

Extending Your Dealership's Reach

Maximizing The Impact of E-Mail

By Susan DeSantis

As technology changes, so does the way we do business. One significant shift in business technology has been the growth of e-mail. Ten years ago, I was averaging 30 to 40 voice-mail messages a day; I would say that 80% of them were a sales person trying to teach me about their product. Today, my voice-mail count is quickly diminishing and the number of e-mails I receive daily is growing fast.

Through thoughtful and meticulous e-mail marketing strategies, strong and lasting relationships are built with your target prospects and customers. Your customer is moved through the stages of your sales cycles with efficiency and clarity through your e-mails that become a much welcomed addition to their inbox. It's easy to see how important e-mail can be for your business when you consider the value that e-mail adds to your products and services and the fact that it is by far one of

the most cost-effective ways to stay in touch with your customer base.

Here are ten ways to enhance the results of your e-mail marketing campaigns:

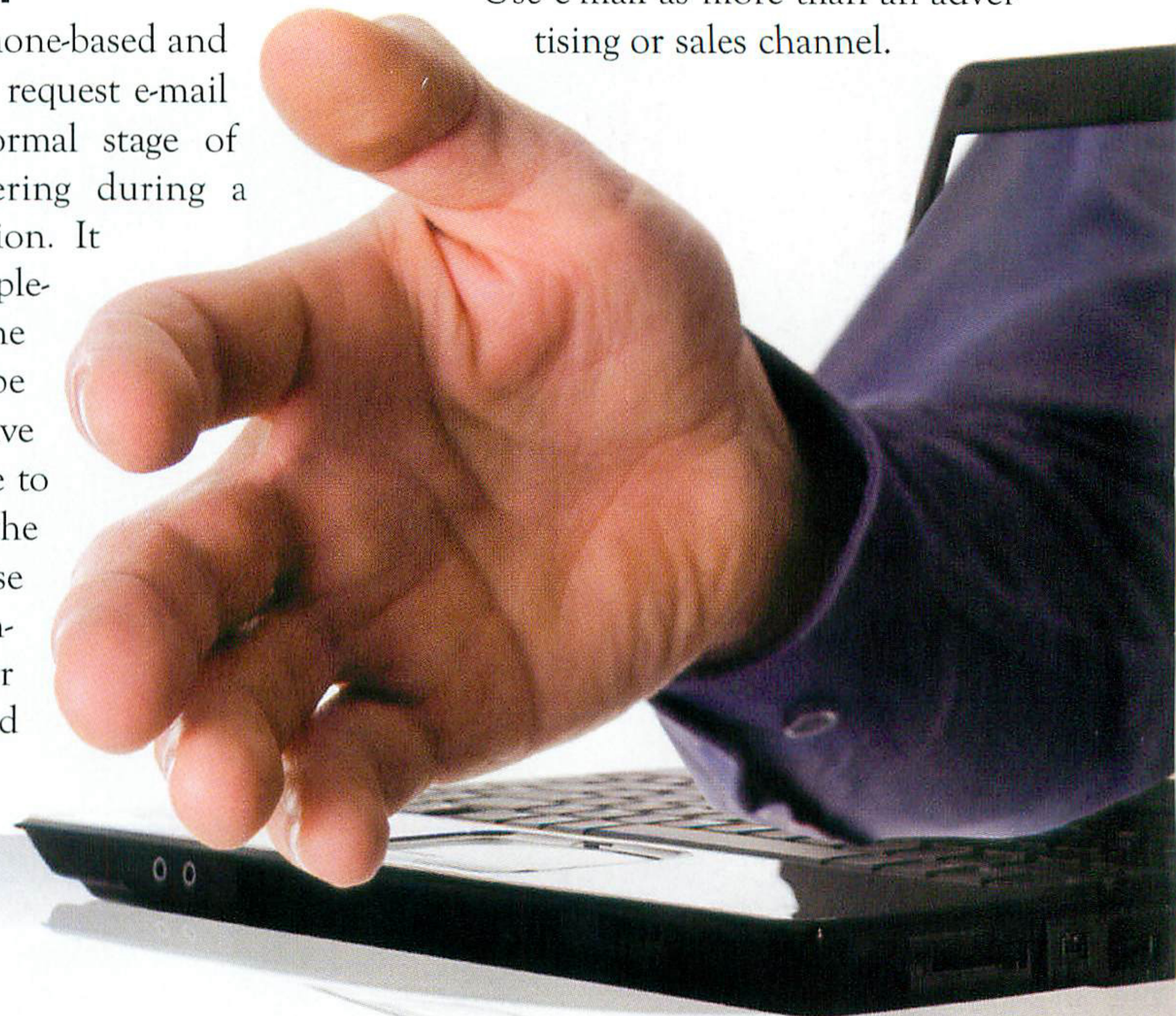
Make e-mail addresses required information and train your staff on how to acquire them.

Teach both your phone-based and face-to-face staff to request e-mail addresses as a normal stage of information gathering during a business conversation. It is imperative to implement this step in the sales cycle and be sure that you have procedures in place to make sure you get the e-mail addresses. Use incentives or competitions to get your sales people excited

about the e-mail collection. Be creative; it will foster a light-hearted but competitive atmosphere. Present it as beneficial to both the staff to get and the prospect to give their e-mail address. And if necessary, prompt visitors multiple times.

Don't just focus on direct selling with e-mail.

Use e-mail as more than an advertising or sales channel.



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Think of additional ways you can use e-mail communication to start or continue conversations with prospects and customers. E-mail is a quick and easy way to

provide customers with the usable and valuable information they look for.
Continued on p. 38

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Your e-mails should be educational and position you as the expert who guides them through the process and is a trustworthy source of knowledge.

Use quality e-mail marketing applications and service providers.

Your e-mail marketing application or service provider is an important part to the overall strategy of your e-mail campaigns. They should provide you with the appropriate tools for advanced list management, content management, reporting and white list compliance. It is also important to consider their deliverability rate among e-mail providers such as: Outlook, GMail, Yahoo, Hotmail, AOL, etc.

Create your e-mails based on what your prospects need and desire.

E-mail marketing applications and service providers can show you precisely which links in your e-mail messages attract the most attention. Based on this information, you can send relevant and timely follow-up offers and promotions. In addition, you can tie your e-mail communications to applicable and timely services they need in order to encourage prospects and customers to return to you for all of your fixed operations services.

Don't ignore the non-openers and non-responding potential clients.

Don't let more than 30 days go by without sending an e-mail message to a prospect or customer ~ even if it's just a quick "hello." Fight the instinct to consider non-openers and non-responders as non-prospects. If you don't follow up with them, you may be throwing away un-tapped opportunities. For many people, timing is the key

and just because the first few e-mails did not initiate any response doesn't mean the next one won't. Don't give up on anyone.

Get personal.

Know the needs of your prospects and customers; understand their demographics, age and the trends associated with their purchasing habits and use this information to create the content of your e-mail communication. Relevancy in e-mail messaging can easily be the difference in a visit and an 'unsubscribe' request.

A good mix works.

To most e-mail recipients, graphical HTML e-mails look like ads. Combining your attractive ads with plain text messages that looks more personal will generate a quicker reply.

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Remember that the goal of an e-mail campaign is to build a relationship with your prospect or customer. Consider a mix of offers with both personal communication and newsletter-style content.

Content must communicate timely value.

Make sure that the content of the e-mails sent have a timely value to your customers. If you are sending a prospect an e-mail for a product or service that is not needed, you will quickly lose their attention and immediately decrease the value of future communications. This goes back to the relevancy of each e-mail.

Don't forget compliance.

Compliance with the use of e-mail

addresses, relevancy and content can all affect your deliverability and capability of effectively communicating through e-mail over a period of time. It is critical that you have systems in place to monitor compliance with spam e-mail guidelines and filters associated with managing blacklists and with the rules of various ISP's. No business can afford to appear on an e-mail blacklist that might affect all of your business through e-mail delivery.

E-mail is just part of the recipe.

The recipe for success calls for more ingredients than just e-mail. E-mails should be combined with contact that ties in the content of the e-mail, whether it is tied to information on your website,

advertising, text messaging or a direct phone call. Use your e-mail campaigns as a primary ingredient but don't ignore the other elements.

It is important that you respect the relationships that are developed through e-mail. Use your e-mails to add value to your products and services. You will be rewarded with prospects and customers who are more informed, more engaged, more focused and more loyal.

Susan DeSantis is Marketing Manager for Who's Calling, Inc. Who's Calling helps dealers succeed with a suite of multi-channel marketing solutions designed to build sales, increase repetitive revenue and gain higher margins while reducing dealer marketing costs. ■



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