

Episode #6: Email Funnels for Non-Marketers

You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is episode number six, and today is all about email funnels, how I built them all wrong for years... well, how I tried to build them, and why it never got done, and how you can avoid making the mistakes I made just by using a simple, backward planning strategy.

Hey guys, welcome back to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast. I want to tell you a story about my failed list-building efforts. Maybe you can relate.

One thing I knew when I started my online business was that I needed an email list. Everyone said so, and being a quick study, I immediately went out and signed up for an AWeber account and then I sat down to create my first opt-in offer.

Several months later, I was still paying for AWeber, and I still didn't have a decent opt-in incentive. Seriously, I paid for that AWeber account for years without it ever earning its keep.

I was completely stuck. I mean, I had some ideas, but even as a newbie I knew they kind of sucked.

I was a virtual assistant at the time, and everywhere I looked I found other VAs offering PDF downloads like "What's a virtual assistant?" or "117 tasks to outsource today" or "How to hire your first VA."

So I created my own version of that, and I called it "Top 6 Outsourcing Mistakes." I just dug it out of my Dropbox archives, and it's actually pretty good, but it had one fatal flaw, and that's where the wheels fell off the whole thing.

See, the whole point of creating an opt-in offer is to get people on your mailing list, but once they're on your list, you have to have somewhere for them to actually go.

In other words, there has to be an end goal.

I thought I had one, but it wasn't enough. I wanted my subscribers to book a discovery call with me, and that's what the call to action is in the PDF, which is a good start, but then what?

If they didn't book from the link in the PDF--and no one did--then they just never heard from me again.

In other words, I had the start of a funnel, but that's it. I knew that the thing I was lacking

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was an autoresponder-which is what we called this email sequence back in the day before we started calling them funnels. So I knew I was supposed to have additional emails going out, but I didn't know what I should be sending.

In the end, I just quit worrying about it, because I had clients and I didn't really care if I had a mailing list or not--and boy do I wish I could go back and do THAT over again, but that's a topic for a different episode.

Anyway, when I quit the service business in favor of becoming a course creator, I knew I had to get super serious about my email marketing, and I knew my previous strategy wasn't going to cut it. I couldn't build a course-based business with less than 100 email subscribers who never heard from me beyond that first welcome message.

So I set out to learn a better funnel building strategy, and that's when I figured out that I needed to begin at the other end of the funnel. In other words, I had to start where I wanted my subscribers to go, not at the top of the funnel where they first are becoming aware of me.

Trying to do it the other way didn't work, because I couldn't see the path forward. But this backward plan made everything much more clear. I could see exactly what needed to happen at each step.

This is the funnel building strategy I've used to grow my list from a couple of hundred to more than 8,000 active subscribers in just a few years. It's what lets me make sales every single day, thanks to a few automated email funnels that convert new subscribers into buyers and buyers into loyal fans.

And on today's episode, I'm going to give you the scoop on how it works, so you can do the same with your email funnels.

Step One: Know What You're Selling

The first step--not surprisingly--is to know what you're selling.

That sounds like an oversimplification, I know, but hear me out.

What I'm saying is that you need to know exactly what you want your email subscriber to ultimately do after they subscribe.

Do you want them to buy a course? If so, which one, specifically? You may have several, so you'll want to consider creating an email funnel for each, or at least for your biggest sellers.

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Or maybe you want new subscribers to hire you. If that's it, then you need to know what exactly you want them to hire you to do. There's a big difference between website design services and social media marketing services. You might do both, but your email funnel can't effectively promote both at the same time.

What if you want them to book a discovery call to discuss your coaching options? If you only have one coaching program, that's pretty easy, but if you offer group and private coaching, or you have month-to-month as well as six-month contracts, you want to think about which program you really want to be promoting to new subscribers in this funnel.

Now if you're saying to yourself, "But Cindy, I have lots of things to sell. I can't just promote one thing in my email funnels." Then I get you. I have 40-some courses and a membership to promote, too, so I totally get it. You want to make sure new subscribers see all the things.

Here's the thing though. When a brand new subscriber joins your mailing list, there's a couple of things going on that you have to keep in mind.

First, this is the most engaged they will ever be. They're opening your email at least half the time--and even more if you do the rest of the steps we're going to talk about really well.

After a new subscriber has been on your list a while that engagement rate will drop to 20% or even less, so you want to make sure you take the most advantage of these higher engagement rates.

The other thing is that they're probably new to you. They don't know you have all of those offers or courses or whatever. They came to you for one thing--which we'll talk about in step three in just a minute--but they came to you for that one thing, and if you try to dump too much on them all at once, they're just going to get overwhelmed.

So keep it to one goal for the first few emails. If they don't buy after that, then you can move them into more general promotions, or just to your broadcast list, but in this funnel, you want to be super focused.

Ok, so you know what you're selling. What's next?

Step two: Know Where Your Buyers Are in the Process

The next step - step two - is to know where your buyers are. And I don't mean where are they hanging out or where are they physically. We talk about that sometimes when we're looking for traffic and you want to get your offers in front of more people, but this is different.

What I mean here is where are they in the process? In my business, I teach people to start

and grow an online business. So for my email funnels I need to know where they're at in that process.

If my funnel goal is to sell my Six-Figure Systems membership, then I want to know where they're at in their business.

Do they have a few course or product ideas and they're working on launch planning?

Are they brand new to business and completely overwhelmed with all there is to do?

Are they ready to outsource so they can scale, but their systems are a mess?

Knowing where my new subscriber is coming from is going to change how I talk to them, and more importantly, it's going to change what I'm offering in the next step, which is about creating an opt-in incentive.

We'll get there in a minute though. I don't want to get ahead of myself.

So here's the question you want to ask about the subscriber you're targeting:

Why aren't they already successful with what you're selling?

For example, if you're a health and wellness coach, why aren't your new subscribers already as healthy as they want to be?

If you teach classical guitar, why aren't your potential students already masters?

If you're a freelance SEO writer, why aren't your potential clients already at the top of the search listings for their chosen keywords?

Answering that question--why aren't they already successful with the outcome I'm selling? Is going to lead right into step three, which is to identify a small problem you can solve for them more or less immediately.

Step three: Identify a Problem You Can Solve Quickly

This is going to be your opt-in incentive, so it's kind of the beginning of your email funnel, and I have three rules for every opt-in offer:

Rule number one - it must be easy to consume. You don't want it to be something they file away for "later" because later almost never appears. You want them to download it or watch it or listen to it or whatever, and to consume it right now, because right now is when they're

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looking for an answer, not next week or next year when they find it stashed away in an overflowing downloads folder.

Ideally, you want it to be something they can at least skim through in 15 minutes or less, so some kind of a checklist, or a template, or a worksheet or even a resource guide that they can take action on--because that's rule number two.

Now, you might be thinking, "But what about webinars and video series and mini-courses or 7-day challenges?"

Those are all valid opt-in offers, but they're a different kind of funnel typically. In this case, we're looking at a very simple email funnel, so we're keeping the opt-in offer simple as well.

Ok - so back to rule number two - it has to be actionable. Remember, the goal here is to solve a small problem for them right away, and in order to make that happen, they have to take action.

And rule number three is that it has to lead them one step closer to paying you. What this is really about is just keeping it focused. In step one you decided what it is you want new subscribers in this funnel to ultimately do or buy, so rule three is just a checkpoint to make sure your opt-in offer aligns with what you're selling.

p with the three rules in mind, you need to choose a problem you can solve, and this is going to be a tiny problem, right? You can't help someone get to the top of the Google search results with a simple checklist.

But maybe you can help them find a reasonably priced keyword research tool with your resource guide.

Or maybe you can show them how to research and outline pillar content to outrank their competitors.

Or you might be able to help them get high-quality backlinks with an email outreach template.

Those are all problems you can solve for them in a very short, easy to consume opt-in offer.

Now you might have lots of problems you can solve quickly, so they way you choose which one is by revisiting where your potential subscribers are in the process. That was step two.

In this case, maybe you know that they already have a blog and they're already doing keyword research, but they can't seem to break into those first page rankings.

If that's the case, then writing pillar content or getting good backlinks might be the solution they need.

Now it's your turn. What's a problem that you can help your ideal customer solve quickly, and what's the best format to make that happen? Is it a checklist or a resource guide or a template of some kind? That's your opt-in incentive. That's what gets them on your list.

The next step then, is to build out the email sequence or your autoresponder emails. To make that easier, I want you to ask yourself three questions. That's step four - get clear on what's missing.

Step four: Get Clear on What's Missing

Now, some subscribers might find your opt-in offer, download it, and immediately take action. They'll book that call or buy that course or hire you for your amazing skills at writing SEO content.

If they all did that though, we wouldn't be here talking about email funnels.

The reality is, most customers need a little more information before they can make the decision to buy, and that's why you--the email funnel builder--needs to get clear on what's missing for them. To do that, you're going to ask yourself:

Number one, "What do they need to know before they're ready to make use of my course or services?" You can think of this like prerequisites for a college class. You won't do well in a computer science class if you don't already know how to do basic math, so you probably wouldn't sign up.

Your customers won't buy your products -- or at the very least they shouldn't buy them -- if they don't have some prerequisites in place. You're going to need to know what those are based on who is in your funnel and where they're at in the process.

The second question is, "What do they need to do or have before they're ready to make use of my course or services?"

This question is referring to tools or resources. In some of my courses, I teach email marketing, and the one thing my students need is an email marketing platform, so I spend some time in my emails talking about the options there.

The last question is, "What do they need to believe before they're ready to make a purchase from me?"

It might be that they have to believe in the process, or in you, or even in themselves.

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For example, your SEO services buyer might need to believe that spending money on SEO is a good investment, or they might need to believe that you're good at what you do, or maybe they need to believe in Google's ability to bring them high-quality traffic.

So again, those three questions are:

What do they need to know ahead of time in order to make the best use of my courses or services?

What do they need to do or have before it makes sense for them to buy from me?

And

What do they need to believe in order to make a purchase from me?

Once you answer the know, do, and believe questions, there's just one step left, and that's to write the emails. If that's where you get stuck--and I know a lot of people do--then I want you to listen up here, because I have some ideas for you that's going to make this step a whole lot easier.

Step five: Craft Emails to Address the Steps

The goal of step five is to lead your subscribers through the know, do, and believe process, and you'll do that in your email sequence with some very specific email styles. It's these email styles that are going to make it easier for you to write them.

Let's say for example that your customer is a niche blogger who's been relying on Pinterest for traffic, and now those numbers are down and she's looking at SEO as a better, more sustainable source of traffic.

She's going to need to know a lot of things about creating SEO content, like how to find keywords, where to use them in her blog posts, what makes a good page description, and what role page speed plays in her overall SEO plan.

These are probably the easiest emails for non-marketers to write, because they're just straight up information with almost no selling involved.

Three tips for writing blog post descriptions Google loves.

Four ways to use images for SEO.

14 hidden sources of keywords you can use today.

You get the idea.

So that's the know piece. Now lets talk about do or have.

How can you write emails that address these needs?

These are what you might call resource emails, and they're very similar to the Know emails we just talked about.

If your subscribers need to do keyword research before they can make use of your services, then you might write about your favorite keyword research tools, or why you think one is the obvious best choice and the others are just weak imposters.

If they need to install a plugin on their WordPress blog, you could demonstrate how to use Yoast or All in One SEO.

If they need images, you could recommend your top choices for stock photos.

Whatever it is they need to do or have in place in order to make the best use of the resources you sell, you can cover in these emails.

Now, you might have noticed that some of these things you already addressed in your opt-in offer. That's a great start, but you can build on that with your email sequence, with each email ticking another know, do, believe box, and moving your subscriber closer to making a purchase.

The last piece is the belief, and you can make sure your readers believe in you or in the process you promote by using things like testimonials, case studies, and industry statistics.

And listen, feel free to mix and match these as well. You might write a case study that talks about how your client used what you taught her about writing good descriptions, and how it helped her break into the first page of the Google search results.

Finally, when you're writing your emails, don't forget the call to action. Since you already know the goal of your email funnel, this part is easy. It's a single paragraph or even just a sentence that says something like, "If you'd like help achieving your SEO content goals, I want to invite you to book a no-cost, no-obligation call with me. On the call, we'll look at your website and how I can better help you increase your traffic and your leads. Click here to book your call today."

That same call to action will work whether you're writing an information email to serve the "Know" step, a resource email to fill the "do" or "have" need, or a testimonial or case study to build a belief in you or in your process.

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You'll want to change it up a bit, so it doesn't get too repetitive, but don't overthink it. Keep it simple, but do include a call to action in every single email in your funnel.

There's one last kind of email that we didn't talk about, and that's the sales email.

So far just about every email I suggested is heavy on the information and very light on the sales piece, and that's fine. The purpose of your email funnel is to lead your subscriber gently to the buy button, not beat them over the head and drag them there.

But not everyone responds well to subtle. Sometimes you have to spell it out for them, and that's when you want to make use of a solid sales pitch.

You can sprinkle these sales pitches throughout your funnel - say one every third email - or you can save it up until the end. It's up to you, but do make sure you include at least one or two for the readers who aren't getting your more subtle clues.

So that's it - five steps to build an email marketing funnel, even if--or maybe especially if--you're not a marketer.

Step one is to get super clear about exactly what you're selling.

Step two is to meet your potential subscribers where they're at in the process by asking the question, "Why aren't they already successful with this?"

Step three is to solve a small problem with an easy-to-consume and actionable opt-in offer.

Step four is to identify what your new subscriber needs to know, do, and believe before they're ready to make a purchase.

And step five is to create a short series of emails to respond to those needs and to pitch your product or service.

Now I want to hear from you. If you've got a tip of your own to share, or you have a question about creating your email funnel, drop me a comment on the show notes page at TinyCourseEmpire.com.

If you're finding value in this podcast, I'd appreciate a rating and review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you're listening, because that helps give the show a boost in the ratings and helps other people find it.

Have a fantastic rest of your day, and I'll talk to you again next week.