

## 10 tips to improve your email marketing

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As most email marketers know, delivering emails to the inbox and maintaining the interest of recipients of emails is increasingly difficult. Below are a few tips on how to keep, and hopefully improve, your email marketing efforts.

### Creative

#### Using graphics in emails

Many email clients block images by default so, unless people specifically turn images on, all they'll see is empty spaces where your pictures should be.

Using 'Alt' tags to describe what the offer or image that you can't see says doesn't work with all ISPs either. For example, Gmail displays 'Alt' tags but Hotmail doesn't, so it pays to make sure your message is in the text as well as the image.

#### HTML for web pages is different to that required for emails

Web sites are becoming increasingly more graphical as browsers become faster and bandwidth improves. So Web designers push the design envelope, using the latest technology, pretty graphics and eye-catching elements. But with email, you need to go back to basics and use elementary HTML. In particular, avoid the use of any scripting, Styles (such as CSS) and background images.

### Data

Any time you get a lot of hard bounces, whether a welcome message, marketing or transactional email, it can have a negative effect on your reputation with an ISP.

#### Get the email address right at the point of collection

Rather than have use two boxes to get registrants to verify their email address (where people just copy and paste what they typed in box one into box two), a standard JavaScript validation alert box might be useful. The pop-up can ask: *Your email address is ... If this is correct, click OK to continue or click Cancel to change your email address.* If you don't want the pop-up confirmation, at least disable copy and paste for the second box and force people to re-type their email address.

#### Fix email addresses that are already in your database

Create a dictionary of all the different errors and misspellings you have seen in an email address string. Inbox Warriors has built up a list of over 400 items, ranging from non-alphanumeric characters that are not accepted, to 76 ways to misspell a Hotmail address. If you're really smart, build this into the registration process so misspellers get an error message stating that the email address is invalid and request they re-type in their address.

## Targeting

Email targeting is often overlooked when sending email campaigns, yet it need not be difficult to achieve.

### Basic personalisation

Simple to do, so do it! Either in the subject line, in the email itself, or both. First names tend to work better than title and last name.

### Data splits and dynamic content

Maybe you want to send customers a different message to your non-customers. Perhaps you want to send differing emails to your subscribers based on their age, gender, or where they live. By segmenting your database based on what you know about them, you will send more relevant emails that will elicit a better response.

The more sophisticated email systems available will allow you to optimise this process, by creating an email template that dynamically inserts content based on profile flags in the email database. This moves us from the 'one-to-many' email to the 'one-to-few' email. Increasing relevance of email content to recipients will lead to better open and click rates.

### Behavioural Targeting

This need be as difficult or time-consuming as it sounds – especially when it comes to email. Most good email systems will give you a wealth of reporting data on how people have interacted with your email campaigns. Who opened the email? When and how many times? What links did they click? Did they purchase? If not, where in the process did they drop out? If yes, what did they buy and how much did they spend? How many times have they done all these things in the last six months?

With a little thought, subsequent email communications can be sent and strong relationships built with your customers. Some can even be automated – such as basket-abandonment emails.

## Deliverability

The single biggest issue facing email marketers over the last four years continues to get tougher. Your reputation as a sender needs to be squeaky clean to ensure your emails get into the inbox.

### Sender Policy Framework and DKIM compliance

Whoever is sending your emails needs to make sure they comply with the Sender Policy Framework (SPF). If they don't, your emails will fall at the first hurdle of deliverability. This is where it starts to get a bit technical and wordy so it's best to go here for more information: <http://www.openspf.org/Introduction>

Yahoo! has its own version of SPF called Domain Key Identified Mail: <http://www.dkim.org/>

### List hygiene

In addition to ensuring your email address data is clean from a syntax perspective, you will need to manage both unsubscribe requests and bounces effectively. Removing unsubscribes should be relatively straightforward – most email broadcasting systems should be able to manage this automatically. Also remember to pick up unsubscribe requests sent back as

replies and to the sending address if different. You may even get a few via telephone or letter, so make sure these are communicated to whoever manages the email database.

Effective bounce management is harder to achieve. With 99 bounce codes and hundreds of descriptions, creating a rule set to remove the real bounces and leave the others in is an art. Remove too many and you're killing off your customers – remove too few and the ISPs will penalise you.

A much harder call to make is removing customers who haven't opened or clicked in the past year. This is another thing that ISPs can monitor and reputation scores have been known to decrease for senders who do not purge long-term non-responsive customers.

### **Feedback Loops (FBL) and SNDS**

The main ISPs offer email senders the chance to remove people from their lists who have complained directly to them – typically via a 'mark as unsafe' or 'report as spam' link – the advantage being that you don't email those people again and negatively impact your reputation as a sender. However, registering with the various FBLs is not particularly straightforward as there are a number of hoops to jump through and vetting carried out by each ISP individually.

Smart Network Data Services (SNDS) is a Windows Live Hotmail initiative allowing visibility of email traffic through the IP addresses used to send them. Email senders can see mail volume and complaint rates (using a traffic light system) to gauge how recipients are responding. This is another one for the more technically minded: <https://postmaster.live.com/snds/FAQ.aspx>