

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Increase Sales With B2B Email Marketing

Katie Elzer-Peters



Does email marketing still work? Yes! Does it work for B2B businesses? Yes! Does it work for B2B horticulture businesses? Yes! Is email marketing the same as sending out a weekly availability? No! Can email marketing include sending the weekly availability? It sure can!

What is B2B email marketing?

It might have been confusing to say that sending a weekly availability isn't "email marketing." It's a part of email marketing. An availability list is content, it's

information, but it isn't a program. A full-throttle email marketing program—really any marketing program—is multi-faceted and inspires a wide variety of responses.

For the purposes of this article, B2B email marketing should be considered a weekly email blast sent from an email service provider (ESP) such as MailChimp, or a Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) such as KEAP, with multiple types of information and inspiring a variety of actions from recipients. Let's break it down.

Sent weekly from a service. For an industry planning production and sales based on week number, weekly promotion is a no-brainer. That cadence is perfect for growers to promote what's looking good for retailers and landscapers, to fill shelves and fill in last-minute projects and to encourage customers to plan ahead for future seasons.

Here's why you should send this weekly email from a service and not just as a BCC to dozens or hundreds of customers from a single email box.

- Adhere to federal laws. Federal CAN-SPAM law requires email marketing to be permission marketing with an easy unsubscribe feature. The ESP will handle that for you.
- Ensure emails are delivered. ESPs carefully manage their sending reputation and their ability to make sure your emails hit your recipients' inboxes.
- Protect your own web and email domain. If you send hundreds of emails from your own email address through, say, Outlook or Gmail, you run the risk of that address being blacklisted. Using a service lowers that risk

substantially.

- Get more information for following up with customers. If you send from your email box, you don't know what happened once you pressed "send." When you send from a CRM or an ESP, you can see who's most interested in what you have to offer and what they're most interested in so that you can follow up. ESPs offer valuable data, such as who opened the email, how many times they opened it and which links they clicked. If you see 20 or 30 people clicking a link that says "how to open a new account," you can assign a sales rep to personally contact the potential customers and close the sale.

Containing multiple types of content sections. If you already send a weekly availability, you're already several steps down the road when it comes to creating an email marketing program. You have the basics down, so you can kick it up a notch.

The reason to include multiple types of content beyond the availability list is to improve your open rate and reach more customers (and potential customers) more often. If recipients know the weekly email is just a list of plants, they'll skip opening it if they don't need (or don't think they need) plants right now. If they know they can look forward to learning something new, seeing something interesting and even just nice plant pictures, they're more likely to open.

Content types to include (choose at least three per email):

- Recent pictures of "what's looking good"
- Recent pictures of "what's on deck" (acres of poinsettias just about to start turning red)
- Current availability
- Future or projected availability (for planning)
- Important pre-book information—promo cutoff dates, pre-book preferential treatment for pre-orders
- Delivery schedules
- Behind the scenes photos and videos
- Polls or surveys
- Staff profiles
- Inspiration
- Featured customer photos or customer profiles
- Instructions for ordering
- And more!

Inspiring a variety of actions. Some businesses have the list size and bandwidth to segment into different groups such as current customers and prospective customers, and winter customers versus year-round customers. Most don't, which means one email blast per week has to support several customer types. At a minimum, each email should include calls to action (CTAs) that encourage readers to:

- Place an order
- Call or email a sales rep to discuss future orders
- Note "what's looking good" and consider making room for special or interesting items

- Open a new account
- Forward to someone else (spread the word)
- Watch a video
- Share on social media

Why invest in B2B email marketing?

This sounds like a lot of work. Why do it?

1. Email marketing is permission marketing. By signing up, your customers have given you permission to contact them directly and you can be certain that they'll see your message, unlike social media, which is hit-or-miss and not the most effective B2B marketing channel, anyway.

2. Email marketing has high, trackable ROI. For every \$1 spent on email marketing, average revenue is \$42. (Research from HubSpot and Litmus demonstrated similar results.) If you have e-commerce for draft or full order placement, you can directly track sales as a result of email and calculate your businesses' specific ROI.

3. The horticulture industry responds well to email marketing, posting the second highest open rate (percentage of recipients that open the email) of any other industry. (Research from Campaign Monitor.) We are second only to nonprofits.

Why do it? Because it works. But only if you're consistent. Email marketing is kind of like exercising—the more consistent you are, the easier it gets and the more results you'll see.

Case study: Willoway Nurseries, Inc.

Here's how Danny M. Gouge, the Marketing & Key Accounts Manager for Willoway Nurseries, Inc., manages their 10-year-old popular weekly newsletter.

Willoway sends a weekly newsletter. The first section is always a "Walk the Dock" video. It's not a fancy video with flashy editing; it's literally 15 minutes of Danny showing viewers what's looking good. In an age of deepfakes and over-polished stock photos, Danny has hit on a way that inspires immediate action from customers. They upload the videos to YouTube and link to them from the newsletter. Because YouTube is part of the Google universe, Willoway gets extra SEO juice from the videos, making them two-for-one marketing collateral.

Danny stresses consistency, saying, "Our sales correspondence goes out on the same day every week. Customers have come to expect it."

He also notes the importance of a predictable schedule and not overcommunicating with B2B customers. "We send the newsletter and weekly availability and that is it."

He says that "staff will always come to you with 'urgent matters' and will want you to send more email correspondence, but stick to your schedule."

Manage this by communicating your production schedule. On Friday morning each week, Danny sends an email to department heads with the list of content for the next week's email.

"They know that they need to communicate back to me what should go on the hot list, specials list, communication list and that it changes by EOD Monday." He said that staff knows that he might push requests to the following week

if space requires it.

A perk of having a consistent newsletter schedule is that Willoway has plenty of content to repurpose for embedding on the website or using on social media.

“Customers are starting to replicate the newsletter because it helps gain business,” Danny said. “They’ll do videos saying, ‘Here’s what’s blooming.’ ‘Here’s what our customers are saying.’ ‘Here’s what’s happening behind the scenes at trade shows.’”

That sounds like success to me!

Quick Tips for Successful B2B Email Marketing

Start strong with these tips.

- **Make it yours.** You don’t have to do a “walk the dock” video, but include sections that are unique to your company. Develop a unique voice—whether it’s punny, down to earth, nerdy or references pop culture.
- **Stick to a regular schedule.** Both in production and sending. Remind staff of key deadlines to submit content and send to the list at the same day and time of the week.
- **Include calls to action.** Invite people to watch, learn more, read more, submit an order, create an account, call their sales rep or share with a friend. People have to be invited to take action. Bonus points if you turn these calls to action into buttons rather than text links.
- **Include your own pictures.** They might not be as polished as brand photography, but sending recently taken pictures from your own facility inspires confidence in your customers that they’re going to get what they expect when they order.
- **Guide your customers.** Always include a section that teaches something: How to order. How much to order. Hot color combinations. New product sales and care tips.
- **Make it easy.** Include a PDF and Excel sheet downloads to show availability. That makes the information more accessible to customers. **GT**