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E-newsletters and fliers drive nursery's traffic up, costs down

Flamingo Road Nursery has advertised with various traditional media. Although the company's ads run on television, in newspapers and magazines, and as coupon inserts, its most bountiful marketing tool is its e-mail fliers.

The nursery has driven attention to special offers, coupon redemption and customer retention. It also has raised awareness of such services and attractions as its nursery and garden supplies, farmer's market, classes on gardening, herbs, landscaping and cooking – even a Calypso band and smoothie shack.

Each plays well as a marketable attribute, said Myriam Cohen, founder and president of Equilibrix Corp. The Fort Lauderdale marketing firm specializes in electronic mail, newsletters and multi-page fliers.



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"They have events going on there all the time," said Cohen, who meets with nursery owner Jim Dezell monthly to discuss articles and shoot photographs for the flier's upcoming issues. "New content keeps the newsletter fresh and readers interested. It's all about staying in front of your customers and giving

them reasons to come back more often."

Electronic fliers and newsletters combine the elements of two commonly used applications: Fliers with coupons, and electronic mail distributed to existing customer lists. Each issue of the nursery and "Home Garden Showplace" flier has new offers, articles and "Green Thumb Gardening Tips" that differ from the previous month's content. The current issue is themed the October Harvest Festival, highlighting weekend events and holiday floral arrangements. It is distributed twice a month.

As important as the content is the list of recipients, she said. Dezell encourages each customer to sign up for his list. Those who sign up for the free VIP list get additional e-fliers with special offers. Today, his list tops 6,000 names. Each month, Cohen combines his list with her database of more than 20,000 names to distribute to households in ZIP codes surrounding his Davie location.

"The coupon redemption of the VIP list is multiples of other coupons or ads," Dezell said. "The others are good magazines and good expenditures of marketing money. This tells me the readability of our VIP mailers."

Other statistics bear that out. The open rate – or the percentage of VIP recipients opening Flamingo's flier – is about 35 percent, Cohen said. VIP open rates can range from 20 percent to 60 percent, she said. The rate of opens by "opt-in" recipients, or those from Cohen's larger regional list, is about 7 percent, she said. Distributing to the list only twice a month, as opposed to weekly or more frequently, tends to keep opens high, she said.

Equilibrix uses a third-party email distribution application for its service. Other options include Web-based hosted services like iContact, Constant Contact or aWeber. Most offer free trials. Prices start at about \$19 a month.

What other businesses might benefit from e-mail marketing and coupons? Cohen suggested restaurants, retailers, salons or other companies that draw from an existing customer base, want to expand a loyalty program, or would like to extend their reach.

E-newsletters and fliers also help to buttress a business against slow periods, she said. Marketers who build their lists during strong times can drive traffic with coupons and special offers during a slow economy.

"If you build up that list during the good times, during down times you can use it as a resource to generate cash quickly," Cohen said. "We target existing customers. They've authorized us to send them follow-up information, so that raises our open rate."



Cohen

The electronic flier doesn't exist in a marketing vacuum. The newsletter is part of a marketing mix that includes TV commercials, advertisements in area newspapers and upscale magazines, and coupons in clipper-style publications, Dezell said. The cost: about 3 cents a name. The return: Markedly higher than other mediums, he said.

"This can be vital to building a relationship with your customer, instead of just assuming they'll come back to you," Dezell said. "It requires reaching out and reminding them you're still around. If you want to be part of the shopping pie, you have to keep them abreast of what you're doing – because everybody else is."

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