

XACT SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS LTD

Comparison of E-Marketing Solutions for Act!

Swiftpage vs. MailChimp

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a comparison between the Swiftpage Connect (referred to as Swiftpage) and MailChimp e-marketing platforms and integrations to Act!

What is e-marketing and how is it different to mail merge?

In short E-Mail Marketing is the next step up from Mail Merge; it works in a similar way but has a few fundamental extras. For example:

- More advanced design features so you can add images/graphics and organise your content to make it easy to read and more visually appealing
- More advanced testing capabilities to ensure your email doesn't get labelled as spam, and to see how it looks across different email clients (e.g. Outlook vs. Gmail vs. Hotmail)
- Analytics so you can see who opened, clicked or unsubscribed from your email and use this information to identify 'hot leads' and to improve your emails for next time
- Social media integration to have a link to your email automatically posted to Facebook or Twitter

Unlike Mail Merge E-mail marketing provides a vital "feedback loop" so you can measure the success of your emails and make improvements to ensure that more people open them and pay attention to what you have to say.

E-Marketing best practices

When sending e-marketing emails to your subscribers there are a few key things that you should watch out for; below are some of our tips'n'tricks for sending effective emails:

- Comply with the law: clearly state how people got onto your mailing list, how they can remove themselves from the list (i.e. unsubscribe) and your physical address on EVERY email you send.
- Watch out for spam filters: certain text, icons and phrases in your emails can fast-track your emails to your recipients spam box.
- Design for readability: make sure your emails look good regardless of the recipient's screen size and whether images are turned on or off. If available you can also run an inbox inspection before sending to see how your emails appear in different email clients and devices.
- Include a call to action: Tell people what you want them to do once they have read your email. For example "get a free trial today!" or "visit our website for more info". If you want to get fancy you can use tracking software to see how many recipients respond to your call to action.



Pricing (\$USD)

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
FREE PLAN	<p>Swiftpage does not offer a free plan, however they do offer a trial which is valid for 60 days.</p> <p>The trial provides 50 emails per day and all the features offered in the Team plan plus Platinum Drip Marketing functionality.</p>	<p>Up to 2,000 subscribers Up to 12,000 emails per month Unlimited users</p> <p>Features not included in this plan: Autoresponders Spam filter diagnostics Delivery by time zone Inbox inspection (not included but available at \$3 per report).</p> <p>All campaigns sent from a free account must include the MailChimp logo.</p>
PLAN A	<p><u>Basic: \$29.95 / month</u> Unlimited subscribers Up to 1,000 emails per day 1 user only “Limited” survey features</p> <p>Features not included in this plan: Scheduled send Send as Call list & call list assignments</p>	<p><u>\$15 / month</u> 501 – 1,000 subscribers Unlimited emails Unlimited users</p> <p>All features included.</p>
PLAN B	<p><u>Pro: \$44.95 / month</u> Unlimited subscribers Up to 1,000 emails per day 1+ users</p> <p>Features not included in this plan: Send as Call list assignments</p>	<p><u>\$30 / month</u> 1,001 – 1,500 subscribers Unlimited emails Unlimited users</p> <p>All features included.</p>
PLAN C	<p><u>Team: \$59.95 / month</u> Unlimited subscribers Up to 1,000 emails per day 2+ users</p> <p>All features included.</p>	<p><u>\$50 / month</u> 2,501 – 5,000 subscribers Unlimited emails Unlimited users</p> <p>All features included.</p>
OTHER PRICE OPTIONS	<p>For Basic plans and above users can purchase an additional 1,000 emails per day for \$4.99 per month.</p> <p>Additional users for Pro and Team plans cost \$5.99 per user per month.</p>	<p>Monthly plans cater to over 3,000,000 subscribers.</p> <p>MailChimp also offers a pay-as-you-go plan which works out to be between \$0.03 and \$0.01 per email.</p>

Templates & Testing

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
PRE-DEFINED TEMPLATES	<p>Swiftpage offers 100's of pre-defined templates for use with the Basic and Advanced editors.</p> <p>Users may find that the look & feel of these templates is outdated.</p>	<p>MailChimp offers 100's of pre-defined templates and basic layouts.</p> <p>The templates are categorised to make searching easier and they all have a stylish, modern look & feel.</p>
TEMPLATE EDITOR/S	<p>Simple editor: basic interface with ability to add/delete 'windows', format images and text, upload PDF documents and set background colours.</p> <p>Advanced editor: HTML editor with WYSIWYG interface.</p>	<p>Drag & Drop editor: advanced drag & drop editor with ability to customise the layout, add text/images/image groups/captions and social share information, and modify the design of all elements in the template.</p> <p>Code Your Own: HTML editor with WYSIWYG interface.</p>
TEST EMAILS	<p>Users can only send 1 email at a time but no obvious limit on the number of tests you can do.</p>	<p>Paid accounts can send 70 tests per campaign or 200 test per account day to a maximum of 20 different email addresses at a time.</p> <p>Additional limitations apply to the free account.</p>
INBOX INSPECTION	<p>Swiftpage does not offer an inspection tool however Bright Peak (a division of Swiftpage) does.</p> <p>Pricing starts at \$5 per template with discounts offered for bulk testing.</p> <p>The testing provides you with a view of your template as it appears in over 30 email clients and 8 devices. The report is only available for 60 days.</p>	<p>MailChimp offers an inbox inspection tool for all paid accounts, with free accounts able to run this at a cost of \$3 per report.</p> <p>The testing provides you with a view of your template as it appears in your readers' 10 most used email clients. The report also looks out for words/phrase in your email that may trigger spam filters. The report never expires.</p>
A/B SPLIT TESTING	<p>Swiftpage does not offer an A/B split testing feature but advises that people segment their list and send two separate emails, changing one detail in each (e.g. subject line).</p> <p>The downside of this is that Swiftpage do not offer a feature which enables you to compare campaign results.</p>	<p>MailChimp offers A/B split testing for all accounts. Users can choose to test based on subject line, "from" name and delivery date/time. Users can also specify how large the test segment should be and how the winning campaign should be chosen (e.g. open rates, click rates etc.)</p>

Anti-Spam

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
SPAM SCORE	<p>Users can test their spam score of each email by sending the email to a specified email address, ensuring they include a code at the beginning of the subject line.</p> <p>In the reply email Swiftpage tell you your emails Spam Score and indicate where you are in the spectrum of “spammyness”. They also highlight what in your email has contributed to your score.</p>	<p>MailChimp offers a delivery doctor feature for all paid accounts which tests components of your email, highlights anything that might be considered as spam and provides advice on how to fix the issues.</p>
ANTI-SPAM COMPLIANCE	<p>In order to comply with anti-spam laws Swiftpage includes the compulsory information to the bottom of each email.</p> <p>The design and placement of this information cannot be modified (with the exception of left, centre or right alignment) and it includes the Swiftpage logo.</p>	<p>In order to comply with anti-spam laws MailChimp checks your emails for compulsory information which you can include using merge tags. If MailChimp cannot find the merge tags it will add the missing information at the bottom of your email.</p> <p>MailChimp also requires you to inform your recipients how they got on your list in order to prevent false spam reports.</p>
OPT-IN & DOUBLE OPT-IN	<p>Swiftpage does not seem to offer double opt-in services however users could set this up using the autoresponder and survey tools.</p> <p>Swiftpage does also not seem to have any process from users confirming that they have permission to send to their email list or subscribe new contacts manually.</p>	<p>MailChimp offers opt-in and double-opt in list management.</p> <p>Whenever a subscriber signs up to your list they receive an email asking them to confirm their subscription. If contacts are imported or manually added MailChimp asks you to confirm that these contacts agreed to hear from you.</p>

Drip Marketing

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
<p>DRIP CAMPAIGNS</p>	<p>Email drip campaigns can be set up to run based on the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All contacts in the drip marketing list • Contacts from previous email stages that: opened the email but did not click a link &/or clicked a link &/or did not open the email. <p>Drip campaigns are organised into three types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchor date: stages are defined as a timeframe before/after set date • Calendar: stages are defined by specific calendar dates • Duration: stages are defined as days since Contact enters campaign <p>Users can pay additional fees to include other steps in the drip campaign such as send postcard, send letter, transfer to another drip campaign, and review.</p> <p>Swiftpage drip campaigns can also be integrated to Act! Smart tasks so when a contact meets specific criteria they can be added to the campaign. Note that this is the only way campaigns can be triggered based on an Act! date field (e.g. birthday) or based on when an Act! field changes.</p>	<p>Autoresponders can be set up to run based on set criteria including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens/un-opens • Clicks • Purchases (if using Ecommerce360) <p>The autoresponder can run on a date/time that you choose, or whenever a contact in your list meets the criteria. Other criteria that can influence when an autoresponder is triggered for a contact includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any date field (birthday or other date) • When merge data changes (e.g. if “payment status” field is changed from pending to paid).

Analytics

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
REPORTS	<p>Swiftpage offers a variety of analytics which measure: open rates, clicks, bounces & unsent emails.</p> <p>Users can also generate a call list which ranks recipients based on their interaction with your email. The call list feature is available on the Pro plan and above.</p> <p>If sending via the Swiftpage Integration you may have to wait up to 24 hours for results to become available.</p>	<p>MailChimp also a variety of analytics including: open rates, clicks, bounces, unsubscribes and social media performance.</p> <p>MailChimp also tracks campaigns against past campaigns and offers performance advice for improving open & click rates.</p> <p>If users are using Analytics360 they can also analyse ROI including conversion rates & revenue created.</p> <p>Like Swiftpage, MailChimp uses report data to 'grade' contacts, giving them a star rating out of 5. This can be used to identify "hot" leads.</p>
GOOGLE ANALYTICS INTEGRATION	Not available.	<p>Available.</p> <p>Users select how they want the campaign to appear in Google Analytics and can track the number of referrals to their website.</p>

Social Media

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
SOCIAL INTEGRATION	<p>For users wanting to integrate social media into their Swiftpage campaigns they have two options.</p> <p>The first is to enable social sharing which adds links to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to the compulsory footer.</p> <p>The second option is to include social links in your template. This enables you to place the links wherever you want although analytics from these links will not appear in your Social Sharing Summary.</p>	<p>Integrating social media into a MailChimp campaign is easy. Simply insert the appropriate merge tag anywhere in your email to add links to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and many more.</p> <p>MailChimp will then track the social activity for your campaign.</p>
SOCIAL SHARING	<p>When campaigns are sent users can post to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The posts include the email subject line and a link to your email.</p>	<p>Set MailChimp to automatically post to Twitter &/or Facebook. When posting you can customise the message, which includes a link to the email.</p>
SOCIAL ANALYTICS	<p>Swiftpage offers a social sharing summary which reports on the number of clicks via each social platform from your post and recipient's posts.</p>	<p>MailChimp offers social stats where you can see how many times your email has been tweeted & retweeted, view Facebook activity and view EepUrl activity including top referring sites.</p> <p>Note: EepUrl is MailChimp's in-house URL shortener with built-in tracking features.</p> <p>MailChimp also offers Twitter Stats for your lists, enabling you to see how many of your subscribers are on Twitter, how many are following you, tweets that have mentioned you, who else your subscribers follow and hash tags your subscribers use.</p>

Integration to Act!

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
PRICING	Free with Act!	\$99.95 one off cost.
LIST MANAGEMENT	<p>Swiftpage reads directly from your Act! contact list. When sending an email you can choose to send to the current contact, current lookup, group, company or all contacts.</p> <p>Contacts can also be added or updated using the survey tool.</p>	<p>After setting up field mapping can export Act! contacts to MailChimp and/or import contacts from MailChimp to Act!</p> <p>Users can also perform lookups in Act! for contacts that exist or don't exist in MailChimp and contacts that have been unsubscribed/cleaned in MailChimp.</p> <p>To prevent duplicate records the integration does not enable you to update Act! records from MailChimp.</p>
CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT	<p>Users can send campaigns directly from within Act! however the template must have been created in Swiftpage first.</p> <p>Swiftpage also integrates with the Smart Tasks feature so contacts that meet a certain criteria can be sent a Swiftpage email or added to a drip marketing campaign automatically.</p>	<p>Users cannot manage campaigns from within Act! using the integration – they must log in to MailChimp directly.</p> <p>Note that a MailChimp link can easily be added to the web info tab and therefore accessed from within Act!</p>
WRITING TO HISTORY	<p>When an email is sent a new history entry is created for each recipient. Additional data stored in this entry includes the campaign results. These results can be updated from within Act!</p>	<p>This integration gives users the option to create history entries for sent, opened, soft bounce and hard bounce results.</p> <p>Note this feature does not apply to autoresponders as this information is not yet available via the MailChimp API.</p>
REPORTING ON RESULTS	<p>There are two ways users can view and analyse campaign results. The first (and easiest way) is by viewing them online. The second way is to import the results to Act! then perform a keyword search.</p> <p>The keyword search enables users to search for specific results.</p>	<p>Users can import campaign results to Act! then view them in the MailChimp tab (from the Contact Detail View). Users can also perform lookups based on specific campaign results.</p> <p>If users want to generate more advanced reports in Act! they can do so using a third party reporting tool, such as Smart Dash by Xact Software.</p>

Other Features

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
MAIL MERGE	<p>Users can insert merge tags for selected Act! Contact fields from within the template editor.</p> <p>The merge tags include basic contact fields such as name, company, email and address.</p>	<p>Any MailChimp field can be merged to a campaign.</p> <p>MailChimp users also have the ability to add conditional merge tags for dynamic content. For example, you may choose to display different pricing based on the recipient's country.</p> <p>If merging Act! fields into a campaign you may need to re-import your list to ensure the data is up-to-date.</p>
VIDEO	<p>Whilst most email clients don't yet support imbedded videos Swiftpage recommends users take a screenshot of their video and add this with a link to your email.</p>	<p>MailChimp makes imbedding video screenshots & links easy by providing video merge tags.</p> <p>Video merge tags give users more flexibility to modify how the screenshot appears in the email. For example by choosing whether to display the video title, adding a border and setting a maximum size for the image.</p>
COLLABORATION	<p>Swiftpage does not seem to offer any true collaboration tools. Users can only share templates with other Swiftpage users (either in the same account or users of a different account).</p>	<p>MailChimp's new collaboration features include the ability to have multiple people working on the same campaign, with changes made by one person shown in real time.</p> <p>Users can also post feedback in the comments tab or by replying to a test email; and to track comments more effectively they can be labelled as "open" or "complete".</p>
SCHEDULED SEND	<p>Users can set the email to send at a designated day/time.</p>	<p>Users can schedule to send at a universal day/time or they can choose to send at a day/time for each time zone using the time-warp feature.</p>

Other Features cont...

FEATURE	SWIFTPAGE	MAILCHIMP
<p>SURVEYS</p>	<p>Swiftpage has a survey tool which works well with the integration to Act!</p> <p>Users can create one of two types of surveys; a list builder or a list updater. Each question in the survey can map to an Act! field and the results can be imported to Act!</p> <p>Note that users can only modify the design if they have a Pro or Team account.</p>	<p>MailChimp does not offer a surveys tool however it does integrate with both SurveyMonkey and Wufoo (online form builder) and also has a merge tag that enables you to include a poll (scale of 1-10) into your email. Poll results can then be reported on via analytics.</p> <p>MailChimp forms are quite extensive and, provided the correct fields have been set up, these can be used in a similar fashion as the Swiftpage List Builder survey type. It is important to note however any changes to user profiles, via the profile update form, will not be imported to Act! via the integration.</p>
<p>CALL LIST</p>	<p>Users can generate a call list which ranks recipients based on their interaction with your email.</p>	<p>MailChimp uses report data to 'grade' contacts, giving them a star rating out of 5. This can be used to identify "hot" leads.</p>

Discussion

Pricing

MailChimp has the most flexible pricing plan and uses a framework that has been adopted by the majority of e-marketing providers; by basing emails on the number of subscribers businesses can accurately calculate their costs. MailChimp also offers an extremely generous free plan which would be suitable for a lot of small businesses.

In comparison businesses that use Swiftpage and have more than 1,000 contacts on their mailing list will most likely need to purchase additional emails on a regular basis, especially if they are producing a monthly newsletter - so the cost can quite quickly escalate. Some people may choose to split their list and send to a different segment each day to save money although this is not recommended as not only does it waste time, but Swiftpage does not enable you to compare campaigns so the analytics will be skewed and difficult to analyse.

Templates & Testing

Users will find a big difference in usability between Swiftpage and MailChimp, especially with regards to the template editors. MailChimp's interface is best described as sleek, easy to use and intuitive whereas Swiftpage is clunky and outdated. In fact, after looking on the Act! Community forum many Swiftpage users suggest creating the template using a 3rd party editor such as Dreamweaver, and then import it to Swiftpage.

Testing is also better handled by MailChimp as results can be viewed from within the MailChimp account within an hour of starting the report, and reports do not expire. Users can also send test emails to a variety of users at once. In contrast Swiftpage users must submit their templates to Bright Peak (a division of Swiftpage) and can expect to get results within 1 business day – these results are only available for 60 days. Whilst there is no limit to the number of test emails you can send, Swiftpage users can only send a test to one email address at a time.

Lastly looking at the A/B split testing feature you will find that Swiftpage's solution is seriously compromised as users cannot compare campaign results. In contrast MailChimp offers a fully featured A/B split test feature where users can choose to split the list 50/50 or test a small portion of recipients and send the most successful email version to the remainder of the list.

Anti-Spam

Anti-Spam is an important element when it comes to email marketing. Best process dictates that users should follow an opt-in process to ensure they comply with anti-spam laws, additionally users that follow a double-top in process can expect better results than from a single opt-in process.

MailChimp offers the most flexible anti-spam features. To protect their reputation MailChimp ensures that users confirm that new contacts have given permission to be added to the list when importing new contacts, and a double opt-in process is compulsory for any contact that subscribes to a list via a MailChimp form. Users also have the ability to choose the design and placement of compulsory anti-spam information making it much more flexible and less intrusive.



Swiftpage on the other hand adds a compulsory footer to the bottom of emails which contains anti-spam information (as well as the Swiftpage logo). The implementation of this footer is quite clunky and users cannot change how this information is displayed.

Drip Marketing

Both Swiftpage and MailChimp offer fully featured Drip Marketing tools although Swiftpage's become more extensive when integrated to Act! 2013 or later (note: MailChimp does not integrate with Act! Smart Tasks).

An important thing to note is that although Swiftpage works well with Smart Tasks, any Smart Tasks that uses Swiftpage cannot be run online – they can only be run when the Swiftpage user is logged into Act!

Analytics

The analytics that Swiftpage provide are what you could expect from any e-marketing platform with users being able to monitor opens, clicks and unsuccessful deliveries. However a major feature that is missing is the ability to compare campaigns; this makes it difficult for end users to analyse the results of an A/B split test, for example.

Another feature that is missing from Swiftpage is integration to Google Analytics. Google Analytics enables businesses to track behaviour on their website based on lead source so integrating an email to Google Analytics could enable businesses to attribute specific website events (downloads, enquiries, purchases etc.) to a specific campaign, providing greater insight into the successfulness of the email.

Social Media

Swiftpage's implementation of social media is basic. Links to social media profiles only appear in the footer of the email and users cannot customise the share messages.

In contrast MailChimp offers a variety of integrations to a larger range of social media sites. Of particular note is the ability to include latest posts and comments and profiles in your email campaigns as well as the typical share/like buttons. MailChimp also enables users to customise their share messages and use their own url shortener to make the most of limited characters.

Integration to Act!

Integration to Act! is an important feature of e-marketing in this report and Swiftpage is the clear winner.

Swiftpage's integration design means users only need to manage one contact list and users can also manage campaigns and results from within Act! Integration to Act! Smart Tasks is also extremely useful as it enables businesses to streamline workflow and send more targeted e-marketing campaigns. One feature that needs improvement is recording history – as history entries contain all the key stats for each contact the entries take up a lot of space in the History Tab, additionally looking up campaign results becomes a hassle as users need to create a query in the Marketing Results tab, then copy and paste it to an Act! keyword search.



MailChimp's current integration uses an import/export process, so users have to maintain both lists. This can become time consuming particularly if your contacts data is constantly updating and/or if you want to map a large number of fields between Act! and MailChimp for mail merge or segmentation purposes. It is also important to note that

integration to Act! is limited to what the MailChimp API provides for. This

One of the great things about this plugin however is how it imports campaign results. Because campaign results are stored in an Act! table they can easily be looked up using the plugin or reported on using a 3rd party reporting tool.

Other features

Swiftpage's strong integration with Act! enhances the mail merge and survey tools. The ability to edit and update contacts from a Swiftpage survey directly into Act! is extremely useful and means businesses wanting to capture data from their website do not have to purchase additional products.

Whilst MailChimp does not offer a survey tool it does have flexible signup and profile update forms. It also integrates with a variety of other applications including Wufoo (online form builder) and Survey Monkey. The scheduled send (aka time-warp), conditional mail merge, collaboration and video imbed features are also more advanced and much more user friendly.

Additionally MailChimp has a lot of additional features that Swiftpage does not including: RSS-to-Email, Coupons (via QR codes), MailChimp App, SMS for events, transactional emails, webhooks and integration to QuickBooks* - just to name a few.

*Additional fees may apply for SMS for events and Transactional emails features.

Summary

If we were to evaluate Swiftpage and MailChimp based on email marketing features only then MailChimp would be the clear winner. It has an extremely intuitive user interface, flexible pricing with a generous free plan, as well as lots of well-built features and integrations. MailChimp also provide proactive, targeted education to help users improve campaign results and are continuously introducing new useful features and addons to enhance the user experience.

However, when we also consider integration to Act! most businesses will choose Swiftpage.

Swiftpage's integration to Act! from a list & campaign management perspective is excellent. The fact that users don't have to manage multiple contact lists, and can send emails from within Act! is a huge time saver. Integration with Smart Tasks is also a useful feature and has a positive impact on overall workflow.

Unfortunately choosing Swiftpage means that businesses will be faced with an interface that leaves you guessing where to find things, an outdated template editor and shallow features. Unless you have experience with HTML and CSS the Swiftpage template editor will be a challenge to use and you might benefit from investing in a web developer or using a 3rd party template editor such as Dreamweaver.

Overall Swiftpage is a dated platform; this is reinforced by the fact that Swiftpage is not compatible with Chrome or recent versions of Firefox.

If you have a reasonably static list and that did not use the autoresponder feature could use the MailChimp integration successfully. In doing so you would not only benefit from MailChimp's advanced features but also benefit from improved analytics available in Act! through the integration. As the analytics are stored in a custom table in Act! they can easily be reported on using a third party addons such as Smart Dash by Xact Software.

Both e-marketing solutions discussed here will result in a compromise and at the end of the day the right e-marketing solution will depend on whether you value integration to Act! or an easy to use, fully featured e-marketing tool.