



Episode 227:
3 Top Tips to Grow Your Email List in 2025

I feel so silly thinking this now, but back then I felt like someone sucker punched me when I logged into Instagram back in 2016. So excited to start my new to me then health coaching business only to find out that somebody had not only the exact same handle that I not only wanted on social media, but that I wanted to be my business name at the time, but that she had the same exact business model, the same approach, the same style, the same... literally same same everything and get this she lived just a couple of blocks away from me, like what are the odds?

My whole business plan back then hinged on Instagram. That's all I knew right? That's what I saw people doing around me. I then turned to the next place that I thought you were supposed to go to start or to grow your online business which was creating a website so I went on and I worked hard and I created a beautiful brand new website. I spent all this time, money and energy. I didn't know who it was for. I didn't know why I was picking what I was picking or anything like that or what I was writing. Despite what I thought would happen, which was that you would basically make your website live and then people would just come roaring in, I made it live and hardly anybody clicked on it or visited it or ever wrote to me about it or read anything on it.

Hitting these very common roadblocks in the beginning of starting my first business, health coaching business back in 2016. It inspired me to start researching better ways to build an online business. I started Googling things that I remember to this day, like what is an email list? What is a freebie? What is an opt-in page? What is a landing page? My mind was just like overflowing. I remember I was exhausted at the end of every day until late into the night, looking up what all these things were, figuring out what these things were, starting to set them up, my eyes straining from all of the checklists, the webinars, ironically, on the freebies that I had downloaded to learn about freebies and building an email list.

And now sitting here eight years and almost 45,000 subscribers later in my legal business in San Vander Wielen LLC, building an email list has been the greatest asset that my business has ever had more than anything else. more than Instagram followers, more than podcast downloads, more than anything. It's led to over \$8 million in sales. It's led to incredible, vulnerable, authentic conversations and replies with people from all over the world. have a very

engaged email list. It has helped sales continue to pour in while I was out of office, when my dad was sick, when my dad died, when my mom died and you know, even on a happier note, it's led to consistent sales when including also a random email I just sent in December that made \$12,000 one day.

When I'm out on the trails in Patagonia or I'm glacier hiking across Norway or eating tapas in Barcelona or at a business retreat in Menorca, all things I did this year, right? And according to loads of you who respond to my email every single week, which if that's you, thank you. I love reading your replies. My emails have really meant something to you too, right? My emails are a little unconventional, not probably what you would expect from a lawyer that you sign up for for online business advice.

But now I really want to help you do the same. I want to help you build an email list that leads to consistent sales, that has stuff flowing in no matter what's going on in your life, that's leading to better connections with your audience, that's helping you to maybe even like formulate your next product that's going to be very successful because you're really tuned into like what they want and what they need. Right.

And that is a big reason why I wrote my book. If you don't know, I have a book coming out on April 15th. And as of today, you can pre-order my very first book. *When I Start My Business, I'll Be Happy: A Practical No BS Guide To Successful Online Entrepreneurship* in my book, which is available for pre-order starting today. It teaches you how to grow a successful online business on your own terms. So in my book, I actually teach you how to research and plan how to start an online business if you haven't yet. So you can dial in what product you should sell and who really needs it.

And these chapters are also so helpful to people who already have an online business but don't have a product that's selling very well. Cause you wanna go back and do some of this initial research on demand and supply and ideal customer and all that. I teach you how to budget to start your own online business and what to do with your money once your business starts making it in order to make more of it, how to grow an email list full of engaged, ready to buy fans with no brainer freebies and pro level email sequences, teach you all the email sequences in my book.

I teach you how to create, sell and scale your first \$1 million product online, how to create content, less content that has a bigger impact. I want you to create less content that is better ultimately without being tied to your phone 24/7 or lip syncing or dancing on reels or twerking or any of that stuff. And so much more. This book is for you if you wanna learn in 2025 how to grow your online business in a way that doesn't drive you crazy, is not too trend based and is really for the long haul.

I do it all in my signature style, sharing stories of my own business growth, the life obstacles I've overcome, and especially how I have turned pain over the years into business fuel and success

so that you can too. You can pre-order my book *When I Start My Business, I'll Be Happy*. Now, anywhere that books are sold, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Amazon, bookshop.org, anywhere that you go to buy your books, any independent book seller, you can go in and ask to order my book or head to samvanderwielen.com/book to preorder it now.

Now here's why you want to preorder right now, no matter when you're listening to this, even though my book doesn't come out until April 15th. If you purchase my book now, I'm gifting you two incredible bonuses that you can only get if you preorder. These will not be available anymore outside of preorder. One of which I'm going to send you immediately to help you build and grow your email list. And you will get it right away as soon as you preorder.

So the first bonus that you'll get immediate access to for pre-ordering my book is my brand new email list building course called the Ultimate Email List Growth Toolkit. Now I've put a \$300 value on this, although I admittedly think that this is probably worth thousands because I think with implementing some of my email list building tips, you can make thousands. This email list growth toolkit is everything that you need. I've put everything you need to create irresistible freebies, grow your email list and turn subscribers into loyal customers. I've included four video training sessions inside of it, including how to create an irresistible freebie, how to get people to sign up for your email list, three things every nurture sequence must have to convert and how to track your email list data.

I've also thrown in my storytelling email training. I'm showing you how I take everyday life moments and turn them into emails that sell. I've given you 20 weekly email prompts in a PDF. And even giving you a copy of a lead generation data tracker template and a video training from my very own director of ops, Lindsay, who walks you through how we look at our data every single week to help me better understand what's going on with email and implement some changes that ultimately make my email list better, stronger, and more highly converting. I will send it your way right away when you do me a solid by pre-ordering my book, *When I Start My Business, I'll Be Happy: A Practical No BS Guide to Successful Online Entrepreneurship* right now at samvanderwielen.com/book.

Okay, but that's not all. That's not the only freebie you get. You will also get free access to my No BS Book Club. It's a live experience to go beyond the book. It's going to include four live 90 minute calls with me in May so that we can go from pages to profits. I really wanna support everybody who pre-orders the book in not just having this book and let it collect dust on your shelf or let the audio book collect audio dust somewhere on your phone or whatever, but I want to help you actually implement what I wrote about. I spent the last four years writing this book. We are going to make sure that you are implementing every single part of it. So this is my book club for pre-orderers only. You'll get to unpack the concepts I share inside the book and chat with me about how they can grow your business. These will be live Q &A style. You can come and ask me questions. So look, look at it this way. If you pay around \$30 now to pre-order my book, which is crucial for first time authors, by the way. It's crucial I have your support on this. And you'll then get my book when it comes out on April 15th. Most book sellers will make sure it

actually arrives the day of. In the meantime, you get an email course immediately that's worth way more than \$30. Plus you get a seat at my virtual book club come spring.

So head to samvanderwielen.com/book or wherever you like to shop for books. Now, once you purchase, head on back to samvanderwielen.com/book and input your details on the page where we have the form to get immediate access to the ultimate email list growth toolkit, my email list building course.

All right, with that, let's get into the episode. So over the years, I've done lots and lots of things that have helped me to grow my email list. But today I wanted to share the three top things that I think have really contributed to my email list growth. And what's ultimately more important to me is not just having a high number of email list subscribers, but having an email list full of people who are like the right people, who all seem relatively nice. Every once in a while we get a bad egg, but you know, it's mostly nice and they also are really engaged and seem like they're, I don't know, like they're to learn and that's really what I want them there for. So ultimately I wanna help you build an email list full of the right people, not just have a fluffy number of people, right? So we're gonna talk through my top three tips and then I asked on Instagram last week what were some questions that you all had about growing an email list and I got great questions. So after I share my top three tips, I'm gonna do a little bonus round fast fire Q&A situation and answer your questions that you submitted on Instagram.

Okay. My very first tip, my top tip to help grow your email list is first you have to have a clear definition of who you help and what you help them with. And ultimately we need to tie that into what you sell, right? Because I like to reverse engineer. I like to think about, okay, what do you sell? Like if you have a product already built out, great. If you're coaching and you understand like kind of the general gist of what you help people coaching wise with or something like that. I want you to start there and then I want you to reverse engineer and take a little chunk of that and make it into a freebie. That's kind of the way that I like to back this out because we want to make sure that your email list is built up of people who ultimately need to buy what you sell, right? As much as I would love to do this all for fun and for charity, this is a business. It cost me a lot of money to run this business.

And so I need to make sure that ultimately I'm getting the right people. Does that mean everybody on my email list buys? No. Am I cool with that? Absolutely. I also am cool with the fact that sometimes people are on my email list for three months, six months, one year, three years. I've even had people email me and say, I've been getting your emails for five years and I just bought the ultimate bundle. That's awesome. There's no pressure on my end and that's just my like attitude and my business approach. But obviously you get to design yours.

At the end of the day though, we are a business. And so my main focus has to be how am I attracting people here who ultimately need what I offer, right? And like I said, that starts with a clear definition of who are you here to help and what are you here to help them with? What problems are you solving? How are you solving them? Like what are the positive outcomes and

the transformational benefits that people have from either using your product, listening to your podcast, taking your online course, signing up for your coaching, whatever it is, and how do we tie that into what you ultimately sell? So that's the very first thing that we have to do. This is something I write about a lot in my book that you can pre-order now *When I Start My Business, I'll Be Happy*. I write about this a lot in my book, but it's also something that we talk through in the free mini email list building course that you get if you pre-order my book, so make sure you do that.

Okay, tip number two. The second thing that I think has helped me grow my email list the most is creating no brainer helpful resources or freebies, right? What we call freebies. What do I mean when I say no brainer? I mean something that is so good, so enticing, like almost teeters on me. Should I be charging for this? Like, I'm not sure. Like, I think this is the kind of thing I can make a what we call tripwire, like something that's \$7, \$15, even up to like, I don't know, \$25, \$50, it starts to get like, okay, I think this is a no brainer. Like who wouldn't want to download this? That's the way that I like to think of freebies. People don't need another to-do list. Like there's another thing on their to-do list. They don't need just another freebie, especially depending on what industry you're in. That's not like, it's just not helpful. We need to give people a reason to take action, right?

It's so important in our businesses and everything we do with your content creator, you sell things, your coach. It's so important to like de-center yourself often. It's something I have to do like daily probably. And I have to remember everybody is busy. I'm not the center of everyone's universe. Like my ideas are probably not that groundbreaking. Like I just have to remind myself of this because if somebody has been out there searching for a solution to the problem that you help people solve. They've probably gotten a whole bunch of this stuff already. So what are you giving them that's going to make them take action? Like how are you making it such a no brainer? Right? This is why it's so important to start with number one of having a clear definition of who you help and what you help them with. Because once you understand that really well, then you understand like, I know what those people want. Like I know what they need. I know what would be so helpful to them. Right?

And so I really recommend spending time on that first one, even though it's tempting to want to skip, because that's what's going to help you create this no brainer. I do encourage you though, if you're having any of those thoughts pop up that are like, wait, is this thing too much value? Is it too much information? There's a difference between offering something that's too valuable and has too much information. On the value side, I personally do not worry about that very much.

I am confident and I have built this confidence muscle over the years and many, many years of doing this, that when I deliver value, customers come to me and people seek out people who they've said like, wow, she's really offered a lot of value and I can only imagine what more she has in store, you know? So I rest comfortably in that. There's a difference, however, in you offering too much information. Offering too much information is bad not because you're giving too much value.

But because you could be overloading people. And really we want freebies to be some sort of actionable thing. Like what is something, what is a no-brainer helpful resource that you can create that creates an actionable quick win for somebody? Or that is something that is very implementable, like something they can complete and do and check off. That's kind of the way I want you to think of it. So I want you to think about creating this no-brainer helpful resource.

Now, if you're depending on what industry you're in or just how you like to approach email, freebies aren't the only way to build your email list. So I would say a sub to to be point here is that you can also advertise people to go straight to your email list. I actually do both. So I have freebies that I advertise quite a bit. And then I also advertise, might have seen me advertise this on like Instagram or something for people to sign up directly to my email list because my email list itself is valuable and I've made it its own thing.

So my emails have a name, Sam's Sidebar, it's weekly, it's every single Tuesday for the last eight years. It always has like a similar flow and a structure. There is value within the emails. Yes, I'm a story-driven, like storytelling type of educator, but my stories always lead to some sort of valuable lesson and my emails always include a weekly legal Q&A. And I have legal like updates for the online business industry, links to things that you need to have like resources. I've been updating everybody about what's going on with the boy registration. Like there's just all these, I don't know, different sections, I guess, of value that make it make sense that I could advertise for people to sign up directly for the email.

I just have to be really good on my end about talking about why it's a good idea and why that's valuable and what my email provides and like, why should you give me your email address for yet another email when I know you already receive a lot of emails. That same logic goes for what I'm talking about if you're advertising directly to a freebie or a resource because you need to give people a reason to give up their email address. Like that is tough, right? And we have to, I don't know, almost like respect that process enough to offer something actually of value.

And I think too often in the online business industry, just create freebies. See other people creating and then they're like, why isn't anybody signing up for this? It's like, how much time and attention have you really put into it? Do you feel really clear about who it's for and what helps them with what's the quick tangible win? How like good are you at talking about it? Like do you have a quippy, like one tune line thing about why this freebie is valuable and what it does for someone and why they should download it. Working on that is a skill and it's something you should contribute a lot of time to. So again, don't worry about if it's too valuable. Having too much information is a different issue but not because of the value.

Now, third and definitely not last but least, is that you want to serve your freebie up as your main dish. I think too often people create freebies and then they just kind of like throw them somewhere like, in your link and bio in Instagram or across your website somewhere or whatever, but you want to talk about these just as much as you talk about your products or

services. So if you've created a freebie, you can't just share about it once or put a link to it somewhere and talk about it once on a podcast episode and then be like, no one signed up for it. No, this is a commitment. This is something that we have to do consistently.

We have to share about consistently and you've got to get better and better and better at talking about it and who it's for and why they should sign up for it and why it's important and what they're going to get out of it. And the more you talk about it, the better you'll get at that. So you got to treat it as a main dish, not a little side situation, not an accoutrement. It's got to be a main dish. Treat it almost like it's a product. I treat my freebies like they're products because I think if I can get you on my email list, then I can reach you every week. And then ultimately I probably can get you to buy my product. So I treat it with the same level of care and concern. I need to get you on my email list. I need to get you off my podcast, just listening to my podcast. I need to get you off of Instagram, off wherever else, and I need to get you on my email list.

I approach every single day in my business that way. It truly is my number one concern at all times. Like I started out in the beginning saying like I came into starting an online business with a very different attitude thinking I needed a huge Instagram or you know, huge podcast or something else. And at the end of the day, it's been my email list that has made me successful. That's why when not only when I wrote my book, I ended up writing so much about building an email list. So much of my book is about email marketing and then how like all your other marketing kind of fits into that driving traffic from social media, driving traffic from podcasts or YouTube.

Like I talk about the big three, what I call the big three content. I talk about email marketing so much in the book, but I also knew that it was what I wanted my bonus to be for you as a thank you for pre-ordering my book, which you can do as of today, January 7th. You can go and pre-order my book anywhere books are sold. But I knew I wanted my freebie to be about email list building because I want this to be the year that you grow at least 1000 subscribers on your list. At least that's my goal for you. So let me know if you're committing to this challenge with me. Will you commit to pre-ordering my book, download the mini course that I've created for you, and will you commit to aiming for 1000 new subscribers on your email list who are the right people, who are responding to your emails, who are ready to buy? If so, I want you to email me. I want you to tell me that you're in on my little challenge.

I also want you to go pre-order my book wherever books are sold and let me know that you pre-ordered so can thank you. Don't forget to head to samvanderwielen.com/book not only to pre-order but also to input your details so you can get access to those bonuses. All right, now as promised, I got a bunch of good questions on Instagram and I wanna answer those for you. I think a lot of these are going to be questions that you have too.

Okay, the first Instagram question was, Sam, how do you stay consistent with your email list? I would say that this is an easy one because I just decide that it's a priority from day one. Again, I knew like email was king. I want this email list to be priority. And so I make sure like we on the

team, we always joke about not being able to go outside to play until I get my homework done. My homework is my email list. So I stay very consistent because it's my number one priority. Like I can't miss it.

So whether that means at times I've had to batch ahead of times, whether I've had to like recycle some content at times, but I am consistent. I am committed to showing up every single week, no matter what. Sometimes my emails have been flops, sometimes they've knocked it out of the park, and sometimes that's been completely like, I've expected the opposite. Like I've written emails that I've been like, this is a great email, this is gonna go amazing, and no one says anything.

And then I've written other emails while like crying and probably eating a bowl of mac and cheese. And then I get like a thousand responses. So it's, it's really dependent, but it all comes from this like commitment to showing up and being like, no matter what's going on in my life, I'm not stopping writing to my email list. So pick a schedule that works for you. Don't be overly ambitious for me. It's once a week. I highly recommend once a week, um, and, treat it as your main dish. It's your, it's your very important part of your business.

The next question was, how do you balance nurturing and selling? It's a great question. So I like to separate selling into kind of two categories. There's like what I would call direct selling and indirect selling. So I mark out at the beginning of the year, if you've done my annual planning guide or anything like that, which we can link to in the show notes, you know that the very first thing I recommend is that you go through your calendar and you kind of put placeholders on your year of when there's going to be big sales or when you're going to run a promotion or you're just going to do what I call sprints, like a two week sprint where you email or go all out talking about a product or a service. And so you put those on the calendar first. And so those are what I would consider to be like your direct selling times to your email list. So maybe that's three, yeah, like three times a year, two week sprints that are like really hammering the like buy, buy, buy, right? So I have those on the calendar.

Other than that though, then work on in between, mean, after a sale, I'll give it some time for things to chill and I nurture, nurture, nurture. But then I do what I would consider to be indirect selling, which is like talking about my product, talking about what's going on inside the ultimate bundle or what, maybe a win that a customer's had or sharing a testimonial, you know, making sure I'm just kind of keeping it top of mind. And that ultimately leads to sales too. So I like to do a bit of both.

I consider myself to always be nurturing. I nurture so much. My emails are full of loaded valuable content. And in my mind, that's what makes me fine with doing the selling part. And I think you need to make sure that your emails are actually nurturing. And sometimes people will not make this actually valuable content that's geared towards what's valuable to other people, but they make it kind of about themselves.

And so keep coming back to like, are my emails nurturing, meaning they are helpful. I'm providing value and also sit with the fact that your sales, your whatever people buy from you is also providing value, right? Just cause people pay for something doesn't mean they're not, it's not valuable. So you're providing it on both sides, but make your weekly emails very valuable. Don't be afraid of selling your business. As I always say, Target doesn't feel guilty when they put up a billboard on the highway. You don't need to either. So that's how I balance it. I hope that's helpful.

Okay, next question was how to start with zero audience. Well, I started with zero audience too and I think that especially the tips in my new free mini email building course that you can get if you pre-order my book, I teach you how to start from scratch because you really need to do the research to figure out like who are you helping? What kind of freebie are you creating? What's an irresistible freebie?

And then how to market that freebie. and that's how I would start. I mean, I started with an email list full of people I knew. It's like a dozen people or a couple dozen people. And then eventually it'd be like one or two people, four people, five people. It can be very slow in the start and that's okay. Use this slow time. Use the time when no one's reading your stuff to get used to talking about your freebie, optimizing it, making it better. That's what I would do. Okay, the next question on Instagram was, how do you create an opt-in that's not geared towards DIYers?

So I know this question actually comes from somebody who does interior design for clients, not only in person, but virtually too. And I can imagine that this is a big problem in your industry and other people can probably relate. But I think, you know, I always think about this example of a mattress company. I think it was like either avocado or purple, I forget. But they have this like brilliant email. Somebody there is doing brilliant email marketing.

And you know, like for example, why would you ever sign up for a mattress company's emails? You would probably only sign up to get like your initial coupon if you were gonna buy a mattress or something, but then you would bounce, because like who wants to get emails from a mattress company? But no, somebody there had the brilliant idea to provide emails full of value. So maybe it's not that you create a freebie necessarily, but maybe your emails themselves are full of value.

And so maybe your emails themselves are, because you do interior design, for example, are about like 10 ways to make your bedroom more cozy or like the colors that are the most popular in 2025, know, or something like this, they're almost like, you know, almost like mini blog posts in your emails that are geared towards people who are interested in interior design. So you're not necessarily teaching them how to design their own stuff or how to tackle their own projects or be their own GC or something like that.

But people who are in that head space, right, who are thinking about redesigning part of their home, they wanna learn about this kind of stuff and they might be feeling really overwhelmed.

for example, your email could be like three ways to pick a general contractor. Or like three signs, like three red flags that you should look for in a general contract. That could be an example of one of your weekly emails. And so the value that you would use is that people who are interested in design, people who are in project mode or going in planning to do a project, need to get your weekly emails because they're going to learn tips from you about how to better manage those things. So that's probably what I would do.

All right, the next person asked, do you do cleanups? I just did one on my email list and got rid of 50 % of my list and now I feel guilty. Yes, we do quarterly cleanups. So what this person's referring to is doing like cold subscriber scrubs. We do do that. I use ConvertKit, now called Kit, for my emails and so we can segment and see like who are cold subscribers, meaning people who aren't opening or otherwise engaging with the emails. And so yes, we do do those. I think it's really important and it's important to keep your list healthy. Again, this is about going back to not minding so much what the number is of your email list subscribers, but more of like what is the quality?

And if people aren't engaging or opening, it's not really helpful for them to be there just to have a nice number at the end of the day. I would also say this is an invitation for you to look at why it was a 50% of your list that wasn't opening your emails. So is this because we're having maybe a lead gen problem? Like are the wrong people getting on the list? That would be interesting. Are we making sure that the emails are getting delivered? Do you have good deliverability? Like I know with ConvertKit, there's some stuff you can do in the backend to make it higher probability that your emails get delivered.

Are your subject lines strong? Are you writing preview texts? Are you writing emails that they actually want and that they wanna open? That kind of stuff. Like are your emails good? Are people getting value out of them? It's really important that you get people to open your emails and then reply to them because over time that tells the email tech gods everywhere that your emails are okay and we really want that because then that's gonna help your email list health and then overall growth from keeping those people on your list.

So don't feel guilty in general about having to scrub your list and getting rid of people who aren't opening your emails. Like I said, it's not helping you just to have them sit there. But I also think it's an invitation to look at maybe what's going on when it's that high. You're always going to lose people, but if you're losing half your list when you're scrubbing, that's what I would look at. All right. The very last question I got was, what did you do in the beginning?

And then another person had said, what would you do now if you were starting and only had a small following. So I think these are about the same. So I think that, you know, I if I only had a small following, I would do the same exact thing that I'm suggesting now. I think in our heads, we sometimes overblow how many people that we really need on our list in order to start making sales and start making successful sales. I mean, especially depending on what you do, you might only need one or two sales off of your email list in order to just get going.

And you have to remember, like when I started and started selling the bundle, for example, in 2018, I would only sell to maybe a month and then it was like four five a month. And then over many, many months or even like over a year, it was maybe even a year and a half. It was like 10 a month, you know, but this was very small. I didn't need that money sales at that time. Right. My expenses aren't weren't also very high, but I also got very used to like, how am I talking about this? And what emails are working and when I write about the bundle this way, I see that it makes a sale and it's just like getting, I don't know, getting your feet under you and really doing this brick by brick. think sometimes we expect like, I have to build up this like giant email list and then I'll finally be able to make some sales. Like, no, no, you can make them now, even if you have small following.

And like, let's just work on like plugging away every day, doing what we're talking about, creating these good freebies, making sure they're dialed in, making sure they have a good name.

a good hook for like, what's the benefit? Why should I download it? And coming back to all the things that we've been talking about in this episode. Honestly, if I were you, this is a shameless plug, but if I were you and I was just starting in the beginning or I don't have a big email list, I would pay the \$30 to pre-order my book just so that I could get my free email list building course. It's worth it for that course alone, I'm telling you. Plus you'll get the book when it comes out. Plus you'll get the invite to my virtual book club.

Um, that's a wrap. I would really ask of you if you've been here for a while, if you've been a supporter of mine in the past, please consider going to preorder my book. *When I Start My Business, I'll Be Happy* wherever you like to purchase your books. Um, it's really crucial for a new author, for a debut author specifically to have pre-orders. It's what triggers all the alarm bells to all of the bookstores and to all the independent booksellers to let them know, Hey, people are liking this book. This book's coming.

It's gonna be a good one. So it really means so much to me if you would consider pre-ordering my book and letting me give you these gifts in exchange as a thank you. So head to sanvandereland.com/slash/book. Thank you so much for listening. I will see you in two weeks. I'm gonna have a brand new On Your Terms episode for you every other week. So I will see you in about two weeks with a brand new episode. Thank you so much for listening.