Online Contest Strategy Guide

HOW TO RUN, PROMOTE, AND GET CUSTOMERS FROM ONLINE CONTESTS

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Introduction

Welcome to Wishpond's Online Contest Strategy Guide - a walkthrough for running, promoting and getting customers from contests. Great to have you with us!

Whether you're looking to increase your social media engagement, generate business contacts, or drive final sales, online contests are one of the best strategies to grow your business online.

This guide provides a comprehensive walkthrough for business-owners and marketers looking to explore contests. We'll be breaking down contest types, showing you real-world examples, diving into contest promotion and wrapping up with a walkthrough of how you can convert contest entrants into customers with intelligent email campaigns.

If you have any questions before, during, or after reading, please email [content@wishpond.com.](mailto:content@wishpond.com) **We'd love to hear from you!**

Chapter 1: Contest Objectives & Types

Online contests are a versatile thing. There really isn't a single "one size fits all" contest which will drive the specific result you want.

Instead, choose the contest type which works best for your business' objectives.

Common objectives which a contest can help you attain include (but are in no way limited to)...

- **Social media engagement** - contests are a great way to get new Fans, Followers, Likes and Shares
- **New contacts** - also called Leads, contests can be a great way to elicit contact information from prospective customers
- **Final sales** - If you have an ecommerce company (or another business which doesn't have a long sales funnel), contests can be used to quickly drive final sales.

This first chapter will take a look at the four most common (and most successful) online contest types, and break down how they work to achieve your objectives.

4 Primary Contest Types

Type #1: Sweepstakes or Giveaway

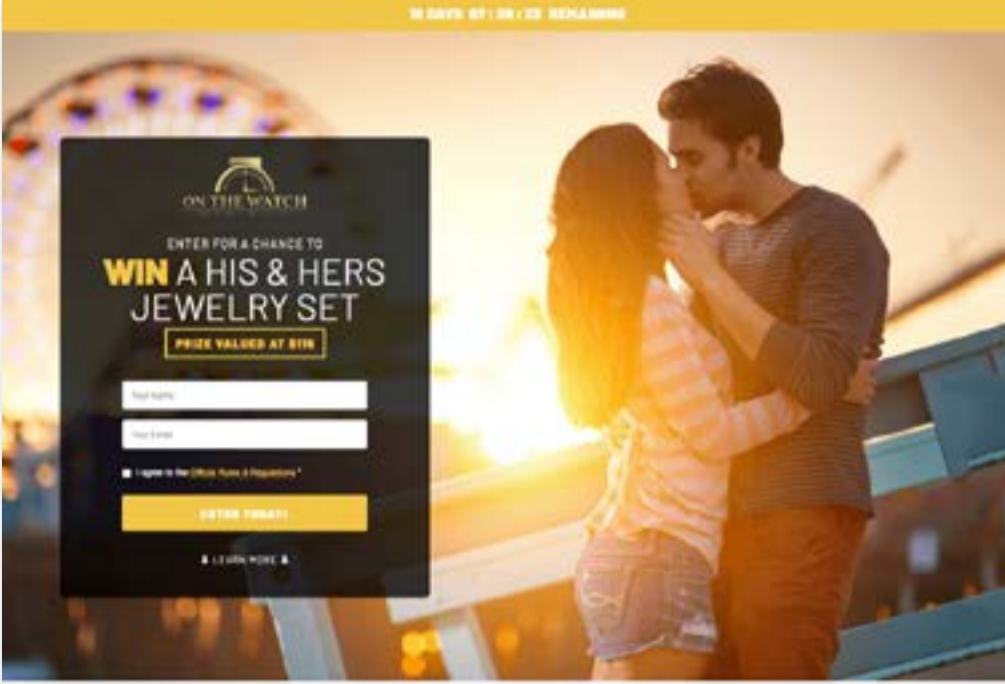Sweepstakes and giveaways are the foundational online contest type.

Simple and to the point, a sweepstakes or giveaway works by giving each one of your entrants a chance to win your grand prize (or multiple grand prizes).

Sweepstakes and giveaways are great for a few primary business objectives:

- Top-of-funnel lead generation
- Increasing sales during a particular season
- Increasing buzz around a new product
- Brand awareness (particularly with a new business or venture)

Sweepstakes Contest Example

4 Primary Contest Types

Type #2: Photo Contest

Photo contests require a bit more work from your entrants, as people need to submit a photo to get a chance to win.

After submitting a photo, your entrants share your photo contest with their friends, prompting them to vote on their submission. The entry with the most votes wins.

Photo contests are great for a few primary business objectives:

- Getting user-generated content (which can be used down the line on social media).
- Getting the contact information of your existing contact's network (as people who vote on a submitted photo need to provide contact information to do so).
- Engaging with your existing customers and increasing brand loyalty.

Photo Contest Example
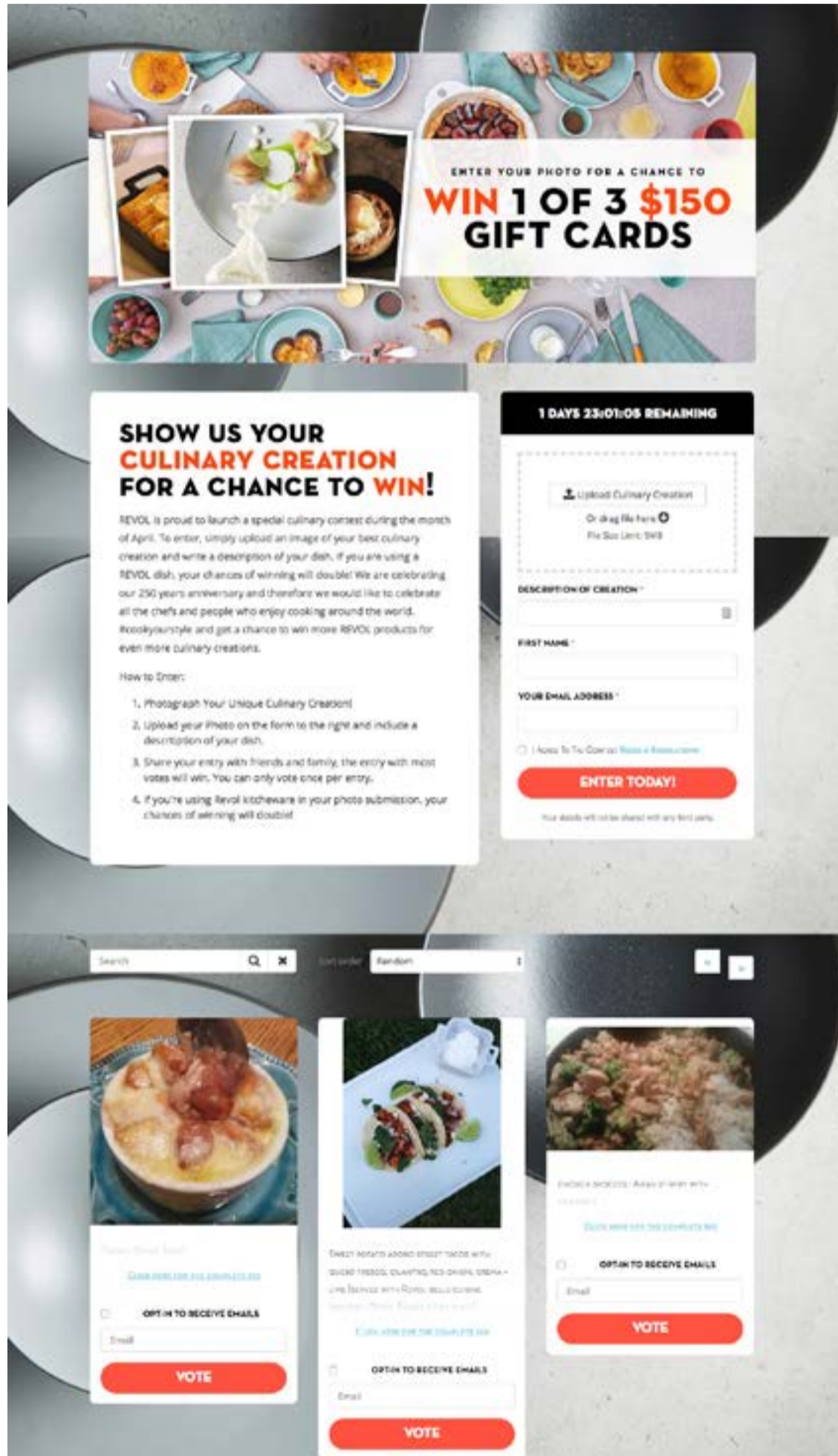
4 Primary Contest Types

Type #3: Bonus Entry Contest

Doubling down on the "entrant involvement" factor, a bonus entry contest rewards your entrants for sharing your contest on social media, via email, or (really) however you want.

Bonus entry contests, as a result, need a larger grand prize (or multiple smaller prizes) than sweepstakes or giveaways.

Bonus entry contests are great for a few primary business objectives:

- Increasing awareness of your business on social media
- Getting the contact information of your existing contacts
- Increasing your social media Fans and Following

Bonus Entry Contest Example

18 Days 17:05:16 Remaining

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN
6 Massage Sessions

Follow on Instagram (+3) — Follow
Tweet on Twitter (+10) — Tweet
Follow on Google (+3) — Follow
Refer a friend (+15)
http://www.referrallink.com/link — COPY

Your Name * | Your Email *

☐ I have read, accept, and understood the **Official Rules & Regulations***

Enter Today!

Enter for a chance to win!

Do you want to indulge in a relaxing, restorative massage at Minam? We're giving away 6 free massage sessions to one lucky winner.

To enter, simply use the form above. If you'd like to increase your chances of winning and earn bonus entries, we encourage you to complete the social actions on the form.

We also have a special offer for every who enters the contest. Keep an eye on your inbox. Good luck!

About Us

Minam is an LA-based spa and massage center that has been offering the very best in massage services since 2003. Boasting a team made up of some of the very best massage therapists in the businesses, our customers know that they can come to us to relax and restore their bodies and minds.

4 Primary Contest Types

Type #4: Instagram Contest

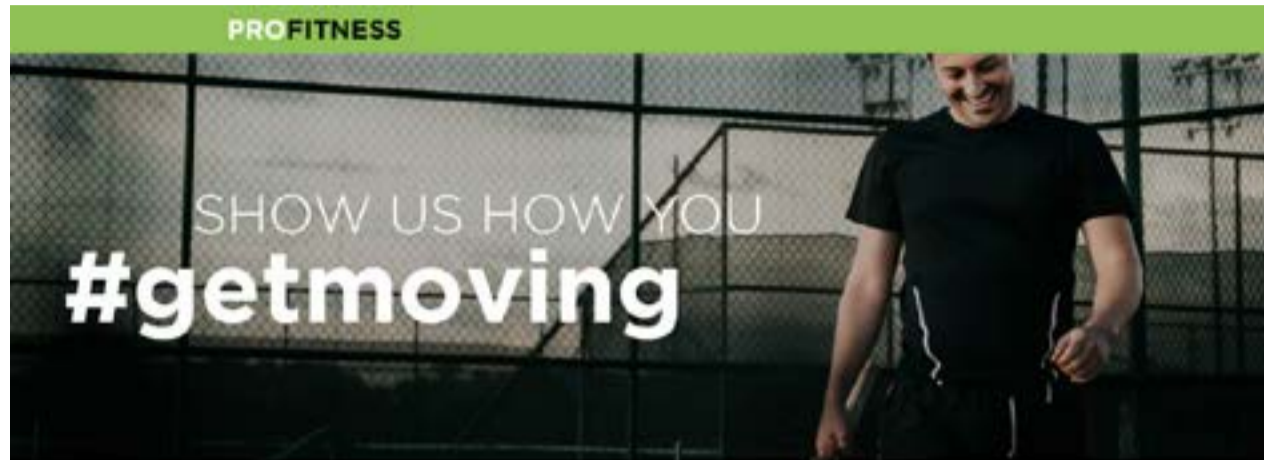Instagram contests (despite the name) are actually run on your website, but are entered via Instagram.

Entry can be done in one of two ways: 1) Uploading a photo into Instagram and using a contest-specific hashtag (enabling a contest tool to "pull" the picture onto the contest page) or 2) Authorizing the contest tool to pull all your Instagram photos, and then choosing which of those you want to submit.

Then, just like a photo contest, entrants are incentivized to share the contest with their network to win. The entry with the most votes wins.

Instagram contests are great for a few primary business objectives:

- Increasing awareness and your business' Following on Instagram
- Getting user-generated content which can be used (with authorization) on social media down the line

Instagram Contest Example

Chapter 1: Related Reading

1 [30 Amazing Examples of Branded Facebook Contests Done Right](#)
- This article gives examples of successful contests with their real-world numbers.

2 [101 Best Prize Ideas to Give Away in Online Contests & Competitions](#)
- Broken down by 10 industries, this article gives great prize ideas alongside real-world examples.

3 [50 Fun Contest Ideas You Can Use Today](#)
- This post focuses on providing proven contest ideas for your industry.

Chapter 2: Designing Your Contest
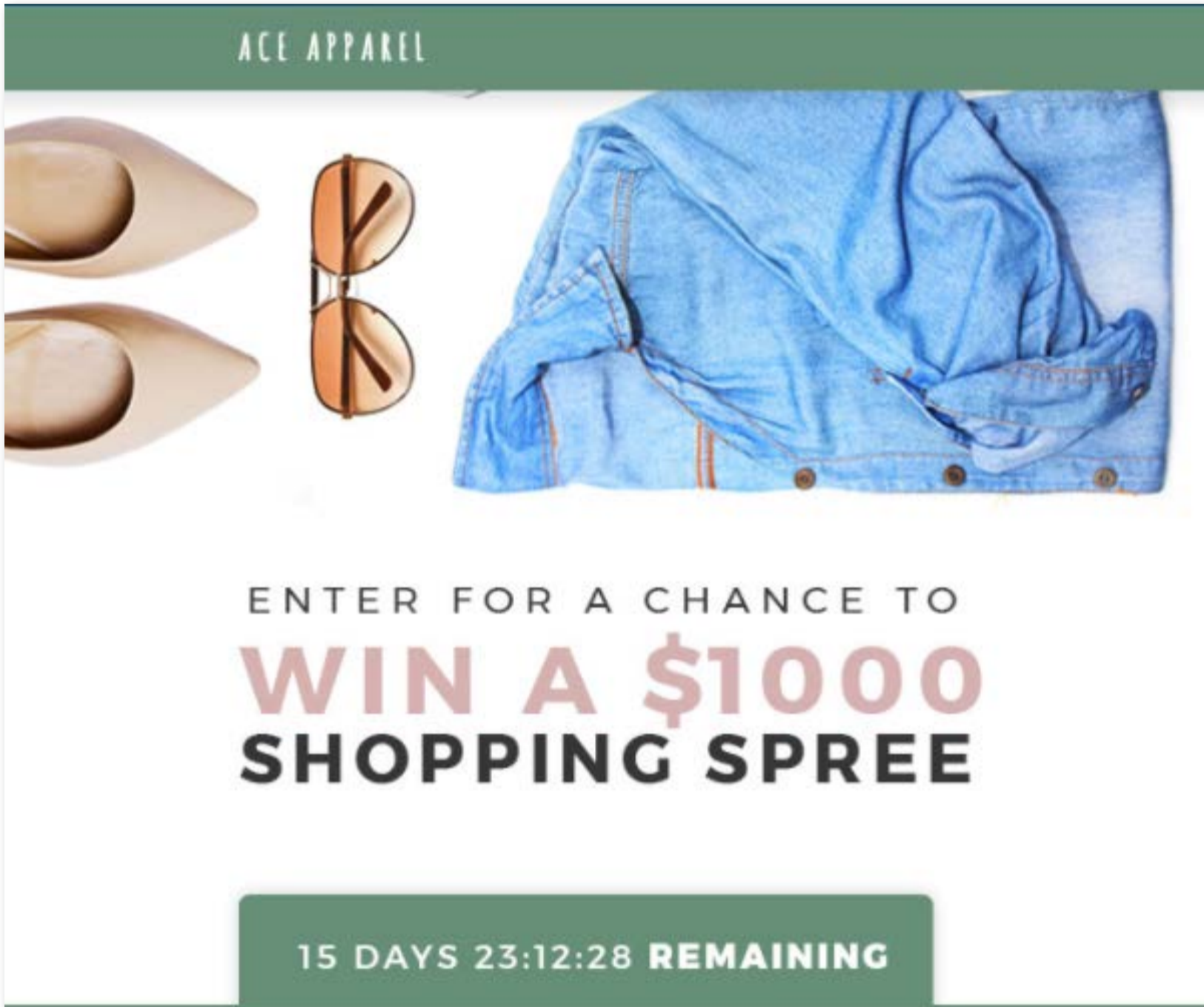
Your contest page is the face of your promotion. Let's make that face a smiling one.

First and foremost you need to keep your contest page simple and exciting. You need to focus on your prize (which is, after all, the reason people are going to enter you contest).

There are, in fact, six simple but essential elements when designing your next contest:

1. **An attention-grabbing headline**
2. **A high-quality image of your prize**
3. **A clear and obvious deadline or countdown timer**
4. **Entry and prizing info**
5. **An entry submission form**
6. **Share buttons**

#1. An attention-grabbing headline

A short title phrased as a call-to-action is the best way to maximize entries.

For example, "Enter to Win a $50 Gift Card from Diamond Candles!" is both simple and informative – it tells visitors what they can do on this page, what the prize is and who is running the contest.

It contains the essential information a person needs to feel informed enough to enter the contest.

#2. A high-quality image of your prize

Your prize is the reason people are going to enter your contest. Not showing it (or not showing it in the best possible light) is the reason they won't.

Include high-resolution, high-quality images. If you don't have them, invest in a quality camera (the investment will pay off almost immediately).

Include the dollar value of your product or prize as clearly as possible.

If you're giving away a gift card, show what can be purchased with it.

#3. A deadline or countdown timer

Not only is displaying a contest deadline a crucial piece of information that your entrants need to know, it's a crucial element for driving people to convert.

Your prospective contes entrants are, fundamentally, lazy. Why do something now that could be put off to another day? Especially if that something is providing personal information that you're not sure you want to provide?

A countdown timer communicates the need for people to enter *today*. Not tomorrow. Not next week. *Now*.

#4. Entry information and prize info

Include a short paragraph with info about the prize, how to enter and (if applicable) any rules or restrictions for your contest.

So as not to overwhelm your contest page visitors, I recommend you add a hyperlink to an outside rules & restrictions page. Alternatively, you could use Wishpond's click popup tool, which could hold your rules and regulations within a popup (only viewed when someone clicked on your hyperlink).

#5. An entry submission form

An entry form for a contest consists of an email address signup box and an "Enter Now" button.

For contests that require entrants to submit photos, videos or text entries, it can include a file upload field or text area. It can also include custom fields like city, age, etc. to capture more personal details.

That said, you should weigh how much personal information you ask for against the value of your prize and what you're asking people to do. If you're asking for a video submittal, for instance, make sure your prize is large and the information you ask for minimal.

#6. Social share buttons
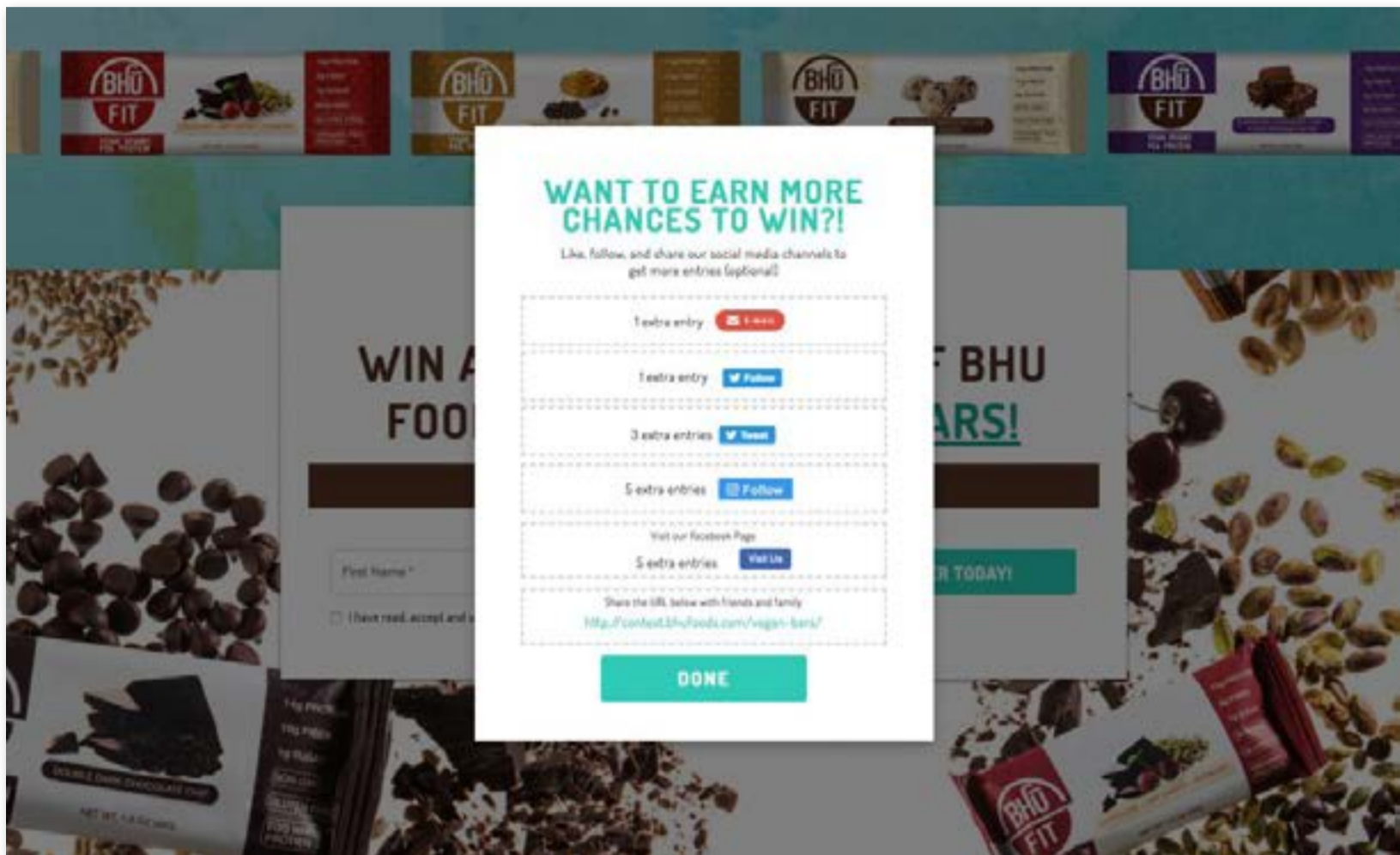
While we'll discuss how to promote your contest in the next chapter, the #1 rule of any contest promotion is this: Let your entrants do it for you.

Bonus entry contests aren't the only contest type in which you should prompt your entrants to share with their network (though they're the only one where you can reward them for doing so).

Make it easy to share your contest by adding share buttons directly on the contest page or (like in the image above) the Thank You page of your contest. Wishpond's contest builder, for instance, makes it easy to add Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest and email sharing buttons to your page.

Chapter 2: Related Reading

1 [How to Run a Facebook Contest or Facebook Sweepstakes](#)

- This article gives a complete walkthrough for creating and designing your next contest.

2 [7 Facebook Contest Examples Critiqued with Best Practices](#)

- This article takes a look at 7 real-world contests and breaks down what works, what doesn't, and how they could improve.

3 [What Makes a Successful Contest?](#)

- This guide will walk you through how to increase your chances of success with a contest so that you can attract and convert more targeted leads.

Chapter 3: Promoting your Contest

With your contest type chosen and your entry page built and optimized, it's time to start driving some traffic.

There are five primary ways we recommend you drive traffic to your contest, and we'll break down each one in this chapter.

Here are the top 5 mehtods to promote your contest:

1. **Send an email blast**
2. **Promote your contest on social media**
3. **Add a banner, opt-in bar or popup to your website's home page**
4. **Create a Facebook Ad**
5. **Prompt your entrants to share on your behalf**

After all, what's the point in spending all the time and energy to create an awesome contest if nobody ever sees it?

Let's drive some entrants!

#1. Send an email blast
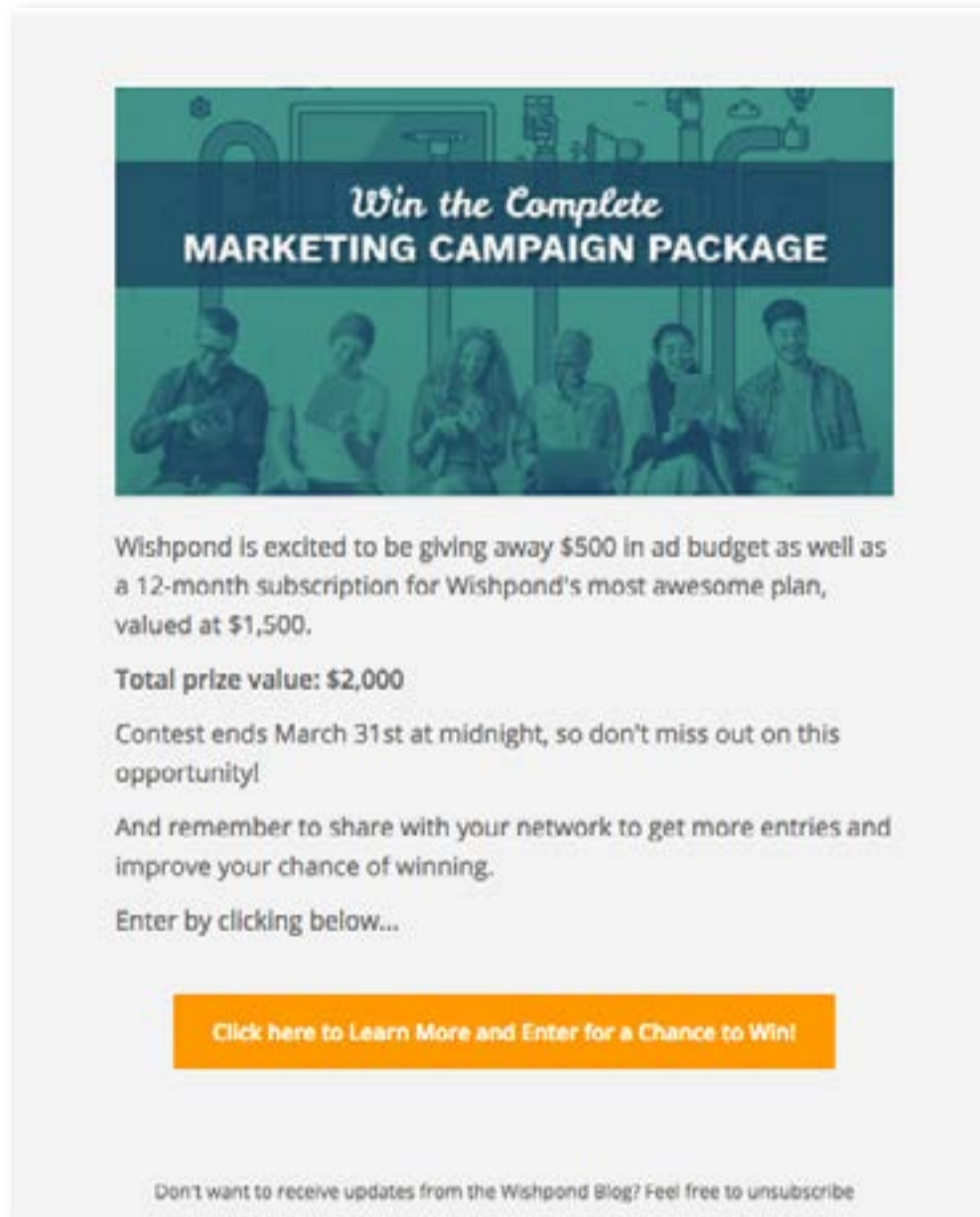
The goal of any good contest runner is to get their contest to go viral - grow on its own two feet.

If the only people who enter your campaign are existing users or customers, then we haven't gained much (unless your focus is to turn existing customers into social media Fans).

That said, it's far easier to get people to enter a campaign which already has entrants, **and that's where an email blast comes in.** Drive your existing contacts to enter for a chance to win, and then (with strategy #5) prompt these people to share on your behalf to people who don't yet know you.

#2. Promote on social media

Re-use your contest graphics for social
media posts and your Page header.

Change your Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
header images to promote your contest.

Social media is still free advertising, and it doesn't matter if you're running a Facebook or Instagram contest, share everywhere.

My recommendation would be to schedule 7-14 posts over the course of a two-week contest (either one every day or one every two days). In the last three days of your contest, start introducing phrases like "Only 72 hours left to win [prize]. Enter while you can!" to add urgency and incentivise your Fans to enter.

Re-use the graphics from your contest page on your social media posts and headers. Not only does this save time and resources, keeping your design elements consistent across platforms (from social media to your website) increases conversion rates.

#3. Add promotion to your website
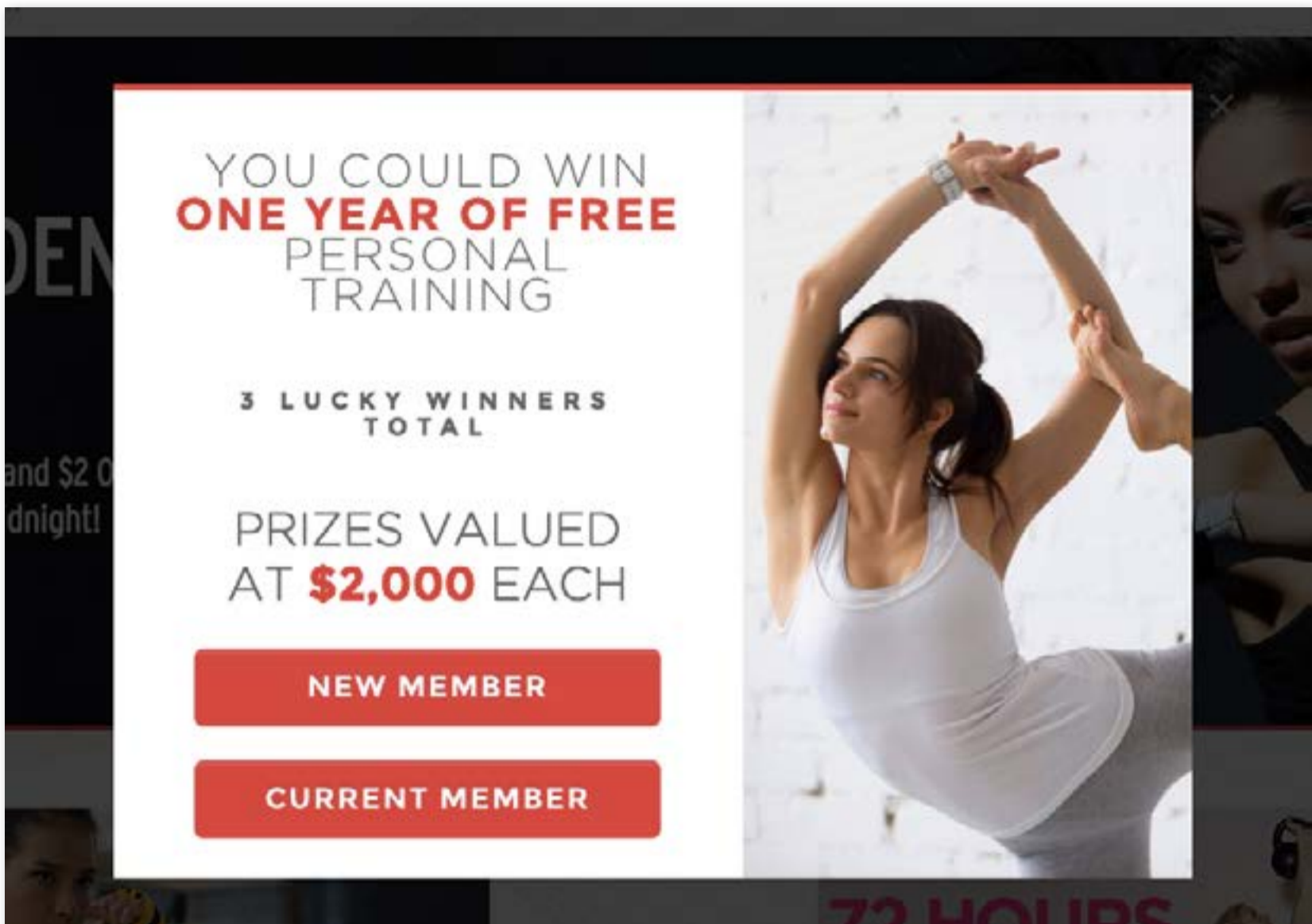
Your website visitors are (clearly) prospective customers who have shown clear interest in your products. You also have more of them than you do Fans.

So, driving those visitors to your contest is a great way to A) Get the contact details of prospective customers, B) Get people to start sharing your protmotion with people who have never heard of you, through the bonus entry feature below.

My recommendation is to create a welcome mat (like the one above) alongside a scrolling header bar and a sidebar scroll popup.

#3. Add promotion to your website

You can put contest-promotional elements everywhere on your website.

The example above is a sidebar scroll popup on a blog article. Wherever you have high traffic (your homepage or a few of your better-ranking articles, for instance) you should throw a contest-promotional add-on.

Try to find a contest builder which also does these kind of promotional add-ons (like Wishpond). They really can be the difference between a successful contest and a failure. Relying solely on social media posts or a newsletter mailout is a recipe for a campaign with 12 entries (all of whom are already customers).

#4. Create a Facebook Ad
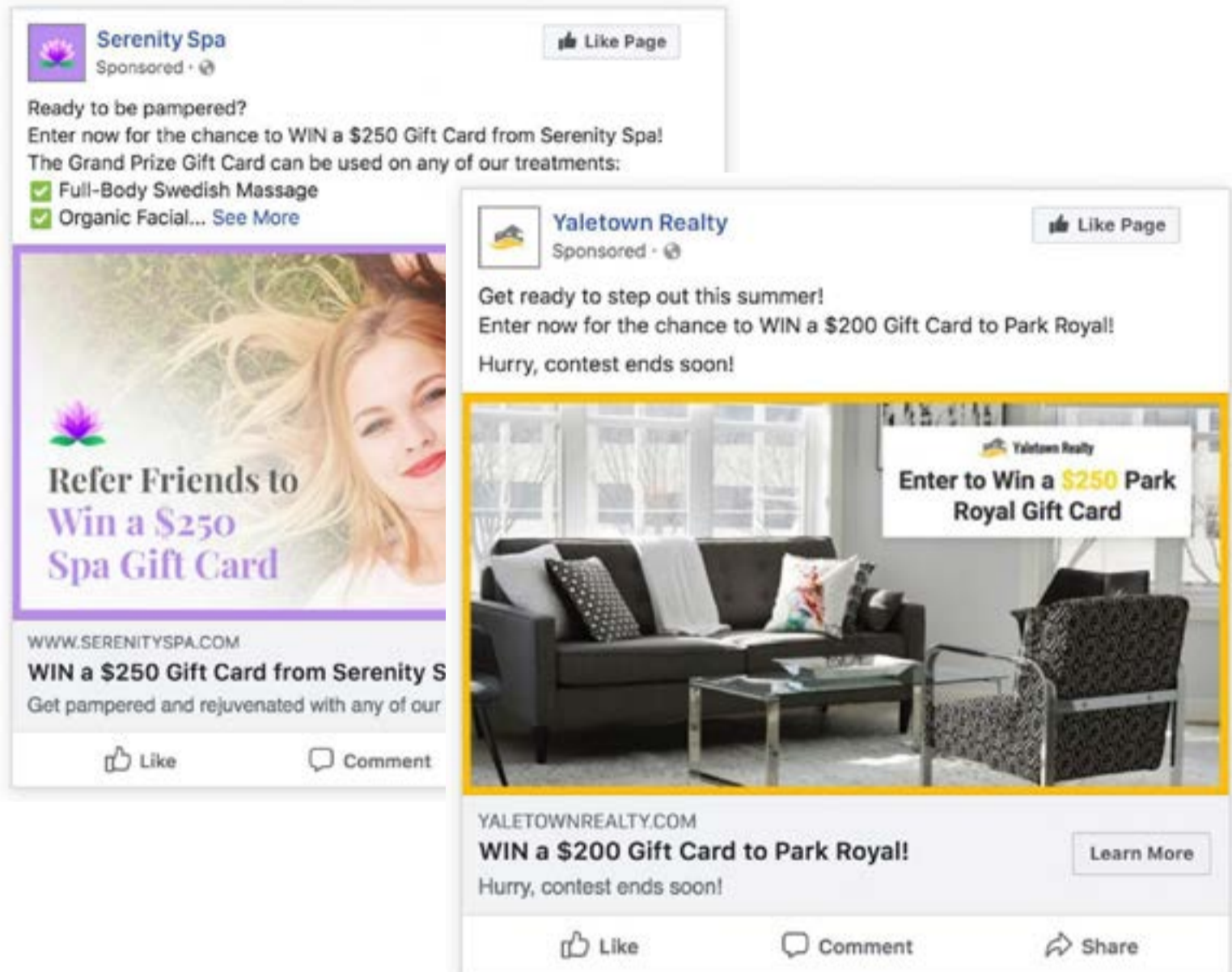
Facebook Ads give you access to the largest audience of prospective customers ever assembled.

You can target based on Interest (which Facebook gets from Pages a user has liked, as well as more complicated methods), demographics (like age, gender, income, etc), or (my personal favorite) Lookalike audiences.

When creating your contest's Facebook Ad, focus on communicating the value of your prize, making it look super appealing, and drawing the eye. Use borders, dollar signs and words like "Free," "Win," and "Limited-Time."

#5. Prompt Entrants to Share

Adding a way for your entrants to get bonus chances to win by sharing is a great way to increase the number of eyes on your promotion.

Wishpond's contest tool has bonus entry add-ons built right into the templates, specifically to increase your ability to incentivize entrants to share.

Think about it. If you have an email list of 1000 people and 50 of them enter your contest, then share with their social network (which comprises, on average, 250 or so people), and then even a few of those people enter, and share with their 250...

Bonus entry add-ons are the most powerful way to make your contest go viral, without paying a dime.

Chapter 3: Related Reading

1 [How to Incorporate Email Marketing and Contests to Maximize Success and Return](#)
- This article breaks down the role of email in contest promotion (as well as follow-up after the contest ends).

2 [How to Ensure a Successful Online Contest with Facebook Ads](#)
- This article explains how to get a positive return on your Facebook Ad investment.

3 [How to Run a Facebook Share Contest: A Step-by-Step Guide](#)
- This guide walks you through a bonus entry, or "Share Contest" step by step, from brainstorming to the final email.

Chapter 4: Converting Entrants

With your contest created, promoted, and entrants flowing in. It's time to determine how you're going to convert those entrants into customers.

This is the mistake I see many first-time contest runners make: They have a great idea for a contest, and it's successful. But then they have no strategy to turn entrants into customers. So the value of their contest is nothing more than brand awareness, when it could be thousands of dollars.

The most effective way to turn your contest entrants into customers is with a series of contest-specific promotional emails, sent as a drip campaign.

Wishpond's contest and marketing software makes creating these easy.

This chapter will break down the emails you'll need to send, as well as when and why to send them.

Let's get into it.

Email #1: Commiserations and Offer

1. Entrant is told they didn't win. Offered discount code.
2. Entrant is prompted to purchase (48-hours remaining).
3. Outright sales email. Features products available.
4. Entrant is prompted to purchase (24-hours remaining).
5. Offer expired email. If another offer, you'll let them know.

The first email you'll want to send notifies entrants of their loss, offers commiserations, and thanks them for entering.

It then goes on to focus on the offer you'll be giving specifically to contest entrants - ideally something like a 20% discount available for 72 hours.

You know people are interested in your prize, so giving them a discount to buy that prize themselves is significantly better than the loss.

Email #2: Follow-up
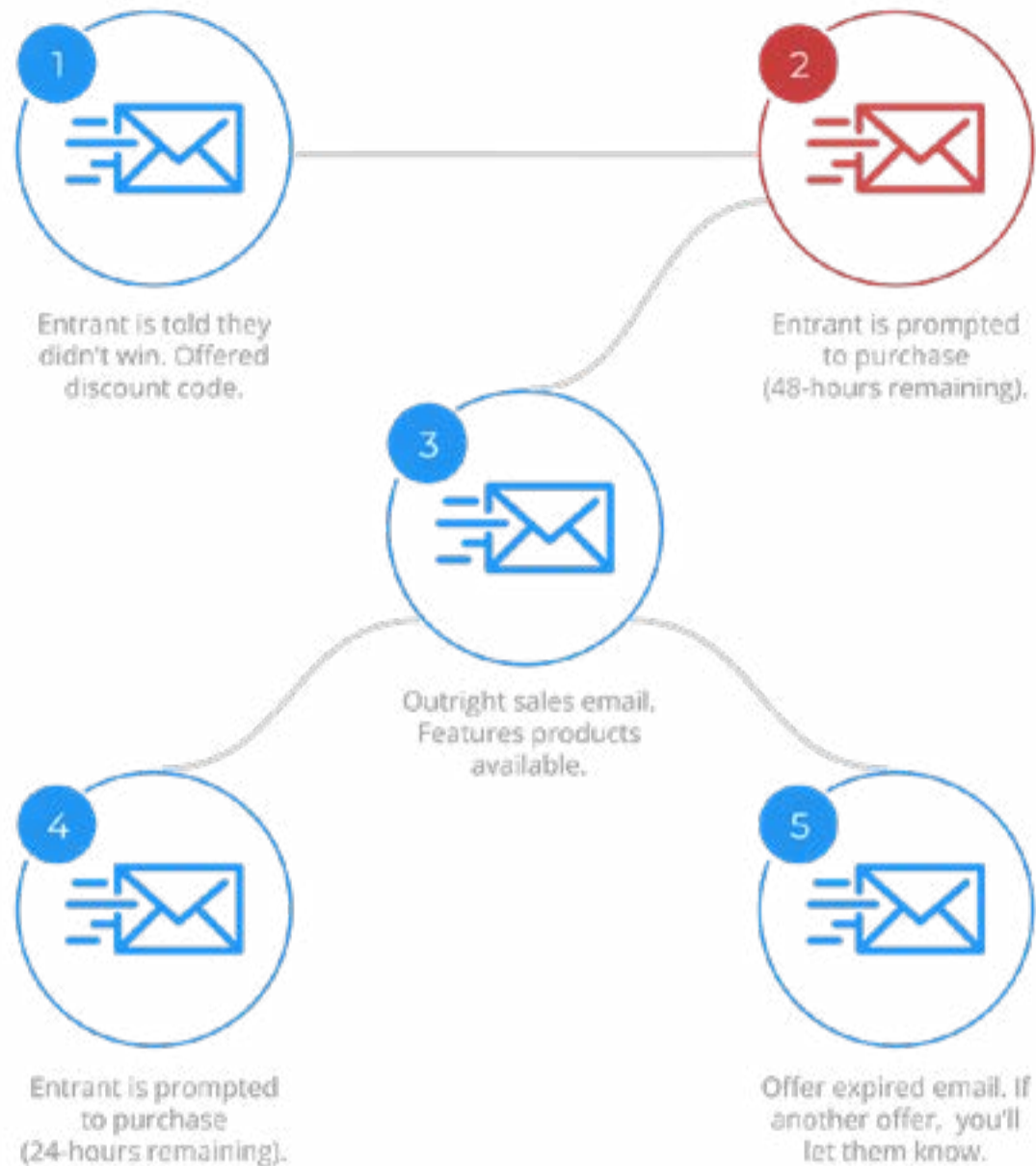
After 24 hours (with 48 remaining) send a follow-up email reminding people of the disocunt and checking that they received your first email.

Use a subject line like "Just checking..." We've found that these kind of "checking up" emails feel far more personal than normal automated emails, and often have a higher open or reply rate.

Within each of these promotional emails, include the discount code so there's no chance your contest entrants/email recipients haven't seen it.

Email #3: Sales-Focused

While the other emails in this drip are more casual, be sure to include one which is more focused on driving sales, today.

Show your products next to the prices. Show how much your discount would take off those prices, and reiterate the importance of buying soon, before the discount expires.

Send all your contest follow-up emails from the same person, except this one. My recommendation is to send it from your head of product or head of sales - to add gravitas to the email.

Email #4: Follow-up

This is the "24 hours left!" email.

Limited-time promotions add urgency to your offer - incentivizing people to convert now, rather than putting it off. The same effect can be created by limiting the number of products you have. Both strategies (limiting time or limiting supply) increase the chance someone will buy from you.

If they're interested in your product (which they will be, because they entered a contest with your product as the prize) they'd rather buy it at a discounted rate than the normal one. Really hit home with messaging in this email to communicate that the discounted rate will be gone forever if they don't buy now.

Email #5: "Won't Bother You"

Entrant is told they didn't win. Offered discount code.

Entrant is prompted to purchase (48-hours remaining).

Outright sales email. Features products available.

Entrant is prompted to purchase (24-hours remaining).

Offer expired email. If another offer, you'll let them know.

**A powerful way to send a "last ditch effort"-type email is with a "We won't bother you again..." subject line.**

Really lay it on thick. Something like...

"I won't continue to email you as I haven't received a response and don't want to bother you any more than I have. If you are interested down the line, just get in touch by replying to this email. I'd love to hear from you. Wish you the best!"

A/B Testing your Emails
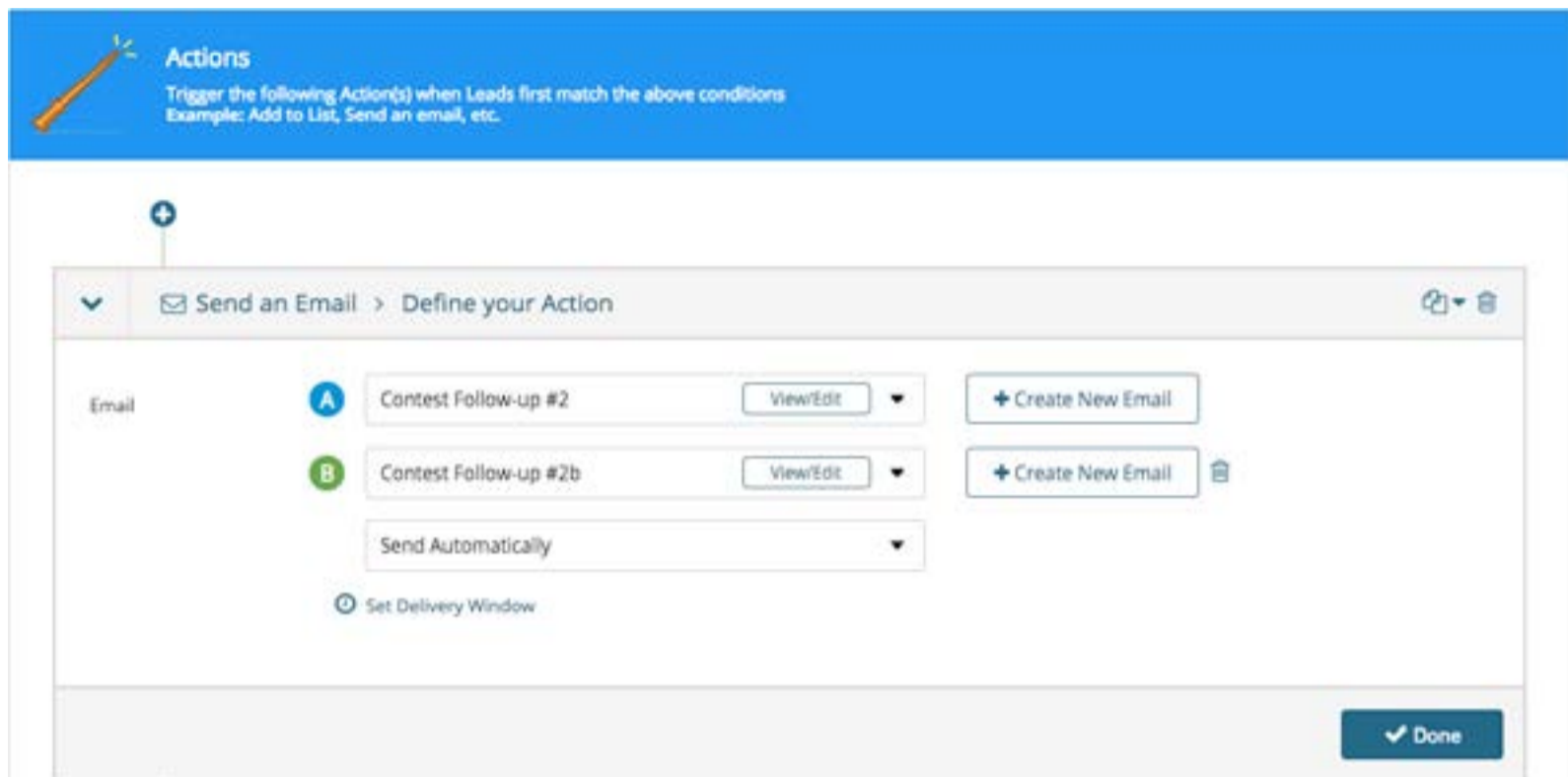
A/B testing in email marketing, also known as "Split" testing, is the practice of sending two different emails to your contest entrants in order to learn what subject lines, copy, "from" name and etc, results in the highest open rates, reply rates or the most sales.

With Wishpond, you can actually A/B test your contest page, website add-ons (popups, overlays, etc) *and* your emails - all from the same marketing platform.

My recommendation would be to test your headlines, the number of fields you ask people to fill out, the images and even the colors you use throughout your campaign.

While A/B testing can be a complicated subject, it's also one of the most fruitful - often resulting in lessons and conversion optimization strategies which can be applied in the future to your next contest or email marketing campaign and drive hundreds or even thousands of dollars in increased sales.

Chapter 4: Related Reading

1 [5 Best Ways to Announce & Notify Contest Winners (With Examples)](#)
- This article gives you examples of emails you should send to notify your contest winner.

2 [How to Incorporate Email Marketing and Contests to Maximize Success and Return](#)
- This article breaks down the emails you need to send before and after a contest to ensure its success.

3 [A/B Split Testing Your Email Marketing Campaigns](#)
- This guide walks you through A/B testing your email campaigns.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

We hope this ebook has given you a better understanding of how to get started and succeed with a contest.

There's a few rules you need to remember, and these are the "actionable takeaways" we want to impress most of all:

1. Use the contest type which works best for your business objectives.
2. Offer something which only your target market will be interested in winning.
3. Focus on the value of your contest's prize. Then add in professional images and clear, simple copy.
4. Use your existing website traffic and email list to get the ball rolling. Coupled with a bonus entry contest, there's no better way to succeed with contests.
5. Never run a contest unless you have a strategy for how you're going to convert entrants into customers. We recommend a five-email drip campaign.

Wishpond's contest and marketing software makes creating all this easy. We built it specifically to do so. If you have any questions, we recommend you book a **15-minute call** with one of our marketing experts. No obligation, just a helpful brainstorming session with someone who knows contests well.

Good luck! And let us know how your next contest goes!

Wishpond makes creating your next contest easy.

We're one of the longest-running contest tool providers out there. We've been running successful contests since 2011.

With industry-based contest templates, email automation, social share incentives and much more, we're offering something no one else is at a super competitive price.

There's never been a better time to try us out.

We're also excited to offer fully-managed campaigns.

That means we'll do it all for you. We'll create the contest pages and website add-ons, manage your ad campaigns, and set up the emails to be sent after your contest is over. You get an account manager, professional designers and ad experts. And all our contracts are personalized for your business.

Try it Free
(No credit card required)

Book a Demo
(No-obligation, 15 minute chat)