

How to Capture Your Customer's Information

Many small businesses capture their clients' information in some way or another.

Some businesses follow the low-tech route, and just ask their clients to fill in a simple form with their names, physical address, email, and their birthdays and anniversary on exchange for some kind of perk (coupons, discounts, etc.).

Other businesses capture the information online; either with a form in their websites, or by using services such as third parties, email, etc.

The nice thing about online capturing is that when customers enter the information themselves there are fewer errors to deal with.

Many businesses do both: online and offline capturing.

However, the badly kept secret in this industry is that very few businesses, even large companies, act upon all that information that they keep on accumulating.

Based on my own experience, many small businesses keep all that captured information in one or more separate silos, such as:

- Paper cards
- Emails (received or sent to customers)
- Invoices from items delivered
- Online information kept on their own website
- Etc.

What should a small business owner do with all that data, and how can they make sense out of it?

The first thing that they should do is to consolidate all the data into just one database.

So how can you consolidate all the data that you have dispersed in many places? Just follow these three simple steps:

1. **OPEN AN ACCOUNT IN [AWEBER](#) OR [ICONTACT](#)**

If you haven't done so, the first step for you is to open an account in one of the main email marketing and auto-responder companies such



as [AWeber](#) or [iContact](#) . There are many more out there but these two have excellent customer reviews (I use [AWeber](#) myself to manage my own email marketing).

By opening an account with either one of these companies, you will be able to easily create, publish, and track email broadcasting, newsletters, surveys, blogs, autoresponders and RSS feeds. If you are not familiar with autoresponders or RSS feeds, you can click on the names to see the definitions.

The price for both companies depends on the size of your list, but it will run you between \$30 and \$50 a month. The lower fee will cover up to 2,500 customers and the higher up to 5,000, with unlimited emails to the list. Both services have similar pricing.

2. CREATE AN [AWEBER](#) (OR [ICONTACT](#)) FORM IN YOUR WEBSITE TO CAPTURE ALL NEW CUSTOMER'S INFORMATION

Once you've opened an account in [AWeber](#) or [iContact](#) (or some other auto-responder system from the many available), the next step is to create a subscription form in these programs and add the HTML code to your page so that all your future customers enter the information there.

This sounds more difficult than it is. Both programs will guide you step by step in the form creation process. If you are not managing your website, ask your webmaster to do it for you, or just do it yourself and give her/him the necessary JavaScript or HTML code that you'll need to add to your website.

Make sure that you give your subscribers some kind of bribe (discount, printable coupon, etc.) so they are motivated to give you their information.

3. CONSOLIDATE ALL YOUR EXISTING DATA INTO YOUR NEW [AWEBER](#) OR [ICONTACT](#) FORM

If you have previously captured any kind of online data, you can export it into an Excel spreadsheet and then import it into [AWeber](#) or [iContact](#).

You should be able to copy the XLS file, open it in Excel in your computer, and



save it as CSV so that it can be imported in [AWeber](#) or [iContact](#).

By default, both [AWeber](#) and [iContact](#) will send an email to your list asking them to confirm their subscription to your list. Although this may look like a hassle, it actually works to your advantage, since only the interested customers will subscribe to your list. In this way, you avoid spam.

PAPER CARDS:

When somebody buys from you, you can include a paper card together with your product. In this card, you can ask your customers for their basic information: name, and email and perhaps their birthdays.

Tell them that they can mail the cards back to you (if you attach a stamp you'll get many more responses) or give them the URL of your website where they can enter the information online (see below). Tell them that you will give them some kind of freebie for subscribing.

A good idea would be to create a short ebook with tricks and tips about how to care for the furniture and to have it always looking like new. Then you can email the people who subscribe a free copy of the ebook.

Once you get the cards, the best solution is for you or somebody from your staff (if you have employees) to access your website, and enter your customer's information by hand as they wrote it in their printed card. In this way, your customer's information will become part of your online list.

Since these customers gave you already permission to contact them, it is OK to enter their information online.

EMAILS:

I'm sure that by now you have accumulated a number of emails to and from your customers with questions, information, etc. Having your customer's emails doesn't give you permission to automatically subscribe them to your list, but you can email them and let them know that they can do it themselves (via your website) and, again, tell them about the advantages of subscribing.

YOUR OWN SITE:

Many businesses' websites already have some kind of subscription form or online reservation system. If you have a way to capture your customer's



information in your site, please ask your webmaster (or company managing your site) to send you a list of the customers that subscribed to your site or booked a reservation. Again, Excel sheet or CSV format are the best to import the data into [AWeber](#) or [Contact](#).

Consolidating your data into one database with mass emailing and auto-responder capabilities is the first step towards implementing a solid email marketing campaign. Check the Online Marketing articles to find out how to use your client's information to promote your business and increase your sales.

Happy selling,
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