



Scrappy Marketing During Covid-19: Crafting Email Campaigns

With the spread of Coronavirus, dealers are in an unprecedented situation. While some dealerships have been forced to close their physical doors, others are being required to limit the number of people who can be inside the dealership. Almost every dealer is left asking this question, "How can I continue to market and sell my inventory during this time of social distancing?"

It's a tough situation, but with marketing and sales moving rapidly online as more people are at home and on their smartphones and computers, we are here to help you expand your dealership's digital presence with a series about **scrappy marketing during Covid-19**. In this article, we're discussing how that success can be achieved when dealers **craft dynamic email campaigns**.

Despite new forms of communication constantly emerging, email remains an important tool in any marketing and advertising strategy - plus, it tends to deliver a solid bang for your buck. [Marketing professionals rank email](#) as the most effective digital media channel, over social media, SEO, content development, direct mail, affiliates, and display advertising. That's likely because email's return on investment (ROI) sits at a whopping 3,800%, returning \$38 for every \$1 spent. In fact, many Email Service Providers (ESPs) offer free starting packages, usually with reasonably-priced upgrades available.

Email is not only affordable, but also the quality of leads it generates is higher than other methods and it often works seamlessly in conjunction with other marketing campaigns you have going on. As you think about incorporating email into your strategy, consider these other benefits:

Benefits of Email Marketing

Email is the primary form of communication in the United States. In fact, among US adults who use the Internet, [85% of them have email](#), a greater number than those who use search engines or social media. Almost every person who could potentially buy from your dealership is going to have email, making an email campaign a great way to generate new leads or re-engage previous customers. In short, go where the people are, and they're on email.

Email grows your influence through its [ability to serve a variety of purposes](#). By keeping your dealership top-of-mind, email can help maintain and expand a consumer's awareness of your brand, while also providing expert content, promoting products, and sharing exclusive offers. The access you gain via email can become an important aspect of building relationships with prospects and nurturing them into leads and sales - as well as continuing to maintain and grow relationships with your current customers.

Email effectively generates leads and sales. Consider these powerful statistics: Two-thirds of customers [have purchased a product](#) directly resulting from a marketing email, and buyers who received email marketing [spent 138% more](#) than buyers who didn't receive email offers. Email campaigns consistently prove to effectively generate leads and sales and, in fact, email marketing [acquires customers 40X more](#) effectively than Facebook and Twitter

combined. That's not bad, considering how impactful social media has become in our society.

You own your subscriber list. As you develop your email program, a primary component will be getting people to sign up to receive your emails. What is great about collecting emails is that once you have your growing subscriber list, you own it and can store it in your own files. Unlike with social media, you don't have to worry about losing your contacts if your account is cancelled or if the platform itself happens to shut down. If you have a problem with one email provider, you can simply move on to another one while maintaining your subscriber list.

Here's the short version about benefits: Email is hugely popular, ESPs offer free basic packages with affordable upgrades, and dynamic email campaigns can expand your dealership's reach, generate leads and sales, and deliver a profitable ROI. Add all those benefits together and incorporating an email strategy into your scrappy marketing efforts should be an obvious decision, especially during times of social distancing when so many people will be researching and purchasing products online.

As you develop and implement email marketing campaigns, you'll continue to learn more and more about what works for your dealership and your audience. The Internet is overflowing with guides about sending effective emails (like [this field guide from MailChimp](#), or [this ultimate guide from HubSpot](#)). So that you don't have to scour the web and spend hours and hours reading all those guides, we've also collected the most relevant planning tips for email campaign beginners during the time of Covid-19. While the following recommendations don't exhaustively cover everything about email, they should give you a solid starting point for meeting the basic email marketing best practices as you plan your campaign:

Planning Email Marketing

Selecting an Email Service Provider (ESP): Unless you employ your own email specialist, you're likely going to need some help putting together and sending out emails. ESPs offer user-friendly software to create, develop, and implement email marketing strategies. Many of these companies have starting packages which are free, with affordable upgrades available for purchase, making them perfect for a scrappy marketing team. Popular ESPs include MailChimp, MailerLite, TargetHero, SendInBlue, ReachMail, Benchmark, and Constant Contact.

Getting Organized: Before you start signing people up to receive emails, you'll have to decide what the purpose of your email campaign is, what [type of content can best serve that goal](#), and how frequently that content needs to be shared. Because [emails should go out on a regular basis](#), it is best to [organize, schedule, and track](#) that content via a content calendar. As your email reach grows, you may even [offer various options to customers](#) based on how often they want to receive emails or the type of content they prefer. The ongoing development of your email program will require a strong commitment to staying organized.

Selecting Content: Once you have a basic plan, it's time to select the exact content that will go out. Emails can [share expert content](#), exclusive offers, company updates, new product details, industry news, upcoming dealership events, or popular social media posts - just to

name a few. Your content is up to you, and will depend on what you can offer and who your audience is - just be sure that what you share is professional, insightful, and aligned with your email marketing goals.

Gaining Subscribers: There are a number of effective ways to get people to sign up to receive your emails, including requiring an email to access certain parts of your website or to download certain content, asking social media followers to subscribe via a landing page, or collecting emails in-person while at tradeshow or in your dealership. From an ethical standpoint, people should always know when their email is collected, what kind of emails they may receive, and how often they will be emailed. Always state your purpose when collecting emails, avoid buying pre-collected lists from outside parties, and only send what you say you will - you don't want to be known as an annoying "spammer." Following these best practices for gaining subscribers will help you maintain a robust list of followers who are interested in your content, and also helps maintain your reputation as a quality industry leader.

Once you have selected an ESP, organized your efforts, selected specific content, and gained subscribers, you will be set-up for success and ready to actually implement a dynamic email marketing campaign. You will learn a lot as you gain personal experience, but the following tips for designing emails, setting subject lines, and previewing and testing your campaign should be a solid foundation for getting started during the time of social distancing:

Implementing Email Marketing

Designing Emails: Many online resources offer great tips for email design, and we've collected a few fundamental recommendations here, including many from our own sister company, [Commercial Web Services](#):

- **Use high quality images and visuals:** For the background, as well as within the email, utilize images that look professional, engage the reader, and keep the text easy to read.
- **Make sure the email is "responsive":** Be sure the email can be read on all devices, [keeping in mind](#) that 67% of emails today are read on smartphones and tablets.
- **Communicate a clear Call-To-Action:** Specifically urge the customer to engage in the behavior you want (which is usually clicking on a link that takes them to a listing, landing page, or blogpost). It's important to remember that people won't typically look at your email for more than a minute. If you want users to see and click on the CTA, keep it "[above the scroll](#)" (above the point where users would have to scroll down to find it) and use engaging language - a prompt like "[Join the Fun](#)" is better than a simple "View Here". And if you have more content, you can always use two CTAs - one closer to the top of the email and one near the bottom.
- **Include links to your website and social media accounts:** The more ways you connect with consumers, the closer they'll feel to your brand, and the more likely they will be to become or remain customers. Giving consumers multiple ways to connect helps you build relationships.
- **Follow federal guidelines:** The [CAN-SPAM Act](#) sets national guidelines for sending commercial emails and is enforced by the Federal Trade Commission. To meet these requirements, your header and subject line cannot be misleading or deceptive, the

message must be identified as an ad, you must include a current postal address and an option to unsubscribe, opt-out requests must be honored in a timely manner, and you should monitor what Email Service Providers (ESPs) or any other entities do with email on your behalf. Following these guidelines also helps your email avoid being automatically filtered into consumers' spam folders.

Setting a Subject Line: You'll need an engaging subject line to immediately grab a customer's attention and convince them to open the email in the first place, and personalizing the subject line is the best way to accomplish that. If you can get a customer to open an email with an eye-catching and interesting subject line, you're already beginning to develop that prospect into a lead. Here's how to effectively optimize and [personalize a subject line](#):

- **Research your audience:** Study the demographic you're targeting with the email and figure out what topics and language would most align with their needs, interests, and styles. And remember that you are a guest in a crowded inbox - do what you need to do in order to stand out, but don't be rude or offensive.
- **Include recipients' first names:** Through your ESP, you can set each email that goes out in a campaign to feature the name of its individual recipient in the subject line. Emails that include a first name in the subject line have a higher click-through rate than those that do not - just be sure your subscriber list is updated with the correct names.
- **Consider using emojis:** If it fits your industry and your brand, consider placing emojis into the subject line. Research has found that [56% of brands](#) that place an emoji in their emails have a higher open rate than those that do not.
- **Establish accurate expectations:** Use the subject line and preheader text to let consumers know the value contained within the email, without overselling or misrepresenting the content. You want prospects to be excited to open your email, without being disappointed once they see it.
- **Avoid rookie mistakes:** In addition to avoiding hyperbole in your words, don't trip into the pitfalls of using all caps, incorporating too many exclamation points, or over-explaining the email. You might think those things communicate passion, but really they make it seem like you are shouting. Subject lines should be more simple and cheerful than rambling and frantic.
- **Pre-check your subject lines:** There are a number of tools out there that will let you test how likely your subject line is to drive a conversion. We recommend [this tool from Co-Schedule](#) because it provides recommendations on how to improve and adjusts your score as you live-edit the subject line.

Previewing & Testing: You've designed your email and set a subject line, so now you're good to hit "send," right? Not so fast. Though you have put in considerable effort to assemble the email, is it as good as it could be? Are you certain everything is correctly spelled and formatted? Is one subject line or CTA better than another? To be fully confident in an email campaign, your last step of implementation is to preview and test the email.

- **Double check CAN-SPAM rules:** We've already covered those guidelines, but take time at the end of the process to double- and triple-check that your email meets all federal requirements.
- **Review for appearance and responsiveness:** You'll want to make sure that the email looks appealing, content can be read and understood, and the email can be viewed

across devices and across email providers, like Gmail, Outlook, and others. To check emails, you can review both HTML and text formats.

- **Click the links:** The last thing you want to do is send out an email hoping to get prospects to visit your website, listings, or blog, only to find out the CTA link didn't work. Avoid frustration and embarrassment by testing that all links effectively direct users to the targeted webpage.
- **Utilize A/B testing:** To really maximize your efforts, conduct a simple test at the beginning of the campaign. Make two versions of the email, with a single difference between them. This can be different subject lines, different headers, or different CTAs. Whatever the change, be sure that it is only one, single difference between the emails - if you change more than one thing, you won't be able to figure out which difference affected the test results. Select two small groups of subscribers, sending one email to one group, and the second email to the other group, then compare open and click-through rates between the two groups. Whichever email performs better, that's the email to send to the full, remaining subscriber list, as it should provide you with the most exposure and engagement. A quality ESP should offer A/B testing as a feature of their service.

Once you have designed your email, set a subject line, and previewed and tested the email, you're ready to pull the trigger on your email campaign. If all goes well, you'll begin effectively engaging prospects, generating leads, and retaining consumers -- all despite Covid-19. Of course, once an email campaign is implemented, you're not quite done -- the next step will be to monitor and measure your success, and learn important lessons for the next campaign.

Evaluating Email Success

Monitor Your Campaign: It can feel great to finally hit that "send" button after a great deal of preparation, but you're still not done. As the campaign progresses, it is important to monitor the campaign for changes - either successes or issues - so you know if any changes need to be made even as the campaign is ongoing. In other words, you cannot manage what you do not measure. Keep in mind that you should not overreact to initial data, as it may not be representative of how the entire campaign will perform and you don't want to impulsively and unnecessarily disrupt all of your planning. However, if more data comes in and you see troubling trends emerging, then it may be time to consider making some changes - we'll talk more about those potential changes in the next point. Here are the 4 key performance indicators (KPIs) to pay attention to¹:

- 1. Deliverability:** The rate at which emails successfully reach the inbox of your intended recipients
- 2. Open Rate:** The rate at which recipients who have received the email decide to open your message
- 3. Click-Through Rate (CTR):** The rate at which recipients who have opened the email click on your Call-to-Action (CTA) links
- 4. Unsubscribes:** The rate at which recipients who have received your email remove themselves from your subscriber list

Making Changes: You should not only monitor your campaign as it is happening, but also measure your total campaign results once the campaign is complete so that you have a complete picture of your overall achievements and shortcomings. Collecting and analyzing campaign performance data allows you to make changes and improvements, either to a current campaign or future campaigns. Here are some basic recommendations that may help you make effective changes to your campaigns in order to improve your KPIs, depending on what adaptations the data suggests are needed¹:

- **1. Deliverability**
 - Double check that you are adhering to [CAN-SPAM](#) best practices (federal guidelines for sending emails) and not ending up in recipients' spam folders
 - Remove inactive recipients or email addresses from your subscriber list so your numbers are not artificially deflated and to maintain your email database accuracy
- **2. Open Rate**
 - Use [A/B testing](#) (comparing 2 emails with 1 difference between them) to experiment with various subject lines in order to find the most appealing for your audience
 - Experiment with sending your email during various times or on different days in order to find the best window of opportunity for audience engagement
- **3. Click-Through Rate (CTR)**
 - Be sure your CTAs are offering actual value to your audience
 - Be sure the language in your CTAs is clear and understandable
 - Be sure the imagery and design of your CTAs are appealing and capture attention (consumers most often see them as a colored button or as blue underlined text)
- **4. Unsubscribes**
 - Ask if your email has:
 - Actually provided value, or has just wasted their time
 - Strayed from your brand or your audience's preferences
 - Inadvertently confused or tricked them with unclear meaning

Segmenting Your Audience: Before launching your campaign, you should consider dividing your subscriber list into different groups, based on factors that are important to you, including age, income, geographic location, or inventory interest. Doing so allows you to target specific groups with individualized campaigns that are catered specifically to that group, increasing your campaign's odds of making a connection. As you analyze your campaign after it ends, you can also use the data to further [segment your audience](#) based on how they interacted with previous campaigns.

For example, after a campaign concludes, you could classify your audience into those who did not open the email, those who opened the email but did not click on the CTA, those who clicked on the CTA but did not contact your or make a purchase, and those who did contact your or make a purchase. Going forward, then, you can send future email to your audience segments based on where they are in the purchase lifecycle, which enhances your ability to get them the information they want or need at the time that is most relevant to them, thus helping you nurture your leads and close sales.

Eventually, after a number of campaigns, you may even be able to develop specific buyer personas - including ideal customer profiles (ICPs) - in which you group your audience into segments based on variables that collectively group together and predict the likelihood of a campaign's success with that persona segment.

In Conclusion

We hope this **Scrappy Marketing During Covid-19** series has helped you understand the basics of email campaigns, giving you a powerful tool for marketing during the spread of Coronavirus and the rise of social distancing. With more and more people at home, and your dealership being increasingly forced to move its business online, crafting dynamic emails is a great way to successfully maximize exposure and grow sales.

Connect With Us Today

For additional information or insights on how or where to be scrappy during this pandemic at your dealership, please contact us at Marketing@traderinteractive.com or call (800) 684-6104 to contact our teams.

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