30 MINUTE MARKETER

How to Use Contests to Grow Your Email List

10 Quick Tactics for Lead Generation through Contests

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30-Minute Marketer: How to Use Contests to Grow Your Email List

10 Quick Tactics for Lead Generation through Contests

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to the 30-Minute Marketer – a new offering from MarketingSherpa designed with you, the busy, time-strapped and (we're betting) stressed marketer in mind. We know you've got lots to do and not a lot of time to do it. You need quick, simple tips that you can put into action right away.

In this report, we focus on contests. Companies host contests for a variety of reasons: engagement, media coverage, brand awareness and more. But one of your primary goals should be lead generation, as contest can be a great way to build your email list. We'll share 10 tactics that will help you use contests for lead generation – and will also alert you to a few pitfalls you will want to avoid.

For every 30-Minute Marketer, I will scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies to MarketingExperiments optimization tests to MarketingSherpa benchmark reports, and edit all of the research down into an actionable piece that helps you improve your marketing performance right now…or, at least, when you're done with lunch. This special report contains tips from a variety of MarketingSherpa resources, including case studies, interviews and how-to guides.

Why Contests?

They can be a fun and effective way to attract visitors, generate buzz and build brand awareness.

Most importantly, contests can help you engage visitors and convert them to long-term subscribers..

We'll show you:

- How to get entrants to refer friends, thus doing the work for you
- Tactics for promoting your contest on social media
- Samples and strategies used by marketers in successful campaigns
- Ways to increase the odds that your contest will go viral

We know you're in a hurry, so we won't make you wait any longer for these tips on how to make contests pay off for you.

Enjoy!

Bobbi Dempsey

Freelance Editor

TACTIC #1: COME UP WITH A CLEVER THEME

Sure, you could just do a plain old boring random drawing – but that's nothing special for entrants and certainly won't motivate them to spread the word to their friends. If you can come up with a fun angle or clever theme, you are more likely to attract people's attention.

In Case Study #CS5456, eBillme created a contest in which entrants submitted videos where they shared their "dirty little shopping secrets." Thanks in large part to the creative angle, the contest received mentions in 31 media outlets. What's more, the contest generated lots of traffic – the most popular video was viewed more than 766,000 times.

In Case Study #CS31855, Microsoft shared strategies used for the launch of Windows Phone 7. To help build a library of apps, Microsoft devised a contest where users created and submitted apps, which were then voted on by visitors. (This had an added bonus as serving as market research for the company, as they could track which types of apps generated the most interest.)

EXAMPLE: MICROSOFT WINDOWS PHONE 7 APPS CONTEST PAGE

TACTIC #2: INCLUDE USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Yes, this type of contest involves more work for the entrant, but is also much more fun. And in addition to a prize, they're competing for bragging rights, which is a big motivator.

This also really helps promote the viral aspect of the campaign. Entrants will spread the word to their friends, and you are more likely to get repeat traffic as people will keep coming back to see the latest entries.

As illustrated by both the eBillme and Microsoft examples above, contests with user generated content can be very effective at driving lots of traffic to your site – and, just as importantly, they can also create a lot of buzz.

TACTIC #3: ESTABLISH (AND PROMINENTLY DISPLAY) RULES

We know rules are no fun – but they can spare you a lot of headaches in the long run. It's important to clearly define your rules before starting the contest – and then make sure the rules are visible to anyone who might enter. In cases involving a competition that will be evaluated by a panel of judges, you would want to identify the judges and spell out the judging criteria.

Important Note

Be sure to check with your team's lawyers before running a contest or sweepstakes, as they're controlled by specific laws.

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For competitions where entrants must create and submit materials such as videos, you also want to spell out any specific requirements regarding format, length, etc.

TACTIC #4: CREATE AN EYE-CATCTHING LANDING PAGE OR MICROSITE

It will be tough for visitors to get excited about your contest if all they see is a plain boring entry form. For their video contest, eBillme created a colorful and eye-catching microsite that would draw in visitors. (The actual video entries were housed on YouTube.)

You want to make the page exciting and creative while at the same time incorporating brand messaging. And of course it should be easy for visitors to figure out how to enter.

EXAMPLE: EBILLME CONTEST LANDING PAGE

TACTIC #5: ENCOURAGE ENTRANTS TO REFER FRIENDS (AND MAKE IT EASY FOR THEM TO DO SO).

Make the most of each visitor to your microsite by motivating them to recruit other entrants. You might need to provide some incentive by offering a special perk for people who refer friends. In Case Study #CS5770, technology education site Noobie ran a contest in which entrants received additional entries by referring five friends. You could even have a contest-within-a-contest by offering a prize to the person who submits the most referrals.

You want to make it as easy as possible for people to refer friends. The Noobie team wrote a script to email the referrals automatically. The email quickly explained the contest and provided a link to the landing page.

"What was nice about the script is that it had the name of the person who had originated the entry," says Patric Welch, Noobie president. "So it said 'your friend, John Smith, says you might be interested in this.'

EXAMPLE: NOOBIE CONTEST PAGE WITH REFER-A-FRIEND ELEMENT

TACTIC #6: SET UP CODED LINKS AND A TRACKING PAGE

To help measure the most effective tactics for driving visitors to your contest, use trackable links. Welch's team created coded links to identify each source of traffic to the landing page. This way, they could see which sources were driving the most registrations.

Sources included:

- Blogs (each blog link was coded separately)
- Referrals
- Emails to Noobie's newsletter subscribers
- Social networks
- Google AdWords
- Link from homepage

TACTIC #7: ATTRACT QUALITY NAMES THAT CONVERT

One big challenge when it comes to contests is to attract high-quality leads. According to [MarketingSherpa research](), among tactics for B-to-C list growth, contests ranked highest on quantity – but lowest on quality.

One trick to attract high-quality leads is to offer a prize that would be relevant to your target group. (Ideally, the prize is something made by or affiliated with your company.)

Tip:

Set up an ongoing campaign to keep your list fresh and growing.

In [How To #HOW31443](), Jason Heflin, VP E-commerce Marketing, CoolComputerBags.com – then a small startup – described his team's efforts to grow the house email list with high-quality, relevant leads. In this case, the company wanted to target laptop owners, so they decided to offer one of their computer bags as the prize.

Rather than going with a one-time giveaway, Heflin's team realized they could help establish a long-term relationship with subscribers by running an ongoing promotion with monthly winners. Each month, after a winner was selected, the team sent an email to all contestants who entered. Those who didn't win still received a coupon for a special deal on the company's products.

EXAMPLE: COOLCOMPUTERBAGS EMAIL TO NON-WINNING ENTRANTS
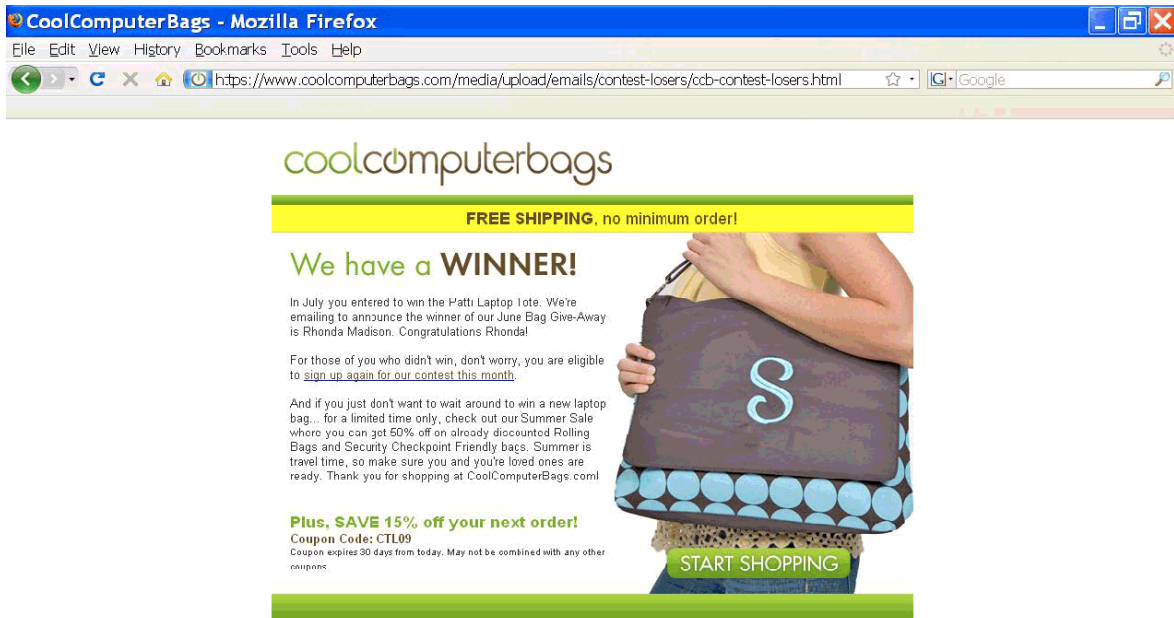
The email had the following features:

o Subject line: "Laptop Bag Contest - We Have a Winner"
o A reminder that they entered
o The name of the winner
o A link to enter the following month's contest

o A mention of a current sales promotion
o A coupon link worth 10% off the purchase price of the featured bag

The team doubled the size of their list in approximately eight months and went on to receive about 55% of new opt-ins per month through contest entries.

TACTIC #8: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FREE ONLINE PROMOTION AVENUES

To maintain efficiency, Heflin's team at CoolComputerBags.com did not use any paid promotion for their contest. Instead, they used three main tactics to spread the word to consumers:

- "Free stuff" websites

Heflin's team identified five sites that highlight giveaways and contests on the Web and promoted the contest there.

These sites let the team submit a subject line and a description of the contest. They duplicated most of the contest description from their own website. Heflin approached writing the subject line in the same manner he would write an email subject line.

"[The sites' visitors] are there to find free contests and products. I would say something like 'win a free laptop bag.' I would be very specific to say 'laptop bag' so that we pulled more targeted people than if we said 'win a free bag,'" Heflin says.

Heflin used the website Compete.com to get an estimate of each site's traffic and determine if it was worth his time to regularly send in the contest's information. Heflin estimates that it took about 10 minutes per month – once all required accounts were established – to send CoolComputerBags.com's monthly contest to the sites.

- Homepage ad

The team placed a display ad on their homepage with an image of the bag and the following text:
o "Win This Laptop Bag! Click Here to Enter Our Monthly Drawing!"

- Email to house list

The team also mentioned the contest once a month in their email newsletter, and supplied a link to the contest page. They wanted to include current customers in the effort and encourage them to pass along the email to a friend.

Tip:

Add a blurb about the contest to company email signatures as an easy way to spread the word.

TACTIC #9: INCORPORATE A VIRAL STRATEGY

In the Microsoft campaign mentioned above, the team needed to measure the social and sharing activity around each app to better understand consumer preferences. By making several viral tactics central to the contest, the most popular app ideas would rise to the top. Additionally, the use of viral tactics fit well with the team's limited budget.

"You can get exponentially more value out of your investment if you can figure out a way to get people to share with their own social graphs and spread your message," says Marty Collins, Director, Emerging Media, Microsoft.

Here are three key viral elements to the campaign:

- Built into contest rules

Entries would be judged largely on the social activity they generated -- such as comments, shares and links. This expanded the campaign's reach by offering incentives to contestants who ask friends and followers to share and vote for their ideas.

"We also know that word-of-mouth and social-sharing are exponentially more meaningful to somebody than a banner or another non-word-of-mouth experience," Collins says.

- Easy sharing across networks

With a few clicks, contestants could share a link to their entries with contacts via Facebook, Twitter and email. They could also copy provided HTML code to embed a link to their entry in other sites, social networks and forums. The winning entry, for example, also promoted her entry in MySpace and PCWorld's forums.

- Work with relevant partner

The team worked with a partner that had an audience built around viral contests (see Useful Links at the end of this report). By hosting the same contest experience on the partner's site, the campaign received exposure from an audience that was predisposed to similar contests.

The contest proved to be a big success. Each contestant spent an average of 9.2 minutes engaged in the contest. "It was over nine minutes people were spending with the brand. You never see that anywhere," Collins says. "So we're really, really happy with the results for sure."

TACTIC #10: INCORPORATE MARKET RESEARCH IN AN UNOBTRUSIVE (AND BARELY NOTICEABLE) WAY

With any mailing list generation tactic, there's always a delicate balance between gathering helpful information and getting so nosy you scare off would-be subscribers. Contests can allow you to do some intelligence gathering without being too obvious. You can include a survey to help gather information on subscribers.

Or, you can find a way to build this into the contest itself. That's what Bank of Montreal did – as outlined in Case Study #CS30708 – when they decided to use a contest as a way to reach out to qualified prospects in a massive market (retiring baby boomers) outside of the bank's existing customer base.

The bank's team created a contest that asked baby boomers to build their own retirement dream worlds.

The contest consisted of boomers answering a series of questions – each one creating a new component to the virtual world. The questions:
1) Where would you like to spend your retirement? Overlooking the sea? Out in the country? Or right in the middle of the city?
2) What kind of home do you dream of living in?
3) How will you spend your days? What do you dream of doing most in retirement?

The bank's team also qualified leads in a more obvious – yet not overwhelming – way. After answering the dream-world questions, entrants completed the contest-entry form by filling in their name and contact information and answering a few short qualifying questions, such as:
-Age?
-Are you a current BMO customer?
-When do you plan to start the transition to your retirement dream?
-Have you already started living your retirement dream?
-If yes, for how long?
-How confident are you about making your retirement dream a reality?

EXAMPLE: BANK OF MONTREAL ENTRY FORM WITH QUALIFYING QUESTIONS

The bank then used this information to create a database and develop relevant newsletter content that would interest these subscribers.

A Final Tip:

As noted in this MarketingSherpa blog post on email hygiene, people often use fake email addresses to enter contests, so you should have email hygiene processes in place to weed these out of your list.

Useful links and resources:

Sherpa report: "Online Video Contests - How to Start Them, Promote & Track ROI + Pitfalls to Avoid"

MarketingSherpa blog: Twitter contest boosts followers 43%

User-Generated Video Contest: 6 Steps to Promote Brand and Generate New Marketing Content

Contest Sites:

Contest Hound http://www.contesthound.com/

About.com Contests & Sweepstakes http://contests.about.com/

ContestGuide.com http://www.contestguide.com/

Get free case studies and how-to articles from our reporters

Join 237,000 weekly newsletter readers. Receive free, in-depth case studies and how-to articles based on hundreds of hour-long interviews with brand-side marketing VPs and directors in Email every year.

Email Marketing

Track what works in all aspects of Email marketing from subject line to content to landing page and beyond. *Weekly*

MECLABS

Optimize the sales and marketing funnel