

Methods of getting readers: Market to those who are listening

Here are a variety of ways that you might find helpful in the quest to obtain customer e-mail addresses.

REMEMBER—ALWAYS ASK FOR PERMISSION

Just ask. You'll be surprised at the number of customers who are willing to become avid readers of your new e-newsletter. Ask for their information at the point of sale, but be sure to tell them your intentions for that information. Assure them that this is not for a sale pitch and that you do not sell their information.

Give customers the opportunity. Don't expect people to know that you have a newsletter—even if it's 5 years old. Always have a box or bowl with slips that allow people to give you their information freely. A great space for this is next to the coffee pot, or on the front counter.

Give them a reason to come back. If you can, use a store gift certificate as incentive. This works well during seasonal sales, store openings and during the holidays. Simply make a sign explaining the "X" number person to sign up for your e-letter wins. Another take on this would be to do a drawing and then award the gift. Make sure you take a photo of the winner to post! Giving away gift certificates are the best way to keep revenue in your store.

Connect with the community. Approach your local symphony, acting troupe, movie theatre, etc. about donations. A shared display with the promise of symphony tickets can rake in a lot of interest. Just make sure to have a line for "e-mail address" and a box to check for "add me to your e-letter list." (Again, don't assume, ask for permission.) See if others will return this favor.

Be exclusive. Give out coupons, notify members of sales a day or two early, or even hold events for only those members of your e-mail list. Of course, listing these "exclusive bonuses" in store will help your sign up rate.

Help them be in the know. Don't do coupons? Can't afford donations? Give your guests the real value—your insider information. Those who are signing up are doing so because they trust your expertise. Share new release information, book reviews, suggestions for gifts etc. Also consider letting customers write for you, with their own reviews, once or twice a year.

Promote in print. Customers who are reading your current newsletter might feel more comfortable getting an electronic version. Ask for subscriptions in your printed materials, too.

Send a reminder. If you send mailers for events or sales, use the back of the postcard to remind customers of your new e-newsletter.

More than just shoppers. Don't think that it's only those shopping in your stores who will be interested in hearing from you. Use places like trade shows, regional gatherings, and store meetings to ask for and receive e-mail addresses from others as well. The more diverse your list, the more word-of-mouth your newsletter can get.

Instant Content for E-mail Newsletters

or what to do when you're on a deadline and the muse has departed...

Copy a staff shelf talker. Ready-made reviews, full of personality.

Include local reading group choices. Lots of people don't have the time or inclination to join a reading group, but they still love "reading group" books.

Print your store's best seller list. People love to see what their friends and neighbors are reading. Your list is going to be significantly different from other regional and national lists, and may include local authors, book club picks, etc.

Use customer reviews. Several newsletters run reviews by kids. One newsletter devotes an entire issue, annually, to customer reviews. Customers can be "incentivized" to write reviews. People do love to see their names in print.

Solicit lists from local experts. For example, "My Top Ten Cookbooks" from a local restaurateur, or suggested books on pregnancy and child care from the local ob-gyn or pediatrician. People love lists.

Share a Book Sense quote. Lots of booksellers are already doing this. Easy to download these from www.bookweb.org.

In paperback, at last! List the upcoming paperbacks that you know your customers are really waiting for.

Mention a cause that is close to your heart. Let your customers know that you care, whether it's a local conservancy group, or www.abffe.org. Just be sure to keep it short (no one looks good on a soapbox), sweet (think about your customers—will you inspire or offend them?), and consider including a link, for those who want to know more.

Think locally. Share a quick thought (a favorite neighborhood place, a park, a school) that you have noticed something about recently. It helps give your newsletter that local personality that national chains cannot duplicate.

Solicit suggestions. Customers appreciate being asked what they think and how they would like to see things improved—even if they may not take the time to give you feedback..