FARMER STUDIO — RESOURCE

Email Marketing Guide for Local Businesses

How to build, maintain, and write an email list that actually drives revenue — without needing expensive tools or a marketing team.

EMAIL MARKETING MARKETING GUIDE

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Email is the most underused marketing channel for small and independent businesses. Social media gets more attention and more anxiety, but email consistently outperforms it — typically generating £36 for every £1 spent, compared to much lower returns from equivalent social media investment.

The reason most small businesses don't prioritise it is that building a list feels slow and writing emails feels difficult. This guide addresses both.

Why Email Works Better Than Social Media

You own the list. If Instagram changes its algorithm tomorrow and stops showing your posts to your followers, there's nothing you can do about it. If your email list is stored in a spreadsheet or an email platform, you have a direct line to those customers regardless of what any platform decides.

People who subscribe have opted in. A social media follower may have tapped Follow because they liked a single post. A person who gives you their email address is signalling genuine interest. The average engagement rates for email (30–40% open rates for small local businesses) are far higher than social media reach.

Email drives action. When you have a new product, a promotion, or an event, an email to your list produces more immediate and measurable results than a social media post.

Building Your List

Start Where the Trust Already Exists

Your first email subscribers should come from people who already have a relationship with your business:

- **Current and recent customers** — ask if you can add them when they purchase
- **Enquiries that didn't convert** — they were interested enough to ask
- **People who follow you on social** — ask them to sign up for "exclusive updates" or early access
- **Business contacts** — if they would genuinely value what you send

Never add anyone who hasn't given explicit consent. It's a legal requirement under UK GDPR, and more practically, a list of people who didn't ask to be on it performs poorly and damages your sending reputation.

Add a Sign-Up Mechanism

- A sign-up form on your website (every email platform provides embeddable forms)
- A paper sign-up sheet at your physical location
- A QR code on printed materials linking to your sign-up form
- A checkbox on your order form or booking confirmation

Give People a Reason to Sign Up

"Sign up for our newsletter" is weak. Be specific about what they'll receive:

- "Get our seasonal menu first"
- "Be first to know about limited releases"
- "Monthly tips for local food producers"
- "Early access to event tickets"

Choosing a Platform

For most small businesses, start with one of these:

PLATFORM	BEST FOR	FREE TIER
Mailchimp	Beginners, small lists	Up to 500 contacts
Klaviyo	E-commerce businesses	Up to 250 contacts
MailerLite	Budget-conscious, clean interface	Up to 1,000 contacts
ConvertKit	Content creators, freelancers	Up to 1,000 contacts

Start free. You will not need a paid tier until you have a list worth paying for.

What to Send

The Welcome Email

Send this automatically when someone subscribes. It should:

- Thank them for signing up
- Deliver on whatever you promised (the discount, the guide, the early access)
- Tell them what to expect and how often
- Give them a reason to reply or engage

Welcome emails have the highest open rates of any email you'll ever send. Make it count.

The Regular Email

Aim for **one email every 2–4 weeks**. More frequent is fine if you have something genuinely worth saying; less frequent and people forget they signed up.

What to include:

- **News**: what's happening at the business, new products, upcoming events
- **Value**: something useful — a recipe, a tip, a recommendation
- **Story**: something that lets them understand the people behind the business
- **One clear action**: what do you want them to do after reading?

The Promotional Email

When you have a sale, an event, or a product launch, send an email. Be direct about the offer. Include a clear link. Keep it shorter than your regular email.

How to Write Emails People Actually Read

Write to one person. Even if 1,000 people are on your list, write as if you're writing to one specific person. Use "you" not "subscribers." Imagine someone sitting across from you.

Short subject lines win. Under 50 characters. Curiosity, specificity, and self-interest all work. "New on the menu this week" outperforms "Check out our exciting new summer menu additions!"

Get to the point. The first line should be interesting enough to justify reading the second. Don't open with "I hope this email finds you well."

One ask per email. Every email should have a single primary call to action. More than one dilutes everything.

Send at the right time. For consumer businesses: Tuesday–Thursday, mid-morning. For B2B: Tuesday–Wednesday, 8–10am. These are starting points — test what works for your specific audience.

Legal Requirements (UK)

Under UK GDPR and PECR:

- You must have consent to send marketing emails (explicit opt-in)
- Every email must include an unsubscribe link
- Your business name and postal address must be in the email footer
- You must honour unsubscribe requests promptly
- You must not sell or share your list without consent

All reputable email platforms handle the unsubscribe mechanics automatically. The consent and address requirements are your responsibility.

Measuring What's Working

The three metrics that matter:

Open rate — the percentage of people who opened the email. A healthy rate for small local businesses is 30–45%. Below 20% suggests your subject lines need work, or your list has gone stale.

Click rate — the percentage who clicked a link. 3–5% is solid; above 5% is strong. Low clicks with good opens means the email content isn't connecting with the call to action.

Unsubscribe rate — ideally under 0.5% per send. Higher than this indicates you're sending too often, the content isn't what subscribers expected, or the list quality is low.

Don't obsess over the numbers — focus on sending consistently useful, honest emails and the numbers will improve naturally.