

Trudy Rankin ([00:06](#)):

Welcome to the Online Business Launchpad podcast. We're gonna be helping guide you, step by step, through the process of growing your business online, and we're gonna be giving you tips and techniques that are going to help you break through the barriers that can stop you making progress in your business.

Trudy Rankin ([00:26](#)):

Are you an online business owner who's just getting started with growing your business? Or, or maybe you're somebody who has a bricks-and-mortar or face-to-face business, and you need to get it online, especially with what's happening with COVID-19, and, and that, what it's doing to the economy.

Trudy Rankin ([00:41](#)):

So one of the more important things you're going to need is some way of communicating with your customers via email. So welcome, everyone, to today's Online Business Launchpad podcast. Today we're going to talk about how to find the right email tool for you to do just exactly that, and to communicate via email with your customers, or your potential customers.

Trudy Rankin ([01:04](#)):

Ah, why email, you know? Isn't that like an old, dead thing? Uh, actually, it's not, you know. A very high percentage of people still do read their emails. They'll still open them. They'll still pay attention to what they say, and I came across a really great article, uh, that has some information in it from some surveys that have been done, and some research that's been done. One was by the Content Marketing Institute, uh, in 2020, that said that 81% of business-to-business marketers say that their most used form of content marketing is email newsletters. And SaleCycle, who did a survey back in 2018, so it's getting a little bit old at the... And is sort of long in the tooth at the moment, but it's still relevant. Says that for B2C customers, 59% of respondents say that marketing emails influence their purchasing decisions.

Trudy Rankin ([01:55](#)):

So emails do actually make a big difference in your ability to reach out to other people who might be your customers, your potential customers. And if you really want to know more about why email, I'll put a link in the show notes to that article that I just referred to, and it's a really excellent article that HubSpot put out in 2020 this year about email marketing statistics.

Trudy Rankin ([02:19](#)):

Anyway, whether you're getting ready to move some or all of your business online, and/or you're wanting to grow an existing business that's already online, you're going to need a way of keeping track of and automating your customer list. You're gonna wanna do that so that you can keep track of where those customers and potential customers came from. You know, how they found out about you. Erm, you know, what they are interested in and what they need from you. And secondly, you need it to be able to build strong relationships with those customers and those potential customers. Thirdly, you want to be able to send automated emails out to them with information links and offers for things that are useful to them that you provide, or that other people provide and that you think would be useful. And fourth, you're gonna want to engage with your customers and your potential customers, asking them about their current needs.

Trudy Rankin ([03:13](#)):

Now, depending on the number of customers you already have and the process that you use to sell to your customers, you're either going to need to have what's known as an ESP, or a CRM. Now, online businesses love acronyms, so just to explain, just in case you don't already know, an ESP is an email service provider, and a CRM is a customer relationship management tool. And typically, they, they're s- kind of the same, but they're not really the same. They tend to be used for different things, and they have a little bit of overlapping functionality.

Trudy Rankin ([03:49](#)):

So how do you decide whether you need an ESP, or an email service provider, or a CRM, or a customer relationship management tool? Now, you're gonna need a CRM if you've got really, really high volumes of customers. Now, typically that would be volumes in the thousands. Erm, and/or you have a manual sales process where you have to talk to someone in order to make the sale happen. And that talking to them could be face-to-face, it could be on the phone or it could be on Zoom. Whatever. It could be c- whatever online tool that allows you to have an online meeting. And any time you have to speak with someone directly as opposed to them being able to purchase directly from your website, you're gonna need to have something that allows you to, to keep track of what's been happening. So you're looking with the CRM, you're focusing on taking notes to show what you've been saying, what they've been saying, how they've been responding, erm, as you build or maintain that relationship.

Trudy Rankin ([04:49](#)):

And if you're just starting out and your customer numbers aren't massive, erm, or your sales process is one that is, or can be, automated, then you'll be wanting to go with an ESP, or an email service provider. Now, with an ESP, you're still building a relationship with the people on your list, but you're using the ESP to automate everything as much as possible, so it's gonna save you time, and it's gonna make it a much more effective way of, of reaching out to your customers.

Trudy Rankin ([05:18](#)):

So for the purposes of this episode, I'm just going to focus on choosing an ESP, or email service provider. Now, when you're thinking about choosing an email service provider, it can get really confusing really fast, because there's a lot of email service providers out there that you can choose, and they all look like they do pretty much the same thing, and it's true. They do all have very similar functionality, but what's different is how much it costs you to access that functionality, and the culmination of functionalities that you require.

Trudy Rankin ([05:58](#)):

So there are some questions that you need to specifically ask yourself when you're choosing an ESP. So I'm just gonna walk my way through these questions and just explain why they matter, and as I go through them, be thinking in the back of your mind what your business is doing, what it needs, and what you're going to need both now and in the future.

Trudy Rankin ([06:21](#)):

So the first question that you wanna ask is a bit of a double-barrelled question, and that is that how many people do you have on your customer list right now, and how many people do you expect to have in two years' time, based on your current rate of, or plans for, growth? Now, this is going to matter because ESPs typically charge based on the number of people that are stored on your list. Now, the

more you have, the more people you have, the more it costs you, but that cost can vary depending on which ESP you choose. They have different ranges of numbers of people that can be on the list at any one time, and they charge differently based on those numbers.

Trudy Rankin ([07:05](#)):

So the second question to ask yourself is, how many future segments do you expect to have? And by segments, I mean how many different groups of people are there that you want to be able to send customized messages to? So let me give you an example. So for us, erm, we have people who come onto, er, our lists, or, or my list. I have, uh, several different lists. The team and I have several different lists. Who are thinking about changing their career by starting their own business, and another segment are people who are currently unemployed who are interested in starting their own business. And a third segment are people whom we've already helped start their own business.

Trudy Rankin ([07:51](#)):

So you can see that central theme is, or the central thread is, starting your own business. But we have people coming from different situations who are considering doing that, or they've already done it and they're looking for help to actually then grow their business, and the needs of each of these groups is different. So we would say that we have three segments, even though we have s- a similar thread, we have three separate groups of people for whom we want to be able to send differently-worded emails to.

Trudy Rankin ([08:21](#)):

So why does this matter, and why does it matter how many segments that we have? Well, it matters because some of the ESPs limit the number of segments you can have based on how much you're paying per month, and this can create a really limiting situation for your business if you're on an account that only allows a certain number of segments, and all of a sudden you're doing some research and you discover that there's a whole new segment that you really wanna reach out to, and now you have to choose between either paying a bunch of extra money or not reaching out to those people at all. Or spamming everybody on your list, erm, who, so that you can reach that small segment, but putting people off for whom that message isn't appropriate. So you want to be thinking about how many segments you need when you're thinking about which ESP account to choose.

Trudy Rankin ([09:12](#)):

Now, the third question you, you want to think about is, how many emails do you expect to send out each month? Now, when you're first starting out, either getting your business online or when you're just getting started with your online business, this probably isn't such a big consideration, but because you're planning on growing, you do need to have some idea how many you'll eventually get to. So how many emails you'll eventually send out a month.

Trudy Rankin ([09:39](#)):

So what does that mean, how many emails d'you send out a month? The way, er, it... It's just means exactly that. Exactly how many separate, distinct emails do you send out? And what that i- means, or in, h-how to calculate that, is, is that you have to know, first of all, how many people are on your list? How many people are you sending those emails to? And how many times are you gonna send emails? So that gives us an estimate of how much capacity you need. So for example, if I have 100 people on my list and

I'm going to send them one email, um, a week during the month, that's 400 emails that I will have sent during the month.

Trudy Rankin ([10:18](#)):

So you basically take the number of people on your list times the number of times that you're going to email them, and that gives you the number of emails that you're sending per month.

Trudy Rankin ([10:28](#)):

So, ah, fortunately, you know, 400, if, if you, we use my example. 400's not that much. Er, and if the answer to the question, "How many are you gonna send out per month?" is 100... Is, is 10,000 or less, then you're pretty safe in terms of cost. Now, if you're sending more than that, then the cost can go up, depending on the email service provider. So you just do have to pay attention to it, even though it's not such a big deal for right now if you're just getting started.

Trudy Rankin ([10:57](#)):

Now, the fourth question that you do need to ask is, do you need access to templates for creating landing pages or opt-in forms and emails? Now, that can matter because not everybody has got the skills or the coding skills or the creative skills to create beautiful landing pages or opt-in forms or emails. Now, I'm assuming that you know what an opt-in form is, and in case you don't, an opt-in form is basically a form where you ask people to give you their name and email address so that that information will go and sit on your email list. And a landing page is a webpage, or a page on your website, or some other platform, that contains information that people can go to click a link and go to, and read about to determine if they're interested in what you have to offer.

Trudy Rankin ([11:45](#)):

So if you're not a very creative person, or you don't have a lot of time, or you're not somebody who knows how to code, then you're gonna probably be wanting templates to help you create these things. So landing pages, opt-in forms and emails themselves. And every email service provider I've ever come across definitely has templates for opt-in forms and for emails. But when it comes to landing page templates, some of them have lots to choose from, and some don't. And there are a few who don't have any at all. And, and that can be okay, because if you're able to create those yourselves, that's fine. You don't need them. So this one isn't a showstopper if the email service provider you choose doesn't have ema- a landing page template, because there's other ways you can create those landing pages, especially if you're using WordPress or Wix or S-Squarespace, or one of the other website hosting platforms that are out there.

Trudy Rankin ([12:39](#)):

Erm, if your, you know, if your website is one where you can just go in there and create another page, that can become your landing page, and you can just plop whatever on there that you wanted. But if you're not very comfortable about doing those sorts of things and you want to be able to easily be walked through a template and a step-by-step process for filling that template out, you want to make sure that your email service provider does have enough templates to choose from, uh, so you can find one that you're happy with.

Trudy Rankin ([13:08](#)):

Now, the fifth question that you need to ask when you're choosing an email service provider is one that is a showstopper. Erm, if, if it doesn't meet your needs, if, if you can't find something that meets your needs. And that question is, how much of a budget do you have so that you can pay out to have access to an ESP, or an email service provider? If the answer is, you don't have any budget at all, you know, zip, zero, nada, then don't worry, you know. There's a couple of email service providers that will allow you to set up a free account, and that free account may have all the functionality you need. A-at least for a little while. And then, of course, because you're growing your business, once you do outgrow that free account, you should be able to afford the next tier up.

Trudy Rankin ([13:55](#)):

So while budget can, or lack of budget, can be a temporary showstopper when you're looking for an email service provider, it's really important that you consider the other things that I've already mentioned, especially the ability to have segments, when you're making a-a decision about which email service provider to choose.

Trudy Rankin ([14:12](#)):

So those are the five key questions that you need to ask, the five questions that you need to know the answer to so that you can make the right choice for your email service provider. So how many people do you have on your customer list right now? How many do you expect to have in two years' time? That's the first question. How many segments do you expect to have? How many emails do you expect to send out each month? Do you need access to templates for creating landing pages, opt-in forms and emails, or not? And how much of a budget do you have that you can pay out on a monthly or yearly basis for access to your email service provider?

Trudy Rankin ([14:49](#)):

So if you're still confused, I'm not surprised. You know, there's so many kinds of email service providers out there, and each one of them offers different kinds of functionality based on what you need, and they're all at different price levels, of course. Now, I personally use AWeber and ActiveCampaign. My team and I use those two things. Erm, and I've used Mailchimp in the past, but I really quickly outgrew it, and to be honest, it's, it's not my favorite, er, out of the ones that I've used.

Trudy Rankin ([15:18](#)):

But because it can be so confusing trying to figure out which ESP or email service provider to get, my team and I created a free tool that's gonna help you make a choice. And all you have to do is go to this URL, it's onlinebusinessliftoff.com/how-to-choose-your-esp, and there's dashes in-between those words, "how-to-choose-your-esp", and just answer a few questions. And those questions are based on the ones that I've talked about in this podcast episode. Once you've answered those questions, we'll give you a recommendation based on what you've said, and what we know about several of the ESPs out there.

Trudy Rankin ([15:57](#)):

Now, we haven't included all the ESPs. There's too many email service providers out there to include them all, but we have included the ones we've used and the ones that we've read about, and ones that we know exist and are going to be probably the most appropriate for you right now. Some of the ones that are out there are too sophisticated, erm, although in our tool, we have included a couple of those. But we've included ones that we think will be, we, valid for you right now. And we've also included the

ones, you know, the things that we've learned about over the years about email service providers, a, especially as we've taught people how to start their own online business, and we've helped them choose their email service provider, and we've listened to their questions about, well, how do I know which one's the right one?

Trudy Rankin ([16:38](#)):

So to say it another way, this tool uses the questions that I've listed above to filter out the types of email service providers that aren't right for you right now. Now, that doesn't mean that they won't be right for you later. As you grow, you know, y-your-you-your business may very well change, and your needs may very well change, and your, your, your f- the sophistication that you're gonna require is going to increase.

Trudy Rankin ([17:01](#)):

However, it's not something you want to do lightly when you're making a decision, because it can take a lot of work to switch over accounts from one, like, a beginner's email service provider to a more advanced email service provider. You kinda wanna try and get one that's gonna last you at least two years if you possibly can.

Trudy Rankin ([17:22](#)):

So, and I can tell you for a fact that it is a lot of work, because we've recently moved most of my lists for paid accounts on AWeber over to paid accounts on ActiveCampaign, and that was because we now need much more sophisticated functionality than we did three years ago, and we've also upgraded our Online Business Lift-Off program to include AWeber Free instead of Mailchimp, which is what we use to teach people to use.

Trudy Rankin ([17:45](#)):

Now, we used to use Mailchimp because it was pretty much the only relevant e- ah, email service provider that had a free account, and that's what people who are just getting started need. They need something, you know, with... That's not gonna cost them any money so they can learn what they need to learn, grow their business enough so that they can start paying for something. But, you know, so that's why we were using Mailchimp, because it was the only one that had a free, free account. But that's no longer the case, so there is more choice now in terms of free accounts these days, which is, thank goodness, is all I can say.

Trudy Rankin ([18:15](#)):

So my point is, pick the email service provider that's right for you right now, but keep in mind that you should be planning at least two years out, and try to find an email service provider that's gonna let you grow as big as possible for the right balance between cost and functionality, because both of those things matter.

Trudy Rankin ([18:35](#)):

And there you have it, you know. I hope that's been helpful, and I hope that makes it easier for you to make a decision about which email service provider to choose. And remember, the link to the email service provider decision tool is in the show notes. So please be our guest and make good use of it, and in a future episode, I'm gonna talk about how to create a similar sort of decision tool that you can use to help your customers make important decisions for themselves or for their businesses. And if you're

interested in that, make sure you hit subscribe, and I would love it if you'd leave me a review. It's always nice to know that what my team and I do are making a difference for people. So until then, all the best, and we'll see you next time. Take care.

Trudy Rankin ([19:18](#)):

Hey, thanks for listening to the Online Business Launchpad podcast. If you'd like to keep on getting tips and techniques and more things from me, ah, that you can use to help grow your business, please sign up to my email list at westislanddigital.com, that's westislanddigital.com, all one word, and subscribe to the podcast. Catch you later.