



**The Fundamentals of Email Marketing for
Authors: Part 1**

Introduction

If you want solid eBook sales, you must have a deep engagement with your reading audience — especially in today’s digital environment. One of the best ways to create and sustain an engaged community is with email. Successful authors usually make email marketing a core piece of their outreach and community-building efforts. Think about it: More people use email than Facebook and Twitter combined. Email lets authors connect with their fans and future readers on a more personal level than traditional advertising. And unlike fixed advertisements in print and online media, emails can adapt to your needs on the fly. Successful authors use email marketing to communicate:

- Author news
- New releases
- Great book reviews
- Books awards
- Price promotions
- Book signings and appearances

This two-part guide contains everything an author new to email marketing needs to get started and increase customers. In Part 1, we’ll cover:

1. What is email marketing and why bother?
2. How to get started.
3. How often to send emails.
4. What to say to your subscribers.
5. What your emails should look like and how to make it happen.

In “The Fundamentals of Email Marketing for Authors: Part 2,” we’ll dive into the more technical details of email marketing. But for now, let’s start with why email marketing is so valuable.

Section I

What is email marketing and why should I do it?

What is email marketing?

Email marketing is the sending of *commercial* messages to large groups of people via email (as opposed to the sending of personal messages). For example, a personal message is inviting your friends to a housewarming party, whereas a commercial message is inviting your fans to your book’s launch party. Commercial messages are those that advertise or promote a commercial product. Emails that announce your new

book or link to websites that sell your books are considered commercial messages. Informal emails that update fans about your latest projects may feel personal in nature, but the overall goal is the promotion of your name and books. That said, even the most commercial of emails can have a fun, unique voice that reflects you as an author. We are emphasizing the broad definition of commercial messages because the U.S. anti-spam laws regulate the sending of commercial messages via email (we'll go into more detail later). So it's an important—albeit bureaucratic sounding—distinction to make immediately.

Why is email marketing important for authors?

The biggest challenge that authors face once their books are on the market is acquiring a stable fan base and converting them to customers with each new book. Relying on book reviews and store merchandising alone will no longer suffice in such a crowded online marketplace. The eBooks that succeed most in Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Apple's iBookstore are those by authors with large fan bases. Brian Brushwood, author of the best-selling *Diamond Club* and *Scam School* books tells Vook that he mobilized his huge fan base because the majority of other customers would only buy from the top of the charts. So he emailed his audience to promote his books. Email marketing is a critical (and near free) strategy for increasing sales. *The Diamond Club* became the #4 bestseller in paid eBooks on iTunes after three days on the market, and *Scam School* made \$30,000 in its first month on sale. Of course, you have to have that audience first—but no matter what your audience size, reaching them directly with a focused message via email is a must.

Acquiring new subscribers to your list can be the hardest part of the process (see Section 2). While they may not buy your eBooks right away, there is always potential for future revenue. As long as subscribers engage with your content—i.e. click on links, learn something new, and write feedback—they'll keep coming back. We've broken down all of the benefits to email marketing below:

Loyal subscribers, loyal readers

It's all about forming relationships. When you invest time and interest in your readers by filling their inbox with good content, you gain their trust. They are more likely to purchase your books time and time again.

Visitors come and go

But subscribers last forever. Well, not literally, but email marketing is a great way to capture the attention of someone who would otherwise forget to revisit your website or check Amazon for new releases.

“I remember that name!”

Name recognition is a powerful advantage when readers are faced with crowded shelves and online displays. Emails that effectively capture readers' attention ensure that your name jumps out from the crowd.

Forward to a friend

Think of this as the email-marketing equivalent of “word of mouth.” When you send a great email, a fan could forward the email to a friend with a quick little “thought you’d enjoy this” preface.

Advertising on the fly

Have a message that you want to advertise ASAP? Newsletters allow you to reach your audience in minutes.

Great content to go

Fans might not have time to read your blog or website at their desks, but they can read a newsletter from their smartphones wherever they are.

Deep analytics made easy

Email marketing platforms can track not only the percentage of people who opened your email, but also how users interacted with the body of the email itself: what links they clicked, whether they forwarded the email, or if they just trashed it. This information helps you adjust your message and strategy for your next outreach.

Section 2 Getting started

How it works in four steps

You'll 1) get an account with an email marketing service, 2) create a signup form, 3) put a link to that form on your website, Facebook page, Twitter bio, and other platforms, and 4) email away!

Setting up with an email marketing service provider

There are four big services for email marketing dominating the market right now: MailChimp, Constant Contact, AWeber, and iContent. We've been successful using MailChimp so we're going to recommend it as a great starting point for the new, and even established, eBook creator. We'll use MailChimp to walk you through the setup process; it's fun, user-friendly, and free for up to 2,000 subscribers. And the decisions we make during the MailChimp process apply to newsletters across all platforms.

After setting up an account at www.MailChimp.com and logging in, the site will direct you to your Dashboard for a three-step “Get Started” process: 1) Create a list, 2) design sign up forms, and 3) send a campaign. It is easy and intuitive to create a list in MailChimp, but here are some notes on the information required:

1. List name: If you have multiple lists (for newsletters, bloggers, invitations), the list name needs to be as specific as possible so you know exactly what the list is for and what would interest these contacts.
2. Default “from” name: Keep it personal. You’re promoting *yourself*!
3. Contact Info: Provide a mailing address or PO Box in compliance with the [CAN-SPAM Act](#) (we’ll go into this shortly).
4. Notifications: Select either “daily summary” or “one-by-one” updates of subscribe/unsubscribe activity (so you know what’s working and what isn’t).
5. Allow subscribers to pick the email format (HTML, Plain-Text, or Mobile)

You can manually add subscribers to a list by clicking on the list and selecting “subscribe.” Make sure you have their permission first!

Design signup forms with MailChimp

You can create a newsletter signup form and “thank you” page for new subscribers. Again, MailChimp makes the setup easy, but here are some general notes:

1. Add a message: Remind people about the content to which they’re subscribing by adding a message.
2. Fields: MailChimp automatically includes first and last name fields. Delete a field by clicking on it and selecting the minus button, and add fields by selecting the options on the right.
3. Design: Custom design the signup form to reflect your content. You’ll be able to change the colors, play with fonts, and even choose themes (e.g. a social-media theme).

Once you’ve saved the form, MailChimp gives you the link to the signup form. Test it out for yourself and add an email address. You’ll notice a great built-in feature with MailChimp: the double opt-in email. Upon sign up, MailChimp will send the subscriber an email to double check that a person opted in to the list. Giving subscribers the double opt-in option is professional and courteous. Now that you have the URL, it’s time to build your list.

Acquiring new subscribers

In your email-marketing plan, your two big objectives are to 1) obtain more subscribers and 2) get subscribers to purchase your books. Gather email addresses from all points of contact—physical and virtual—with potential readers.

- Your website, Facebook page, Twitter bio, and any blogs should all have prominent links to the newsletter’s sign up form.
- Put it in your email signature for all contacts to see.

- Display forms requesting the names and emails of guests at book launches and signings.
- If you have friends in the publishing industry, ask if they can promote you and your newsletter on their websites and/or social media platforms.

Remember, peoples' inboxes are personal, and unsolicited messages can feel like an invasion of their space. Here are some general courtesy rules:

1. Ask for permission before adding someone to your list.
2. Let subscribers know what content you plan to send them.
3. Assure subscribers that their information will not be sold to third parties.
4. If you are emailing subscribers from your personal email account, always BCC the list. No one wants strangers seeing their email addresses and what they subscribe to.

A note on the legal stuff

Congress passed the [CAN-SPAM Act](#) in 2003 to regulate commercial email. The law defines commercial email as “any electronic mail message the primary purpose of which is the commercial advertisement or promotion of a commercial product or service,” including email that promotes content on commercial websites. Whether your email is a commercial message or a personal letter to your list, here are requirements that you must follow:

1. Tell your recipients where you're located by providing a physical address.
2. Don't use deceptive subject lines. Your subject must reflect the content.
3. Let your recipients opt out of receiving future emails and honor this request promptly.

Even if your email isn't asking subscribers to purchase your latest book, you want consistency and professionalism across all emails; you're marketing your name and it's your reputation!

Section 3

How often to send emails

The frequency with which you email your subscribers needs to strike a balance between keeping your name fresh in their heads without bombarding them with the same message. At the very least, try to send a monthly email with a round up of the previous month's news and upcoming projects. And at the most, one email a week is perfect.

Setting up a calendar

Setting up a newsletter calendar with each newsletter's date and theme is the best way to plan your content, keep it original newsletter to newsletter, and keep yourself

motivated. Establish the day of the week and time of the day at which you'll send your emails, and stick to it. Ideally, you want your readers to expect your newsletter and actively seek it out in their inboxes.

Date	Objective	Newsletter content
8-Oct	Pique interest in <i>Awesome New Release</i> , on sale next week	Description and preview of <i>Awesome New Release</i>
15-Oct	Drive sales of <i>Awesome New Release</i>	Introduce <i>Awesome New Release</i> with price promotion
22-Oct	Drive sales of <i>Awesome New Release</i>	Summary of <i>Awesome New Release</i> reviews
29-Oct	Maintain subscribers' interest with original content	Halloween-themed short story (and an <i>Awesome New Release</i> plug at the bottom)

Section 4

What to say to your subscribers

Newsletter content

Email marketing generally falls into three categories: newsletters, announcements, and promotions. Figure out your objective going into each email and base your content around that. This is where your calendar comes in. Even if you want to promote *Awesome New Release* several weeks in a row, vary your content to keep readers interested and curious about your next email. No one wants the same email over and over again.

Content directly related to promoting your book/driving sales includes:

- Announcement of new book release
- Offer for an eBook price promotion
- A preview or sample of your book
- A roundup of your book's recent reviews
- Calendar of upcoming book signings

But here is additional content worth including in order to engage recipients and keep them from hitting that unsubscribe button:

- Articles by other authors worth sharing/commenting on
- Author interviews
- A review of a book that you just read and loved (keep it positive)
- A short story written just for your them ("The Dog Ate My Manuscript")

- A fun fact about writing or publishing (everyone loves an insider perspective)
- Roundups of content from your blog
- Writing tips from fellow authors

How to say it

Email is a more personal means of communication than your website. People want to receive personal emails from friends and actively seek these out when they check their inboxes. Be that friend who your subscriber wants to see in his inbox. Speak in the same everyday language as your audience; a romance novelist and business advisor will probably have different audiences and therefore different voices. If you feel your list is too varied to use one distinct voice, keep it friendly and professional. In “Fundamentals of Email Marketing for Authors: Part 2,” we’ll talk about segmenting your list so that you can send different emails to sublists of subscribers.

Nice gestures

Depending on the scale of your subscriber list, try to send personal emails when someone first signs up for your newsletter, responds to one of your emails, comments on your blog, writes a favorable review online, etc.

Tip: Sign up for newsletters by successful authors to learn what they’re saying to their subscribers, how they’re saying it, what you like, and what you don’t like.

Section 5

Designing and sending an email in MailChimp

Whatever email marketing service you choose, there are common fields that you will encounter. In this section, we will go over the basic process within the context of sending an email in [MailChimp](#), but remember that these general rules hold true across all platforms.

Sending an email with MailChimp

After you’ve selected a list for the email (called a “campaign”), MailChimp asks you to fill in a form. Here are some notes:

1. Name your campaign: use a detailed description so you know exactly what this campaign was when you compare campaign results (we’ll discuss this in “Fundamentals of Email Marketing for Authors: Part 2”).
2. Message subject: keep it catchy and avoid spam words (see a list of common spam words [here](#)).
3. From name: keep it personal. Your name is your brand!

4. Personalize The “To” Field: This includes the recipient’s name in the message. Check this box to make your message more personal.
5. Specify *|MERGETAGS|*: MailChimp fills this in with the tag for the recipient’s first name. No need to change anything in this box!
6. Track opens: keep this box checked so you can see how many people open your email. It will help you gauge the success of your campaign. Don’t worry about the other check boxes for now.

Now the fun part begins. Click “Design” on the toolbar at the top of the page. Unless you have a professional designer and coder working with you to design your emails, use one of MailChimp’s 44 different layouts and 435 predesigned templates. Here are some notes:

1. There is a small box at the top of your campaign that allows you to add a teaser description of your email. It’s nice to put a short sentence or two in this box. In Gmail, it will appear immediately after the subject line in the recipient’s inbox.
2. Click on the body of the email to write your content. With certain layouts, MailChimp automatically formats the body with headers. You can delete these as you edit your content and even clear all formatting by clicking the eraser icon on the edit toolbar.
3. Click on the mountain icon to add an image. Keep the size under 50 KB so your recipients can open the email quickly. You can adjust the size and alignment after you’ve uploaded the file.
4. Once you’ve inserted the image in your email, you can double click on it to edit. If you select no alignment, you’re able to drag your image anywhere in the email.
5. Upload a headshot and a logo/signature for branding.
6. Always preview your email. Select the “Preview & Test” button in the upper right corner. “Open a Popup Preview” allows you to preview the email in a popup page. “Send a Test Email” is a great way to ensure your email is perfect before moving on.

Once your email looks perfect, select “Confirm” in the upper toolbar and double check your preferences.

Tracking your success in MailChimp

Email marketing services provide tools to help you track the success of your emails. In MailChimp, go to Campaigns, click on the email you wish to track, and click “campaign reports.” The report tells you how many people opened the email, how many clicked through to a link if one was provided, how many people unsubscribed from your list, and how many people complained. MailChimp will even tell you how your open rate for a blast compares to previous campaigns and to your industry’s average open rate (the Media and Publishing industry’s open rate is 18.43%). If the results are particularly

dismal, reevaluate the email's subject line and content. We'll talk more about testing the success of your emails in "Fundamentals of Email Marketing for Authors: Part 2."

What not to do

Avoid using words and characters in the subject and body that might mark the email as spam such as "FREE" and "Click here!" and multiple exclamation points.

[Bloomtools.com has a helpful list](#) of these words. While some can't be avoided, try to limit your use in the body of the emails.

Avoid attaching files to your emails and instead link recipients to a website where they can download any attachments. If you want to send your subscribers the first chapter of your new book, either paste it in the body of your email or offer a short teaser followed by a link where readers can download the rest.

Don't rely on embedded images to catch your readers' eyes. Many email services, including Gmail, initially block images in emails and ask users' permission before loading them. If you insert images into the body of your email, keep the size below 50 KB or the recipient might give up waiting for the images to download. Keep in mind that many readers open emails on their cellphones and will not wait for an email to load. Moreover, spam filters are more likely to block emails comprised of one large image because many spammers use images to try and trick filters.

Conclusion

While email marketing is one of the most effective tools for book sales, don't rely solely on newsletters to drive eBook sales. Your website needs to compel visitors to sign up for your newsletter and make them want to come back when you link to it in the emails.

In "The Fundamentals of Email Marketing for Authors: Part Two," we'll dive into the technical details worth learning once you're familiar with the basics, including:

- Monitoring and comparing the success of your campaigns
- Split testing emails to see what your readers respond to more
- Segmenting lists so you can send different emails to different audiences

Until then, get started! Carla King, author of *Self-Publishing Boot Camp Guide for Authors* sums it up: "These people have signed up to hear what you have to say. Send them excerpts. Send them information. Entertain them. Reward them with special offers. Ask them what they want, and give them what they came for. These are your 1000 true fans."