

7 Email Marketing Strategies and When to Use Them

Article by Roxanne Hawn



Thank goodness veterinary clients know and like you. It makes email marketing a lot less dramatic—for everyone. Because people enjoy real relationships with veterinary practices, they are less likely to get an email from you and wonder how the heck they got on your distribution list.

Email marketing, done well, should be helpful to people. It should accurately inform clients' pet care needs.

That's where segmenting your email list comes in handy. Cat people don't need dog-themed messages. Families with young pets do not need senior pet information. New clients need different information than long-time ones and so forth.

If you're currently sending everything to everyone, I encourage you to put a bit more strategy to use. You have several options for the timing, content and frequency of email campaigns—depending upon your goals.

1. RSS feed

When to use: If you write a practice blog or consistently post new content to your website, you can email a teaser about new items along with a link to drive traffic to your site.

Typically, you can set this up to go out automatically by using an RSS (rich site summary) feed through an email marketing tool.

That's how I send out new blog posts to my subscribers. Every day at a specific time, the tool looks to see if there is any new content on the site, and if there is, then it inserts an excerpt of the new content into a template I have set up, and it automatically emails my subscribers at a time I've set in the dashboard.

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Depending on your goals, you can set the RSS feed to pull just an excerpt and link to your site, or you can use a full feed that sends the entire new content. Excerpts encourage website clicks and traffic. Full feed can encourage more engagement with the email itself.

I had to give up my full feed when internet thieves began "scraping" my full RSS feed and putting all of my content on their sites. Excerpts are less convenient for my readers, but it was the only option to protect my content. People can still steal what I write, but it's a lot harder for them without a full RSS feed.

2. e-Newsletter

When to use: Emailing a regular newsletter is a good way to share practice news or client educational materials on a regular basis.

Common e-newsletter schedules include monthly or quarterly timelines.

Keep in mind that you don't always need to create newsletter content from scratch. Many email marketers, instead, curate topics in their niche. For example, in addition to a blurb or two of news about your practice, you could briefly introduce then provide links to local pet news.

3. Promotions

When to use: If you want to promote an event or a specific product or service in a certain timeframe.

For specific promotions, craft perhaps three to five emails and send them on a pre-determined schedule in advance of your event or in advance of your call-to-action goal (such as scheduling heartworm tests or ordering flea/tick preventives).

These campaigns run for a very limited time; they feature specific goals and metrics which can be tracked.

4. Triggered by action

When to use: Action-triggered email campaigns provide strategic follow-up information and support after clients do something you want to encourage.

These email communication flows feature more advanced delivery plans and messaging. Essentially, you'd create a specific number of email messages that go only to certain clients who take specific actions.

For example, brand new clients might receive a series of emails over three to six months that welcome them to the practice, teach them about who you are, and encourage or entice them to make a return visit.

That's the most obvious example, but you could also have email campaigns specifically for:

- Post-op situations
- Pets starting new therapeutic diets on your recommendation
- Clients who recently had a pet die
- Clients who have expressed interest in a new product or service from your practice but who have not yet purchased or scheduled anything

5. Triggered by timeline

When to use: If you market certain topics or services to clients on a predictable schedule throughout the year, but are tired of having to think about it all the time, create a content calendar.

Email campaigns that go out on a set schedule dictated by the calendar are commonly done in the educational or seasonal markets. If you always want to promote certain topics or services at the same time each year, then this is a way to plan all that out in advance so that you're not always scrambling.

6. Drip campaigns

When to use: Drip campaigns work best in scenarios where the product or service is expensive or typically has a longer decision timeline.

So-called drip campaigns take a very long view of email marketing. In many cases, marketers use them in relationship marketing and to keep a business or brand top of mind.

Specialty veterinary practices are probably more likely to use drip campaigns to keep in touch with referring practices.

General practices that also offer grooming, boarding or daycare to clients could make good use of drip campaigns by sending out three to five emails per year.

7. Come-back campaigns

When to use: If you want to encourage inactive clients to become active again, a come-back campaign is a good place to start.

Think of this strategy as chasing stragglers. Come-back campaigns are common when someone has unsubscribed from a publication or has stopped using a frequent service or product. The general message is this: “We miss you!”

I stopped getting one dog magazine years ago, and I still receive emails almost weekly asking me to subscribe again. This makes me laugh because typically a come-back campaign expires if someone does not take action after a set amount of time. If we’re being generous, let’s say that cutoff point is one year of receiving come-back emails.

Veterinary practices might use a come-back campaign for clients who have not come in for an appointment in more than a year. Of course, you have to be careful and aware that the pet (or client) might have died.

In addition to potentially bringing people back into the practice, these campaigns also give clients the opportunity to decline or opt-out. Not ideal, for sure, but it’s better for people to exit contact with you deliberately so that you no longer spend any time and marketing resources chasing them.

Measuring email success

The tool you use for email marketing should be able to provide stats, including:

- How many people unsubscribed from your email list
- How many emails bounced (meaning you have a bad email address for that client)
- How many people opened your email (often tracked by if the photos loaded or not)
- How many people clicked on a link in the email

The tools can even tell you how your stats compare to other users in similar businesses.

Once you have an idea how your emails perform, then you can play around with days of the week or times of day that your emails experience better performance. There is some research that says stats improve the more emails you send, so try increasing frequency too, if you are doing few emails currently.

The tool I use even tells me which subscribers are most loyal, meaning they open and click-through almost everything I send. Understanding those people is good for business.



Roxanne Hawn is a professional writer and award-winning blogger based in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. A former writer/editor for the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Humane Association, she has written about veterinary medicine and pet topics for nearly 20 years. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, Reader’s Digest, Natural Home, Bankrate.com, WebMD, The Bark, Modern Dog, and many high-profile outlets. Her first book is called *Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate*.

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