

An Interview with John Arnold, Author of *Email Marketing For Dummies*

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, published by John Wiley & Sons, the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of Social Media; and today we are here with John Arnold, the author of *Email Marketing for Dummies*, also published by John Wiley & Sons, and we'll be speaking today about Social Media and of course, email marketing. So John, it's really great to have you here today.

L: Yeah, thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

JS: This is going to be cool. I love it. Great book! Great book! Can you tell the listeners a little bit about who you are and what your background is?



JA: Well, my background comes from a great company called *Constant Contact*, where I'm the director of *Constant Contact University*. We produce learning resources to help all businesses do better with their email marketing, and practice some of the email marketing best practices to help you grow your business. And so, out of that company background comes a burning desire to help the small-business owner. And that's really why I wrote the book, *Email Marketing for Dummies*. Because email marketing is such

an awesome tool for growing your business, being sort of an entrepreneur at heart myself. I tell people this is my first real job, in effect. I've always been a small business owner since I could crawl. So that passion and that desire are still there and I just think email marketing is one of the best ways that you can grow your business. And so that is what the book is for. It's really written for the small-business owner. It's not written to impress a whole bunch of technology-focused industry-geeks!

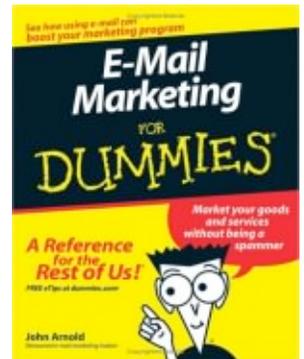
LS: (Laughter)

JA: It is really written for the small-business owners who are in the trenches every day, just trying to get more customers and trying to live the life that they want to live.

LS: That's awesome. And you say that you were a bit of an entrepreneur yourself and so you actually recognized why email is so powerful for the small business owner, and that's why you went to work with *Constant Contact* and wrote the book.

JA: Yeah, that's right. And if you're a small business owner, these days it's tough to find customers and it's tough to keep them coming back. You've got to be in front of them all the time. And email marketing is such a low-cost tool. When you think about it, this is what's so powerful about that concept.

You know when things are low-cost, that's great as a small business owner, but it can be a trap, too. You don't want to make sure that you're always just cutting your costs. Which you want to do is grow your revenue. So if you find a low-cost tool out there and it's cheap and it doesn't work, you're really just wasting your money. But if you find a low-cost marketing tool that's cheap and it actually returns more than a dollar for every dollar that you spend, then it's a gold mine. And that's what email marketing is. You spend a dollar and you get way more than a dollar back. In fact, the last time I checked this statistic the direct marketing association said that the average email marketing ROI is over \$45 for every dollar spent.



So the average campaign is, you spend a dollar, you can get up to \$45 back on your email marketing. Well, that's a great trade if you're a small business owner you can rely heavily on some of those technologies that allow you to do that.

LS: Well, that's amazing, \$45 to one; I mean that's an incredible ROI. And when we did the chapter on email marketing for *The Social Media Bible* and we put it out to 1,000 people to get input, the user-generated content, wisdom of the crowds. What they kept coming back with is, "Email? Been there-done that, it's passé, it's last century". And then my comment was, "Well, what about segmenting, what about day-parting, what about creative subject lines." So can you address the fact that email really is as efficient today as it always was?

JA: Well it...I understand people who say that kind of things, because I have the same form of attention-deficit disorder that some of those marketers have. You know, you always want to be doing the latest thing and you want to make sure you're not missing an opportunity. But let's face it, the statistics show a couple of things. First of all, everyone uses email if you want to look at how many people read blogs and know how to subscribe to RSS, or how many people are using their mobile devices, or how many people are actually reading somebody's *FaceBook* page or finding people online. You know, it's not everybody. And certainly you don't want to miss those markets, so it's important to have a strategy that includes all of those different mediums.

But do you know anybody who doesn't use email?

LS: (Laughter) no...

JA: Everybody uses email. In fact a recent study by *AOL* sort of indicates people read their email at work, they read it at home, they read it in bed while in their pajamas, they read it in the middle of the night, they read it while they drive (don't do that!), they read it church...12% of respondents said that! So you know, email is getting delivered where your customers are looking. And if you want to say that that's passé and you want to pass up on that opportunity, well, then I guess maybe you have a better plan. But you should include email marketing in your mix because everybody's there. And your message is getting delivered where people open it.

LS: Yeah, I've got to agree with you 100%. With one of my companies, *Paper Models, Inc.*, we use it often and, really, the rate of return on it is just spectacular. And one of the things mentioned, when I had the pleasure of interviewing Eric Groves from *Constant Contact*, was integrity. Integrity not only in the email but the content. And also that in working with *Constant Contact*, they absolutely insure that their clients use integrity and follow all of the rules. And I think that's what sets you guys aside from just conventional spam.

JA: Yeah, all the statistics about getting more than a dollar back for every dollar that you spend depends on doing email right. You know, if you do email right it works really well for your business. You can rely on it. If you do it wrong, i.e., you send email to total strangers and expect that they're going to appreciate your communications, that's called spam.

You don't want to practice spam marketing, you want to practice email marketing. Email marketing is delivering professional communications to an interested audience, and that audience has to want your communication and think that your information is valuable.

LS: Okay, so if somebody actually wanted to get started doing an email marketing campaign, is it difficult, is it expensive, does it take a long time? How do you go about it?

JA: Well, the first thing that you want to do is recognize that there is a key difference between email programs that are designed for one-to-one email communications, and those are programs like *Outlook*, where they are really only designed for one-to-one communications. You want to get a program that is going to work to delivery “one-to-many” email communications. And those are called *Email Service Providers*. So *Constant Contact* is an email service provider.

What they do is they just make it super easy for you to create an email using one of their templates. So you don’t need to know HTML programming and you can still create a great-looking email design. You can do a newsletter or promotion, anything that you can think of. You can create that and look professional and make it look like your business. And then they’ll send it out for you so that you can get a high rate of deliverability and you can stay compliant with all the Can- Spam Laws, and they will help you track your message. So as it goes out, you can tell who opened it, and when they have opened it, which links they click on in the email. You can use that for your own marketing information.

So you really want to get started with somebody who knows what they are doing and that is an email service provider. And is it low-cost? Of course it’s low-cost! *Constant Contact*’s plans start at \$15 a month. So you will waste \$15 a month trying to do it with one-to-one email programs. It is just so cost-effective and so easy to use. That’s really the first step. Just go with somebody who knows what they have been doing.

LS: And you mention something interesting, too, that I heard in the conversation with Eric. You guys kind of help...the templates, by the way, are fabulous! I mean it’s just “put in your content” and they really do look professional. One of the things that I like about working with an email service, in particular *Constant Contact* is how you guys are “White-Hat”-ed. You are respected in the industry. So more of your emails are going to get delivered.

And, I’ve got to be honest; I made a mistake here a couple of months ago. I took our entire email database from the nine years we have been collecting it and I blasted it out. And I didn’t even think about it, but what happened was that most of those emails were old; the people didn’t remember that they were customers, and the bounce rate and the opt-out’s were so high that you guys shut me off. (Laughter)

JA: That’s definitely...there are some challenges. You know, email marketing is not as simple as just loading up all your email addresses and clicking the send button. There are some things that you have to get over, some challenges. And if you think about it, email marketing is both a challenge and an opportunity. Everybody faces those same challenges of collecting email addresses the right way, with permission and the Can-Spam Laws and those kinds of things, and deliverability.

So, if everybody faces those issues and you can overcome them, then you have a competitive advantage over your competition. So when you go with somebody like *Constant Contact* and they help you and their with you every step of the way, then you’re going to get over those challenges faster than somebody else who’s sits around and tries to figure that out on their own. So it’s another reason to use the service and get that stuff done.

And *Constant Contact*’s approach is, “We are there to help the small business owner grow.” And when the small business owner’s business grows they reward us by using the product for a long time. So that’s the core

of the business model and that's why we have learning resources on the website, we have face-to-face seminars, we've got hints and tips newsletters, we've got frequently asked question files, we've got live support that's always free to our customers.

Need I say more! We are always there to give that helping hand and to make the business owner's getting the value that they think they should be getting, which is business growth.

LS: If you were going to start your own email campaign, I just gave one of the things that you do not do and that is to use an old email list. But if somebody wanted to start, what are some of the things that they need to watch out for to make sure that they are successful?

JA: Well, I think that colossal mistake #1 for email marketing is not having a plan. You really want to take a step back as a business owner and say, "What am I trying to accomplish and what is the end result of what I'm trying to accomplish?"

So let me give you an example. A lot of people like to use email to drive traffic to their website, but if your website traffic spikes (and you are not going to have a company party because of that statistic because you really wanted sales), then you've got to back up and think, "Okay, how is my email going to really drive sales, not just traffic to my website?" So you might find out that that changes the way you're going to do your messaging. Maybe you want to create a special landing page on your website and not just drive them to the homepage. Or maybe you're going to change your offer so that people click through straight to a shopping cart, so you can try to drive sales to the shopping cart in you website.

So really, just having a plan and developing all your content around that plan is a super step.

Step #2 is, of course, to build your list with permission. So you cannot use any mail-address list full of total strangers. If you email total strangers, there are going to think it is spam and then that ruins your deliverability. If they mark your email as a spam, the internet service providers that deliver your mail will shut you down, and they won't allow you to delivery mail anymore. So, you have got to have a permission-based email list.

And then the third thing you want to do is design your email to look professional. So don't just send out email that has a bunch of text and pictures thrown in there. Use a professional design that reflects the branding and the images that your company has. Use your logo, use your company's colors, your company's fonts, and those kinds of things that brand your business so that you're recognizable and you're starting to differentiate yourself in your marketplace.

And the fourth thing is you want to track your results. So after you send out an email campaign, make sure you are looking at your open-rates and click-through rates and all those statistics, and then you use that stuff to create interest lists so you can target the next message, and be more targeted with the way that you communicate. Targeted-marketing working works better than marketing that's general and tries to be for everyone.

LS: I love that.

JA: So those four things are a pretty good package. If you can do all that stuff as a marketer, you're going to have good results.

LS: Those are really incredible tips. I really love that, and I would like to talk about conversions and metrics here in just a second. You also mentioned this spam, and a lot of people still get spam and it's pretty obvious. Can you just mention, just quickly, a little but about the Can-Spam Act?

JA: Yeah, well here's the thing about the Can-Spam Act. You know, I could talk until I'm blue in the face about the different regulations and all that stuff, but I'll tell you what; it doesn't matter. What matters is that spam is in the eye of the receiver. So the consumer on the other end gets to decide whether they think the email is spam, or not. You can meet the legal definition of spam, or not spam, but if you send the email and the person that receives it thinks its spam, then it damages your business.

And here's the thing about spam. If you send out a whole bunch of postcards or RSS feeds with your blog and nobody wants them, nobody really cares. They don't get excited about that. People just throw away their junk mail and they just don't read their RSS feed. But if you send out a whole bunch of emails to an audience and nobody wanted them, then people will get enraged like they hate spam. You know consumers hate spam and the last time I checked, "hate" was not one of the buying emotions!

LS: (Laughter)

JA: You don't want to elicit those kinds of emotions in your audience. What you want to do is you want them to love you, right?

LS: Right!

JA: So send out emails that people are going to love, and that starts with having a list of people who are familiar with your business and who actually signed up to receive what you have. And let's face it; if you're sending emails out to those kinds of people, you're going to get more business out of that anyway. And that is because it is a lot easier to track a repeat customer than it is to attract somebody who has never heard of you before. And that's the best use of email. It is to go out there and get those repeat customers, those referrals, and email people who are familiar with you. Staying "top-of-mind" is one of the keys.

There are a lot of uses for it that you can try. It doesn't matter about the Can-Spam Act. You want to email people who are familiar with you and who love you; and you're just trying to stay "top-of-mind" and get them to buy stuff. And then you'll stay a mile away from the Can-Spam Act and you won't have to worry about it. And I'm not a lawyer anyway, so if you wanted to ask me about the regulations, I'm not the right guy. Talk to the attorney about it

LS: (Laughter) that's a great answer. Again, it gets back to integrity in your marketing practices. It always amazes me that I will get an email, albeit, obviously that has been harvested from one of my companies and they are asking me to call them to do business with them. What? Are you kidding me?

JA: Exactly, you have got to remember it is a relationship on the other end. It might be an electronic communication but the person reading the ad is a real, live human being, and they expect you to be professional.

LS: And it gets back to the other point that you have made and I have heard, “referral”. I love the idea of the pass-a-long, and too often we forget to include that in our emails.

JA: Yeah, did you ever catch anybody down at the copy center making copies of the postcard that you sent out through the mail so they can send it to their friends? You know that doesn’t happen! Email is easy to forward.

LS: Yes!

JA: You click the forward button. Now why would anybody do that? Well, it’s either valuable to somebody that they know (so you’ve got to include some valuable content in your emails), or it has an offer that their friends and colleagues will be interested in and it makes them smart forwarding it. Because it says, “Hey look, I have the offer, I have the goods, I have the information; and you don’t.” So it makes you look smart to forward it on. So, great tools! So easy to use!

LS: And really that is the basis of the whole Social Media genre and it is this trusted network. As long as content is “king”, as long as you have the right content, you have value. Then the network that you send it to will pass it on through their trusted network. And that’s the best referral possible.

JA: Exactly! There is the whole basis of Social Media, right! You know, everybody has a friend, and those have friends, and there is an affinity of groups and people that talk to people that like to share information. Do you want to enable them to share your information in everyway possible and you want to make it as easy as possible?

LS: I love it. That is really good. Is there any tricks? And I’m using that term very loosely, I don’t really mean tricks. Are there any techniques that we can use to better our chances that our email might get opened?

JA: Yeah, there’s a whole bunch of stuff. Too much for this call, but let me give you a couple of tips. Getting your email open starts, usually, with deliverability. So if you cannot get the email into the “in” box and it goes into the “junk” folder all the time, then of course it’s not going to get opened. And most of deliverability right now is depending on the reputation of the sender. So the email service that delivers your mail, (like *Yahoo* or *AOL* or *Hot Mail* or *Comcast* or those kinds of providers) when they decide whether or not to deliver an email to one of their customers, they look at the reputation of the sender. “Where is this email coming from, and can we trust this sender?” And if they trust the sender there’s a higher degree of probability that the email is going to go into the “in” box instead of getting filtered or blocked or bounced back to the sender.

So it starts with finding, again, that email service provider with the good reputation so you can get the highest delivery rate possible. After that you want to take a look at the content of your email, and that starts with your “from” line and your “subject” line. Sixty percent of consumers look at the “from” line to determine whether to open an email, and then the rest of them say they look at the “subject” line to determine if they want to open the email.

So you want to make your “from” line really familiar, make sure you are communicating who you really are. If they know you as your business name, you want to put your business name in the “from” line. If they know you because you’re the person they deal with personally, then maybe your personal name can go in the “from” line.

And then your subject line has to be short and it has to prompt them to open the email. So you don't want to give a generic subject line, like "July Newsletter". That's not going to prompt them to open. Maybe you want to highlight one of the articles in your newsletter or given them a reason to open the email right now and take a look. Those are two big keys.

LS: So in the subject line you want something that has a, "What's in it for me" factor.

JA: Absolutely, yeah, "What's in it for me and why should I do this right now?"

LS: Well, that's a really good point too, because if something is compelling enough and you can engage the reader, they'll open it right now. But if they put it off until later and their "in" box gets full there's a pretty good chance they will indiscriminately delete it.

JA: Yeah, they figure, "You know, this is a week old and I haven't read it yet, so I'll probably just get the next one." And they delete it and they never open it and they never read it.

LS: Excellent point. Our email and the intent of an email is to actually sell something? Do you have to put it in all your copies? Is that what's intended? Or really is it just to drive people either to the telephone or to a website because that is where the sell takes place?

JA: Well, you know it really depends on your goals. You know you can enable an email to send somebody straight to a shopping cart or to make a one-click purchase. And those kinds of things are possible. But typically what I find (just going back to some of the mistakes that people make) is that people put too much content in their emails and not enough in other places. So one of the fears that small business owners have is over-promoting. So a great way to keep from over-promoting is sending just enough information to get someone to "click", and then hosting the rest of that information someplace really important that drives traffic. So, maybe it goes to your website or maybe your social media page. So you can use an email, perhaps, to write a summary of a blog article and then once you've called attention to the blog article you can send them over to read the rest of the blog article. And now they are on your social media site, and that social media site can be driving traffic towards conversion somewhere else. Maybe to a shopping cart or something like that.

So it can be a two or three-step process. Or you could just say, "Hey, buy it now" and the "buy" button is right there in the email. It just makes it real convenient.

LS: That's incredible advice, that's really good. There are two camps there and you brought them all together in a common-sense way. Earlier you had mentioned the term "conversion" and I'm a strong proponent of identifying what your conversion is. And then setting up metrics to identify how well you're doing. The different types of conversion while using email, can you speak to that?

JA: Your email can't track conversion because conversion usually happens someplace besides the email. You cannot put a full-blown shopping cart right in the email box. It has got to go someplace. So you either need to drive traffic to your storefront online, or to your brick-and-mortar, or to the phone to give you a call. Someplace where they're going to order whatever it is that you have.

You are going to have to track your clicks and then track those click-through's using your analytic software. If you're getting phone calls from people, you need to track your phone calls and try to figure out where those

phone calls came from. And you're going to have to keep all those statistics so that you can tell which emails resulted in which sales. Also, you should track which landing pages on your website resulted in which sales, and which emails drove those sales.

So it can get a little complicated, but really it's simple. Just think about it in these terms. If your email drives lots of traffic to a website or to the phone or anyplace where there's conversion ready to happen, and then you do not get a log of conversions, then your email did a great job but your conversion process is not working very well and needs some attention.

If you do it the other way and if your email is lousy at driving traffic towards conversion, then nobody is calling you and nobody is visiting your website. But if when they do call you and visit your website and they buy something right away, then there is nothing wrong with your conversion process. But maybe your email needs some attention, because you're not driving enough traffic. So it is an easy indicator of where you, at least, need to focus your attention. And if you are not tracking that at all, you are losing the opportunity. Your competition is doing that, and they are fixing it, and they are honing their skills, and they are getting better at it. So make sure you are doing that, too.

LS: So what I'm hearing is that there are a lot of different types of metrics and different definitions of conversion. In the email you can get your deliverables, your bounce-rates, soft-bounces, hard-bounces, which is a type of metric that you really want to focus on, as well. But then when the emails actually get delivered, you get your click-through's that are going to take you over to a website, or a Social Media page, and also pass-along's. And all that information is available from reports in your email service provider.

JA: Right. So you want to take a look at both sides of the equation. Where do they come from, and then what do they do once they got there?

LS: And then (you should be) creating unique landing pages, maybe for a particular email campaign. This is also an easy way to track what takes place once they get to the website as a result of that email campaign.

JA: Yes, a great way to do it!

LS: And it is really low-cost!

JA: Sure!

LS: Can you think of any success stories, anything personal that you've been exposed to, or read about, or you have seen at *Constant Contact*, where a company is using email marketing and it has been successful?

JA: Yeah, you know it is amazing. We now have over 200,000 small-business customers, so you hear success stories all the time. And this is just an indication of how committed *Constant Contact* is to our customers' success. Every Tuesday we have a company meeting and the whole company gets together in this giant room and we talk. One of the things we share is a customer story. So we are always looking at our customers and finding those success stories.

I'll just give you one that I heard a couple of weeks ago. There is a company out of the Chicago area that is called Dinner by Design. This woman started her company in a sole kitchen, just one little kitchen. And her

dream was that families were not getting together around the dinner table as much anymore, because they just do not have time. So she started making meals for people who are busy and wanted to have dinners, so that they could swing by and pick them up and load four or five dinners into the fridge for the week. Or they could come by a, sort of, social event and actually assemble their own dinners. And they would only need a little bit of the ingredients, so they would just take a pinch of this and a pinch of that and put it all together. So they did not need to have a fully stocked kitchen full of all the ingredients. It would only take them a couple of hours to assemble five or 10 meals for a week or two. And they would go home and put them in the fridge and they had fresh, home-made meals all week long without spending all that time shopping and all the other stuff.

So that is how Dinner by Design started, and she started using email marketing to talk to her customers, because it is a repeat-business model. So she needed to remind people of the ingredients she had on hand for that week, and all the different meals you could put together. And she could remind people to schedule an hour or two during the week to put those meals together. She could remind people of what meals were available for that week. And she has since grown that now to over 30 locations.

LS: Oh my gosh!

JA: It has become quite a franchise and quite an idea. She still uses email marketing in all of her franchises to connect with her customers. One of the other things I enjoyed about the story was the fact that the emails resulted in a lot of people replying to them, telling them what they think about her products and services. So she has been able to design her growth plan around knowing exactly what her customers are thinking. So it is such an easy two-way form of communication that people will reply to the emails and say, “Hey, we really would appreciate it if you did this, or that.” Then she can incorporate that into her business plans, and that helps her to grow, too.

So it is this really great, robust communication strategy and it is just as cheap as can be. So there is tons of value in stories like that, and there are a million of them.

LS: That is an incredible story; going from one kitchen to 30 locations and she is really providing this necessity for working families. But the one thing that I heard here, too, in your conversation was this; if you think about email, especially email campaigns, you think of it as a one-way communication. I will look at your email, I decide whether I am going to hit “delete” or if I am going to hit “click” to click through. But, what you just said there was it brought in that whole Social Media aspect, where your customers actually can open a line of communication and tell you what they were thinking, so that you could better your product and your service. And this built up and this also built that “trusted network”.

JA: Yeah, and they don’t even have to hit the reply button and then send you an email to be communicating back. You can look at which links they are clicking on and you can try to determine what their interests are. You can ask them (when they sign up for your email list) to select a couple of different interest categories that you might have. You can watch them click through to your Social Media page and see which articles they go to, and then find out what their interests are that way. So, there are a lot of ways to get that feedback. You can even send an online survey. A survey or a poll will take their temperature and see what they are thinking. It is really, really valuable stuff in which to develop your products and services around what you already want, instead of trying to figure that out by putting a product out there and having it fail. Find out what they need and what they want first, and then deliver it.

LS: And you are talking about less than pennies per email.

JA: Exactly. It is just a little bit of extra effort, but not a huge and significant investment in terms of money.

LS: That is great stuff! That is good! Is there anything else that you would like to add to the conversation or mention about email marketing or Social Media?

JA: Yes. I just want to tell people how important it is to maintain a relationship with your customers. So make sure that your marketing is connecting with people. That will make sure that you are successful. If you have people and you have customers, you are in business!

If you do not have relationships and you do not have customers then let's face it, you probably have a hobby. So get out and find those customers and build those relationships. And then you are going to have a competitive advantage.

LS: That is incredible advice! In my conferences when I teach and speak on innovation, I use the term, "When you build a better mousetrap (you know the saying) the world will beat a path to your door." Well, actually, they will build a better mousetrap and you will just have more dead mice. If you are not out there marketing and communicating and building that network and using tools like email marketing, then you really do not have a business.

JA: That's right!

LS: Can you tell the listeners where they can find *Email Marketing for Dummies*, because I want it immediately.

JA: Yeah, absolutely. You can get *Email Marketing for Dummies* anywhere books are sold. Preferably, go buy it from a small business, if you can.

LS: I like that!

JA: That is not always possible, but if it is possible, do that! And if it is not, then you know you can go to the traditional sources. You can also find it on www.emailtrainer.com, which is my website. You can also find a lot of hints and tips and resource stuff on www.constantcontact.com.

LS: Okay. So it is www.emailtrainer.com and www.constantcontact.com.

JA: That is right.

LS: And the final message is, of course, "Support the entrenepeur!"

JA: Absolutely!

LS: (Laughter) I love that! Thank you. I would really like to thank John Arnold, author of *Email Marketing for Dummies*, for being here today. It is also published by John Wiley & Sons.

John, really, thank you so much. Thank you.

JA: You are welcome, I appreciate it and thanks for having me.

LS: This is great!

This has been Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out the other valuable Social Media tactics, tools and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book and its companion website, www.thesocialmediabible.com.

For more information about me, Lon Safko, please go visit my website at www.lonsafko.com.

And again, John thanks a lot for being here today.

JA: Thank you.