

Newsletters vs auto responders: what's the difference?

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Newsletters vs auto responders: what's the difference? A question I often get asked when it comes to e-mail marketing is:

- What is the basic difference between an e-mail newsletter / mass mailing system and an auto responder?

E-mail newsletters An e-mail newsletter / mass mailing program lets you send info - such as a newsletter, product update or educational info - at a certain time, like once a month. The info you send goes out to everyone on your list at once and they all get it at the same time. You create fresh content for each newsletter. A newsletter / mailing program lets people sign up for your newsletter from your website. The names and addresses of your subscribers are automatically saved to a database list, so you don't manually have to add each subscriber to your mailing list.

(Individual subscribers can be added manually to some systems though, should they not sign up via your website for whatever reason but still want to receive your newsletter.)

Once a person has signed-up for your e-mail newsletter, the system should then also send them a confirmation e-mail. This is an e-mail that asks them to confirm that they want to receive info from you by clicking a link in the e-mail. This double opt-in system makes sure "robots" don't try to sign-up for your newsletter just to get your e-mail address when you send them something (they'll then use your address to spam you). It also protects you from complaints of spam as you'll be able to show that a person really did request info from you. The double opt-in system is regarded as best-practice on the internet and is actually law in some countries. A newsletter program should also place an unsubscribe link in each e-mail you send so that people wanting to leave your list can do so quickly and easily (this is also law in many countries). By handling the subscribe and unsubscribe functions automatically, your mailing program will save you a lot of time that you'd otherwise have to spend on trying to keep your list updated manually. Some newsletter programs will let you simply import the list of names and e-mail addresses you've collected from clients straight into your mailing program. Then you can send newsletters and relevant follow-up info to clients and prospects and keep referring them back to your website to see your latest shoes, candles, books, T-shirts etc. An e-mail newsletter campaign allows you to stay in touch with your clients by giving them info they'll find useful when buying your product / service or that will help them make the most of their product once they've bought it. Using a system like this to educate and inform your clients adds value to their lives. It makes you look like a trustworthy supplier who knows what she's talking about. On the other hand, using a system like this to harass your clients and prospects with hard-sell sales copy is going to annoy them and destroy your reputation. Instead of building a relationship, they're going to click that unsubscribe button... Although this system is commonly called an e-mail newsletter system, you don't have to call your e-mails "newsletters." You could send out a

- Tip of the Month,
- Hint of the Week,

- Quarterly Update

- Whatever will appeal to your client! An e-mail newsletter system can be a powerful marketing tool if you use it with a plan. So what's an auto responder system then? An auto responder is a superb way to educate your clients! You create the content you want to send (information about a specific topic) and put it in a few e-mails. The auto responder will then automatically send those e-mails, one after another, to each subscriber as she asks for it. These e-mails are sent at set times - like one e-mail every three days - until the subscriber has received all the e-mails in the series. (An example of this is our 9 part Will My Website Work? e-course.) You create the content once and it sends itself out repeatedly. All the e-mails in a specific series must be added to the auto responder beforehand. It then sends the e-mails to each individual subscriber according to a pre-determined schedule that starts when they subscribe.

(The auto responder should first send a confirmation e-mail requesting confirmation of the subscription. This is to make sure you don't get accused of spamming anyone. Once the subscriber has clicked the link in the e-mail, it will send her a welcome message. Shortly after that, the message containing the first part of her info will arrive.)The time between the e-mails can be set so that a series of 5 e-mails, for example, can go out as..

- one e-mail every day for a week or
- an e-mail every third day over a period of two weeks or
- one e-mail a week over a period of five weeks.

E.g. Let's say the time between e-mails is set to two days. If Karl subscribes on Monday and Sharon subscribes on Tuesday, Karl will get his first e-mail on Monday and his second on Wednesday. Sharon will get her first on Tuesday and her second on Thursday. So each person gets the info at times specific to them. Once all the e-mails in the series have been sent to a subscriber, the auto responder has nothing more to send them and they get no more e-mail from that auto responder. You can now take the list of subscribers from here and add it to your newsletter list. This lets you stay in contact with the client even after the series is finished. An auto responder doesn't have to send out a whole series of e-mails. It can also be used to send only one article (in cases where you don't have enough information for more than one e-mail) to those who request it. For example:

- A guideline on How to choose the best hiking boot for your trip,
- How to prepare your house for sale or

- What to look out for when choosing a medical aid.The advantage here is that the auto responder still sends the info automatically and immediately by itself so the subscriber doesn't have to wait for you to first get your e-mail and then send her the info she wants. The point of the auto responder is not to replace your direct contact with your client. The point is to give your client the information she needs to help her reach a decision on how best to solve whatever problem she is experiencing. It allows you to give more detailed, better presented information faster to a larger number of people. It allows your client to enjoy the benefits of making an informed and educated decision in her own time, without the pressure of a salesman peering over her shoulder.

If your solution, as also detailed in your information, is the answer to her problem, she will then approach you. If not, you've still delivered a great service by educating her and helping her get the best in her situation. This kind of approach may well see her return to you in future when you can solve her particular problem. Using an e-mail newsletter and auto responder system can do wonders for your marketing. We recommend the AutoMagic Mailer . For more information on how you can use this marketing tool and what the AutoMagic Mailer includes, take a look here . For advice on the dangers of using your normal e-mail program (like Outlook) to send e-mails to lots of people, as well as sending e-mail to everyone in your address book, check out The dangers of using Outlook to send lots of e-mail newsletters.