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a company's services or products through a stretched-out, methodical series of promotions to a target audience. According to About.com, drip campaigns were developed to respond to the "Law of 29." A prospect won't turn into a client unless the prospect views a marketing message at least 29 times. That sounds like way too many times to me, but it may very well be the case depending on what a company is trying to sell, the price point and other factors, such as supply/demand and competition.

Scott Cytron • Aug. 01, 2010

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Exclusive online content from the August 2010 issue.

Like the drip-drip-drip of water in a leaky faucet, drip marketing campaigns promote

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Accounting firms, resellers, providers and other companies who sell products or services will be most concerned with the obvious bottom line: how to retain clients, find more prospects and increase sales. Drip marketing campaigns can certainly do this, but you must pay attention to the details in order to expect a return on investment.

A drip marketing campaign requires careful, detailed planning because it involves a series of promotions — usually e-mail blasts — to the same audience on a regular basis. A firm or provider cannot decide on a Wednesday to begin a drip campaign without logical organization and a look into the future, all the way to the end of the campaign.

Factors to consider include the following:

Audience — A company or firm may already have the audience's e-mails captured in its database or CRM system. Or the company may want to purchase a list or construct a list using a service, such as Hoovers. Decisions must be made on who the recipients will be. The list probably will not be "the entire database" because your campaign may not apply to everyone in the database. There's nothing more embarrassing than sending a promotion to a client or customer who already has the product or service.

Creating the List — Decide how you're going to physically construct your list. While a CRM system can do this much more easily than cherry-picking e-mails from a database, many companies and firms may not have this availability. Instead, a firm must figure out how to assemble its list. I recommend doing this in Excel and then using the spreadsheet to track progress with regard to response and call to action. In other words, keep it simple.

Frequency — How often will you send your messages? Monthly? Weekly?

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would be too often to receive a drip campaign e-mail.

Plan Your Messages — You'll want to plan out exactly what you're going to say in each e-mail message. There are two schools of thought here. First, to establish continuity and create awareness, the message should be mostly the same each time. Second, the exact opposite is true. The message should be changed each time, as long as the focus remains on the product or service. I've seen this go both ways with equal results. If you have a campaign going every other week for three months, decide if there is enough to say for six to eight e-mail messages. Most likely, there is; but that's not always the case. If you keep your messages consistent, one variance is to change up your call to action each time, then measure which messages were the most effective.

Enable Click-Through — Throughout the campaign, you will only know a prospect is interested in your product or service if he or she responds to the call to action — what's called a "click-through." Again, you're asking the recipient to perform a certain action. This could resemble a phone call to your firm or company, an e-mail message or going to a webpage. Here, you set up a page on your website to enable recipients to click through to the page. The link is included in the e-mail message. So if you use something like Leadlander or Google Analytics to monitor which of your pages are visited the most often, you can easily monitor who is coming to your site.

Monitor "Opens" — Most companies will find a drip campaign far easier to manage if they have a CRM system in order to tell through analytics who is opening an e-mail message. If, for example, a message was opened twice, that would be considered a solid lead because it shows the person is

interested in what you're offering. A typical follow up from the company

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instead. This isn't the ideal situation and is not recommended, but it is a workable solution.

The best way to figure out if a drip campaign works is to try it, then vary your messages and possibly the frequency of e-mails as you move through the campaign. There is no right or wrong way to execute a drip campaign, but you can build on success and failure to hone your message and adjust the operations side.

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