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FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS NETWORK TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT CONTRACT (FEWS NET TSC)

EMAIL LIST TOOLS: WHITE PAPER

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CONTENTS

- USE CASE**..... 1
- OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATION TOOLS** 1
 - Product Feature Grid..... 2
 - MailChimp Overview 3
 - Constant Contact Overview 3
 - Vertical Response Overview..... 4
 - Emma Overview 4
- RECOMMENDATIONS**..... 4

Use Case

FEWSNET regularly sends a number of products via e-mail to various people at different times. Recently, FEWSNET representatives have expressed issues in working with their current email lists. The total number of subscribers consists of roughly 750 individuals, and challenges can arise with spam filters when sending to lists of this size. FEWSNET seeks an online, hosted tool that can manage their mailing lists (and sub-lists) and serve as a place to post product documents.

Email marketing tools, while they appear to focus primarily on product marketing, can serve more broadly as effective list management and email newsletter tools to manage organizational communication. Email marketing tools eliminate the need for office employees to manage bounced emails and unsubscribe requests and prevent emails with critical information from getting stuck in spam folders. Overall, they provide the ability to design email newsletters, segment subscribers for targeted communications, and view reporting on subscribers' habits. In addition, these tools often allow for newsletters to be archived for future reference.

The process for sending emails via an email marketing tool:

- Create lists via upload or manual entry (must only be completed once)
- Segment lists for targeted emails
- Create new email or choose from available templates
- Upload and attach documents (see feature list)
- Select sub-lists or individual subscribers
- Send the email

Overview of Collaboration Tools Reviewed

An abundance of email marketing tools exist to assist businesses, non-profits, and other organizations and agencies in communicating with their constituencies. The four tools highlighted here (MailChimp, Constant Contact, Vertical Response, and Emma) are some of the most common tools and have received positive reviews in online ratings.¹

¹ http://www.idealware.org/articles/fgt_email_newsletter_tools.php
<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/218199>

Product Feature Grid

Tool Name	Cost per month*	Inbox Acceptance Rate	List Import	Segmentation	File Hosting	Spam Filter Analysis	Reporting
MailChimp Mailchimp.com	\$15	96-99%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant Contact Constantcontact.com	\$30	97%	✓	✓	✓***	✓	✓
Vertical Response www.verticalresponse.com	\$28	98%	✓	✓	X	X	✓
Emma Myemma.com	\$30**	98%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Pricing is the monthly cost per subscriber, based on 750 subscribers, unless otherwise noted. Prices do not include promotional offers such as contract discounts. See the description of each tool for more detailed pricing information.

**Pricing for Emma is per email, not per subscriber. Quoted price is for up to 1,000 emails per month (assumes 1 email per subscriber)

***Available for an additional \$5 per month

MailChimp Overview

Priced at \$15 per month (for 501-1,000 subscribers) or \$0.03 per email with the pay-as-you-go plan, MailChimp is a user-friendly, intuitive email marketing tool with well-designed templates, effective reporting, and responsive support. The tool offers a free version for up to 2,000 subscribers for users that are willing to go without some features.

MailChimp boasts an abundance of features, though so many options may cause some users to waste time and energy on features that are not crucial to their specific purpose. Still, some are relatively unique and may be useful for FEWSNET's purpose. Users can create emails in Outlook and "beam" them to MailChimp, therefore using the tool primarily to manage the subscriber list. The auto-translation and "Time Warp" (send communications at the same time of day in different time zones) features may be of use for communicating with subscribers in different parts of the world. Finally, "Comments" allow subscribers to respond to the communications they receive.

Like similar tools, MailChimp integrates with social media sites and blogs, offers the ability to create surveys, includes an auto-responder, and can format-test newsletters in different email programs to ensure that the email looks nice for all recipients. It also provides a permanent URL for archiving purposes. It offers reporting functions for counting the number of emails sent, opened, bounced, unsubscribes, and the number of clicks on embedded links, all of which can be tracked by country. It also provides subscriber activity reports. MailChimp integrates with Google Analytics for further traffic-related analysis.

Constant Contact Overview

Constant Contact is an established name in the field of email marketing. It is priced at \$30 per month for 501-2,500 subscribers, though pre-pay discounts are available for 6-month and year-long subscriptions. While Constant Contact offers free image hosting (for a limited number of images), users must pay an additional \$5 per month for MyLibrary Plus, through which they can store additional photos and files. The tool also charges \$5 extra per month for archiving services. These hidden fees serve to make the tool one of the less attractive options.

It offers useful templates and good coaching and technical support, segmenting, and reporting. Conversely, the tool is not intuitive, which may provide challenges in terms of adoption and day-to-day ease of use, and some users have experienced difficulties with its spam filters.

A useful and unique feature is that of anti-spam checker flags, which runs each email through a system to check for common instances in which the email may be stopped by an email's spam filter. Another interesting feature is the inclusion of "forward-to-a-friend" links, which allow subscribers to easily send the content to others. Of course, this may or may not prove useful for FEWSNET, depending on whether the products shared are classified or not. If so, this feature may actually prove to be an impediment.

Like other tools, Constant Contact integrates with social media tools and blogs and offers an auto-responder feature. While users cannot preview their messages in different email programs, all of their templates are format-tested. The tool's reporting consists of tracking emails opened, bounced, links clicked on, social media statistics, and list growth.

Vertical Response Overview

Vertical Response is another popular email marketing tool, available for \$28 per month for 501-2,000 subscribers, or for \$0.015 per email with their pay-as-you-go option. While MailChimp users primarily pay in monthly subscriptions, Vertical Response customers typically use the pay-as-you-go option. As with Constant Contact, pre-paid discounts are available for 6-month and year-long subscriptions.

Vertical Response is known to be a reliable, sophisticated tool with high ratings for deliverability, segmentation, and integration. However, users have reported the interface to be overly complex and have mentioned that the templates are not as polished as those of its competitors. Overall, Vertical Response seems to be a solid, standard option for email marketing.

As with other tools, Vertical Response integrates with social media. Unlike other tools, the company charges for its survey feature. Its reporting tools offer information on the number of opened emails, link clicks, bounces, unsubscribes, and social media statistics. As with MailChimp, it integrates with Google Analytics.

Emma Overview

The advertising marketing tool Emma bases its brand on a foundation of being “stylish.” Unlike its competitors, Emma’s pricing model is based off of the number of emails sent, not the number of subscribers in the user’s lists. If FEWSNET sends one email per month to each of its users, it can expect to pay \$30 per month (up to 1,000 emails). For two or three emails per subscriber per month, FEWSNET can plan to spend \$45 per month. Emma offers two promotions: the first 60 days are free and yearly subscribers save 10% per year.

Living up to its brand, Emma is known for creating attractive templates and also offers strong integration and segmentation. It includes surveys and forms with a regular membership and includes a free online version of each email for archiving purposes. Like its competitors, Emma’s reporting includes the number of opened emails, clicks, sign-ups, and social media statistics.

Recommendations

Overall, we have determined that MailChimp is the best email marketing tool for use by FEWSNET. While its many features are not all necessary for FEWSNET’s purpose, some of them are unique and may prove both relevant and useful, like the automatic translation feature. MailChimp also has the full list of features required by the use case and is the least expensive of the options.

While Emma also has the full range of features required by the use case, its pricing model can get expensive quickly. However, if FEWSNET is not planning to send more than a few emails to each subscriber each month, Emma is the best alternative to MailChimp.

Constant Contact also has the capacity to provide the full range of necessary features; however, we are not recommending it for two reasons. First, not all costs are included in the stated, up-front price. Archiving and file storage are add-ons at an additional fee. Second, users have expressed concern with the tool’s intuitiveness and spam filters.

Finally, Vertical Response, while a solid email marketing tool, does not offer two of the features critical to the use case: file hosting and spam filter analysis. Additionally, only images can be hosted by Vertical Response.