

# Internet Marketing

Online Advertising  
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## Avoiding The Pitfalls Of Email Communications

Internet Marketing



Jill Gehrhardt

Email is changing the way dealerships interact with their customers. As more dealerships implement customer relationship management (CRM) strategies, a key marketing tactic often includes sending bulk email campaigns to promote dealership specials and to remind customers of service visits. Email campaigns are dynamic, fast, easy, and low cost to produce and send. Plus, many busy customers prefer to be contacted via personalized emails rather than via the phone.

Unfortunately, as with all new technologies, there are pitfalls to email communications. Today, with tougher spam filters, many email communications go unread or get reported by consumers as spam. In fact, if your domain is reported too many times for distributing unwanted email (officially known as Unsolicited Commercial Email or UCE) your dealership could be *blacklisted* by Internet Service Providers (ISP) such as AOL and blocked from sending future emails and e-marketing campaigns.

### Smart approaches

Email campaigns, when designed correctly, are an effective marketing and communications tool. Launching a successful email marketing campaign begins with understanding the dos and don'ts of email marketing and content development. To avoid being blacklisted and to increase the open rates of your emails, try the following recommendations:

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## From The TRENCHES

"The key to a successful CRM implementation lies in standardizing dealership processes and attaining a top-down commitment. In CRM, the process, driven by dealership management and solid implementation, is often more important than the software tool. When dealerships capture each interaction with the customer, from the Web to the showroom, and log that customer immediately into the follow up processes, sales and relationship-building opportunities become endless."

— Jill Gehrhardt, Solutions Executive, CRM, at Reynolds and Reynolds

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• **Display name:** Your email display name should always appear as the dealership name. Do not use a fictitious name in an effort to be creative. With the rise of viruses and hacker attacks, many consumers will immediately delete an email from a sender they do not recognize.

• **Subject line:** Include a clear and detailed subject line for every email. A good tactic is to use the dealership name here as well, such as "Reynolds Motors—30,000-Mile Service Reminder." Be sure to avoid using all capital letters, excessive punctuation, or words such as *Free For You Only*, *Guaranteed*, or *Save*, as these are all elements commonly found in spam emails.

• **Body:** Take time to develop and proofread the content of your email. Your goal should be to send a clear, professional business message that will be read and acted upon. Email content should be respectful, detailed, and free of grammar mistakes, misspellings, slang, or overtly promotional language. Don't use overblown sales language such as, *Do it today!* or *Have you been turned down recently?*

Lastly, try to avoid jumping on the bandwagon of larger initiatives such as disaster relief efforts; rather, keep your communications focused on the customer's car or dealership offers.

• **Opt-out option:** Be sure to include an opt-out option on every email as a sign of respect to each customer's preferred form of communication. If an opt-out option is not included, email communications may be suspended by ISPs.

• **Graphics and attachments:** Avoid sending an email with large images or attachments. Instead, use images and attachments that are easy to download and view for consumers with both dial-up and high-speed Internet connections. In many instances, a customer's inbox has a capacity limit and you certainly don't want to abuse that limit with unnecessarily large files.

#### Campaign responses

The goal of your email communication is to generate a positive response from the customer or prospect. If the customer replies to your email, it is imperative to have a follow-up plan

in place. Emails from customers should be followed up by a dealership employee within 15-30 minutes of receipt. A rapid response will show the customer how important the relationship is to the dealership and increase your chances of setting that important sales or service appointment.

In the end, it is through these important relationships that a dealership can find and retain customers at a lower cost of acquisition while building customer satisfaction and dealer profitability. Dealerships that operate successful e-marketing campaigns will continuously mine existing customer data to develop targeted communications based on the latest customer information. Further, by smartly leveraging new technology tools such as email and CRM tools, dealerships will be able to take advantage of personalized, low-cost marketing tactics to better stay in touch with and retain consumers over the lifetime of their vehicle.

Jill Gehrhardt is the CRM solutions executive at Reynolds and Reynolds. She can be reached at 937-485-0592.

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