



The Email Marketing Business

The highest-ROI channel in marketing, run for owners who have the list but not the time. Retainers up front, flows that earn while everyone sleeps.

\$100-720

START LEAN

14-30 days

FIRST DOLLAR

80-90%

TYPICAL MARGIN

Is this your business?

Email is the only marketing channel a business actually owns: no algorithm, no ad auction, no platform that can turn off the tap. Most small brands sit on a list worth thousands a month and send to it twice a year. Email marketing services turn that neglect into stacked retainers plus automations that keep earning after you log off. It is unglamorous, measurable in dollars, and structurally sticky: nobody fires the person running their best channel.

\$100-720

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$1,000-2,500

STANDARD BUILD

14-30 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

80-90%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, fully

SOLO-FRIENDLY

Yes, entirely

HOME-BASED

BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE OPERATOR

THE STORYTELLER

■■■■■ 3/5 difficulty

THE HONEST FIT TEST

This is a systems-and-numbers business wearing a writing costume. You will live in flow charts, A/B tests, and revenue dashboards, and your best work runs invisibly for months. If you need novelty every day, it will bore you. If 'set it up once, get paid monthly, prove it in dollars' sounds like a beautiful machine, this is one of the cleanest laptop businesses available.

Who pays, and why now.

Email returns more per dollar than any other channel, and every owner has read that statistic, which is precisely why the neglect embarrasses them. The med spa has 4,000 emails from its booking system and mails none of them. The Shopify brand pays \$40 to acquire a customer and never sends a post-purchase sequence. You are not selling a new channel. You are selling the harvest of an asset they already paid for and left in a drawer.

The structural secret of this business is flows. Welcome series, abandoned checkout, post-purchase, win-back: automations that trigger themselves and routinely produce half or more of a store's email revenue. A well-run ecommerce brand gets 25-35% of total revenue from email; most small stores sit under 10%. That gap is your pitch, your case study, and your retainer justification, and you build the machine once.

The moat nobody talks about is deliverability. Since Google and Yahoo tightened bulk-sender rules in 2024, authentication (SPF, DKIM, DMARC), list hygiene, and sender reputation decide whether email lands at all. The course-bros teach subject lines; inboxing is won in DNS records and sunset policies. An operator who can fix a domain's reputation walks into accounts the 'email copywriter' crowd cannot touch.

The honest constraint: results are proportional to list quality, and a 400-person dead list cannot pay a \$1,500 retainer no matter how good you are. Qualify hard. The right client has at least a few thousand contacts or real traffic to grow one from, sells something with repeat purchase or high ticket, and can name last month's revenue. The wrong client churns in 60 days and blames the channel.

WHO BUYS	WHAT THEY PAY	WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT
Ecommerce brands (Shopify)	\$1,500-3,000/mo retainers	Revenue per send, carts recovered, email at 25%+ of store revenue
Coaches and course creators	\$1,000-2,500/mo	Launch sequences, nurture that sells between launches
B2B and SaaS companies	\$1,500-3,000/mo	Onboarding, nurture, and a newsletter someone actually reads
Local service businesses	\$500-1,000/mo	Rebookings, reviews, and seasonal pushes from the customer file

OF ECOM REVENUE, FROM EMAIL, WHEN RUN WELL

25-35%

Most small stores get under 10% of revenue from email. Closing even half that gap on a \$60,000-a-month store is worth thousands a month, which is why a \$1,750 retainer reads as cheap to the right client. The gap is the entire sales pitch.

Every dollar, before you spend it.

Almost everything runs on the client's email platform and the client's dime. Your stack is a laptop, partner-level access, and a thin set of tools. Spend on the legal foundation; let the first retainer buy everything else.

THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE	WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE	COST
Laptop you already own	The whole agency fits in a browser	\$0
ESP partner accounts (Klaviyo, Mailchimp)	Free agency-side access; the client pays for their own platform	\$0
Design tool (Canva or Figma free tier)	Email templates are 90% reusable blocks; build the system once	\$0-15/mo
Deliverability testing tool	Inbox placement and DNS checks; your unfair advantage	\$0-30/mo
LLC + business license	Your liability wall. See the legal page	\$50-500
Professional liability (E&O) insurance	You send to thousands of inboxes on someone's behalf; mistakes scale	\$30-60/mo
One-page portfolio site + domain	Three flow screenshots with revenue numbers, one button	\$20-100
Business bank account + bookkeeping app	Separate money from day one; future-you says thanks	\$0-15/mo
Lean total		\$100-720 all-in
THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE	WHAT IT UNLOCKS	COST
Klaviyo partner certification	Free to cheap, and it puts you in a directory clients actually search	\$0-100
Reporting dashboard tool	The monthly revenue report is your retention engine; automate it	\$20-60/mo
Email template design system	A reusable block library for YOUR niche; time more than money	\$0-200
Subcontract designer budget	Custom graphics for premium clients without hiring anyone	\$100-300/mo

THE RULE

Do not buy the \$1,500 'email agency in a box' course or an agency software suite before client three. Klaviyo's own academy is free and better. Your first dollar comes from an audit and a flow build, both of which run on tools that cost nothing.

Clean from day one.

Email is one of the few marketing channels with actual federal law attached. None of it is hard to follow, and following it visibly is a sales advantage: you are the professional in a niche full of people who have never read CAN-SPAM.

- Form your LLC:** File in your home state, get the EIN free at irs.gov, open the business bank account. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks every step.
- Service agreement with hard scope:** Campaigns per month, flows included, revision limits, approval deadlines, and a 30-day out after an initial quarterly term. 'One more quick send' is how retainers die.
- CAN-SPAM compliance, every send:** Working unsubscribe honored within 10 days, a physical mailing address in the footer, no deceptive subject lines. Violations price at over \$50,000 per email, and the law does not care that you were the contractor.
- GDPR and CASL awareness:** EU or Canadian subscribers mean consent rules, not just opt-out rules. You do not need to be a lawyer; you need to ask where the list came from and what consent it carries before you mail it.
- The list belongs to the client, in writing:** Subscribers, accounts, and data are theirs; your templates and methods are yours; everything exports cleanly on exit. Clean custody language wins deals against agencies that hold lists hostage.
- No purchased lists, ever:** Bought lists are a compliance violation, a deliverability bomb, and a spam-trap minefield. Put your refusal in the contract. A client who insists is handing you their domain reputation to burn.
- Data privacy and confidentiality:** You hold customer emails, purchase histories, and revenue numbers. A mutual confidentiality clause plus sane data handling (their account, partner access, no CSV exports on your laptop) protects everyone.

INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

Professional liability (E&O) at \$30-60 a month is the core policy: a broken discount code sent to 40,000 people or a segment mailed in error is a real, claimable mistake. Add cyber liability once you hold partner access to several accounts, since you become a single point of compromise for all of them.

WATCH FOR

The purchased-list client. Sooner or later an owner will hand you 25,000 'leads' from a broker and ask you to blast them. That send can torch their domain reputation for months and put your name on the spam complaints. Decline in writing, explain the math, and sell them a list-growth program instead. It is a better invoice anyway.

Requirements vary by state and city. Verify with your state, city clerk, and a licensed professional. Education, not legal advice.

Three doors. Real numbers.

Price by the month for ongoing work and by the project for builds, and anchor with the middle door. Local and small-brand retainers run \$1,000-3,000 nearly everywhere. Below \$1,000 you will resent the account; above \$3,000 you are promising strategy and should be charging a revenue share too.

DOOR ONE	RECOMMEND DOOR TWO	DOOR THREE
<p>The Flow Foundation</p>	<p>The Send Engine</p>	<p>The Growth Partner</p>
<p>\$2,500-3,500 <small>one-time</small></p>	<p>\$1,500-2,000/mo</p>	<p>\$2,500-3,000/mo</p>
<p>build</p>	<p>most-booked</p>	<p>premium</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Authentication fixed: SPF, DKIM, DMARC verified ◆ Core flows built: welcome, abandoned checkout, post-purchase, win-back ◆ Template design system in their brand ◆ 30 days of monitoring and tuning included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 4-6 campaigns per month, written and designed ◆ Flow maintenance and A/B testing ◆ List hygiene and segmentation upkeep ◆ Monthly report in revenue, not opens ◆ Quarterly strategy call 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Everything in The Send Engine, 8+ campaigns ◆ Pop-up and list-growth program managed ◆ SMS campaigns layered in (platform fees separate) ◆ Launch and promo calendar ownership ◆ 48-hour turnaround on requests

PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS

- Floor: \$1,000 a month. Below that you are a freelancer with a boss, not a business with a client.
- Revenue share (3-5% of email-attributed revenue) only ever sits on top of a base retainer, with the attribution window agreed in writing before the first send.
- Charge an onboarding fee (\$500-750): audit, authentication check, and strategy doc. It filters tire-kickers and pays for the unprofitable first two weeks.
- Sell quarterly commitments: flows need 90 days of data to prove themselves, and so does your case study.
- Qualify on list size and revenue before quoting. A dead list cannot pay a live retainer.

THE UPSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT

SMS. Once the email engine runs, adding two to four text campaigns a month lifts the retainer 20-30% on the same platform with the same segments and the same report. It is the easiest yes in retention marketing, and it makes you harder to replace, because now you run two channels nobody else understands.

Names, not strategies.

The portfolio paradox is real: clients want revenue screenshots and you have none. Manufacture them. Email is uniquely fast to prove: one flow build on a real store produces a dollars-attached case study inside 45 days, and the audits that win those builds cost you nothing but attention.

1 The empty-inbox audit

Subscribe to ten small brands you actually like and watch what arrives: usually nothing. Send each a short, specific audit of what their silence is costing them. It is generous, impossible to confuse with spam, and the warmest cold open in this niche.

2 Two founding clients at half rate

Offer 90 days at 50% in exchange for a case study, a testimonial, and permission to publish their before-and-after revenue split. This is how you buy a portfolio honestly: discounted excellence, not free desperation.

3 Brands you already buy from

You know their products, their cadence, and their gaps because you live in their inbox. Warm familiarity plus a specific flow-by-flow audit converts at rates cold outreach never touches.

4 Agencies without an email arm

Ads agencies and web designers create traffic and walk away from the follow-up. Offer white-label flow builds at a fixed rate. One agency relationship can quietly fill your calendar while public proof builds.

5 One niche owner community

A Shopify meetup, an ecom Slack, a local maker group. Answer email and deliverability questions generously for a month before pitching anything. Rooms full of owners produce clients in clusters.

THE EXACT ASK

"Hi [name], I run an email marketing studio for [niche] brands. I subscribed to [business] three weeks ago, bought [product], and have not received a single email since the receipt: no welcome series, no follow-up. For a store your size that is usually four figures a month left in the channel. I wrote up a short audit of the five sends you are missing, free, use it either way. I am taking two founding clients this quarter at half my normal rate while I build my public case studies. Want me to send it over?"

THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

Two founding clients at 50% off for 90 days, in exchange for a written case study, a testimonial, and permission to publish their email-revenue before-and-after. At day 91 they convert to full rate or roll off, and you announce the founding spots closed. Real scarcity, honestly retired, converts better than discounts that never die.

Owned, earned, then paid.

You sell email, so your own email is the audition: a prospect who joins your list and receives silence has already seen the whole pitch. The engine is a flagship newsletter, audits that do the selling, and case studies with dollar signs. Paid ads are unnecessary until you are turning work away.

CHANNEL, RANKED	WHY IT WORKS HERE	THE FIRST MOVE
Your own newsletter	The shoemaker's shoes; prospects judge the flagship before they buy	Weekly teardown or revenue note; flawless welcome flow; every prospect subscribed
The empty-inbox audit	Specific, generous, and provably about THEIR money	Five audits a week to brands whose welcome flow you tested yourself
Agency and freelancer partnerships	Traffic people need a retention person; referrals flow both ways	Offer three local agencies a white-label flow build at a fixed rate
Case studies with revenue splits	One screenshot of email at 28% of revenue outsells any promise	Publish one numbers-included case study per quarter; baseline screenshots from day one
Niche communities and directories	Klaviyo's partner directory and ecom Slacks are where buyers already look	Get certified, get listed, answer deliverability questions generously

FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- I subscribed to 20 local brands and 16 never emailed me: the audit thread
- The four flows every store needs before it spends another dollar on ads
- What email marketing actually costs in 2026, and when a retainer is the wrong buy
- Anatomy of a welcome series that pays rent: a real flow, real numbers
- Why your emails land in spam now: the 2024 Google rules nobody told you about

THE REVIEW MACHINE

Ask at the monthly report, at the exact moment the revenue split is on screen: 'Email was 24% of your revenue this month, up from 8 when we started. Would you put that in a Google review or a testimonial? I'll text you the link right now.' Reviews with revenue numbers in them are miniature case studies, and five of them make you the default choice in your niche.

One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: what one average retainer month actually nets, and what a steady solo book looks like with five retainers and a flow build in motion. These use the middle door at \$1,750 and real tool costs. No guru math.

ONE UNIT: ONE CLIENT MONTH AT \$1,750	AMOUNT	A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 5 RETAINERS + 1 FLOW BUILD	AMOUNT
Revenue	\$1,750	Revenue (retainers + build)	\$10,500
Software share (testing, design, reporting)	-\$40	Software stack (tools, testing, reporting)	-\$180
Payment processing (2.9%)	-\$51	Subcontract designer (overflow)	-\$450
Insurance + overhead share	-\$40	Insurance, phone, internet share	-\$170
Gross profit (10-14 hrs of batched work)	\$1,619	Marketing (newsletter, community, cards)	-\$150
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$437	Pre-tax profit	\$9,550
Yours, per client month	\$1,182	Tax reserve (27%)	-\$2,579
		Owner take-home	\$6,971

BREAK-EVEN

1 client

A single founding retainer covers the entire lean startup cost in its first month, and one flow build covers a quarter of overhead by itself. Capital was never the barrier. The barrier is qualifying clients honestly and doing unglamorous list hygiene nobody applauds.

Illustrative figures at typical market rates; your market, prices, and costs will differ. Run YOUR numbers in the One-Page P&L from THE LAUNCHPAD, Module Six. Remember the 25-30% tax reserve on every dollar of profit.

Pre-decided, so motivation is never consulted.

WEEK ONE: FOUNDATIONS

- LLC filed, EIN issued, business bank account open
- E&O insurance bound; certificate saved
- Klaviyo academy modules done; partner account created
- Your own newsletter live with a flawless welcome flow
- Pricing doors finalized with the \$1,000 floor written down

WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- Subscribed to 15 niche brands; silence documented
- Five empty-inbox audits written and sent
- Founding offer pitched to 5 warm contacts
- Service agreement finalized: scope, list ownership, no purchased lists
- Three agencies pitched a white-label flow build

WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- First founding client onboarded; partner access set up
- Authentication audited and fixed; baseline revenue split screenshotted
- Core flows drafted and in client review
- Second founding client closed or pipeline at 10 warm
- First newsletter teardown published

WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- First flows live; first campaigns sent on calendar
- First monthly report delivered in dollars, not opens
- Review and referral asked at the report
- Founding offer publicly retired or final spot announced
- Month-one P&L done; pick one growth lever for month two

DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: 2 paying clients, flows live on at least one account, and 5+ warm conversations in the pipeline. Yellow: audits sent but no closes: they are too generic, so name the missing flows and the dollar cost for THEIR store and re-run week two. Red: zero clients despite 25+ real asks: your proof is invisible. Run your own newsletter like a flagship account for two weeks, build one spec flow map for a real brand, then return with screenshots.

How this business fails, and how it grows.

THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✗ **Reporting opens instead of dollars**
Open rates have been half-fiction since Apple Mail privacy changes, and owners do not renew retainers for percentages. Report attributed revenue, orders, and list growth: the numbers a CFO would accept.

- ✗ **Skipping authentication**
Beautiful campaigns sent from an unauthenticated domain land in spam, and the client concludes email does not work. SPF, DKIM, and DMARC checks are day-one work on every account, before a single send.

- ✗ **Taking the dead-list client**
Four hundred stale contacts cannot pay a \$1,500 retainer, and in 60 days the churn will be blamed on you. Qualify on list size, traffic, and revenue before quoting, and sell list growth first when the asset is thin.

- ✗ **The blast habit**
Mailing the full list every time burns engagement and sender reputation. Segmentation and sunset policies are invisible work that keeps the channel alive; skipping them is slow-motion account suicide.

- ✗ **Building in your own accounts**
If the list, flows, or platform live under your login, you have taken a hostage you never wanted. Their account, your partner access, clean export language in the contract. Professionals leave cleanly.

THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **The niche retention shop**
Own one vertical: the email studio for supplement brands, for med spas, for course creators. One template system and one flow library serve every client, and referrals travel inside the industry on their own.

- 2 **The retention suite**
Email clients already trust you with revenue. SMS, pop-ups and list growth, loyalty flows, and post-purchase reviews bolt onto the same retainer: lifetime value doubles with zero new logos.

- 3 **The pod model**
A designer and a junior tech handle production while you keep strategy, deliverability, and client calls. Twelve to fifteen accounts, three people, agency margins without agency bloat.

YOUR FIRST HIRE

A part-time email designer or VA at client five or six, handling template builds, campaign loading, and QA checklists. They free the production half of your week and they are your systems test: if your campaign checklist cannot keep a stranger from sending the wrong segment, you have a job, not a business.

THE STAIRCASE CONTINUES

The playbook is the map. The machine is waiting.

Everything this playbook describes, Epic Advisory Group can build with you: the brand, the cinematic website, the entity, the engine. Describe your idea to the Launch Engine and see your business real in about sixty seconds, free.

- The Launch Engine: your idea, built free, in about a minute
- THE ASCENT: Founder Edition: the eight-module course
- Launch-in-a-Box: entity, brand, site, and first campaign, one flat price
- Growth, capital readiness, and the path to the public markets

"There is no right age. There is only the decision."



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