



Identical mass marketing emails simply don't work anymore. Customers want materials that are relevant to them and their interests. Your marketing automation system depends on a [robust segmentation strategy](#) to do its best work.

Let's consider a very basic segmentation: customer vs. prospect. Obviously, there is a critical difference between a person who has purchased from your company and an interested window shopper. This is a very important but easy first segment to add to your system.

Unfortunately, this is where you might start overthinking it.

The Problem

It's easy to take customer vs. prospect segments and immediately jump to harder tasks. Why not store everything a customer has purchased so you can further [segment by product](#)? Maybe a renewal date for a subscription service they've purchased? And obviously you want feedback, so why not segment further to send detailed follow-ups or surveys? This thought process can quickly turn the simple act of customer vs. prospect segmentation into something intimidating.

The good news is, you don't have to get that detailed quite yet. Start with a simple goal and save the additional capabilities for a future project.

Customer Segmentation Can Be Simple

Are you having difficulty getting a list of all your customers into Eloqua? You might have conflated your project scope too quickly.

It's easy to think that customer segmentation in Eloqua typically involves a long, detailed process:

- Having meetings to define what a customer is:
 - What if they are really small customers?
 - What if they haven't been active for several years?
 - What if they are only a service/support customer?
- Asking sales reps to go through and flag all their customers or which contacts at an account should be considered customers
- Scrubbing the list of accounts/contacts
- Creating a complex ERP integration

All of these are good ideas, of course. But you don't need to worry about them immediately. Spread your more detailed segmentation plans over several incremental updates to avoid overwhelming your team. You can still get excellent value from your simpler segmentation strategy in the meantime.



A Simpler Approach

Consider taking the simpler approach. Every quarter, ask the accounting department for a list of customer companies. Even if the list is incomplete, you can still easily upload the list to Eloqua and flag the companies as contacts, then set the contacts as customers. And there you have it! You've segmented by customer, and all it took was a few hours of work that you'll repeat every quarter.

As you eventually work your way to a [more detailed strategy](#), consider using the following distinctions for segments:

- **Industry:** You can use standard definitions of industries, like the North American Industry Classification System, or create your own categories (e.g., venture-backed enterprise software startup companies founded in the last 24 months).
- **Geography:** This might include country, state/province, city, and postal code.
- **Job Level:** Different job levels (manager, VP, etc.) will have different interests for you to market to.
- **Job Role:** Consider the department your prospects work in (sales, marketing, etc.)

- **Activity:** Choose segments based on their engagement with your marketing (e.g., prospects who have attended a webinar).

As you master this basic strategy, you can begin implementing updates over time. Don't rush—give your team the time they need to adjust to each change.

This article is an excerpt from our ebook, "7 Common Marketing Automation Mistakes & How to Avoid Them". [Download the full ebook for free here.](#)