoo.com**.

When choosing a domain name seller, it can pay to shop around. In general, sellers like [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com), [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) and [www.register.com](http://www.register.com) are trustworthy. The domain name does need to be renewed every year or you can lose it. "Big name" domain name sellers such as [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) will send you renewal notices and/or offer the option of automatically renewing your domain name registry through direct billing to your credit card.

(More information on domain names is available in Level 2.)

## Mailing List Servers (LISTSERVs)

List servers are E-mails sent to groups of people discussing a mutually interesting topic, such as production issues, where to find supplies, and sharing experiences. Generally, these lists are used for information sharing and discussion and not directly for marketing. An example of a mailing list is *market-farming*. Subscribe by sending an e-mail to: [market-farming@lists.ibiblio.org](mailto:market-farming@lists.ibiblio.org)

With mailing list servers, people sharing an interest may "subscribe" to a given discussion. All subscribers' contributions to the discussion (known as **thread**) are distributed to the entire subscriber base via e-mail. (It can be hard to reply to the list and get your questions answered, especially if you have questions for one individual.) These mailing lists are usually moderated to keep discussion on topic. If you subscribe, do save instructions for "unsubscribing."



At a basic level, mailing list servers are similar to *newsgroups* and *forums* (see below), except that the messages are transmitted as e-mail and are, therefore, available only to individuals on the list.

(Although LISTSERV refers to a specific mailing list server marketed by L-Soft International, the term is sometimes used incorrectly to refer to any mailing list server.)

## Newsgroups

Newsgroups are discussion groups of people using the Internet to take part in focused intellectual exchange on a wide array of topics. Discussion takes place by posting messages for everyone to read online. You can also read other people's queries, and have live conversations. Taking part in newsgroups is just like posting email messages that everyone on the mailing list can see, however the messages are generally available for anyone with Internet access to see! Example:

There are thousands of newsgroups available on as many different subjects. Some ask you to enroll (by logging in) in order to read the discussions and respond. Some popular Web sites with extensive lists of newsgroups have you pay a small fee (~\$6.00) to become members. Example: [Botany-Related Usenet Newsgroups](#)

Be aware that anyone can post anything on the Internet, and that **not everything you read on the Internet is credible** (see Element 5, Evaluating the Quality of Information on the Internet.)

A *forum* is a discussion group on a particular subject that is hosted by a newsgroup. Example: [SSB Tractors](#)

## Photos

Photos of your farm and farm products are very important for marketing on the Internet. Sending photos by E-mail will complicate your computer experience, but customers love to see interesting, colorful, and clear photos. It connects them to the farm!

If you develop a Web site, the more graphics and photos you have, the more time customers will spend on your site.

While a digital camera is a nice way to get electronic photos, you can also take regular film pictures and have them developed and put on a CD.

The size of picture files can be an issue for customers downloading the image, as can the resolution of the pictures. Google offers the *Picasa* picture software free at <http://www.picasa.com/index.php>. *Picasa* is software that helps you instantly find, edit, and send or print photos.

