

Episode 13

Navigating Common Pitfalls of Email Marketing

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Hello and welcome to another episode of my weekly marketing. I'm Janice Hostager. And as always, I'm so glad that you're here. Today I have a special guest who I can pretty much guarantee can teach you some things about email marketing. Scott Hartley is a serial entrepreneur and founder of masterplan for success. He understands the challenges small business owners face. He also knows what it's like to wear all the hats in the business like many of us, he built his first company into a multi six figure business from scratch. In 2017, Scott decided to help other small business owners create a shortcut to their success by helping them with marketing strategy systems and automations including email marketing. I love that he brings a technical perspective to what works and what doesn't work, since he understands the backend aspects of email delivery. I learned some awesome things in this interview and I'm pretty sure you'll walk away with some things you can use to. Here's my interview with Scott.

1:30

Well, Hey Scott, thanks for joining me today. I'm thrilled that you are here. Scott Hartley is the CEO of masterplan success and he's gonna talk to us today about email marketing and I am so excited about this subject because it is so much the bread and butter of what I do personally and a lot of small business owners. So now, tell me first, how did you get into email marketing? How did you probably not just get out of school and say, I'm gonna go into email marketing, you know, it's like, how did you get here? What's your story?

2:05

Yeah, so really back in 2013 So I started my first company which was a small IT company in a small community. I kind of have been studying marketing, you know, figuring like, How I can grow my local IT business. And so one of the people that I was working with recommended that you start doing some email marketing using an automated marketing platform. I was like, "oh, that sounds pretty interesting". So, you know, I signed up and it was just kind of like learning how to use that platform. And, you know, how do you figure out how to send emails, what do you send to people you know, all that kind of thing. And so, I did my first campaign, what we would call an email marketing campaign, and I broke all the rules of direct response marketing, you know, should have like a series of at least three communications and all that type of stuff. And I sent out one email to my list, you know, through that marketing software, and it was for our PC tuneup service, and low and behold, I don't remember how many emails that I had sent

out. But we had a really good response from clients who were interested in the PT PC tune up special that we were offering and I was like, wow, like, if I can just do this with one email and get this type of response. Like, if I do everything correctly, can you imagine what the results of that you know, that might be so that really fueled my fire? And so I started leveraging email marketing along with other forms of marketing in the IT business.

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Well, in 2017 2018, I kind of stepped away from my IT company, just getting burnt out on technology. And so I started helping small business owners with marketing automation and marketing strategy. And of course, for a lot of those people, it involves email marketing. And so as I've been working with those business owners, you know, for over five years now, you learn a lot of things that people don't tell you when you first start doing email marketing. Things that really everybody needs to know before you send your first marketing email. And so that's really where I've kind of got my grassroots into the whole email marketing world and then helping small business owners with that.

4:29

I love that and that is so true. I think we just don't know what we don't know. And it's really just a lot of information that's just not really readily available. We think that once we get our MailChimp account or whatever it is that we can just go ahead and send out emails which, in itself, a lot of people don't even know to do. I still get emails that are sent through Google and that sort of thing that violates the can spam act, and you know, so I mean, there's a lot of things that I think people just don't really understand. So I think this is great. You do have a free book, which I'm sure you're gonna talk about later, but it's a free download. And I found it really, really informative. It's called hit the inbox. And it's just there's just a lot of good information on there about, you know, things that we don't necessarily think about as marketers or small business owners. So what is one big mistake that you see, and I'm sure there's a few but what do you make a mistake that you see small business owners making with their email marketing?

5:34

Yeah, so obviously, there are a lot of those which I do cover, you know, all of those pretty well in the book. One of the biggest mistakes that I see is that when we send an email and I was guilty of this when I started doing email marketing, you send that same email to everybody on your list. It's called an email blast, right? Or just blasting everybody with that one message that we want to get out there. And that actually works against you. You know, if you get much better results, when you take the time to segment your list, you break it down, and you send email communications based upon what people are interested in. So as a simple analogy, for example, let's say that you are a pet store, okay. And you got products for dogs and you got products for cats. There are going to be some of your clients. They only have dogs as pets. They don't like cats at all. They love dogs. If you blast your entire list and you're promoting something about cats, you're going to turn off all of those dog owners, and they're going to be like, Oh, I don't even need to pay attention to this email because it doesn't pertain to anything with me. And that's training your audience in a bad way. Right? But if you segment your list, you know that these 50 People love dogs and these 50 People love cats, and you send a message

out that pertains only to those dog owners. I can almost guarantee you every single one of them is going to open it, read it and probably take action on what you're communicating because they love man's best friend. And so segmentation is so important.

7:23

I'm so glad you said that because that is absolutely true and personalization in email, what including segmentation, so they're getting the right message and and just that you are addressing their problems specifically. I mean, that's even, that's growing. I mean, it's always been important, but I think that's even becoming more and more important with time as we see technology increase. We've all got so many emails in our inbox, you know, and we just, we just want to sort through it and get to the stuff that's important to us. And you're absolutely right. I am so glad that you brought that up.

8:00

You touch on a very controversial topic among email marketers, and that's the design of your emails. You're adamant that people should ditch the email newsletter. Why? Is it that a lot of us have newsletters and are just curious what you find?

8:15

Yeah, this one is controversial, and I usually have some really lengthy discussions with people when we talk about this. And there's really a couple of primary reasons why I say to get rid of the email newsletter, now by email newsletter, what I mean what I'm describing is what you would typically see that is a beautifully designed email, lots of images, lots of color, and it also contains a lot of links and maybe a lot of articles or a lot of teaser paragraphs 24567 or more themes that people can read. And there's two reasons why I say ditch the email newsletter number one is, remember that the majority of emails are read on mobile devices, the small screen so nobody wants to be sitting here scrolling for 20 minutes to consume your content. So if your newsletter is lengthy, most people say oh I don't have time for that right now. And then of course later never comes and so they never come back to it and they don't read it.

9:30

Secondly, is the design of the email. Studies have shown that mostly plain text, emails text only emails, maybe with one or two small images kind of sprinkled in? Those actually get better open rates and better action rates on the emails than the ones that are beautifully designed? Beautifully designed emails. They scream Hey, this is a marketing email. So that also increases the chances of those emails going to junk or spam. So if you keep it plain and simple, and then you lead people over to your website, spice that website up, use all the images and all the colors and all the videos and everything that you want, because that's what people expect on a website. But in an email, you want to keep it really plain and simple.

10:22

And then the third primary reason is, let's say that you have a newsletter and you've got four different blog posts that you would like people to read. You're giving them a lot of options and when people typically leave an email, they click that first link and go to your website. Very

seldom do they come back to your email. And so those second, third and fourth articles, they're not going to go check those out. That's where if you get them to your website over on the sidebar, you can kind of create you know, Hey, check this out. Go read this article, other teasers on the website. And then kind of a bonus of that. And one of the arguments that I always get because I tell people, you need to email your list at least once a week. The objection that I get to that is, but I don't know what I would write. I send something to my list once a month. How am I going to come up with content with four emails a month? Well guess what? If you've got four articles that you're putting in that one newsletter, split that up one article a week. Now you have your weekly content that you can send out to your list.

11:33

Oh, yeah, I totally agree with that. I know over the years I tried the newsletter concept and I find that people click on maybe the top one or two links that are in there, but I tend to have a one call to action per page per email kind of rule. You know, to you know, if necessary, but you know, you just that your email has one job and that's to send it to your website, hopefully or to a sales page or what is it whatever it is that you're promoting.

12:05

So yeah, and you're right, I do have a lot of clients and I have some emails that I love. I look forward to those emails. And they are email newsletters, but you're absolutely right. You know, I haven't thought about that before but I do like them for later. But you're right. So it's like you know, over the weekend or something. If I get time I'll look at them, but they're a lot more labor intensive, even though it's great content. I just can't take it all in the middle of a workday. You know, I just can't because I know it's gonna be good stuff.

12:34

But exactly. Yeah. You know, and even though you may have the best of intentions to go back to it over the weekend, if you get busy or if you're just tired and you want to just veg out over the weekend. You may not get back around to it, and then it starts to accumulate and then you're like, Nevermind, it's great stuff, but I'll catch you the next time around.

12:53

Yeah, yeah, that's so true. So over the years, I can't tell you how many people have asked me, small business owners have asked me, Can I just buy a list? You know, so I, of course, tell them it's not a good idea. Can you go into that a little bit and tell them more about the perils of buying an email list?

13:13

Yeah. So you can buy marketing lists that contain physical addresses and phone numbers and you can send out direct mail to anybody that you want to. There's no problem and no rules against doing that. But when it comes to buying an email list, that's a big, big no no. All right. You mentioned earlier, there's the can spam act. Every country Canada, the UK, every country in the world practically has something related to the can spam Act in the United States, which

means that you can not send unsolicited email to people who haven't requested to hear from you. And so if you're buying a list and you're intending to email those people, you're really running an extremely high risk. of not even being able to email at all in the future.

14:16

The Mailbox providers, Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, and others. They have gotten really, really smart about, you know, determining if this person is legitimately emailing people. And if you get a large number of spam complaints, so you buy this list, you blast out to everybody on that list, that message and a good number of them mark you as spam and your reputation takes a nosedive. And it is very, very difficult and very time intensive to actually recover from that. And there are some cases where you can't recover from that. I've seen instances where Microsoft and Google have said you know what? You've gone too far. We're not going to accept any email messages from you whatsoever.

15:10

And that's tied to their IP address, right? So it's tied to their domain and their IP address. So they look at all kinds of data points, and they connect the dots really well. And so some people try to game the system they'll get you know, you may have your primary domain. So like mine is a masterplan for success.com. Some people might try to, you know, do a shortened version of that. So mp4 s.com Well, Microsoft, Google and Yahoo they're smart enough. There's enough data that they can know Oh, Scott's got both of these domains. And he's trying to spam a bunch of people using the one that's not his primary domain. They're gonna be like none other than that. We see the game you're playing and then they end up penalizing you for both of those.

12:57

Yeah, no, I've never encountered anyone that's been blacklisted. I have heard about it. And it's not something any business wants to be. Position anybody wants to be in for sure. So I'm glad you addressed that. So in your book, you talk about or you write about rather that there's an action that single-handedly can transform your email marketing. I'm curious what that is?

16:24

Yeah, the one thing that makes the biggest difference to get more of your emails going into the inbox is managing and monitoring the engagement of your recipients. Getting people to engage with your emails. And what that means is that not only are they opening them, because opens is not a great metric to monitor but opens does, you know, indicate engagement, getting people to click on links in your emails. That's important. Are they replying to your emails, and even little actions like are they keeping your emails and dragging them to a folder where they can store them?

17:13

You know, those are all positive indicators that say, oh, this person wants to receive these emails. They get value out of them. So we want to make sure that they see them. If you're managing and monitoring your engagement that's going to drastically improve your business in the eyes of the mailbox providers. And so the more people on your list that you can get to open,

reply, click, you know, keep and move your emails. That's going to say, hey, these people are getting some good material, they want to get it. So let's put it in the inbox. Let's not put it somewhere else. And of course, that's a thing that you have to manage and monitor over time. What that means is, you know, how many people are engaging with your emails every week? Every month, who's not opened or clicked on an email in more than 90 days, who's never opened an email that you've sent, you know, looking at all of those numbers and then determining what to do with those individuals. That's very important, but that's the number one hands down action that can totally transform your email marketing.

18:24

And that's so hard for small businesses who are just trying to grow lists. I mean, oftentimes people especially for free downloads, they'll put a separate email account that they don't monitor down as their email address. And yeah, really your point you're saying is that it really is going to pay off even if you have to delete a big chunk of your list and get that number down. I think it's kind of a vanity metric too. You know, it's like, and obviously we want to have as many people on our email list and engaged with our email lists as possible. But if they're just sort of dead weight and hurting you in the long run, you're better off cleaning out your email list. Get rid of some items that you're saying. Yeah, yeah.

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And I have seen in it's proven itself time and time and time again, that the smaller more engaged lists are way more profitable than the lists of 1000s of people on them, of which the majority never open an email. So the higher your engagement, the more profit that you're gonna get from your clients and prospects.

19:35

So, do the email services keep track of whether or not you personally are engaging with an email and would they be more likely, for instance, to send it to a spam folder or a promotions tab? If it's Gmail, or is it more of a general kind of saying based on your particular business?

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Yeah. So there's really three levels of engagement, right? So if I'm marketing if you're on my marketing list, you know, and I send you a marketing email, Google or Microsoft, Yahoo, they're going to look at, you know, whichever provider that you're using, they're going to look at what are you doing, as an individual with the emails that you get from me? You know, if you're not opening them, you're just immediately dumping them into trash. Then my emails are going to start going into your junk or spam folder, because you basically told Google, for example, I don't want to see these emails. Now let's assume that you're on Google, you know, Gmail, and I've got a list of 100 people. Not only is Google looking at you, but they're also looking at all 100 people.

20:46

How is the majority of those 100 people interacting or engaging with my emails that I'm sending? If I have 62 of those 100 people that are opening, clicking, replying, doing all this positive stuff, Google's gonna say, Okay, this is pretty good content. Let's start moving this into the primary inbox. Let's move this to the inbox here. But if on the converse side 62 Out of the 100 aren't doing anything with my emails, but dumping them in the trash, then all 100 contacts on Gmail have a higher likelihood of going straight into junk or spam. So they look at the individual. What are you personally doing with the email and then aggregate? What is happening with everybody that's you're emailing on that particular platform.

21:37

Gotcha. So, I mean, that's complex.

21:41

I mean, I tell you why, you know, the mailbox providers, they have this down to an art and a science. They are looking at so many different things that like, you can't game the system. And of course, it's their rules that we have to abide by. And so we have to do our best, you know, to try to follow those.

22:01

And for good reason, because if a provider led and all this spam, then we wouldn't want to use them anymore. So I guess it's in their best interest to do that. Tell me a little bit about the promotions tab. On Gmail. You talk in your book about how people kind of overreacted with that. And I was guilty of that, too. It's like, oh, my gosh, I have to tell people to drag it to their main inbox. I mean, that was a few years ago. I think people have learned a little bit about it now but tell me more about that.

22:32

Yeah, it becomes a real controversial point. A lot of people, you know, start to panic. It's like, oh, I'm sending out the emails from you know, MailChimp keep active campaign or whatever. It's like, oh, but they're going into the promotions tab or they're going in the updates tab. I want them to go into the inbox. Well, here's the thing. The motions and the Updates tab is part of the inbox. All right. So for all of those Gmail users who don't have the tabs turned on, which is a large number of Gmail users. Those emails go straight into the inbox. If they do have the tabs turned on like I do, then they are going to go to the promotions tab. But here's the thing.

23:20

A lot of people check their promotions tab on a daily basis because they expect those emails to go there. But they still want to get them, they still want to read them. So like the numbers really are very negligible as to how that might affect sales, how that might affect opens and engagement. If it goes to the promotions tab the one thing that's really important on all of your thank you pages, whether somebody opts in for a free resource, or they you know, buy something from you, and you're going to send them an email, you want to give them explicit instructions on that thank you page. We're going to send you an email. Be sure to check your

junk, spam and promotions folders or tabs for our email. That way, you know people can look and they know exactly where to go in case it doesn't show up in their primary inbox.

24:19

But yeah, the promotions tab. It's not anything to worry about. And I will tell you this, I touched upon this in the book as well. There are a couple of email marketing gurus and they use that term lightly, that encourage you to game the system they want you to stuff your email with irrelevant stuff in the hopes that it's going to keep it out of the promotions tab and it will put it into the primary tab. Google especially is onto that game, and they are punishing and penalizing people for doing that. So what some people will do is that they'll take an entire chapter of a book and put it into a hidden section on an email, in light text and all that type of stuff like to point time, like Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, they don't play that game. So if you have somebody that recommends doing something like that, so that your emails don't land in the promotions tab, just know that that's going to damage your reputation.

25:25

Oh yeah, they used to do that early on in the web design world to just sort of put like white text on a white background and thinking that they're going to the search engines will pick up on that and rank their site higher and then say it just worked against them. And it's interesting because I just saw someone recommending it on Instagram. And I would guess that if they're not into it already, they're going to be on to it very soon.

25:56

Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting. I didn't know that people do that on email, too. If people want to hear from you, if you know they want to hear from you, then there's no reason to play games like that to make you sick of the system, because that kind of defeats the point. I mean, if Gmail and Yahoo and all the big email providers out there are going to put your email to give your email to the people that want to see it.

26:25

Exactly. Yeah, really. I mean, it boils down to you know, we're all in business. We're all ethical, moral people. We want to do good in the world, and we want to help others. And if we're truly operating from that place in our life, and in our business, then the message that we send out, is going to resonate with the people who want that type of message. And those are the people that are going to do business with us and stay engaged with us all along. And that's exactly what we want. We don't have to play games.

27:00

Oh, yeah. That is so true. And I think we all want to be ethical marketers. I don't think any of us really want to. Well, hopefully no, I don't want to be the type of marketer that is pushy, and nobody wants to hear from someone they're not opted into to hear from. So what do you think about email marketing in general, do you think it's still alive and well? Do you think it's people just getting too much of it? Or what are your thoughts on the future of email marketing?

27:27

Yeah, so great, great question. So some people will say you know, email marketing is dead. You know, there's no way that you can make money with email marketing there. We're just inundated with emails. You know, we're flooded, you know, it's a full time job just to keep your inbox down to like five messages, right?

27:47

And so, like, how are you going to be able to stand out, but really, the fact of the matter is, email marketing is the number one way to generate revenue for most small businesses. It's just a matter of doing it the right way, which I lay out, you know, in my book, hitting the inbox.

28:10

That doesn't mean that you can't or you shouldn't use other forms of marketing. You know, in my own business, I do direct mail. I do some social media. You know, there's a lot of other ways that we should be marketing to people. And then email is a supplement. You know, for that it kind of builds the relationship and encourages and drives people towards the sales, especially if you know they're coming in as a prospect. So email marketing is definitely not dead. But you have to be smart about the way that you're doing it. Because otherwise you're just becoming part of the noise that we have in our inboxes and you want to be able to stand out when you're showing up in people's inboxes.

28:54

That's so true. Yeah, I think so I have a process which I call the Trail to the Sale™ which is based on the customer journey, and email falls into the consideration stage to suddenly awareness stage where you'll find social media or maybe direct mail or some other advertising. It is in that second step because people at that point are opting in. They do want to learn more about your product or your service or whatever it is you're offering. That's not it's not the awareness part of it. And I think a lot of people who are buying the lists and are trying to game the system are trying to get awareness and it's just not the platform to do that with.

29:38

What kind of tips do you have for listeners who are just starting out with email marketing, maybe they just have you know, they don't really know where to start? What would you recommend how they get going at it? I know, all of us.

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That's all of us. You know, we get started, we're told hey, you need to do email marketing in your business cool. I'm gonna go get me a MailChimp account and like five minutes later, I can start sending out emails. The first thing I would say is get a copy of my book. It's free, you know, and read that thing. It's 76 Short pages. Everything that's in there is really what all small business owners need to know when it comes to email marketing. If you do these things as you're getting started you don't have to fix problems later on. You're actually doing things right from the beginning, which means you know, you know how to set up segmentation. In your list. When somebody opts in for a report, you're going to tag them that they're interested in whatever the

topic of that report is, you're going to know, hey, I need to monitor the engagement. You're going to know that there are three identification records that you need to have set up on your domain so that you are sending emails legally, you know, so that they have a better chance of landing in the inbox. You're going to know how to craft your emails, what should you put in there? What should you not put in there? How many links should you have? How many images should you have? And then you're going to learn about things you know, like the importance of reputation.

31:15

So all of those things, they all play together. None of them is an isolated thing. It's like oh, if I just do this one thing, that that's all I have to worry about. They all interweave together. And if you have that foundational understanding which you can get in you know less than an hour reading the book, like that's going to set you off for running profitable email marketing campaigns, and building relationships with the people that you're emailing. That's another thing that I've seen that a lot of people look at, this is my list.

31:53

Now, these are people, these are individuals and you want to when you're writing your emails, you want to imagine who is that one person that I'm writing to? Just as if you were writing a one to one email or writing a card to them? And if you craft your emails that way, then now you're going to come across as more personable, and people are going to want to receive those emails. Don't look at your list as Oh, I've got 500 people, I've got 5000 people. No, I have individuals on my list that I want to build close relationships with so that some of them will want to do business with me.

32:35

Oh, yeah, that is so true. I recommend to my clients that they just even have a picture of their ideal customer, their avatar, so that when they are writing they are not tempted to say, you know, everybody should do this, but instead say you should do this or right to them. And so they are an individual person, like you're writing to a co worker or a friend on email, and it becomes a much more powerful email that way as well and you're absolutely right, even if you're starting out and you only have five people on your list, and one of them is your mother, you know, it doesn't matter, because that just creates that more personalized way of getting that client to know like and trust you and that really is what's important for that sale.

33:23

Scott, this has been super, super interesting. I just want to recommend that everybody's listening, download his books, and hit the inbox. I'll put the link in the show notes. I learned a lot just by reading it and it's free. What could be better than that, right?

33:44

Absolutely. And the reason why I did that is you know, I want people to get the knowledge that I didn't have when I started doing email marketing back in 2013. And even the more conversations that I have with small business owners have realized, they don't know these things that they don't know. But they're so critically important. The landscape of email marketing

has totally changed over the past few years. And this is stuff that all of us have to be aware of. It's not rocket science. It's not time intensive things, but they are important foundational things that can majorly move the needle in our business and to be able to consume this in an hour and start to implement that, I just want small business owners to have that leg up. So that they can, you know, we're all doing email marketing. Let's make it worth our while in doing the email marketing by doing it the right way.

34:43

That's so true. Love it. Thank you so much, Scott. I appreciate you being here with me today.

34:50

Yeah, I enjoyed it. Janice. I really appreciate the opportunity.

34:52

All right, take care. So I'm hoping you found my conversation with Scott as interesting as I did. As we talked about in our interview, Scott has a free book entitled Hit the Inbox. You can find a link to it in my show notes at [My Weekly Marketing.com/13](http://MyWeeklyMarketing.com/13), hey, lucky episode 13! You can also find links to Scott's website and his social media accounts there too.

35:15

Also if you have marketing questions for me, I like to record a Q&A session every so often. Visit my show notes page and you'll find a link where you can leave a question for me. Again, it's at myweeklymarketing.com/13.

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Thanks for joining me today. If you found this podcast helpful, I would be THRILLED if you could leave a review on the podcast app of your choosing. I work hard at putting these together and reviews will help the podcast be found by others as well!

Thanks so much! See you next time. Bye for now!