

BUILDING A PERMISSION-BASED EMAIL MARKETING LIST

Say “Please” Before Hitting Send

InfoUSA wants email marketers to know that you have two choices: You can either send unsolicited email or send email to people who have requested to hear from you. Unsolicited email is, of course, spam, and you definitely don’t want to be known as a spammer – it can harm your business reputation and brand.

By taking the time to build a permission-based email marketing list – that is, a database of people who have agreed to receive your messages – you will build stronger, more trustworthy relationships with your customers and prospects.

You’ll stop wasting time and money on prospects who are not interested in your services. And you’ll also stay on the right side of the government regulations – visit www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/canspam.html for details on the federal CAN-SPAM Act for more details. While the Spam Act merely requires you to have a “pre-existing business relationship,” it’s always best to get permission first – this also ensures that there’s a record of the recipient’s agreement to receive your messages.

Remember that being a successful marketer isn’t about building the biggest list. It’s about getting the biggest results. When you engage in permission-based email marketing, you will get:

✓ Better response rates

People who sign up for your email list generally have a direct interest in your product or services.

That makes it more likely that these subscribers can be converted into buyers.

✓ Improved deliverability

People who want to hear from you are more likely to provide a legitimate email address. They’re more likely to open and respond to your offers, and you’re less likely to wind up on a blocked-sender list.

✓ Increased trust and brand affinity

By sending emails to subscribers who have granted you permission to do so, you can avoid being labeled as a spammer. And by sending only quality information, you’ll build goodwill with your readers because you’re providing them something of value.

As writer and Internet marketing pioneer Seth Godin says, permission marketing is about “turning strangers into friends and friends into customers.”

SO HOW DO YOU GET PERMISSION?

Ask your customers and prospects to “opt-in” to receive communications from you. There are three levels of opt-ins:

① Basic opt-in

Someone fills out a registration form, for example on your website, and provides his or her email address.

② Confirmed opt-in

After someone signs up to join your email list, you send a “thank you” confirmation email with a link to unsubscribe.

③ Double opt-in

Someone signs up for your email list. You send a confirmation email with a link that must be clicked before they're added to your list. If they don't click the link, they don't get added.

Regardless of what level you choose, be sure to remind your customers that you won't sell or share their email addresses. Why? It's just good business practice. According to a 2008 MarketingSherpa survey of consumers, more than 60% of respondents said they would be more likely to opt-in to an email list if they knew their information would not be shared with other companies.

GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

Getting consumers to grant their permission to receive your emails may be challenging, but the effort is well worth it. Here's one more statistic: according to a 2009 study released by Epsilon and ROI Research, 84% of consumers surveyed said they liked receiving email from companies they had registered with. Even if they don't always read the message, these consumers said it was good to know the information or offer will be there when they're ready.

DELIVERABILITY - GETTING INTO THE INBOX

You spent weeks building "the perfect email" – a compelling message, a dramatic design, and an irresistible offer. You send it out and wait breathlessly for the phone to ring... and you wait... and you wait. What happened?

There's a good chance many of your emails never reached their intended recipients. It's estimated that almost 20% of permission-based emails are blocked, bounced or returned to sender. Why? It could be a handful of reasons – email servers can get overloaded and return them for later attempts, some subscribers change their email addresses, while others flag irrelevant messages as spam. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) also play a big role.

In an effort to protect consumer inboxes from spam, ISPs enforce anything from moderate to severely strict rules regarding unsolicited bulk email. Unfortunately, legitimate emails are often inadvertently blocked.

Whether you're sending email in-house or through an Email Service Provider (ESP), every undelivered email translates into wasted time and lost revenue. Low deliverability can also inhibit the growth of your email program. Even worse, if you end up on an ISP "blacklist" (a list that ISPs use to determine which emails should be blocked), your company's name your email program could suffer a significant setback.

READY FOR SOME GOOD NEWS?

There are many steps you can take to increase deliverability. Here are 5 of them:

① Develop a solid reputation online

In the world of email marketing, reputation is everything.

For example, let's say a customer calls your company with a complaint. If your company handles the issue poorly, this unhappy customer could post negative comments about you online. Before you know it, these comments could be circulated throughout the Internet. The next time you send out an email, some recipients may not believe your company is reputable. They could report your domain as a spammer, affecting how ISPs filter your emails.

How can you avoid this cascading affect? Develop a good reputation and address concerns before they go viral. Actively engage your customers in surveys about your company – what do they like? What can you do better? By creating opportunities for customer feedback, you can gain insight into your company's reputation and build strong business relationships. And by building positive relationships with industry bloggers and participating in social media sites, you can spread good news about your company and develop a rock-solid reputation online.

Just like your relationships with your customers, it's equally important to develop and maintain good relationships with ISPs (or work with an ESP that has a good relationship with the ISPs). ISPs look at many criteria when determining your reputation, including user complaints; the volume of emails sent; the length of time your domain has been active; the number of bounces; whether you're on any blacklists, etc. By working with ISPs to understand their criteria and address their concerns, you can build a solid relationship and gain direct access to these gatekeepers should big issues arise (for example, an ISP wants to shut you off because of a spam complaint.)

2 Minimize spam complaints

Your emails can be flagged as spam for many reasons, including irrelevant messages; unrecognizable or misleading from and/or subject lines; frequency (too many, too often); missing or broken unsubscribe links; spammy-looking content (think back to the spam you've received and don't allow you emails to look or read like that).

One of the major reasons for your emails getting flagged as spam is failing to ask recipients to "opt-in". The first step to minimizing spam complaints is to build a permission-based email-marketing list – a database of people who have agreed to receive your messages.

Also, clearly identify your company in the from line; use a clear subject line; send only well-designed and relevant communications; and set expectations early about what you will send and how often. Good email marketers always work to offer value, while making an effort to not annoy their recipients. "The Golden Rule" also happens to be an excellent email marketing strategy.

3 Clean your lists regularly

A "dirty" email list hurts your deliverability because ISPs will block senders who email repeatedly to bad or closed email addresses. To ensure you have a "clean" email list, remove all bounced accounts

and unsubscribe requests immediately. Another important step: Identify and correct typos in your email files, as well as missing characters in the domain name and extension. If your file is full of outdated email addresses, contact your customers and update their information.

Another far less time-consuming option is to call us and use our email list cleaning service. We can run your list against a national database of email addresses known to be undeliverable or part of a "do not send" list – if the recipient is aggressive about flagging email as spam, it is best to avoid email marketing to them altogether. Our cleaning service will also correct any misspellings of addresses in your list. The service typically pays for itself and then some in the form of better deliverability and a stronger reputation for your company with ISPs. List cleaning before each email deployment is also considered to be an industry best practice.

4 Test your emails via seeding your list

Sending proof of your email to yourself, co-workers or others will help uncover typos, broken links, formatting issues or other potential blocking or filter problems. Be sure to send your email to a variety of email clients (these include AOL, Outlook, Gmail, etc.). HTML emails can look and behave very differently on different platforms, clients and devices. InfoUSA also provides a service that can test your email against dozens of browsers, email clients and mobile devices—just call and ask for our "email pre-flight service."

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Email Experience Council, the email marketing arm of the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), offers a plethora of free tools, advice and insight on deliverability. Visit them online at www.emailexperience.org. Also feel free to call one of our email-marketing experts with any of your questions. As the nation's largest provider of email marketing services, whatever you may need, from design to

delivery, we can most likely handle—or we'll point you in the right direction.

CALL US TODAY
888.297.0899

BASIC LEVELS OF OPT-IN



ANATOMY OF A GOOD EMAIL

Here are a few basic elements that every good email contains:

A From line:

Using your business name and valid email address will encourage recipients to “white list” your address, better ensuring your email will pass through spam filters.”

B Subject line:

Just like the “from” line, the content of a “subject” line will drive prospects to open an email, delete it, ignore it, file it or report it as spam. Keep it short and be sure it accurately reflects the content of the message.

C Preheader

Here you’ll find a link to an HTML Web version of your message as well as white listing and address book instructions. Some companies also include a call to action, an unsubscribe link or mobile text instructions in their preheaders. The purpose of the preheader is to make the email actionable even if the main content or images cannot be viewed.

D Message

You have less than three seconds to hook your reader – do it with a simple, powerful message that clearly offers value in the form of compelling information, entertainment, discounts, free gifts or other innovative content. If you want to create a

relationship with a customer, you'll need to get their attention, offer relevant value and earn their trust. Great emails can achieve all three at once – but one at a time is also good enough to win customers over the course of the next weeks and months. What you don't want, above all, is to annoy them and trigger an opt-out – or worst case, encourage the dreaded “mark as spam” response. As a general rule, no response is a good response in email marketing. Just as you may drive by the same billboard every day for weeks or months until you actually call the advertiser, the secondary goal of email marketing is be easily found and contacted when the customer is ready to take action. And better yet, they don't have to get in their car to find your number.

Rome wasn't built in a day – respect their inbox and keep providing relevant offers they can't refuse. If what you have is something that most of the people on your list want, the clicks and calls will eventually follow.

Also remember that people are busy – just because they don't buy from you today doesn't mean you aren't on their to-do list for a rainy day. They can simply mark your email for follow-up later, or search their inbox for your offer when their paycheck arrives the following week. Don't make assumptions. Stick to your strategy, keep working it, and adjust accordingly once you have decisive statistics to reveal what is happening behind the scenes.

E Value

Offers come in all shapes and sizes – a free trial, a free marketing paper or percentage off etc. Whatever you offer, make sure it's easy to try. Initial offers should be the “lightest” you can devise. Just as meeting up for coffee is easier to schedule into your life than a concert, a free consultation will be easier for them to commit to than requiring them to put down a credit card for an annual subscription.

F Call to action

Many emails are full of information and end up confusing the recipient – they don't know how to respond. Lay out exactly what you want them to do.

G Footer

Here's where you'll put the small print, including an unsubscribe link, a “forward to a friend” link and your physical address (don't forget, a physical address is required by the federal CAN-SPAM law.)

H Company logo

Including your company logo on all of your marketing materials boosts your visibility and helps people remember your brand name. Don't allow your company to be confused with a potential spammer. If you're doing things the right way as an email marketer, fly your flag high and proud – it will pay off as a long-term strategy as your less-competent competitors fall into the spam box.

As people begin to look forward to your emails for all the great content you provide, your ‘from name and logo will signal to them that your emails can be trusted – this paves the way for marketing partnerships, where you essentially vouch for another product or service that you admire and trust. This credibility doesn't happen overnight, but when it does, it can transform your brand into something much larger and more profitable than just the product or service with which you began the marketing relationship.

CALL US TODAY
888.297.0899

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF A LOGO-BRANDED EMAIL



Thank you for taking the time to learn about permission-based email marketing.

Please contact InfoUSA with any questions you may have about our email or database marketing services. A highly-trained email expert is ready to help 888.297.0899.