

# Eight Free Strategies I Used to Grow My List This Year

You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is episode number eight, and today it's all about list-building. I'm going to give you the inside scoop on what I've done this year to grow my list, what's working really well, and something scary I'm considering trying in the near future.

Hey guys, welcome back and happy Thursday, or whatever day you're listening to this.

Back on episode six of this podcast, I gave you a step-by-step plan for creating an email funnel, from deciding on your opt-in offer to closing the sale with your amazing and timely calls to action.

But those opt-in offers and email funnels are just a tiny part of an overall email list-building plan--something I didn't fully understand when I was just starting out online.

I had heard the advice to create an opt-in gift, of course, and I did it. Not well, as you'll hear in that episode, but I did create an opt-in offer. It wasn't enough though.

It might have been--even bad as it was--if I'd had more traffic, but with just a handful of visits to my site every day, it was clear it would take years to build a meaningful list of subscribers.

I'd love to tell you that I sat right down and made a plan and all my list-building efforts fell right into place.

I really wish I was that smart, but I'm not. It took me a while--years, even--to figure out how to actually grow an email list, and it turned out I was making it much harder than it had to be, so that's what we're talking about today--how to make it easy.

Before we dig into what I do to grow my list though, I want to start off with the things I don't do, and the big one here is paid advertising, which I've never put any serious effort into.

If, in the beginning, I had had the money to throw at Facebook or Google or some other ad network, I might have been able to fast-track my list-building efforts. At the time I was bootstrapping everything, so I just didn't have the budget for it, and honestly, I'm glad I didn't try to go that route, because it's not just about the cost.

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Using paid advertising is more about understanding how to find the right audience on the right network with the right offer so you don't fill your list with thousands of subscribers who won't ever buy from you. Or even worse, so you don't end up spending \$10 or \$20 or even more just to get one new lead.

So like I said, I've dabbled in ads in the past, but it's not something I'm doing now, nor do I have any plans for it in the near future. Maybe someday when I want to put the time and energy into becoming good at it I will, but not right now.

Another thing I don't use is social media. You may not know this, but a couple of months ago I deactivated or deleted all of my social accounts. If you've looked for me on Facebook or Instagram and couldn't find me, that's why.

And truthfully, I never really used social for business anyway. It was always personal connections, so as a list-builder, social media just was never a thing for me.

Now--full disclosure--at the time of this recording, I did just agree to partner with social media app Missinglettr for a 90-day social trial, so if you start to see me popping into your feed on Facebook or Twitter, that's the deal. I'll report back on how that works out for me and whether or not I'm going to continue with it, but up to this point, social has not been a factor in my list-building efforts at all.

Alright, so if those are the things I don't do, how exactly DO I grow my list?

Well, let's talk about the 8 strategies I used in the last year to add about 3,000 engaged subscribers to my list, and I'll let you in on the one scary thing I'm seriously considering that I think might be a winner.

### **Strategy #1: Sell Digital Products**

Ok, strategy number one is to sell things.

You might not think of products as list-builders, but all of the courses, toolkits, and other offers I have do bring subscribers to my list.

It's actually the most critical piece of my list-building efforts, because a buyer on my list is worth far more than just an opt-in.

Of course I don't do this alone. I have to have a way to attract new buyers, otherwise I'd just be making offers to the same people over and over again, and that's not sustainable long-term. And this is what I was talking about when I said I was making it harder

than it had to be. I told myself I needed a list BEFORE I could start selling, but what I really needed was just to get some help from other people, which brings me to strategy number two, which is to partner with affiliates.

## **Strategy #2: Create an Affiliate Program**

Without traffic or a list of my own to promote to, and without money to spend on ads, I had to figure out a different way to get eyes on my products, so I created an affiliate program.

If you're not familiar with the term, an affiliate program--or a referral program as it's sometimes called--is an agreement between you and your affiliate partners that rewards them for sending customers to you.

Obviously, this one isn't technically free, since I do pay my affiliates. But I'm counting it as free for this list because there are no upfront costs. With ads, you have to pay in advance and then hope that you get leads and that those leads turn into customers.

With affiliates, you only pay when they make a sale, so there's no out-of-pocket expense to budget for.

That means for brand new digital product creators like I was, an affiliate program and one or two friends with established lists who are willing to send an email can really kickstart your list-building efforts without causing a big dent in your operating budget.

Back in 2018 when I had just decided to pivot from service provider to product creator, I released my Operations and Marketing Checklist Pack. A friend of mine--Tracy Roberts from Piggy Makes Bank--messed me to ask if she could promote it.

A few days later, thanks mostly to Tracy's emails, I had added 300 new subscribers to my own list.

I get similar results even today when I release a course that strikes the right chord with an affiliate and their audience, so leveraging those relationships is one of the best ways to keep my mailing list growing.

I'm always on the lookout for new affiliates to partner with, and I make it a point to stay in close contact with my existing affiliates as well.

## **Strategy #3: Partner With Others**

I partner with other business owners in different ways, too, and that's strategy number three.

One new thing I was invited to try this year was an email swap with Debbie Gartner, the Flooring Girl. We both agreed to give away an entire course for free to the other's email list.

I'd never done anything like this before, and I didn't quite know what to expect, but I was very pleased with the results. If I recall correctly, this one added around 300 new subscribers to my list.

The key here is to partner with someone who has a similar audience, but where there's not a lot of overlap in subscribers. It wouldn't make a lot of sense to do an email swap with someone who shares 80% or 90% of your list, for example, because then you're not bringing in new people.

## **Strategy #4: Participate in Bundles and Giveaways**

By far my biggest list-builder of the past several years is strategy number four, and that's participating in bundles and giveaways.

Let me explain how these work in case you're not familiar with them.

Bundles and giveaways are actually two different things, but I'm lumping them together because they're similar when you use them as list-builders.

How a bundle works is that someone is the host, and they invite course and product creators to donate a product, which the host then bundles them all together and sells access to all the products for a small fee. Then when a customer buys the bundle, the host provides instructions for them to get access to all of the courses or products or software or whatever. The customer can then choose whatever they want from the bundle, and get access to it just by opting in to the course or product seller's list.

A giveaway works exactly the same way, except the customers don't pay to get access, they just opt-in to the giveaway host's list in order to gain access to all the goodies in the giveaway.

Now, you might be wondering why on earth I'd give away a course just so someone else can either sell it or give it away, so here's the appeal.

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When you participate in a bundle or giveaway, you also agree to promote it. So for example, over Thanksgiving each year, I participate in the Feast of Education event that Cathy Demers of BusinessSuccess.com hosts. As a participant, I'll email for that event several times, and so will all of the other course creators who are a part of it, and so will Cathy. Together, our combined lists total somewhere in the hundreds of thousands, which means lots of buzz about the event, lots of opt-ins, and potentially, lots of new subscribers for everyone who participates.

You can think of it is a great big list swap.

Some of the best have been BC Stack, which this year added around 700 brand new subscribers to my list, and Ultimate Bundles, which brought me another 400 subscribers, and of course Cathy's Feast of Education.

Of course, not all of them have been winners, and I'm a lot more selective of the events that I take part in these days, mostly because my marketing calendar is almost always full. Also many of the bundle and giveaway offers that come across my desk share my existing audience, and it makes more sense to focus my limited promotional time on getting in front of new audiences instead.

I still think it's a great strategy though, and if you have a few products already available, it's one that's easy to implement.

There's just one problem, and that's finding them.

People ask me all the time how to find good giveaways, and I wish I had a secret weapon to share with you. Often you won't hear about events like this until it's already happening and it's too late to throw your hat into the ring.

There are some annual or even more frequent events like BC Stack and Ultimate Bundles that you can apply to, and I'll post the links to those in the show notes.

Another thing you should do though, is let your business friends know you're looking for events to participate in. What often happens is that those who are hosting events will ask for recommendations from their participants for other people who might be interested, so by putting the word out, you're inviting people to share your contact info with event hosts.

And, once you are in one or two higher profile giveaways or bundles, you aren't going to have to go looking for bundles to participate in, they'll come looking for you.

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You might find that some of the giveaway event organizers ask for a participation fee. That makes this a not always free option, and in the past I've been against this pay-to-play model, especially since I'm driving a not insignificant amount of traffic to the organizers' list as well. In other words, they're not doing it out of the goodness of their hearts. They're growing their own email lists, too.

That said, I find it IS worth paying in some cases, when the participant list is one that's beneficial to be associated with.

### **Strategy #5: Speak at Virtual Events**

Ok, on to strategy number five, and that's speaking at virtual events such as telesummits or on webinars.

In the past year, I've spoken at Cathy Demers' Business Success Cafe, Lisa Atkinson's Blogging Success Summit, Tawnya Sutherland's VA Virtuosos event, and many others. I also present webinars with affiliate partners.

Not all of these were winners, to be honest. Some resulted in only a handful of new subscribers, but list-building--even though it's the focus of this episode--is not the only benefit of speaking.

Maybe the biggest draw is just in building brand awareness. The more places you can be seen, and the more "as seen on" credits you can earn, the more opportunities will come your way.

It's easier to land an interview spot when you can point to other interviews you've done. Event hosts pay attention to other events and use their speaker lineup as a directory of sorts when they're looking to fill their own speaking schedule. And you just never know when a future customer is in the audience.

### **Strategy #6: Create More Opt-In Offers**

Creating more opt-in offers is high on my list-building strategies plan, too, and this one comes in at number six.

Opt-in offers, or lead magnets, don't have to be big, involved things. Just the other day I was talking to a client who told me that on a recent video by the team at Thrive Themes, they recommended spending no more than an hour creating any one lead magnet.

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That's some advice I can get behind, because I think a lot of times we overthink these things and they end up taking us far longer than they're worth. It's a lead magnet, not a plan for world peace. Get it done and get it out there, and then make another one and another one and another one.

One of my favorite opt-in offers to create is what's called a content upgrade.

That's where you create an opt-in gift or freebie specific to a piece of content. For example, if you go over to the show notes for this episode--you'll find them at [TinyCourseEmpire.com/8](https://TinyCourseEmpire.com/8)--if you go there and scroll to the bottom of the show notes, you'll find a freebie that I made just for this episode.

It's a checklist of different ideas you can use to grow your own mailing list, and because it's specific to this episode or this content, it's a content upgrade.

I love content upgrades because they let you really segment your list. If you drop your name and email into the form in the show notes for this episode, for example, I'll already know a couple of things about you.

I'll know you're a podcast listener, which is awesome. Thank you for that.

And I'll also know you're interested in list-building.

Knowing those two things lets me tailor my content and my emails just for you. Pretty cool, right?

So not only am I growing my list, but I'm doing it in a way that allows me to offer more value to you, which in turn creates better engagement, and better engagement means fewer unsubscribes, which helps my list keep growing.

Make sense?

### **Strategy #7: Make My Lead Magnets More Visible**

But here's the thing. The best lead magnet in the world won't do you any good at all if no one sees it, which is why my seventh list-building strategy is to make sure my opt-in offers get seen.

If you go to my site at [CindyBidar.com](https://CindyBidar.com), you'll see opt-in forms in the sidebar on the blog, in the header, at the top of the home page, and what's known as a welcome mat or overlay, which is a full-page pop-up that shows up when you first land on the page.

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I may even have some pop-ups on select pages, but to be honest, I don't use those much.

The point is to give potential subscribers lots of opportunities to grab something of value and get on my list.

Remember that just because you're aware of an offer, not everyone has seen it, or maybe they saw it, and--like I do--immediately reached for the little "x" to close the form so I could finish reading the article.

Honestly, I can't tell you how many times I've seen something intriguing on that form just as I clicked to close it, and then couldn't figure out how to get it back so I could opt-in.

Once, I started to think that I hadn't heard from a particular marketer for a while, and I missed his emails. I thought maybe I had unsubscribed, so I went to the site to find an opt-in form, and I couldn't even find one. I had to message him to get back on his list.

Now, most people are not going to go to that much trouble just to get on your email list, so make sure you give them lots of opportunities to see your opt-in offers and to take action if they want to. Don't make them work for it.

### **Strategy #8: Email Consistently**

Ok, last one, and this one isn't so much about getting the opt-in as it is about building relationships.

See, there's more to list-building than just driving sign-ups. It's equally important--or maybe even more so--to engage with subscribers after they opt-in. That means a consistent email schedule is a must for me.

When I used to email sporadically, and sometimes not for weeks or months at a time, every email I sent resulted in a flurry of unsubscribes and spam complaints. That's just because people went so long without hearing from me that they forgot who I was or why they subscribed in the first place.

A consistent email schedule is the best way to prevent that, and by consistent, I mean at least weekly. You don't have to mail six days a week like I do, but you should be sending something every single week.

And along with a consistent email routine, a regular list clean-up routine is helpful as

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well. Every other month or so I do a search in Active Campaign for anyone who hasn't opened or clicked any email or visited my website in 90 days or more, and I unsubscribe them.

That, combined with consistent emailing, helps keep my open rates high, and higher open rates sends a signal to email providers like Gmail that I'm not a spammer.

So there you have it. Eight things I did in the past year to grow my list, and that you can do as well.

- Number one: Create and sell digital products or courses.
- Number two: Create an affiliate program and get other people to help you sell your products and courses.
- Number three: Partner with other business owners in different ways.
- Number four: Participate in bundles and giveaways.
- Number five: Speak at virtual events.
- Number six: Create more opt-in offers
- Number seven: Give your website a generous sprinkling of opt-in forms so your site visitors have plenty of opportunity to join your list
- Number eight: Email consistently and keep your list clean and engaged

And I promised you I'd share one thing I'm considering, and that's placing a course up for sale on AppSumo.

If you haven't heard of AppSumo, they're a marketplace for digital sellers. They have a huge audience, and some pretty big companies have launched on AppSumo with great results.

Now I said I'm considering it--and let's face it, I'll probably go for it--but it's a scary thing to put yourself out there in front of tens of thousands of Sumolings, as the AppSumo fans are called. They can have pretty high expectations, so I want to make sure whatever I offer over there really overdelivers.

I'll keep you posted on how that one works out.

In the mean time, I'd love to hear from you.

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Head over to the show notes for this episode at [TinyCourseEmpire.com/8](https://TinyCourseEmpire.com/8) and tell me what list-building strategies are working for you right now, and what you'll do in the future to add more subscribers to your mailing list.

I can't wait to hear what's coming up for you.

Have a terrific day everyone. I'll talk to you again next week.