A guide to email marketing platforms

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The power of email marketing

Email marketing can really boost your travel business. The numbers prove it: A 2020 study found businesses get a 35% return on investment.[1] And that return builds, year-on-year.

A well-written, timely email is a strikingly powerful tool, even if it isn't as visual as an Instagram post or have the accessibility of an SEO-optimized blog. It even beats the directness of picking up the phone in some cases.

Luckily, polished email marketing campaigns are accessible to everyone. As a travel business, you can quickly and easily leverage the advantages of email marketing with just a little time and know-how.

[1]   https://dma.org.uk/research/investigating-email-getting-returns-on-email

Why should travel agents use email marketing?

Low cost: There are no print or postage costs. There are no fees to pay social media channels or outdoor advertising agencies. You can start an email marketing campaign with nothing more than a few hours, a customer list, and a business email account.

An engaged audience: If a customer has happily shared their email address and agreed to receive news from your business, then they're already open and interested in what you have to say. That makes them delightfully easy to engage.

Personalization: With the right email platform, you can craft emails to each recipient. Even a small amount of personalization—such as using a customer's name—can make a big difference to the impact of your marketing campaigns.

Easy to create: There are several email marketing platforms with free packages. They provide a secure place to store customer data, and they have a library of templates and elements you can use to create visually appealing email campaigns.

What are email marketing platforms?

Email marketing platforms, unlike your regular email, are software for creating, sending, and tracking the emails you send to your leads, customers, and contacts. You can build lists of contacts, making it easy to send the right kind of email to the people you're targeting.

Some email marketing packages are free to use—making them especially useful for small local businesses. With ready-made emails to help you start out, platforms can streamline your communications, saving you time and money as you advertise, promote, and inform your ecosystem.

What email marketing platforms are there?

Mailchimp: One of the most established, intuitive platforms out there, Mailchimp is ideal if you're new to email marketing. Signing up gives you access to more than 100 email templates, it integrates easily with most CRM systems, and allows you to personalize whole content blocks in your emails. It has a free plan for up to 2,000 contacts.

Omnisend: An all-in-one email marketing automation platform, Omnisend works very well for small businesses, its target market. You can customize its library of templates with your brand, discount codes, and services. There's also a library of pre-built workflows that guide you through automating your interactions with customers at different stages of the sales funnel. The platform is free for up to 15,000 emails per month.

GetResponse: The most business focused of the bunch, GetResponse also has a reliable library of templates, automation workflows, and ways to personalize—it also has a few extra features specifically designed to drive sales, like a ready-made marketing funnel for email marketing campaigns.

When and how to make use of email marketing

Once you've tried the platforms and found the one that most suits, start thinking about when and how to build your first email marketing campaign.

The key thing here is to prioritize quality over quantity.

Don't bombard customers with so many emails they grow frustrated and either delete, unsubscribe, or relegate your emails to their spam folder. Instead, pick your moments carefully and plan campaigns linked to exciting new destinations, services, or deals.

Be clear on the action you want customers to take at the end of reading the email, too. Do you want them to subscribe to a regular newsletter? Do you want them to download a travel guide or a packing checklist from a landing page on your website? Do you want them to book a holiday using a discount code? Read more about a particular travel destination on your website? It's vital you have a purpose in mind for each email, and make sure the reader knows what that purpose is by crafting the email copy (the words) around that purpose.

How to craft an effective marketing email

A catchy subject line: A punchy subject line that intrigues, excites, or surprises is most appealing and gets readers to open the email—which is a good start. Mention enticing discounts. Be playful and humorous. Give them a reason to click through.

Visuals: Packing emails with words makes them hard and uninspiring to read. Break up short paragraphs with captivating travel shots of dream destinations. Experiment with different fonts and colors for variety. And remember to include your brand logo somewhere in the email.

Follow-ups: The best email marketing campaigns are series of emails that gradually entice customers in. It's a journey you need to before you start sending the emails. Your first email might be a spotlight on a particular destination, your second could share a discount code they can use to book and the third a reminder it's a limited time deal.

The TAAP Academy Travel Agent Toolkit has many of practical tips and templates you can use when creatingyour next marketing campaign, including social media templates, guides, and email templates.

What does success look like?

Like all marketing, it's important to monitor the success of email marketing campaigns to see what's working and what isn't. Most platforms have analytics reports as standard and provide tools so you can easily track the below metrics.

Open rate: The number of people that opened the email.

Click-through rate (CTR): The number of people that clicked on one or more links on your email. This is a great sign because it means they've read and engaged with the email, so make sure you include links to your website or social media so they have somewhere to go when they click.

Conversion rate: The number of people that clicked on a link in the email and completed a desired action. This is why it's important to clarify the action you want customers to take first.

Unsubscribes: The number of people that saw or read your email but clicked 'Unsubscribe,' which means they don't want to hear from you again. If the number is high, you might want to rethink the tone or content of your campaign.

Bounce rate: The number of emails that didn't even reach a customer inbox. A high rate here indicates you may have an inaccurate contact list. A good quality mailing list is incredibly valuable, but they take time. Be patient and proactive in gathering good quality leads.

Harness email marketing for your agency

Email can be a fantastic addition to your marketing toolkit. It has a fantastic ROI, and it's affordable, accessible, and easy to monitor.

Follow our tips and use your next email marketing campaign to...
- Provide inspiration and know-how
- Re-engage customers that have previously booked with you
- Drive sales using exclusive deals and promotions
- Build a long-term relationship with your contact list

With the effectiveness of email marketing only increasing, now is a great time to make it part of your strategy going forward. While you look through the platforms and decide which is best for your business, start capturing travelers' email addresses, ask travelers what type of content they want to receive, so when you're ready to go, you can hit the ground running.