



The Definitive Guide

Email Lead Nurturing

To create a successful email lead nurturing campaign, you need a winning strategy and opening sequence, quality ongoing emails and a firm grasp on email best practices.



If you're using paid or organic traffic to grow your email marketing list and ultimately drive customer acquisition, a strong lead nurturing campaign is the difference between success and failure. More than 50 percent of leads haven't yet reached the purchase stage of the marketing funnel, so your follow-up is key to continuing the conversation with prospects, building relationships, and ultimately growing your customer base and revenue.

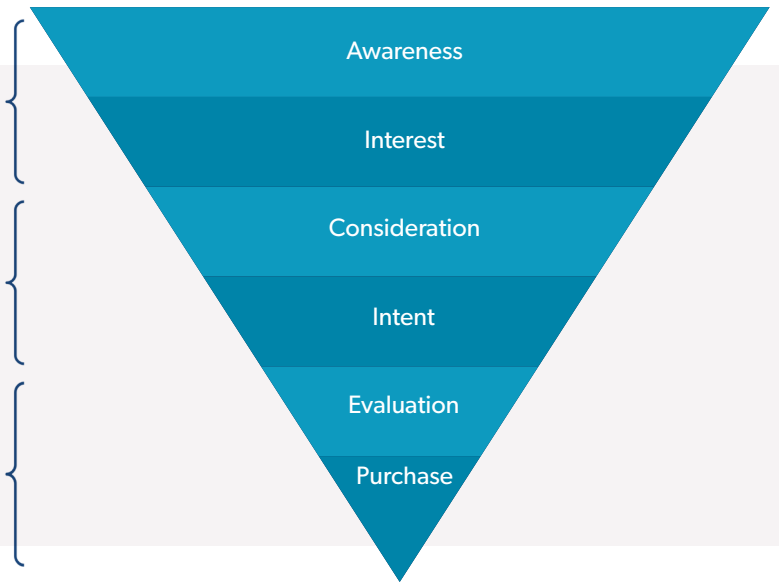


Most leads haven't yet reached the final, purchasing stage of the buying funnel, and need extra nurturing to move down through each step.

Lead Generation

Lead Nurture

Sale Conversion

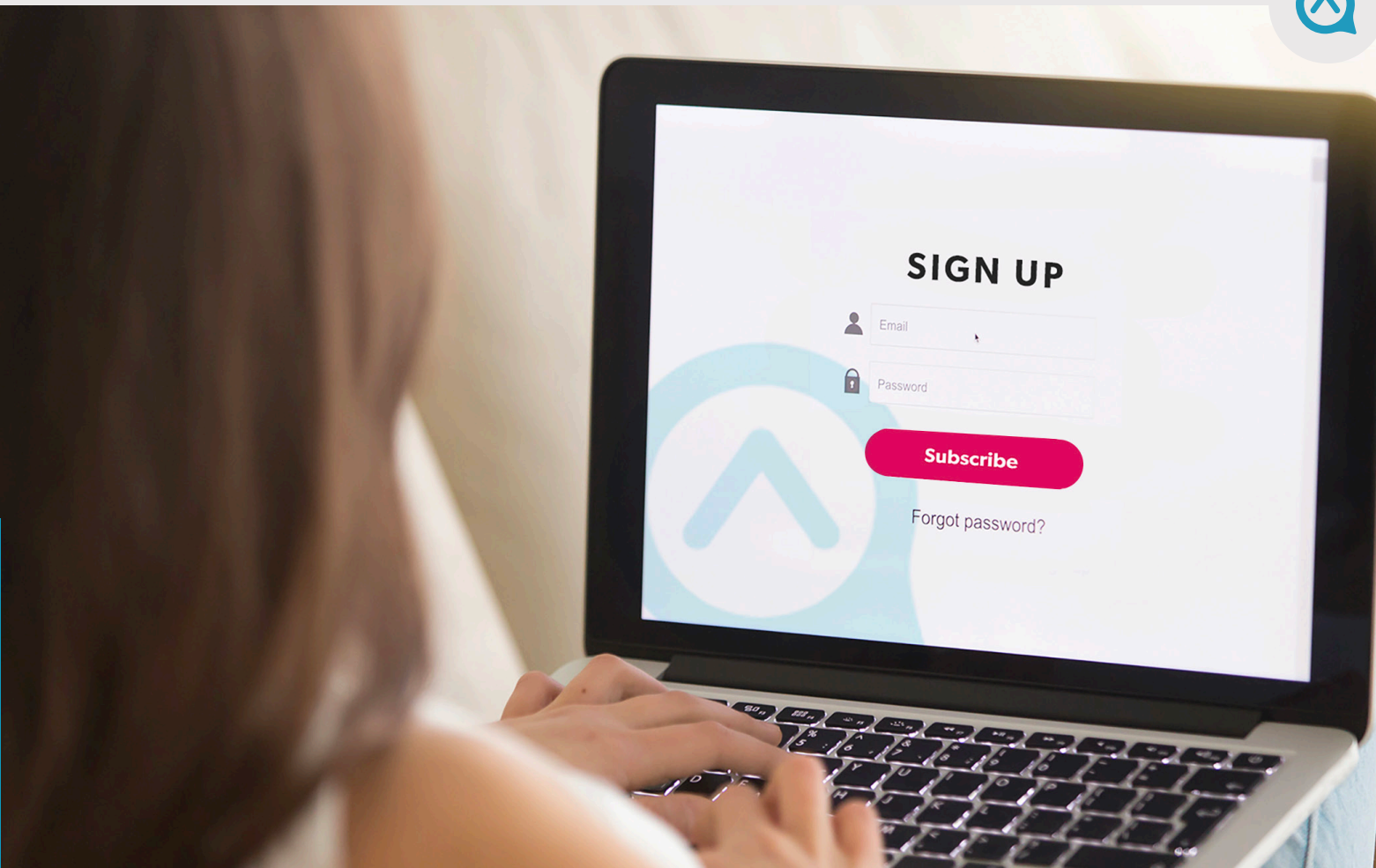


This isn't as simple and transactional as putting together a few pieces of content and sending them out in a welcome email. Converting customers requires careful consideration, planning, and effort. Adhering to proper guidelines can maximize your conversion rates and subscriber retention.

The following is a rundown of email lead nurturing best practices to help ensure your next campaign is a success.

Outline Your Strategy

Before you start running ads or writing emails, you need to outline your campaign goals and a plan to get there. This will help you launch, test, and make changes in a systematic manner so you get the best returns.



Understand Your Sales Cycle

The first part of outlining your strategy is to make sure you understand your sales cycle, as this will affect every part of your email campaign. All the tips listed in this article are guidelines, and can and should be adjusted to fit your situation.

For example, if your average sales cycle is several months, daily emails are excessive. On the other hand, if you typically make sales within weeks, multiple messages in the first day would be necessary—and you may include CTAs very quickly.

Set Clear, Measurable Goals

Once you have a handle on your sales cycle, it's time to set goals. These goals should be reasonable, objective targets that are easily tracked. They should also address both front-end metrics such as open rates and click through rates, and back-end metrics such as total sales, and conversion rates.


Open rate (OR) and click-through rate (CTR) can be useful high-level, front-end indicators of campaign performance, so it's a good idea to include them in your initial strategy. If you have previous campaigns to compare to, use them as benchmarks against future efforts.



Keep in mind that open and click-through rates can vary by industry, lead source, cost of acquisition, and other variables. Also remember, that these rates are only the first indicators in the process of acquiring customers and should be evaluated in the larger context of sales and revenue.

Whatever your method of acquiring leads and subscribers, make sure to set up corresponding back-end goals for each campaign. These goals can include return on investment, return on ad spend, cost per acquisition, cost per sale, cost per store visit, overall sales growth, or even consumer site engagement. Every company is different, so work within your organization to set the goals and metrics most relevant to your business needs. Regardless of the metrics, the goals should be objective and measurable, so you can track progress and improve over time.

You may find that organic website subscribers show slightly higher front-end metrics than leads from paid sources, but they require more patience and investment to acquire. Leads from paid media on the other hand, may produce slightly lower front-end metrics, but the overall back-end metrics can meet or beat organic methods due to reduced costs per lead. You may also find certain paid channels provide much greater ability to scale.



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The Opening Sequence

Immediately after joining your list, a subscriber should be greeted with an onboarding sequence. This can include one email or a few emails, but the onboarding is meant to welcome the reader, set expectations for future communications, and prepare the subscriber to get the most from your content.

The Welcome Email

The first email the subscriber receives should be a simple introduction that includes a thank you, explanation of what to expect, and a small taste of the value you provide:

**Say
Thank You**

**Set
Expectations**

**Provide
Value**

**Limit
CTAs**



1 Say Thank You

Inboxes are crowded, and consumers are getting more marketing messages now than ever. Start the relationship on the right foot by thanking subscribers for their valuable attention.

2 Set Expectations

Tell your subscribers what kind of content they can expect from you and how often. Let them know you're sending a weekly deal or daily newsletter. This ensures your readers' expectations are aligned with your content, so they stay engaged.

3 Provide Value

Give your readers a small taste of what's to come. This can include a collection of your best content, a short tutorial, or a preview of the week's deals. Whatever you include, make sure it's some of your best material so users want to keep reading.

4 Limit CTAs

Make sure you start by focusing on what connected you with the subscriber and delivering what was promised without asking for anything additional in return—in other words, don't include any unnecessary CTAs (Calls To Action). If you offered a promotion to the consumer—such as a discount, or a coupon—in exchange for their sign-up, you should provide an avenue for them to claim the offer, but don't include other promotions. You'll have plenty of opportunities to make sales in future emails; dedicate the first message to building a relationship.



Extended Onboarding

One welcome email is usually enough, but sometimes it's necessary to send a few in short succession to provide the best onboarding experience. If you're providing a lot of information up front, two or three messages helps spread it out and gives the reader time to absorb.

A news aggregator might send a second email with a collection of headlines from the past month for example, and an online pet store could send a multi-step training guide. Just make sure you're delivering on the message that made your reader sign up in the first place.

Be Ready Before Launch

Make sure you have all content for your onboarding sequence ready before running any ads. When a prospect signs up for your list you have their attention; it is critical that they hear from you so you can capitalize on the opportunity to engage with a prospective customer.

Ongoing Emails

After sending your welcome sequence, be ready to follow up with readers on a regular basis. More than half of all leads in any sales system are not ready to buy right away, so you'll have to stay in touch consistently to be top of mind when it's time for them to make a purchasing decision. The best way to do this via email is with a steady, consistent stream of relevant content.

Select the Right Email Cadence

Selecting the right cadence for your emails is a balancing act that can have a significant effect on engagement. Send emails too often and readers will stop paying attention; send too infrequently and they won't remember you.

The appropriate rate for your business depends largely on industry and customer base, and there isn't a single rule that works

for all situations. A Quick Serve Restaurant (QSR), for example, might only send weekly specials, while a news aggregation site would send emails daily. Just remember to keep your customers in mind and think about how often they'd like to read what you're sending.

If you're not sure what would work best for your business, ask your vendor. An experienced partner will be able to help guide you towards a schedule that maximizes returns and provides the best customer experience

More sophisticated mailers can set up a "preference center" where the subscriber can control the frequency at which they wish to engage with your brand. These can prove valuable by helping reduce attrition. Too many mailers only offer this option once the user is already in the process of unsubscribing, at which point the relationship has already been too impacted to retain the subscriber.



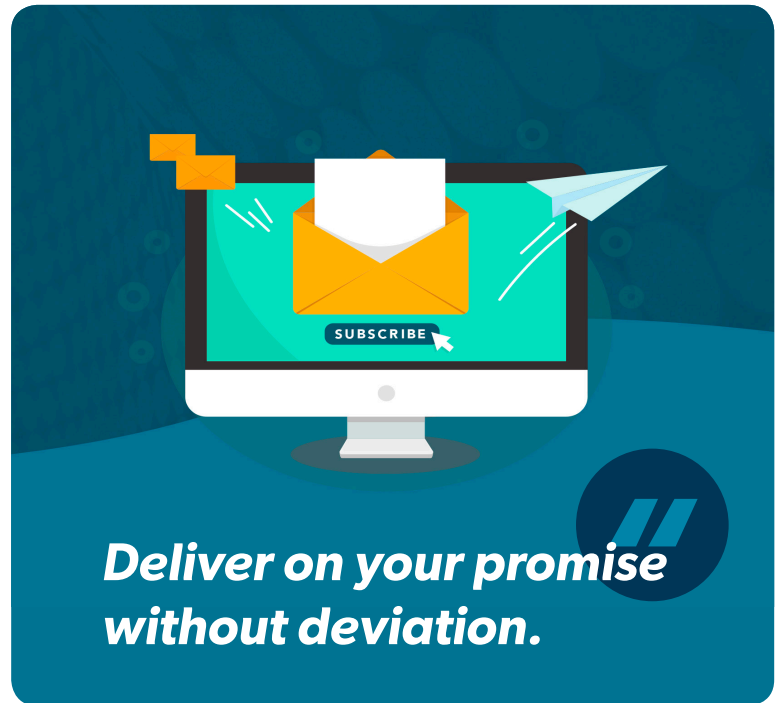
Stay Consistent

No matter the cadence, consistency is key. Consistency provides the best reader experience, and helps you get results while measuring performance accurately.

Make Sure Content Is High Quality

Every email that is sent has to contain high quality content, or readers will lose interest and unsubscribe.

Here are four guidelines to help create emails that subscribers will want to receive:



1 Make Each Email Unique

Make sure each email in your sequence is unique. Not all readers will open every email, but that doesn't mean you should send the same content repeatedly. The price you'll pay in disengaged recipients far outweighs the benefits of a few more views.

2 Execute on Your Promise

In your welcome sequence, you should have explained what readers can expect, in terms of content type and regularity. Deliver on your promise without deviation.

3 Deliver Incremental Value

Every interaction shouldn't be a product or sales pitch. Deliver ancillary content that provides value to the prospect. For example, if you sell gardening supplies include relevant tips and information to make a gardener more successful, such

as a planting schedule guide, or a list of plants that perform best by geographic region, for example. By not making every interaction a sales ask, you build a relationship and instill trust rather than fulfill a one-time transactional need that allows the subscriber to easily forget your brand.

4 Make Your Messages Concise

A good rule of thumb for content length is to make sure your email is no longer than two scrolls of a normal mouse. If they're any longer, ask yourself if the content would work better as two separate messages. Remember, a high percentage of your readers will likely consume your content on a mobile device. If you often find yourself writing long emails, consider shortening the emails and increasing how often you send them out.



Segment Contacts to Create Personalized Interactions

If you have a diverse customer base and wide variety of products and services, segmentation—the practice of separating your contacts into groups based on a set of characteristics—will help provide a better customer experience while increasing campaign performance. For example, a clothing company would do well to separate contacts based on gender to promote relevant collections. On the other hand, a Direct to Consumer company with only one offering will send the same content to their entire customer base, so segmentation won't drive any incremental performance improvement.

When appropriate, segmentation improves performance by enabling a marketing message to focus on a more precise interest or desire, which increases sales.

Email Best Practices

Include a CTA

Include a CTA whenever possible; prospects won't become customers if you don't provide an avenue to do so. This doesn't mean you have to sell them something in every post; you could offer a link to read more, or a PDF download. Simply create avenues for the reader to engage with your brand or company so they purchase from you when they're ready to buy.

Ideal placements include the top and bottom of the message, at a minimum. The first CTA should be visible without scrolling, with more throughout the content if it's on the longer side. The goal is to make sure the recipient can take action at all times without having to search or scroll excessively, if at all.

Stay Compliant

Regardless of cadence or content, every email needs to be compliant with the CAN-SPAM guidelines created by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC):

- 1 Don't use false or misleading header information.**
Make sure all "From," "To," "Reply-To" and email address information are correct and accurate.
- 2 Don't use deceptive subject lines.**
Your subject line has to be relevant to the content in the email.
- 3 Tell recipients where you're located.**
Include your address in the email, typically in the footer. It doesn't have to stand out, but it has to be present.
- 4 Tell recipients how to opt out of receiving future emails from you.**
Best practices include adding an unsubscribe link in the header, in addition to the requisite one in the footer of each email, to make opting out easy.
- 5 Honor opt-out requests promptly.**
When someone unsubscribes, stop sending them emails immediately if you can. If your system is unable to, inform the user how many days it will take for them to be removed.
- 6 Monitor what others are doing on your behalf.**
If you hire a marketing company to write emails for you, you're still responsible for the content of the messages.



Test, Test, Test

When you have your initial content, cadence, and goals set, you're ready to launch, but launching is just the beginning. As your campaign grows, you'll want to continually test each component to improve and optimize performance.

Open rates and CTR can be improved by testing the subject lines, content, and CTAs, respectively, to start. With the right software, you can measure how long recipients spend reading your messages, see where they click, and what devices they use. There's a metric for every goal.

It's best to go about optimization in a systematic way to make tracking easy and ensure you know what is causing each performance variation. Examine each metric, decide on one—and only one—to improve, and test the corresponding content until you see a change.

Examining a single metric will allow for a clear delineation of the changes to the campaign performance. As with all tests make sure to build up a statistically valid pool of data and allow enough time for the campaign to mature so the audience can move through the sales cycle.

Keep Your List Clean

Keeping a list clean is crucial to maintaining engagement and performance and should be attended to on an ongoing basis. Preferably, all bad emails will be removed before being added to your list, but a few might make it through. Keep an eye out for any bounces, and remove them as they appear to ensure that you are maximizing your engagement and performance and enhancing your reputation with your email service provider (ESP).

Conclusion

The right email lead nurturing campaign can create a win-win scenario by providing value to customers, while helping you grow your business. The key is to define a clear strategy, create high-quality content, and continually test to improve performance. With these principles in mind, you can turn a list of emails into a list of customers and advertising spend into a stream of revenue.

If you'd like to learn more about how to create the ideal email campaign for your opt-in advertising strategy, contact us. Our team specializes in delivering custom acquisition programs built to deliver back end results based upon your specific needs