EMAIL MARKETING
BASICS FOR
VIDEO GAMES

by CHRIS ZUKOWSKI

The 87 Emails You Must Send to Make Players Crave Your Games

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For more information

I post a blog every other week about indie game design and marketing.

To find out when my next post goes live, and get special tips that I don't published anywhere else, subscribe to my mailing list:

https://tinyurl.com/zukowskimailinglist

Intro

You may have heard that you need to start a mailing list. And you did it since you are a diligent game maker looking for any opportunity to get the word out about your game. But now what? What do you send the folks who signed up? How is this any different than twitter? Don't people hate SPAM?

I know it is confusing. I was an independent game designer with a number of games that nobody bought. I was frustrated with the process, so I spent a lot of time digging into how other independent creators (like self-published authors, software developers, and musicians) market their projects. I listened to hundreds of hours of podcasts and read countless articles and books. Over and over I found that each industry made email marketing the core of their business. Looking back at indie game developer marketing, I was amazed that we have not adopted any of these concepts. So, I thought I would write this book to bring back what I learned. I have tried many of these but not all. Always test and verify to make sure it works for you. And after you try them, please let me know how they go for you.

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About Email Marketing

Email marketing is the single most powerful way to connect with people who love your games. Social media has a broad reach but it is not personal like an email. Furthermore very few people actually click the links that you send out through Twitter and Facebook because they are inundated with so much other content. People do, however, click links when sent via email from someone they know.

Because email marketing is so powerful it should be the backbone of your company's marketing strategy. At every opportunity you should encourage people to sign up for your mailing list. It is the primary way that you will get people who purchased your first game to purchase your second one.

You need to treat your email list like it is the fan club of your studio. You should share news first here. NEVER have a sale without telling your mailing list first (to do so is like not inviting your best friends to a party.) Respect your list, these are your true fans..

The following list details all the different types of emails that you need to send. I broke it up into sections pertaining to the tasks and phases of your campaign. At the least you should be sending 1 email to your list every 2 weeks. Your goal is to keep in the minds of your subscribers.

Getting people to join your list

Some people put a little text box at the bottom of their website that says "Sign up for my newsletter." A slim percentage of folks fill that out. There is just nothing to entice them to fire their email address into the black hole of the internet. Instead, you need a slight incentive to get them to give you permission. This giveaway is called a "lead magnet." Basically they send you their email, then you send them back a downloadable freebie. The gift is theirs to keep (even if they immediately unsubscribe).

Here are some basic ideas of things you can give away in exchange for their email address.
- A pdf art book of the your game's concept art
- The original sound track
- Digital maps of your games
- A detailed walkthrough of your game
- A free game. Maybe this is a jam game or a back-catalog game that doesn't sell as well anymore.
- From within an existing game, give them access to special areas or characters

I have tried several of these lead magnets but, in my experience, the most effective way to entice them to join your list is to add your email signup within your existing games. For example in my game Return of the Zombie King I gave them a secret password that permitted the player to access a bonus level that gave away tons of coins.

Glossary

Auto-responder - A feature that will automatically send out emails in a sequence that you configure. You basically write a bunch of emails, line them up like dominos, and then when the trigger is sprung (like a player signs up for your email list) the emails start coming on your defined schedule. Any basic email service will have this.

Double-opt-in - An email list setting where once a user gives you your email address, your Email Marketing Service sends a second (aka double) email asking the user if they did indeed want to subscribe to this list.

Email Automation - See auto-responder.

Email Marketing Service (EMS)- A company that manages your list and the sending of emails for you. Examples are MailChimp, AWeber, ConvertKit, or Drip. I do not go into which one is best in this book. Just make sure that the one you pick supports email automation, some form of segmentation, and doesn't charge by the email but by the number of subscribers. Note that Gmail and Yahoo are not an Email Marketing Services, they are email providers.

Lead-in-Game - This refers to the game you released that has the built-in email signup form.

Lead Magnet - A modest digital gift you give players in exchange for their email address. For example, you might have an offer on your website "I will email you a free game, just tell me where to send it."

Segment - A way to divide your subscribers into buckets based on their behavior. This will allow you to send specific messages based on their needs. For instance you might segment them by game they have purchased or by how long they have been subscribed.

Welcome to the list

This first set of emails are sent as soon as someone types their email address and pushes that "Subscribe" button. These are pretty standard stuff but important because they are the first things your customers will see from you.

1) **Confirmation email** - This is the standard email that is sent out when the customer signs up. It is a super simple email that says "Did you mean to subscribe? Y/N" and when they say "Y" it officially adds them to the list. This might seem like an extra hurdle that could turn away subscribers and seems like something you should disable. DONT! You MUST send this confirmation email. It is required as part of anti-spam laws. Subscribers must consent to receiving email from you because it is marketing. You must follow the rules to stay on the right side of the law and prevent getting banned for sending SPAM. This opt in also increases the overall percentage of people who open your emails because only someone truly interested in your content will take this extra step.

2) **What you promised them** - This email is triggered automatically when the subscriber consented to join your email in the previous email. It is a very simple email that just contains a link to download whatever give-away you promised. Keep it simple and don't even try to sell them anything. Just give it to them. Note: to auto-send an email when a user subscribed is a feature that is configured on your email client. You should not do this manually for every subscriber.

3) **Confirmation of Freebie** - A day or two after you send the email with the give-away, send a second email that just checks in to make sure they downloaded the lead magnet. The point of this email is just to remind people that you delivered what you promised but it secretly has a second goal. It shows you are attentive, true to your word and really care about them.

Onboarding sequence

After you sent them the lead magnet and confirmed that they received itb your next goal is to "warm up" this new subscriber. You need to turn them from someone who randomly found you or your game into a raving super-fan who knows all about you, your studio and your games. You do this by sharing your backstory and why you do what you do.

As I mentioned in the previous section, all EMSs have a way to configure emails to automatically be sent based on timed events. All of the following emails are staged so they are sent to the user every couple of days. Tuning the schedule is different for every studio based on the message. Test it a lot to get it right.

The purpose of the onboarding sequence is also to get a new customer to catch up with all the development you have done over the years. Think of the onboarding sequence as similar to when everyone is talking about a show that you have not watched so you spend a whole weekend binging all the previous seasons so you can be all caught up. These automation sequence emails are that binge session.

All email sequences will cause some people to unsubscribe. That is OK. If you are telling your story well the people who unsubscribe would have never been your fans anyway. It is better to get them out of the way early than to keep trying to convince them otherwise.

4) **How is the water**? - This occurs a day or 2 after your confirmation of freebie. It is very conversational, plainly written email. You just ask them how they are enjoying that free thing you sent. If they signed up for your list through a game that you made, you should also ask how they are enjoying your game.

End this email with a simple open ended question. Something along the lines of "How did you find my game?" or "What is your favorite game genre?" Many people will respond to this because it is a question that came in their inbox. ALWAYS, ALWAYS respond back. Even if you just say a simple "Glad to hear it, let me know if you need anything more." That simple gesture is the start to a long relationship with your fans. You want them to know you are just a regular person that is on the other side of the emails. I have had many fans reply to my quick one-sentence response utterly SHOCKED that a real person read it and a real person responded.

There is one more reason why you do this. Gmail will move emails out of the "Promotion" tab and into the "Primary" tab if an email is responded to. Your simple question and response makes Google think you are a quality marketer and not a spammer.

5) **Free Tips** - This just what it sounds like. It is an email with tips about your lead-in game that got them to your list. Don't try to sell them anything here. You just trying to build good will at this point. This is like a second gift after your lead magnet. You can send multiple tip emails after several days. Make the subject really catchy too such as "Need help beating level 3?"

6) **Introduce players to your community** - A few days after your tip, send them links to your forums, your Discord, or even any subreddits that are for your games. Make it personal, like you are inviting them. This is like another giveaway because you are providing them with customer-provided support. Still not time to sell them anything.

7) **Tell them your Story** - Explain your studio, who you are, and who makes your games. Most game studios let the games press tell their story. This is a missed opportunity. Instead tell your own story here. Include a photo of yourself and team, where you work, and how you got into game development. Don't be afraid to make this a long email. If they are interested they will read it.

8) **You might like my other games** - Here it is. Your first official sales pitch email. The purpose of this email is to introduce the player to your other games and where they can buy them.

We waited quite a while before sending this one. We wanted to build goodwill and set the stage for it first. If the player has read all your previous emails and still subscribed, there is a pretty good chance they are in for the long haul now. This is where the real power of email marketing comes in: it gives you a chance to automatically sell your back-catalog and generate hundreds of game sales that would have never been there without it.

To prevent this from sounding like a sales pitch write the email like is part of the continued history of your studio. Something like "Then in 2014 we released our most ambitious game to date… <your game's title>. It was our watershed game and really put us on the map. The press loved it, our fans loved it. It is a game about … You can download a copy here <link to store>" See it isn't overly pitchy. You are just telling someone about the best game you ever made and some background about it. You can spread a history of your games across several emails. Maybe every other day you tell about another game and the production backstory behind it.

9) **Remind them to review your game**. You told your back story and they stayed subscribed. You told them about your other games and they stayed subscribed. They really like you. Now it is time to really ask them for their help. You should ask them to submit a review on the app store they bought the lead-in game from. When your game has a lot of reviews it tells the store that this is a quality game and it increases your chances to get featured.

To get them to review you must be honest and not overly pushy. You must tell them exactly why they should review: Tell them a bit about how the app stores determine the game's relevance based on reviews and that players do too. Let your reader know that one of the most helpful things they could do would be to leave a review. At the bottom of the email provide a short but detailed instruction (with pictures) on how they review your games for the platform they bought it on. Then provide a direct link to where they do the review.

10) **Ask them to join the Street team** - Your email list is made up of fans of your work. But there is an even more devoted sub-group who would do anything they can to help you and evangelize your games to the rest of the world. This sub-list is typically called a "street team." They are so special I wrote a whole section about the emails you need to send them. See the section titled "**Street team**" for more.

To get someone to join the street team sub-list, you must first lay out the work that is expected of them (beta feedback, quick reviews, reddit upvotes.) You also sell them on the benefits (early access to every game you make, direct channel feedback to the creators, their name in the special thanks section of the game's credits).

If the person responds yes, send them a link to sign up for the street team. Emphasis that this is really an honor and is by invitation only.

11) **Why do you hate me?** - This is a very difficult email to write but is very necessary to make sure your list is addressing your fans. If you have a bunch of people on your list who stay subscribed but never open the emails you need to find out why so that you can fix the problem. It also is to unsubscribe people who just aren't paying attention. It is important that your list only contains people who consistently open your emails because if your open rate is too low you can be flagged as a spammer.

For this email, write a subject that says "Why do you hate me?" or "Do you still want to hear from me?" and send it only to people who have opened less than 10% of your emails. Be honest in the body and describe what your studio is about and ask them how you can make your games better, what price they typically buy games and how you can earn their business. You sometimes get some hard to read but helpful responses. If the person doesn't respond, remove them from your list.

Post Auto-responder

After a subscriber has made it through all the autoresponder emails you configured, they are now automatically thrown into the general population of your email list. Typically if you write a one-off email it only goes to the subscribers in the general list and will not be sent to people still going through the auto-responder sequence. The following sections describe emails that are one off and not part of your auto-responder sequence.

Humanize your studio

So many indie devs try to make themselves sound legit by calling themselves "a studio" when really they are two guys working part time on their game. Don't hide. Be true to who you are and show that you are a real person, not a bland studio. You can put these emails in as part of your auto-responder or just send them out when you are feeling like you haven't told your list about yourself in a while.

12) **A profile of your studio dog / pet** - Just be sure you also include pictures.

13) **What are your personal influences** - For any artist I adore, I always like to see their influences because it allows me to find additional art I might like. Telling your fans what games influenced you also gives them a chance to bond with you. Maybe you both like the same obscure Commodore 64 strategy game. You would be surprised by how many responses this email gets.

14) **What got you into games** - Think of this as your origin story. What was the first game you made (even if it never got released)? Every video game fan has a dream game idea even if they never make it. Hearing your story is very interesting to them.

15) **What tools you use and how are games made** - People have a pretty good idea how paintings, films, and music are made, but very few know what mysterious process goes into making a game. Keep this article jargon free but link out to the software you use and what it is used for. List drawing tools, engines, IDEs, and programming languages.

16) **The time you screwed up** - You can't always be awesome and spectacular failures make for great stories.

17) **Ask Me Anything -** Send an email telling your fans that you want to do a Q&A session with them and to respond with anything they have always wanted to know. It can be about anything: design process, what the last game you played was, how to beat level 3. Again, the bonus side effect of polling your audience is that their responses tell Google's algorithms that you are legit and not a spammer.

18) **Results of Ask Me Anything** - A week after you solicited questions from the Ask me Anything, send out your responses. You can also run a Reddit AMA and include the best questions and answers in this email.

19) **Your birthday** - Instead of asking for gifts, I like to give things away to my list on my birthday. I always discount my games for this day and send out an email telling them such. It is just another way to show goodwill and that I am a human.

20) **Twitch** - Send out your streaming schedule and mention what you stream.

Grow your list

You can use your list and your devoted followers to in turn promote and grow the list itself.

21) **Tell a friend** - Tell your followers that you are going to randomly select 5 new followers and the person who recommended them a prize. Make it a Steam gift card or a copy of a real game. Encourage them to send friends the special sign up link and to specify who referred them.

22) **Actually show who the winners are** - you want people to know even if they didn't win that you did what you said you would. Even show a video of you calling the people on skype that they won.

Document the development

The main reason why people join your list is because they want to know when your next game is coming out. They also like to see progress to have an idea of how the game development process works. So take this opportunity to make your fans feel special and to give them a behind scenes look.

Since you need to bring value to your mailing list, it is important that you publish this info exclusively to the mailing list. Don't turn around and provide the same info to your Facebook fans. Instead, you should use Facebook and Twitter to tell them to join the mailing list to see it. Always lead with spoiler tags, but make sure you still make it general enough for your list. You don't want them signing out if they want to save the surprise for when your game releases.

23) **New game announcement** - always always tell your mailing list about your game before you tell any of the other marketing channels. You want them to feel special and like they are one of the cool kids. This is the whole reason why they joined your list. They want to hear when you have something new. Give them unique background details about your game (think DVD commentary type trivia). After you have sent this email, then you can announce it to social media.

24) **A deep dive on your next game's mechanics** - You can tell if your marketing is doing its job when your audience plays your game in their head before it comes out. One way to accomplish this is to send out a series in which each email details how a different game mechanic works. It should be like reading the instructional manual. That way, when your true fans play your game they are already primed to how the game works and don't have to go through that awkward learning phase.

25) **A short story setting up the backstory -** If you are making an RPG, this is excellent to include. RPG creators love writing long lore dumps. Go crazy here by writing a short story setting up the world or characters.

26) **Show your design documents -** Include sketches, storyboards, maps.

27) **Introduce each character** - Show their art, list their backstory, and what motivates them. If it is a fighting game also include their moves list. As a kid I spent more time studying the moves of Street fighter II than actually playing it.

28) **Introduce weapons** - If it is finalized, send them the spreadsheets of all the weapon types and their stats. Why not let them pour over the details so they are ready when your game comes out.

29) **Concept art** - Always a fan favorite. You can also include several different resolutions so that people can set them as their desktop background. Don't forget to include the name of the game in the art so that random passer-bys can see what game this is for.

30) **Show the trailer** -Show this to your mailing list before you share it with the rest of the world. You want your list to be fell exclusive so say something like "please, this is embargoed don't share with anyone." This sly gesture makes them feel like they are on the same team as you. You can even ask for feedback and possibly make it better before you launch it worldwide.

31) **Final Icon, final banner image** - People love to see this stuff and if you share it only with the mailing list. Don't share this stuff on Twitter. You have to make it exclusive to the list

32) **The intro cutscene**. Show this before your game is out and people will actually watch them instead of wanting to skip them when the game is in their hands.

33) **Tutorial** - Before launch, I love giving as much instructional and background information as I can. That way your fans know how to play your game on day one and have a better experience.

Get feedback

One of the keys to any business is to really understand what your customers want. A game that does not fit the market will not succeed. Because you have a mailing list, you have a direct line to all of your biggest fans. Use this connection to get feedback and suggestions from them. Be careful though because your fans are not game designers so you can't take what they say literally. To protect yourself from this, listen to what problems and feelings your fans have and ignore what they say about how to implement the change. It is up to you to design the solution to address their likes and needs.

34) **Get basic ethnographic information** - It is very helpful to understand who makes up your audience. Are they young? Old? What country do they come from? Gender? It is also helpful to find out what websites they read, what other games they enjoy, and what else they do for fun. To do this, setup a google survey and then send them a link.

35) **Ask them which forums they post in** - this is a good way to get your fans to post good stuff about you. You need to know where they live and play because there are probably people similar to them on these forums and they don't know about your games yet. Start posting to the forums that are most popular with your list and make sure to tell them about it so they can bump your post and provide positive comments.

36) **Which game should I make next?** - I have so many game ideas it is hard to know what to work on next. Send an email describing 3 concepts and possibly some early concept art to your most die hard fans (folks who open over 75% of your emails) and ask them to vote on which one they like the best. I did this once thinking that I would get an even 33% split of all games. However I was surprised that the design I considered the weakest got a clear majority of the votes.

37) **Ask them to pick their favorite marketing materials** - Your icons and screenshots are the most important marketing materials because they must catch the eyes of customers in a fraction of a second as they scroll through the store. Test your designs by sending the list 3 options. Ask the list to pick one. You don't have to tell them the results, or even whether you chose the design they picked. But it is a very clarifying data for something that is difficult to judge on your own. You will be surprised how much one is prefered over the other.

38) **One question survey** - A survey doesn't have to be a multi-page, complex set of questions. You might just need the answer to one question. The tone for this email should be very conversational like "Hi <customer name> I was thinking of doing x or y. Which would you do?" One tip to get more responses is to share the results with your list (even the people who didn't vote) and then ask, "Yesterday everyone said X was the best. Was this the choice you would have gone with?" Chances are those quiet folks will respond back this time.

39) **Randomly invite a couple folks from your list to a 1x1 conversation** - Quantitative data is the raw numbers you get from surveys. But there is also qualitative data which cannot be measured but is useful for explaining the reason behind the data you see. Qualitative data comes from talking to users and having a deeper understanding of context. A few times a year email a few random people from your list, explain what you are doing, and that you want to chat so you can better understand your community.

I know, this can be awkward and hard if you are introverted. Try this to make this go down easier: preface the meeting as a chance to play a co-op game with your community. While playing with them, slip in the questions you are curious about. Even if the conversation doesn't flow as you would like, you will have had a good time playing a video game.

Street team

The street team is like a special forces unit that you can deploy in creative and extremely potent ways. These folks are part of a separate, much smaller, and more exclusive mailing list that is made up of your most fervent fans.

To get fans onto your street team, at the end of your automation sequence (see the Onboarding sequence section) you send an email that asks if they would like to join. To be accepted they must promise to beta test your game, give feedback, leave reviews of your games. In return they get special perks like mentions in the credits, early access to your games, and a direct line of communication to you. You must be very strict and if they are not holding up their end of the bargain kick them out. It has to be something special to be on the street team so that you can ensure cooperation.

Now that you know what a street team is, these are the emails you should send them.

40) **Please review my game** - Send out this email as soon as your game goes live on the store. Also do not specifically tell them to give you 5 star reviews. Ask them to review honestly. Also, DO NOT give them promo codes for the game when you ask them to review because Steam and itunes will not count their reviews. Tell them this and explain to them why you will not give them a free copy of the game even though you appreciate all their hard work.

41) **Tell your favorite streamer** - A good streamer listens to their fans. If you have a street team you can get them to ask their favorite streamer to play your game.

42) **Thanking them for what they do** - Your street team is the tip of the spear for the rest of your fans. They are there for you. Don't ever take them for granted. Remember to thank them post launch.

Launching a new game

A mailing list was built for game launches. If you have a well-run mailing list and a good street team, you are going to kill it on launch day. Most app stores are tuned for normal game launches and expect a slow trickle of player reviews and downloads. When you deploy your well-trained mailing-list army, the sudden flood of reviews and downloads can actually trick the app store algorithms to think your game is much bigger than it actually is. Stores will commonly give it special features and promote it in the "hot" game sections. Launch days are why you are building this list. Here is how to take advantage of it.

A few days before

43) **Sequel download** - If your game is a sequel, send out a link to the original. You should also put it on sale. Your email should also give the backstory and a refresher on the characters. Think of them as the "Last time on…" clips that plays before any new episode of a TV show.

44) **Tell them to add the game to their wishlist** - When your game launches, Steam will send anyone who flagged it. Make sure they are ready.

45) **Tell them about special bonuses for your game** - A week or so before launch, tell your list the pricing and incentive plan for your launch so they are totally clear as to what to expect. For instance, if you are planning to increase the price by a dollar every day, tell them that. You might do special promotions like being available online to play multiplayer with lucky fans who bought the game. Just be absolutely clear with them.

Week of launch

Launch day! It is the most terrifying and exciting day as game developers. I could write a whole book about launching your game (which I will do some day) but I am going to focus on the emails you need to send.

The secret to selling anything is you need to exert pressure through scarcity (classically: limited time offers) However, most games are digital and therefore are infinitely reproducible. There are a few ways you can create scarcity: limited sale price, special developer access, and special unlockables that are only available during the first week. Whatever way you chose to add scarcity, you will need to communicate it with fans.

46) **It is live -** As soon as your game is available for purchase, send a link to your list. Don't include a long description or a big sales pitch (the week leading up to launch should have done this already.) You just want them to hammer on that buy button as fast as possible. Make sure there is a clear call to action of "Buy this game."

47) **Follow up -** Halfway through the sale period, send an email only to people who have opened your email but didn't click the "Buy" link (your EMS will tell you this). Remind the list that the sale will only last X more days.

48) **Please tell a friend** - Recommendations from friends is the number one way to sell anything. Harness this power by encouraging your email followers to recommend it or gift it.

49) **Last chance -** On the last day of your sale week, just 24 hours before the sale ends, send this email to everyone. Make it clear if they miss this, they miss the special price.

50) **Last 8 hours-** 8 hours before the sale ends, send a final email to the folks who have not clicked the link of any of your previous emails. Tell them that this really is the end.

I know it might sound ridiculous to send all these "last chance" emails but this one email is always, by far, the most profitable of all my previous emails. The "fear of missing out" is a real thing and you have to appeal to the procrastinators out there.

51) **Review appeal -** Getting lots of quality reviews for your game is essential for attracting new players. It is even more critical to get these reviews during the first week when you will have the most attention from people who don't know who you are. To get reviews, send a totally honest appeal telling readers the nuts and bolts of how the app store business works and this is actually more important than paying for your game. Think public radio and PBS pitches. Another tactic that helps make this request over better is to include funny or heart-warming reviews that your game has already received.

Post launch

52) **Wrap up thank you** - After the sales are over and the spike of initial sales end, send a big thank you letter summing up what happened. Say that this launch couldn't have happened without your email list and tell them how much you appreciate their reviews. Also send them links to great reviews you got, funny let's plays, and any other good media. The purpose of this email is to increase the bandwagon effect.

53) **Patch notes** - No launch goes without bugs. You can turn this into a positive email if you say that you are making changes because of feedback from the mailing list. Because, most likely, they were the ones who found and reported them. Also, make patch notes fun to read. In the list of changes you include with the patch notes, don't just say "bug fixes." Describe each bug, credit who found it, and make it funny because bugs are kinda funny.

Limited time events

If you are going to a conference or will be visiting a city to promote your game, be sure to let your email list know.

54) **Lead up** - Two weeks before your trip, give them your plans. Ask if anyone else will be there. If you get enough responses, consider scheduling a meetup.

55) **During the event** - Give details of where your booth is. Give a schedule of events like talks or special demos.

56) **Trip report -** Post trip, write up a mini travel log. If you met any email list readers, mention them (with their consent of course). Include photos.

Sales

Other than your launch window, sales are the next biggest time to expose your game to new players. Therefore, activating your mailing list is just as important. This is also a time to sell to people from your list who didn't buy the game at launch. The general flow of emails should be very similar to the emails you sent during launch week.

57) **Advanced warning**- If you are not embargoed (Steam seasonal sales won't let you pre-announce) warn your list of the upcoming sale. You want to make sure nobody buys just a few days before it goes on sale. This act of goodwill can make your list appreciate you and want to stay on the list.

58) **Countdown to sale over** - These emails are nearly identical to the set of emails you sent during launch week when you were reminding the list that the sale was almost over. Remember, your most sales will always come on the last email you send. Everyone waits for the last minute.

Long tail

Your back catalog of games is your biggest resource and I don't think indie game devs are utilizing them to the fullest. An email list fattens the tail because you can expose people who joined the list for one game to all your other titles in a timely and targeted way.

59) **Dredge up an old classic** - Write a long email about one of your older games. Profile one that was released before many people joined your email list. Target the list who may not have been on before that game launched. Almost pretend like you are launching the game again. Sell them on all the great details, the good reviews, and awards it got.

60) **Write about a success story** - Danger, don't make this a blog post and your email list is not your RSS feed. Don't send out every blog you wrote. Especially about game dev - your audience isn't developers. They are players. Most don't want to hear about it all. But people like to read about successes for your games. It makes you human and if your list pushed you to success tell them. They can cheer along with you.

61) **Restate your studio mission** - Write up your mission statement and punctuate it with the games that demonstrate this. Tell how each game supported your mission and what you liked about it. Talk about your journey in a personal and uplifting way. Always include links back to the store to buy the games.

62) **New content** - Adding levels and new characters can get you store attention but it can also excite everyone who already bought the game or who was merely interested but never pushed the buy button. Send emails detailing the new content and a link to buy.

63) **Remember when** - On the one year (two year, even five year) anniversary of your game's release, send out an email about it. Talk about all the patches and new content you added and remind people of the good press. Tell them what that game did for you. Did it change your life after release? People may have joined your list well after its initial release or people had meant to buy it but never did.

64) **Chatty developer** - If you do a talk or a podcast, link to it. Even if it is esoteric and about game development, it is good for fans to hear it so they can know what your voice sounds like and your personality.

Give away stuff

An important aspect of email marketing is not to be constantly selling to your list. The rule of thumb is for every email that you send asking for them to buy something, you should send three emails giving away things. This is referred to the Give-Give-Give-Ask or the Jab, Jab, Jab Right Hook.

Giving things away on email is a bit difficult. To give you an idea of what I mean here are some examples:

65) Concept art sized to several resolutions to support desktop wallpapers.

66) One or more tracks from the game's soundtrack.

67) A comic of the game's story.

68) Images of your main characters and enemies sized to be forum and Steam avatars

69) The game's intro cut scene cinematic shared only with the mailing list .

70) An interactive fiction (IF) story set in your game's universe. Most commonly you can make an easily readable IF in the online service TWINE. Make sure to set the story permissions so only subscribers can access it.

71) High quality maps of your games. Even if you have a 2D game you can make long screen diagrams like Nintendo Power did.

72) Cheat codes.

73) An advanced strategies guide containing secret combos, and secret passages.

74) Papercraft kits of your characters. They can print it out and make your characters.

75) A story bible. It is all back story about your characters. Or it at least tells the backstory of the game.

76) A raffle. You get 3 cool things based on your budget - a gift certificate, a game, even a game console. Then tell your list if they are subscribed then they can win. Then do a live drawing on your twitch channel or some other network you are trying to promote. Then hold the drawing and send it to them. Tell them to get their friends to subscribe too.

77) Special holiday greetings - the Beatles would send out Christmas albums which had short christmas message to their fans. It had carols, skits, and thanks to loyal "Beatle People" It was mailed free to the British fan club. Do something like this but stuff that is a) relevant to your holiday b) relevant to your game.

Cross promote

If you have a large list and another developer with a similar type of game and similar audience has a large list there is an excellent opportunity to cross promote with them. Done properly, both you and your cross-promote partner will get more downloads of each other's games and greatly increase each other's email list following. Remember indie games are not a zero sum.

78) **Team up on a sale** - If you find a developer who makes games similar to yours, consider partnering with them on their next promotion. When they run a big sale, send an email to your followers telling them how much you love this person's games. Oh and by the way, they are on sale. Saving someone 50% off is a gift and coming from you it is a positive. It counts as a gift to them. The game has to be something your audience would like. Don't send them to a hard core RTS if your list loves match-3 casual games. Also, you must genuinely love your partner's games. Don't promote something that is crap.

79) **Bundle** - If you are part of a bundle with other developers, ensure that each of the developers email their lists. Describe the other games and why, as a subscriber of your list, your fans would like these other games. You can make it a friendly challenge within the bundle as to who can send the most clicks from their list

Filler emails

It is very important to keep your list active but sometimes you don't have any news. Well I got you covered with these timeless, yet interesting, emails.

80) A list of games you have been playing

81) Articles and reviews you think are interesting.

82) Recount your experience at a conference or developer meetup.Show pictures, tell them about it.

83) Review and give a synopsis of a movie that is in the same genre as your game. If you are making a cyberpunk game, review the new Blade Runner.

Summary

That is it. Now you have no excuse not to email your list.

Your job is to make your fans remember you and love you. If you are generous with your list they are going to look forward to your emails. Try to make every email you send a tiny in-box present.

Then destroy Steam on launch day!

Thank you for reading.

You can contact me at the following places
Email: iamchriszukowski@gmail.com
Twitter: @adventuremtn

And if you are not on my mailing list, shame on you:

https://tinyurl.com/zukowskimailinglist