

A PRACTICAL FIELD GUIDE FOR SMALL-BUSINESS OWNERS

Email That Earns Its Keep

How to grow a list that opens, replies and buys — without sending more email than you can stand behind.

THE FINISH LINE

Work through this guide and you will hold four things you can act on immediately:

- 01 A one-page email strategy
- 02 A sign-up offer worth the address
- 03 A four-email welcome sequence
- 04 A cadence you can actually hold

What’s inside

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How to use it

This is a working document, not a reading document. Every section ends in a decision you write down, and the decisions accumulate into the one-page strategy on page 21.

- READ

Ten short sections. Roughly forty minutes end to end.
- WRITE

Gold rules mark something for you to fill in. Print those pages or type into the PDF.
- RETURN

Review the strategy page monthly. Ten minutes is enough.

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Write the four-email welcome sequence on page 13. It is the highest-return email most small businesses have never sent.

O I

The list you actually want

Two hundred people who reply beat two thousand who never open.

Most small businesses treat the list as a number to grow. That is why so many lists get big and go quiet. A subscriber is not an asset because they exist — they are an asset because they still want to hear from you, and because you know what you are trying to help them do next. Everything in this guide follows from that one distinction.

THE NEW RULE

Do not ask “How do we get more subscribers?”

Ask: “Who should be on this list, and what are we helping them decide?”

YOUR 90-DAY SENTENCE — WRITE IT NOW, REFINE IT LATER

THREE SYMPTOMS OF A LIST PROBLEM

- You do not know what the next email is for.
- Nobody ever replies to one.
- You would be embarrassed to send it twice as often.

Over the next 90 days, our emails will help _____
to understand / believe / do _____
so that more of them _____

The whole system — on one page

Each step feeds the next, and the last feeds the first. Skip one and the list quietly stops paying.

1 FOCUS

One audience. One offer. One outcome you are aiming at.

2 OFFER

Something worth an email address, delivered instantly.

3 WELCOME

Four emails that do the introducing for you, written once.

4 SEND

One idea, one action, on a rhythm you can hold.

5 ANSWER

Read every reply and respond. This is where sales start.

6 PRUNE

Remove the cold, keep the willing, then focus again.

WHERE MOST LISTS BREAK

Between *welcome* and *send*. Someone subscribes, hears nothing for six weeks, then gets a newsletter from a stranger.

THE SMALLEST COMPLETE LOOP

One offer, one welcome sequence, one monthly email, one review. Build that before you add a second list or a second automation.

HOW OFTEN TO RUN IT

Steps one and six are quarterly decisions. Steps two to five are the monthly cycle — about half a day of real work.

O 2

Earn the address

“Sign up for our newsletter” asks for something and offers nothing.

A good sign-up offer solves one real slice of the problem, immediately. It should be small enough to deliver in a single email and specific enough that the wrong person does not want it. If everyone would take it, it is not doing its job.

THE PROMISE	THE PROOF
One outcome, named in their words.	Show what is inside, not how comprehensive it is.
THE PRICE	THE PROMISE KEPT
Name and email. Nothing you will not use.	Delivered in seconds, working on a phone.

ON POP-UPS

They work, and they cost you goodwill. If you use one, earn the interruption: trigger it on intent, not on arrival, and make the offer worth the interruption.

WORKSHEET

Write your sign-up offer

If you cannot fill in the first line without using the word “newsletter”, you do not have an offer yet.

WHO IT IS FOR

THE ONE OUTCOME IT DELIVERS

WHO IT IS DELIBERATELY NOT FOR

WHAT THEY GET IN THE FIRST EMAIL

WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT AFTERWARDS

03

Where subscribers actually come from

None of these need a bigger audience. All of them need you to ask at the right moment.

- 01

The thank-you page

People who just enquired or bought are at their most willing.
- 02

Your best article

One offer inside the page that already gets traffic.
- 03

Email signatures

Yours and your team's. Free, and it compounds.
- 04

In conversation

"Shall I send you the checklist?" after a site visit or a call.
- 05

Quotes and invoices

A line on documents people actually read to the end.
- 06

Events and referrals

One card, one short URL, asked for on the day — not later.

Pick three to fix this month

THREE IS ENOUGH

WHERE YOU WILL ASK	WHAT YOU WILL OFFER THERE	BY WHEN

EMAIL THAT EARNS ITS KEEP

06

Map one sign-up path

From the moment they notice you to the moment they buy. Five sentences.

WHERE THEY FIRST MEET YOU

WHAT MAKES THEM HAND OVER AN ADDRESS

WHAT LANDS IN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES

WHAT THEY HEAR IN THE FIRST FORTNIGHT

THE MOMENT THEY ARE READY TO BUY

EMAIL THAT EARNS ITS KEEP

A WORKED EXAMPLE

A garden-design studio publishes “*What a garden redesign actually costs in Ayrshire*”. The sign-up offer is a one-page budget checklist, delivered instantly. Email one gives the three costs people forget. Email two shows a real project with real figures. Email three offers a site visit. The path is four emails long and it never mentions a newsletter.

SIGNS THE PATH IS BROKEN

- The only thing new subscribers receive is the next campaign.
- The offer and the emails that follow are about different subjects.
- Nobody has ever been asked to do anything.

O4

Decide what earns a send

The cost of a weak email is not the unsubscribe. It is that the next good one gets ignored. Score every planned email out of eight before you write it.

PRIORITY

Send anything scoring **6–8**. Rework a **4–5**. Anything below four is a calendar slot looking for a reason.

SCORE EACH PLANNED EMAIL

0 · 1 · 2 EACH

EXPECTED

Did these people ask to hear from you about this subject?

USEFUL ALONE

Is it worth their time even if they never click anything?

ONLY YOU

Does it contain evidence, a figure or a view only you could give?

ONE ACTION

Is there exactly one thing to do, and is it easy to do?

TOTAL / 8

05

Write an email people finish

One idea per email. One thing to do at the end.

Five moves, in order. Most business email has all the information and none of the shape — it never says why it arrived today, never takes a position, and ends with three competing links.

I WHY TODAY Say what prompted it. A real trigger beats a schedule.	2 THE ONE IDEA State it in the first three lines, not the last.	3 THE EVIDENCE A number, a case, a mistake you watched happen.	4 THE LIMIT Say where it does not apply. It is why people believe you.	5 ONE ACTION One link or one question. Never a menu.
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THE QUALITY TEST

Would a busy reader be glad this arrived, even if they never click anything?

IF THE ANSWER IS NO, ADD ONE OF THESE

A number from your own work · a decision you made and why · a mistake you watched cost someone money · a short answer to a question three clients asked this month.

Two emails, same news

The subject line earns the open. The first line earns the rest. Both are free to fix.

BEFORE *announcement-shaped*

SUBJECT

"Our June Newsletter — News, Tips & Updates!"

FIRST LINE

"We hope this email finds you well. It has been a busy month here at..."

- Describes the container, not the contents.
- Nothing that could only have been written by you.
- Four topics, so no reason to read any of them.

AFTER *useful on its own*

SUBJECT

"The quote question that saves people £400"

FIRST LINE

"Three people this month accepted a quote without asking what happens if the work overruns. Here is the question to ask, and what a good answer sounds like."

- One idea, named specifically.
- Evidence from work only you have done.
- Useful even if they never click.

REWRITE YOUR LAST SUBJECT LINE

EMAIL THAT EARNS ITS KEEP

The one-page email brief

Fill this in before you open the campaign editor.

WHO RECEIVES IT (WHICH SEGMENT)

WHY IT ARRIVES TODAY

THE ONE IDEA

THE EVIDENCE ONLY YOU HAVE

SUBJECT LINE (WRITE THREE, PICK ONE)

THE ONE ACTION AT THE END

EMAIL THAT EARNS ITS KEEP

BEFORE YOU SEND

- ☐ Read it aloud. Cut the first sentence if it says nothing.
- ☐ One action only. Delete the competing links.
- ☐ Send yourself a test and read it on a phone.
- ☐ Check every link, including the unsubscribe.
- ☐ Reply-to is a real inbox someone reads.

A NOTE ON LENGTH

Write until the idea is delivered, then stop.
Three useful paragraphs beat a template with six panels and a hero image.

06

Segmentation you can maintain

A segment you never use is a column in a spreadsheet.

Most guides tell you to segment by age, gender and location. For a small business, none of those change what you should send. What changes it is where someone is in relation to buying from you — so start with three groups and only add a fourth when you have an email that would genuinely differ.

I NEW

Joined in the last 30 days.

They are in the welcome sequence. Do not also send them the monthly email — it competes with itself.

2 ENGAGED

Opened or clicked in 90 days.

Your real audience. These are the people worth writing for, and the ones who can take an offer.

3 COLD

Nothing for six months.

Win them back once (page 16), then remove them. Keeping them costs you deliverability, not just money.

THE ONE SEGMENT WORTH ADDING NEXT

Existing customers. What you would say to someone who has already paid you is genuinely different from what you would say to a stranger — and it is usually where the fastest money is.

WRITE YOUR THREE GROUPS

07

The four-email welcome

Write it once. It works while you are on site, on holiday, or asleep.

New subscribers are more interested in you now than they will ever be again. Four emails over ten days, written once, will out-earn a year of monthly newsletters. Write yours in the boxes below.

I IMMEDIATELY

DELIVER

The thing they asked for, at the top, with no preamble. Say what is coming next.

YOUR SUBJECT LINE

2 DAY 2

HELP THEM USE IT

The one step people skip, and what happens when they do. Pure usefulness.

YOUR SUBJECT LINE

3 DAY 5

SHOW IT WORKING

A short real example with real numbers — a client, a project, a before and after.

YOUR SUBJECT LINE

4 DAY 10

OFFER THE NEXT STEP

One clear, proportionate invitation. Ask a question they can simply reply to.

YOUR SUBJECT LINE

SET IT UP ONCE

Any decent platform runs this as an automation triggered on sign-up. I use **Brevo** for client work — the free tier covers unlimited contacts and 300 emails a day, which is more than most small businesses need for a first year, and it does not charge you for list size while you are still learning what to send.

WHATEVER YOU USE, INSIST ON

Sign-up automations · simple segments · a plain-text-looking template · its own sending domain · export of your list whenever you want it.

08

A cadence
you can hold

Choose the frequency you can hold in your worst month, not your best one.

Every guide argues about the best day and time to send. It matters far less than whether the email is worth reading and whether it turns up when you said it would. Pick a rhythm, tell subscribers what it is, and keep it.

ON SEND TIMES

Mid-morning midweek is a reasonable default. Test it once you are sending consistently — not before. With fewer than a thousand subscribers, most send-time tests cannot tell you anything reliable.

WORKSHEET · THE NEXT QUARTER

Plan six emails, not sixty

One a fortnight for three months. Fill in the idea and the one action. Leave the dates you cannot commit to blank.

WEEK	THE ONE IDEA	THE ONE ACTION
Week 1		
Week 3		
Week 5		
Week 7		
Week 9		
Week 11		

09

Land in the inbox

Three DNS records do more for deliverability than any subject-line trick.

Old advice about avoiding capital letters and exclamation marks is mostly folklore now. What actually decides whether you reach the inbox is whether you are provably who you say you are, and whether the people receiving your email want it. The first is a one-off technical job. The second is everything else in this guide.

SPF

Lists which servers may send email for your domain. Your email platform gives you the record; it goes in your DNS.

DKIM

Signs each message so the receiver can prove it was not altered or forged. Also supplied by your platform.

DMARC

Tells receivers what to do when the first two fail. Start at *p=none* and tighten once you can see the reports.

THE REST OF IT IS HYGIENE

- Send from your own domain, never a free Gmail or Outlook address.
- Never buy, rent or scrape a list. One purchased list can poison a domain for months.
- Remove hard bounces immediately and cold subscribers quarterly.
- Make unsubscribing easy. People who cannot leave press “spam” instead, and that hurts far more.

CHECK YOURS

Send one email to a Gmail address you own, open it, and view the original. If SPF and DKIM both say *PASS*, the technical side is done.

- ☐ SPF passes
- ☐ DKIM passes
- ☐ DMARC record exists

Restarting a list that has gone cold

If it has been a year, do not just resume as though nothing happened.

Sending to a list that has not heard from you in months is the fastest way to land in spam folders, because a wave of complaints from a domain with no recent sending history looks exactly like a compromised account. Do it deliberately instead: send one honest email to the cold group only, and let people choose.

REMIND THEM WHERE THEY SIGNED UP

SAY PLAINLY WHAT WENT QUIET, WITHOUT EXCUSES

SAY EXACTLY WHAT YOU WILL SEND FROM NOW ON

GIVE ONE GENUINELY USEFUL THING IN THIS EMAIL

INVITE THEM TO STAY — AND MAKE LEAVING EASY

EMAIL THAT EARNS ITS KEEP

HOW TO SEND IT SAFELY

- Send to the engaged group first for a week, to build recent history.
- Then the cold group in batches of a few hundred, not all at once.
- Watch bounces and complaints between batches. Stop if either climbs.
- Delete anyone who does not open it. They are not your audience.

EXPECT TO SHRINK

Losing half a stale list is a good outcome, not a bad one. What is left is a list you can actually write to.

IO

The rules, plainly

Get consent honestly and almost everything else follows.

Marketing email is regulated wherever your reader is, not where you are. If you sell only in the UK, the first column is your job. If you have subscribers abroad, read the other two.

UK AND EU	UNITED STATES	CANADA
UK GDPR, GDPR and PECR Consent must be freely given, specific and recorded. Soft opt-in lets you email existing customers about similar things — with an opt-out every time. The ICO enforces it.	CAN-SPAM Consent is not required up front, but you must not mislead, must include a valid postal address, and must honour opt-outs within ten business days.	CASL The strictest of the three. Express or clearly implied consent is required, you must identify yourself fully, and penalties are significant.

NOT LEGAL ADVICE

This is a plain-language summary to help you ask better questions. For anything consequential, check the ICO's guidance or take proper advice.

TRUE EVERYWHERE

- ☐ Consent is recorded: who, when, and what they agreed to.
- ☐ Every email carries a working one-click unsubscribe.
- ☐ Your real business identity appears in the email.
- ☐ No pre-ticked boxes, and no consent bundled into terms.
- ☐ Unsubscribes are honoured promptly and permanently.
- ☐ Subject lines and sender names are not misleading.

Measure movement, not opens

The metric everyone quotes is the one you can trust least.

WHY OPEN RATES LIE NOW

Apple's Mail Privacy Protection pre-loads tracking images for users who enable it, which registers an open whether or not anyone read the email. Treat open rate as a rough trend at best, and never as proof.

THE NUMBER THAT MATTERS MOST

Replies. They cannot be faked by a proxy, they tell you what people actually think, and they are the start of most sales.

EMAIL THAT EARNS ITS KEEP

DELIVERY

Did it arrive at all?

Bounce rate · spam complaints · whether your own test copy landed in the inbox rather than promotions

ATTENTION

Was it worth reading?

Clicks on the one link · replies · forwards · unsubscribes on this specific send

PROGRESS

Did anyone move?

Visits to the page you pointed at · bookings started · quotes requested · return visits

OUTCOME

Did it earn anything?

Enquiries · jobs won · repeat work · customers who mention the emails unprompted

Work down the list. If *delivery* is fine but *attention* is not, the email was not worth reading. If attention is fine but *progress* is not, the action was wrong or invisible. Each gap points at one specific fix.

The 15-minute monthly review

Five questions. Each ends in a decision, not an observation.

ASK	DECISION
Which emails got replies?	Write more like those
Which got clicks but no enquiries?	Fix the destination
Which got nothing at all?	Rework or stop sending it
Where did new subscribers come from?	Do more of that one thing
Who has gone quiet for six months?	Win back once, then remove

Score last month's emails

HIGH · MEDIUM · LOW

SUBJECT LINE	CLICKS	REPLIES	ENQUIRIES	DECISION
				Repeat / rework / drop
				Repeat / rework / drop
				Repeat / rework / drop

Your first 30 days

One offer, one sequence, one email, one review. Nothing else.

WEEK ONE Decide Pick one audience and one offer. Write the sign-up offer on page 5.	WEEK TWO Build Write the four welcome emails and set them up as an automation.	WEEK THREE Ask Add the offer to your thank-you page, best article and signature.	WEEK FOUR Send Write and send one real email to the engaged group. Answer every reply.
OUTPUT A sign-up offer	OUTPUT A live welcome sequence	OUTPUT Three real sign-up points	OUTPUT One email, and replies

Then: the 20-minute fortnightly rhythm

SAME SLOT, EVERY TIME

5 MIN Note the questions clients asked this fortnight.	5 MIN Pick one and score it out of eight.	5 MIN Fill in the brief and write three subject lines.	5 MIN Read the last email's replies. Answer every one.
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The one-page email strategy

90-DAY OBJECTIVE

WHO THE LIST IS FOR

THE SIGN-UP OFFER

WHERE YOU ASK FOR THE
ADDRESS

WHAT SUBSCRIBERS ARE
PROMISED

WELCOME SEQUENCE — FOUR
SUBJECTS

SENDING CADENCE

THREE SEGMENTS

THE USUAL ONE ACTION

WHAT YOU WILL MEASURE

REVIEW DATE

EMAIL THAT EARNS ITS KEEP

START HERE

Write the sign-up offer on page 5, then the four welcome emails on page 13.

Those two pages are most of the value in this guide.

PRE-SEND QUALITY GATE

- ☐ **Reason** — it is clear why this arrived today.
- ☐ **One idea** — not four in a template.
- ☐ **Evidence** — something only you could write.
- ☐ **One action** — and it is easy to take.
- ☐ **Function** — links, phone, unsubscribe all work.
- ☐ **Ownership** — someone reads and answers the replies.

Write one email worth replying to

Send it to the people who asked to hear from you.
Answer everyone who replies. Then do it again in
a fortnight.

KEEP LEARNING

Practical guidance on content, SEO, email, local visibility, websites and useful automation for small businesses — without the noise.

WANT IT BUILT FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

This guide gives you the framework. If you would rather skip to a structured discussion about your list, your offer and your objectives, book a free call.

steviewelshmarketing.com

sales@steviewelshmarketing.com · 07814 558325