

Find the E-Mail Marketing Service

Best for You

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Detailed Comparison of E-Mail Marketing Providers

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About the Author

Ricki Steigerwald is the owner and operator of [Office Animation](#), an educational resource for Internet businesses, and [Just2Technical](#), a web support service company.

Ricki has over thirteen years of experience with web technology. After completing her Bachelors in Business Administration at S.U.N.Y Buffalo, she worked for seven years with two major IT firms in many roles including web developer, project leader and process improvement coordinator.

In 2003, Ricki opened a virtual assistance business as *The Time Tamer*. Over the years, she re-affirmed her love of technology and now specializes in maintaining the web presence of her clients.

Office Animation assists clients with web sites, blogs, shopping carts, and e-mail marketing campaigns.

One of the most common questions asked by her colleagues and clients is “What e-mail marketing provider should I use?”

Her clients use many different e-mail service providers and shopping carts. She knows the pros and cons of each service because she uses them to send e-mails and integrate them with her clients’ web sites, blogs, and social networks.

Ricki has summarized her findings in this report that is available to you.

You can reach Ricki at <http://VirtualMsFixit.com>.



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Introduction

First of all, there is no **one perfect solution** for running your e-mail marketing campaigns.

This report compares the strengths and weaknesses of each e-mail marketing service allowing you to decide which service is best for you. The services we recommend give you the **most versatility, have a proven track record, and frequently introduce features** to allow you to stay competitive as the Internet matures.

Labor costs to maintain a list in Outlook are high.

Is \$20 per month for a service really that expensive?

Why Use an E-Mail Marketing Service?

Many small businesses have an e-mail list and send messages out through Outlook using distribution lists or just sending messages to all their contacts.

They handle subscribe and unsubscribe requests manually.

Here are the cons to a manual system.

- Labor costs are higher than to use an e-mail marketing system.
- Manually keep list up-to-date.
- Not instantly processed.
- No instant feedback to people who just subscribed or unsubscribed such as “thank you for subscribing” and “you have been successfully unsubscribed”.
- Possible privacy issue. If you use To or CC to list your subscribers, each person can see all the email addresses on the list. Even using BCC for your subscribers is not 100% safe.
- Lack of readership statistics.

An e-mail marketing service handles the following:

- Compliance with CAN-SPAM law
- Add new subscribers by having them fill out a form on your website, social network page, blog, etc.
- Add new subscribers by having them click on a link in your e-mail signature.
- New subscribers get instant feedback such as “thank you for subscribing”.
- Statistics on who is subscribing and unsubscribing as well as who opened your message and clicked on the links.

Double Opt-In or Single Opt-In

A single opt-in process does not require contacts to verify the e-mail address is valid and that they want to be a subscriber.

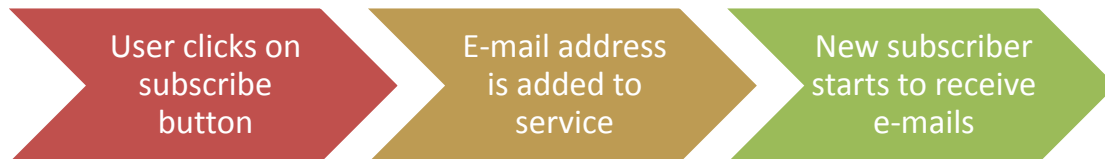


Figure 1: Single Opt-In Process

The double opt-in process is where a confirmation e-mail is sent after a person fills out a subscribe form. The e-mail contains a link the contact needs to click on in order for them to start receiving e-mails.



Figure 2: Double Opt-In Process

Privacy Laws and Double Opt-Ins

Privacy laws such as CAN-SPAM do not require opt-in for people who fill out subscribe forms or click on “subscribe links”. The act of a person clicking on a subscribe button and submitting their contact information by free will is enough as your e-mail marketing service tracks the IP address, date and time of subscription.

If you do not use double opt-in for contacts you import or add manually, you must maintain records of when they gave you permission to add them to the mailing list.

It is much easier to have contacts confirm their subscription through a double opt-in message as all records are maintained in the same place.

What are the advantages of using Double Opt-Ins?

- Ensure compliance with the United States CAN-SPAM Laws as well as some other International privacy laws by maintaining logs on the method, date and time subscribers gave permission for you.

- For those moving to a new marketing service, double opt-ins remove contacts who are not actively reading your e-mails.
- Increase your delivery rate by removing invalid e-mail addresses (e.g. mistyped addresses)
- Reduce spam complaints because the contact has physically opted-in to receive messages from you.
- Double opt-in message gets a contact used to seeing your e-mails.
- Most contacts whitelist your e-mail address and/or selects to permanently display your images if your double opt-in message shows up in their Junk Folder.
- Higher open rates.

Different Types of E-Mail Messages

There are several different types of messages you can send with an e-mail marketing service. Several services now offer surveys as well and will track the results for you.

Broadcast Message

An e-mail message such as a product announcement or newsletter that gets sent at a specific date and time to a group of contacts.

Examples: product announcement, newsletter

Autoresponder

One or more messages that get set at a certain time interval based on how long a contact has been subscribed.

Examples: 10-week e-mail course, 30-day satisfaction survey

Blog or RSS Broadcast

Automated e-mail messages of new posts in an RSS feed from a blog or other RSS source. A message is only sent if there are new items in the feed.

Examples: E-mail notification of new blog post

Moving to a New Service?

This section is for those readers who currently have an e-mail list and are using an existing e-mail marketing service.

Prior to moving, you need to make a major decision. Do you want to move?

Major decision factor: Have your current subscribers re-confirm their e-mail address and re-affirm they want to receive your communications. [AWeber](#) and 1ShoppingCart require that email addresses you import into the system must confirm their email addresses to stay compliant with CAN-SPAM.

[iContact](#) does not require this.

WHY DOUBLE OPT-IN WHEN YOU MOVE TO A NEW SERVICE?

PROS	CONS
You reduce the size of the list to active subscribers because they manually needed to click on a link.	You have less total subscribers on your list after the move.
Your statistics such as open rate will significantly increase.	You cannot resend confirmation messages after you import a list due to CAN-SPAM.
Your subscribers usually whitelist you if the message ends up in the spam folder after the move.	Your subscribers must click on the link in the confirmation e-mail message.

Never move to a new service without informing your subscribers that it is occurring.

There is a good possibility that the first message will end up in the spam folder and they need to white list your address again because it comes from a new source.

Our Top Choice

AWeber

[AWeber](#) is all about **control** which is why I highly recommend it. It is also a company that continues to add features without increasing the subscription price.

You can choose the date and time of your message delivery for broadcasts, blog broadcasts and autoresponders. This allows you to automatically distribute messages when your contacts are most likely to check their mail and have time to read it.

You have the ability to integrate [AWeber](#) tightly with Paypal, shopping carts like 1ShoppingCart and member site applications like Wordpress Wishlist and AMember. This allows you to create an automated sales cycle.

For example, when a person purchases your can have Paypal or your shopping cart send [AWeber](#) the standard notification message. [AWeber](#), after you set it up, will automatically add the person to your mailing list and send them a double opt-in message. Furthermore, you can set [AWeber](#) up to automatically remove a contact from the prospect list when they are added to the customer list.

Other notes:

- New contacts that you add manually or import must confirm their subscription through a double opt-in message.
- You can choose whether you want subscribers through a web form should receive a double opt-in message or not.
- Over the five years that I have used [AWeber](#), they continue to add new features every couple of months. *Their latest feature is the ability to set the day and time autoresponders are sent.*



Allows for Most Automation

Integrate s with many shopping carts, Paypal and member sites.



Messages Delivered at Best Time

Select day/time for all messages, even blog broadcasts and autoresponders.



Improved Open Rates

Split testing and required double opt-in of imported contacts.

Other Recommended Companies

iContact

[iContact](#) is a mini contact manager and e-mail marketing tool integrated into one.

Unlike most e-mail marketing services, at [iContact](#) a contact record includes company name, phone numbers and postal address.

It is the solution we recommend to clients that absolutely must import records without double opting in.



Import Contacts
without double opt-in



Broadcast Blog Posts
immediately or periodic digest



Multi-List Forms
Users choose lists they want

- Lower start-up price
- Easy-to-use interface
- You can choose whether to add contacts without confirming their subscription with a double opt-in message.
- You can create a web form with multiple lists for the subscriber to choose from (i.e. Product Announcements, Newsletter, etc.)
- Additional features include blog broadcasts, a basic survey feature that works like SurveyMonkey
- Because users can import contacts without a double opt-in, there is some spam abuse by users which could impact deliverability.

Other Services Reviewed

1ShoppingCart

With [1ShoppingCart](#), you have the functionality of a shopping cart as well as rudimentary e-mail marketing features.

[1ShoppingCart](#) is a shopping cart first and foremost – an e-mail marketing service second. For a complete e-mail marketing solution it is best to combine it with another provider's service such as [AWeber](#).

[AWeber](#) can add a contact to a list by having [1ShoppingCart](#) send [AWeber](#) the notification e-mail.

Here is a list of other observations.

- E-Mail Messages are sent via a [1ShoppingCart](#) address with “on behalf of <your name>” behind it.
- Multiple e-mail domains are used depending on the mail server your message goes out on.
- Imported and manually added contacts will be sent an opt-in message with a confirmation link.
- New contacts that purchase a product through [1ShoppingCart](#) do not need to be double opted-in.
- As of August 2009, e-mail templates are available. You can upload custom email templates as well.
- Test messages take approximately 10 minutes to arrive in your inbox because they are queued with all e-mail marketing messages.
- No blog broadcasting is available.
- The autoresponder system is complex because it fully incorporates the messages with the sales process.

At first glance, 1ShoppingCart looks like a cost savings because it has some e-mail marketing features included.

However, it requires more labor which may be more costly. Missing features (like blog broadcasts) require a person to setup and send a broadcast message from 1ShoppingCart as well as create a post on the website or blog in order to reach the largest audience possible.

1ShoppingCart is a ecommerce solution first, an e-mail marketing system second.

The e-mail marketing features are very limited.

MailChimp

[MailChimp](#) has many of the same great features as [iContact](#), but is newer and some of the features such as the blog broadcast are constrained as far as the time of delivery.

- Low start-up price
- Easy-to-use interface
- You can choose whether to add contacts without confirming their subscription with a double opt-in message.
- The ability to add contacts who make a purchase with Paypal or other shopping carts.
- Blog broadcasts can be sent as daily, weekly or monthly digests, but cannot be sent instantly after a post is made.

Constant Contact

[Constant Contact](#) provides the core functionality expected of an e-mail marketing service. However, they are not recommended because of the following:

- You can choose whether to add contacts without confirming their subscription with a double opt-in message.
- The web form sign-ups are difficult to implement. You can create only one web form with their wizard.
- The e-mail template wizard incorporates a user's company logo and makes it easy to add content by a novice.
- It's missing features such as blog broadcasting and 3rd party integration.
- They tend to charge you extra when they add functionality such as Surveys and Image Library.

Vertical Response

Features that are standard with other services are missing with [Vertical Response](#):

- You cannot send autoresponders nor can you send blog broadcasts.
- You can choose whether to add contacts without confirming their subscription with a double opt-in message.
- Because users can import contacts without a double opt-in, there is some spam abuse by users which could impact deliverability.

Find the E-Mail Marketing Service Best for You

Comparison Chart

Pricing	AWeber	iContact	1ShoppingCart	Constant Contact	Vertical Response	Mail Chimp
1. Cost per Month for 500 Subscribers	\$19	\$11.90	\$29	\$15	\$10	Free
2. Cost per Month for 2,000 – 2,500 Subscribers	\$29	\$24.65	\$29	\$30	\$28	\$30

Subscription Process	AWeber	iContact	1ShoppingCart	Constant Contact	Vertical Response	Mail Chimp
1. Is a contact that fills out a web form required to double opt-in?	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
2. Must contacts I import or add manually double opt-in?	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
3. Can I create a custom opt-in message for contacts I import or add manually? ¹	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	--
4. Can I use a custom confirmation page?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Can I use a custom Thank You page?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ⁴	Yes	Yes
6. Can I use a custom Already Subscribed page for contacts who try to re-subscribe? ²	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
7. Can I use a custom error page (ie. invalid e-mail address)?	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
8. Can I create a web form that allows subscribers the option to select more than one mailing list to subscribe to?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
9. Can I create more than one web form with service's wizard?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No ⁵	Yes	Yes
10. Can I create custom fields?	Yes	Yes globally	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
11. Are the contact's address, phone number, and company name fields available? ³	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

¹ If not, the service uses the default opt-in message of the mailing list you are adding the contact to.

² Example of use: You can send these subscribers to a special page where they can re access the free report they get when they subscribe.

³ If not, you can use custom fields to create these.

⁴ You can designate a custom thank you page through custom HTML code.

⁵ Constant Contact only allows you to create one web form through their wizard, however, you can create multiple forms for your websites if you know HTML.

Find the E-Mail Marketing Service Best for You

E-Mail Editor	AWeber	iContact	1ShoppingCart	Constant Contact	Vertical Response	Mail Chimp
1. Can I create both a Plain Text and HTML message?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Are HTML e-mail templates available?	Yes	Yes	Yes ^{NEW}	Yes ²	Yes	Yes ³
3. Do HTML templates incorporate company logo?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
4. Can I paste from a Word document into the editor? ¹	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
5. Can the service add a "Forward to a Friend" to message?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
6. Are test messages sent right away?	Yes	Yes	~ 10 mins.	Yes	Yes	Yes
7. Can I attach a file to the message?	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
8. Can I upload message images to the service	No	Yes	No	\$\$\$	Yes	No

¹ Microsoft Word adds a lot of unnecessary code for formatting. Many services clean this up for you.
² Constant Contact has a great template structure. They use a "block structure" where you select a particular block such as "table of contents" and just edit its contents – which is great for technology challenged users.
³ MailChimp allows you to import your custom e-mail templates and save them. It also has a easy to use template design wizard so you can create your own newsletter online. So, unlike other services, you can select your saved template instead of copying an old e-mail.

Broadcasting Features	AWeber	iContact	1ShoppingCart	Constant Contact	Vertical Response	Mail Chimp
1. Can I select the specific date and time a broadcast message (newsletter) is sent out?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Can I send an autoresponder message?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
3. Can I select the specific time of day an autoresponder message is sent? ¹	Yes ² ^{NEW}	No	No	No	--	No ⁴
4. Can I send a blog broadcast message?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes ⁵
5. Can I create a branded template for a blog broadcast?	Yes	No ³	--	--	--	Yes
6. Can I select the day of the week and time a blog broadcast is sent?	Yes	No	--	--	--	Some ⁵
7. Can I select how many minimum new items in the feed need to be available before a blog broadcast is sent?	Yes	No	--	--	--	No

¹ Most services allow you to set the interval (ie. 10th day), but not the time of day to send it.
² AWeber allows you to set specific days of the week and times you want an autoresponder and blog broadcast to be sent. This allows you to ensure that any e-mail message lands in the contact's Inbox at a time when it will be seen immediately.
³ iContact allows you to format a blog broadcast message, if you choose not to automatically send the broadcast. You can manually update each message.
⁴ MailChimp sends its autoresponders at 8:30 pm EST.
⁵ MailChimp does not have instantaneous delivery of new feed items. It only gives you three options (everyday at 8 am, Mondays at 8 am or 1st of Month at 8 am).

Find the E-Mail Marketing Service Best for You

Available Statistics	AWeber	iContact	1ShoppingCart	Constant Contact	Vertical Response	Mail Chimp
1. Can I get a report automatically e-mailed to me on a periodic basis?	Yes	No	No	Yes Weekly	No	No
2. Do you offer visual charts and graphs of your statistics?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes ¹
3. Do you offer reports that display changes over time? <i>Examples: monthly subscribes/ unsubscribes, open rate of last 10 messages</i>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Limited	Yes
4. Do you offer a report that displays the geographic location of a contact?	Yes based on IP Address	Yes if postal address captured	Use Postal Address	No	Use Postal Address	No

¹ MailChimp has some basic statistics included in its membership. They have an in-depth analysis tool that costs extra.

Advanced Features	AWeber	iContact	1ShoppingCart	Constant Contact	Vertical Response	Mail Chimp
1. Do you offer a survey feature? ¹	No	Yes	No	\$\$\$	Yes	No
2. Do you have shopping cart features? ²	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
3. Do you offer split testing? ³	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
4. Can I send to a message to a sub group of my mailing list based on a custom field or other criteria? ⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
5. Do you offer list automation? ⁵	Yes	No	Some	No	No	No
6. Can I add contacts from 3 rd party applications such as a shopping cart, member site or Paypal automatically to my mailing list? ⁶	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	Yes
7. Is there social network integration?	No	No	No	No	No	Twitter

¹ Most survey functionality is rudimentary. The survey is not included in the message. Contacts access the survey through a link similar to Survey Monkey.

² With any service, you can place a Paypal or shopping cart link by cutting and pasting code you generate in your shopping cart.

³ Split testing is where you to create two message layouts and the service randomly sends either format out and gathers open and click through rates. This allows you to see what format gets you better results.

⁴ You could send to a subgroup of contacts with most services if you create a new mailing list and add the contacts to it.

⁵ An example of this is if a contact is placed on a "purchased a product" mailing list, automatically remove him or her from the "prospect" list.

⁶ Some services can add contacts to a list if you send them the e-mail notification generated by the cart.

Resources

Here are some good resources for getting more information about e-mail marketing.

- Learn-About-Email-Marketing.com, a blog with articles, tools, and industry trends on e-mail marketing.
- Learn-About-Member-Sites.com, a blog with articles, tools and industry trends on paid subscription sites.
- AWeber has a great blog with tips and trends relating to e-mail marketing.
- Wilson's Web Marketing has some great e-mail marketing articles. They release a report on industry statistics annually.
- Wishlist Member, a Wordpress plug-in that allows you to create a paid subscription site.
- Yaro Starak has some great programs about making money on the internet. Entrepreneurs-Journey.com is his blog.
- iStockPhoto. Add visual impact to your e-mail messages for \$1 per image (x-small size is all you need).