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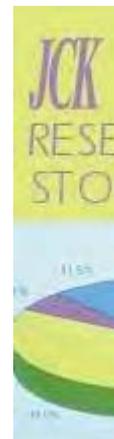
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The Tech Connection: Staying in touch by E-Mail

Caroline Stanley
 JCK-Jewelers Circular Keystone -- 1/1/2001

*Note: This is the first in a series of "how to" articles designed to help retailers develop a better understanding of technology. Every other month, a guest writer will provide step-by-step solutions to common computer-related problems. This month, **Caroline Stanley** takes a look at e-mail.*

E-mail is a simple, convenient, and affordable way for you to connect with your customers. You can send it almost instantaneously at your convenience, and you don't have to pay a printer or the post office for delivery. So what do you need to get started?

Collecting e-mail addresses. Ask your customers for their preferred e-mail address. Offer them an incentive to leave you their e-mail addresses: a weekly drawing for a prize or early notification of special events and news. Also, most business cards now contain an e-mail address-make sure you are tracking these in your customer database. Another way to collect e-mail addresses is to add a spot for visitors to leave their e-mail address at your Web site.

If you're just getting started and want to begin with a larger list, consider a mass mailing in which you ask customers for their e-mail addresses. Again, give your customers a reason to respond-a drawing for a prize or some other incentive.

As you solicit e-mail addresses, assure your customers that you do not sell their information or allow others access to it. Let them know that you guard their privacy according to your stated policy, and offer them the option to "unsubscribe," i.e., be removed from your list.

How to use e-mail. After collecting e-mail addresses, you are ready for the next step. Most e-mail programs offer the option of group lists. Take Microsoft's Outlook, for example. It's easy to set up and easy to use.

Looking at the opening screen, select Tools. Then, select Address Book. (If you prefer short cuts, use Ctrl+Shift+B.) From here, select New Entry, then select File, then select New Group, and add your customers' names. If you already have names within your address book, you can easily copy them into the new group list as well. Best of all, when you make changes to an e-mail address within Outlook, the changes automatically take effect in any other lists within Outlook. Easy.



Using Outlook is one way to organize your addresses, but there are many more. Even users within Outlook will approach adding and organizing names differently. However you organize your information, be sure that if someone wants to be removed from your e-mail list or wants to change their e-mail address, you can easily find it and fulfill their request. Getting unwanted e-mails is like getting unwanted solicitor phone calls-it's an annoyance and can be counterproductive, costing you sales instead of paving the way to better customer communications.

Be informative. Set up a newsletter schedule (monthly, biweekly, etc.) and think about what your customers want to know. Most of them don't want a sales pitch. Instead, give them the insider's scoop about your business or share product information. Your newsletter should have continuity. Decide what you want to do in advance and begin an editorial calendar. Make sure your e-mail coincides with any special promotions or events your store is having, being informative without the hard sell.

Is it working? Make sure your e-mail is interesting and interactive. Challenge your readers for feedback by providing incentives, such as a contest with rewards. E-mail is easy to reply to, so give your customers the chance to interact with you. Use the comments (or lack thereof) to assess the value of your newsletter. The ultimate goal is to keep your customers loyal. Also, you can use your e-mail newsletter to direct your customers to your Web site.

One-on-one marketing. Don't forget about individual e-mail marketing. Keeping up with your customer's important dates has never been easier with e-mail. Just make sure you keep the giver's e-mail address separate from that of the recipient.

Using e-mail to market to your customers is an easy, affordable way to integrate technology into your world and to stay in touch with your customers.

***Caroline Stanley** is a third-generation jeweler now working with Jnet, a new Web site "connecting the jewelry industry." To utilize Jnet's Web resources, visit www.jnet.com.*



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