



Wired Up Guide

Everything you need to know about Email Broadcasting systems

If you're about to invest in email broadcast technology for the first time, or simply want to check that the system you're using is the best for your money and your needs read on....

Introduction: Types of service available

There are three broad categories of email broadcast service to choose from they are:

1. Shrink-wrapped software,
2. A web-based ASP (application service provider)
3. Software-based ASP (a hybrid of the two)

Shrink-wrapped software

Like all off-the-shelf software solutions shrink-wrapped email broadcast software is cheaper than the other options and is wholly within your management once purchased.

And although it comes at a fixed price there may be additional costs for things like a variable licence fee calculated on use, bandwidth to support the actual sends and hosting charges to support any images in your email.

Not all software is compatible with every computer system and so to make an off-the-shelf solution work additional investment in computer hardware is sometimes needed while others require a constant connection to the Internet in order to work.

Each varies in terms of usability and the less user friendly options require some specialist IT knowledge.

And – unless free upgrades are part of the deal, you run the risk of having an out of date system in a short timescale given how quickly new versions and additional features are added.

Web-based ASP

ASP web-based are one step up, and are priced under a licence deal. This means as and when new features are added you benefit from them without having to buy a software patch. Having said that the 'one size fits all' rule applies and so a web-based ASP solution is not the best choice if you require a bespoke system.

Further, unlike shrink-wrapped software, you do not have complete control and are therefore reliant on the service provider for quality and speed of service. Being web-based, rather like Hotmail, they do the job, are relatively simple to use but can be slow when demand is high.

Client server solutions

The client server solution is the best of both worlds.

You have the control of a shrink-wrapped software because you can manage the design, dispatch and delivery in-house. Added to which you have access to the external expertise through which you can manage your speed and quality of send according to your needs.

For these solutions the initial costs are variable with a nominal fee based on volume of emails sent.



Features

The features of email broadcast solutions vary across all three categories, and your own requirements will dictate which features are essential and which are desirable.

When choosing an email broadcast system here are the things you need to consider:

Database and list management

• Can I import lists?

All solutions will let you import lists, but the amount of data you can import and the format in which it can be carried over varies.

Some solutions will let you only import as little as the name of the recipient and their email address.

• Once I have imported the list can I store and build a database within the solution?

The more basic systems will not allow support any list once the message has been sent, which means the whole process has to be repeated for every send – most labourious when you are going to the same lists repeatedly.

Others will link with a database that exists elsewhere and feed from it every time you dispatch a campaign, but in both cases deduplication, suppression procedures and general database updates have to be undertaken outside of the solution.

More advanced solutions will support and host a database, allowing dedupes to be undertaken every time new data is imported and enabling queries, searches and segmentation.

Some allow you to build the database by importing additional information on which to base selections and content.

Others include a subscription management feature whereby you can subscribe people to different types of campaigns.

In addition to the above the best systems dynamically update the database with individual campaign selections and results, to assist selections for future campaigns.

• How do I run tests campaigns?

Whether you're running a test to ensure the technical aspects of the promotion work across all clients or to trail different creative not all systems will support a test campaign.

The less sophisticated models will require you to run a test in the same way as a live campaign, which can be incredibly labourious if a number of changes need to be made.

Better systems are set up to manage lists of test users during the set-up phase prior to the live send.

• Can the software be set up to manage the campaigns?

In some instances the data itself may act as the trigger for campaigns. For example, car insurance reminders may be automatically dispatched when the renewal dates of the database are known.



Security

- ***Is the data protected?***

You need to be sure that your data is safely protected and that there is sufficient back-up in the event of a system crash.

- ***Where is the data being stored?***

Whether you store the data yourself or entrust it to an ASP or Client server provider always ensure the database is securely ring fenced from other databases held in the same location.

Make sure also that there is high security at the physical location where the data is stored and that a written security policy applies.

European law prevents the transfer of personal data outside the EU without permission of the owner except in exceptional circumstances. Make sure any non-EU providers have appropriate measures in place to protect your customers' data to the standards you would expect under UK law.

- ***Who has access to the data?***

Access to data should always require authorisation, and may operate at different levels according to the stage of the campaign. For example, a number of people may have access to view campaigns, but extra levels of security are required to alter and authorise a live campaign.

Content: creation and management

- ***Can I create HTML and Text emails?***

All systems will allow you to import text emails, and most will allow you to import HTML emails, however they are created.

Many will link to standard content editors in order to enable you to import your HTML email.

Others bypass the need for import by having a user-friendly content editor built-in.

- ***Can I create a forms and personalised web-pages?***

Not all systems are limited to email production. Some enable you to create web-pages and microsities (websites within websites) to gather and use your customers' data. Incorporating these facilities enables some very sophisticated and interactive campaign elements in terms of using existing, gathering new and analysing data.

If you're using a system that allows you to create web pages and/or microsities make sure you can put your data to use with better targeting and tailoring. Also ensure respondents are able to submit and update their records.

- ***Can I customise content?***

After you have painstakingly gathered all that information about your customers' preferences, make sure you use it. A well designed system will take personalisation far beyond "Dear Fred" and let you include whole sections of text and graphics which will change according to what the user has told you about themselves.

Where this functionality is not provided separate emails containing each piece of content will have to be created with their own specific lists and tested independently.



- ***Is image hosting included?***

Some packages allow you to manage your images as part of the deal, where others require you to use your own server space.

If you're planning on using streaming video this can be a heavy burden so always check what you get in the deal.

- ***Can I store old content?***

Some packages include a previous message storage facility, linked to the database. With this not only can you see what was sent and to whom but also compare campaigns over time to see what did and did not work.

Based on this information, you can create new emails with already-made templates.

A storage facility is also useful at the testing phase to record the changes that are made.

Campaign management

- ***How can I control responses?***

When you're dealing with high volumes you need to be set up to manage the responses well.

Ask if the systems can:

- automatically feed bounces and out-of-office replies to a nominated address (or straight to the trash can!)
- deliver "human" replies to a nominated address
- send automatic acknowledgement emails to replies

- ***How are campaign results reported?***

Reporting will vary from number of sends and bouncebacks to the number of opens, duration of views, number of click-throughs, forwards, replies and so on.

If you have very specific objectives you can build in tracking data in order to monitor more closely the results which are most important to you.

Reports may be available live and online, while others are supplied as electronic documents.

How the report is delivered is as important as what is reported. The figures must be easy to read and analyse. You should be able to drill down into your results to scrutinise campaign success. Some systems allow you to export the results to Excel so you can conduct your own analysis for reporting purposes.

The better systems will feed the results directly into the database so if you're planning a follow-up campaign you can make selections based on the results.

Training and Support

- ***What training is provided?***

Even if you go for the most sophisticated of all the solutions, without any training you will be wasting your money. So once you have found a solution that meets your requirements ensure that you will be provided with the necessary training to use it properly.

**• What support is provided?**

In addition to training the better service providers will complement their solutions with a range of support services like marketing consultancy, strategy, design, HTML mark-up/writing, video file editing and streaming and list sourcing.

This can be really useful when you need some extra help from the experts because to really realise the value from your technical solution, you need to understand how to get the best from it.

About Frontwire

Frontwire helps organisations acquire and retain customers in more cost effective ways using digital marketing solutions (with e-mail, SMS and streaming video). Frontwire's core services include: Strategy & Planning, List Building and Rental, Data Management, Design & Editorial, Message Dispatch & Tracking, Response Management, Research & Analysis.

To find out more about our solutions, clients and case studies please visit our web site www.frontwire.com or call Jason Meads on 020 7368 9700.

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