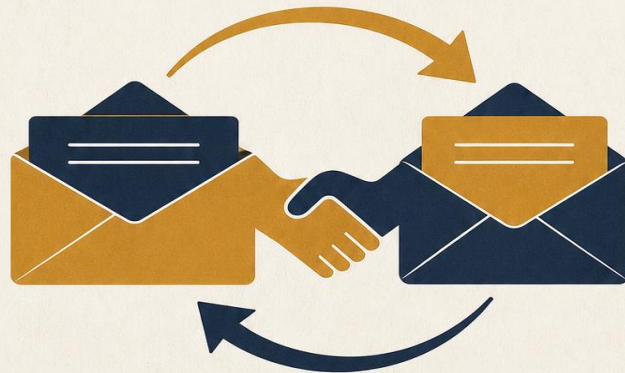

The
List Swap
Playbook:

A GETTING STARTED GUIDE

*Grow your email list without
spending a dollar on ads*



by
SwapMyList

Welcome

This playbook gives you everything you need to run your first email list swap in the next 14 days — even if you've never partnered with another creator before. It is short on theory and long on practical steps.

What you'll get:

- A clear, 7-step process from preparation to follow-up.
- A printable quick-start checklist (last page — tear it out).
- Answers to the 12 most common questions new swappers ask.
- Templates for partner outreach and the swap email itself.

The 7-Step Getting Started Process

Step 1 — Prepare your list

Before reaching out to anyone, make sure your list is swap-ready. You need at least 500 active subscribers, a consistent sending cadence (weekly is ideal), an open rate above 25%, and a clean list (remove bounces and 90-day inactives). Partners will ask for these numbers — have them ready.

Step 2 — Build your lead magnet & landing page

You can't swap if you have nothing to send people to. Create one strong free offer (PDF guide, mini-course, template, or checklist) and a single-purpose landing page: one headline, one promise, one form. No navigation, no distractions. Aim for a 30%+ opt-in rate before swapping.

Step 3 — Write your welcome sequence

New swap subscribers need to fall in love with you in the first 5 emails. Write a 3–5 email welcome sequence that delivers the lead magnet, introduces you, shares your best content, and makes a soft offer. Without this, swap traffic evaporates within a week.

Step 4 — Find compatible partners

Look for creators with: a similar audience (not identical — overlap kills results), a list within 0.3x–3x your size, comparable engagement, and a non-competing offer. Use the SwapMyList directory, or browse newsletter directories like beehiiv Discover and Substack Notes.

Step 5 — Pitch the swap

Keep your first email short: who you are, your list size & open rate, your offer, why you think you're a fit, and a specific proposed swap (e.g., 'dedicated send on Tuesday Mar 12'). A 4-sentence pitch out-converts a 4-paragraph one every time.

Step 6 — Run the swap

Agree on: send date (same day or within 48 hours), format (dedicated email vs newsletter mention), size (equal sends or ratio-balanced), copy approval, and tracking links. Both parties send. Both parties screenshot the send for proof.

Step 7 — Measure & follow up

Within 7 days, share with your partner: new subscribers gained, opt-in rate, and any sales attributed. Send a thank-you, ask what worked, and propose the next swap. Most of your future revenue comes from repeat partners — not new ones.

Frequently Asked Questions

How big does my list need to be to start?

500 engaged subscribers is the practical floor. Below that, most partners won't bite. Above 2,000 you have real leverage. List quality (open rate, engagement) matters more than raw size.

Won't my subscribers unsubscribe if I promote someone else?

A small number will — usually under 0.5% per swap, less if the partner is well matched. The new subscribers you gain almost always outnumber the losses by 5–20x.

How often should I swap?

Start with one swap per month. Once you're comfortable, twice a month is a healthy maximum. More than that and your list will tire of promotional content.

What if my list is much smaller than my partner's?

Use ratio swaps: the larger party sends a proportional subset, or you send 2–3 times to balance one of their sends. Our calculator does the math automatically.

Should I charge or pay for swaps?

No. The whole point is the trade — cash transactions turn it into a paid placement (with different rules, expectations, and disclosure requirements).

How do I track results?

Use UTM-tagged links (`utm_source=partnername`) and a unique landing page per swap. Most ESPs report new subscribers by source automatically when you tag the opt-in form.

What's a good opt-in rate from swap traffic?

10–25% is normal. Above 25% means strong fit. Below 8% means weak fit, weak landing page, or both.

Do I need a contract?

Not for small swaps. For dedicated sends to lists over 10k, a one-page email agreement covering send dates, copy approval, and exclusivity windows is wise.

Can I swap with multiple partners in the same week?

Yes, but stagger sends by at least 3 days and never feature two partners in the same email. Your subscribers should not feel like they're inside an ad network.

What if a partner sends late or not at all?

Reach out once politely. If no response in 5 days, withhold your remaining send. Don't burn bridges, but don't be a doormat.

Should I disclose the swap to my list?

Yes — a single line like 'A friend of mine just launched something I think you'll like' is honest, warm, and converts better than pretending it's spontaneous.

How long until I see results?

First swap: hours. Compounding results (repeat partners, referrals, sales from new subscribers): 60–90 days.

Two Templates To Steal

Partner outreach email

Subject: Quick swap idea — [their niche] x [your niche]

Hi [Name],

I run [your newsletter] — [X] subscribers, [Y]% open rate, focused on [topic]. Big fan of [specific thing they did recently].

I think our audiences would love each other. Open to a swap? I'd send a dedicated email featuring your [offer] on [date], and you'd do the same for my [lead magnet]. Happy to share copy in advance for approval.

Worth a 10-minute call to scope it?

[Your name]

The swap email itself

Subject: The newsletter I wish I'd found 2 years ago

Quick one today — a friend of mine, [Name], runs [Newsletter] and I've been quietly stealing ideas from it for months.

If you care about [topic], it's the best free resource I know. They just released [lead magnet] and it's worth the 30 seconds to grab.

→ **[Get the free guide]**

Back to your regularly scheduled programming on [day].

— [Your name]

Printable Quick-Start Checklist

Tear out this page. Tick each box before launching your first swap.

Preparation

- List has 500+ active subscribers
- Consistent weekly sending schedule for 60+ days
- Open rate above 25% on last 5 sends
- Bounces and 90-day inactives removed
- You know your numbers cold (size, open rate, click rate, top URL)

Lead magnet & landing page

- One free offer created (PDF / mini-course / template)
- Landing page live: one headline, one promise, one form
- Opt-in rate tested at 30%+ on warm traffic
- Thank-you page with next step (video, related read, or soft offer)

Welcome sequence

- Email 1: deliver the lead magnet within 60 seconds
- Email 2: who you are & what to expect (day 2)
- Email 3: your best free content (day 4)
- Email 4: soft offer or call to engage (day 7)
- Email 5: 'reply and tell me what you're working on' (day 10)

Finding & pitching partners

- Built a list of 15 potential swap partners
- Confirmed audience overlap is partial, not total
- List sizes within 0.3x–3x of yours
- Sent 4-sentence pitch (not a wall of text)
- Proposed a specific date and format

Running the swap

- Send date confirmed in writing

Format agreed (dedicated / mention / takeover)

Tracking links built with UTM tags

Copy reviewed and approved by both sides

Both parties sent on agreed date

Screenshots exchanged as proof

After the swap

Results shared within 7 days

Thank-you email sent

Notes saved: what worked, what didn't

Next swap date proposed (repeat partners > new ones)

New subscribers tagged in your ESP by source

Need help on any of this? Visit swapmylist.com — the directory, calculator, and full guide are all free.