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Steps to Success
EMAIL DELIVERABILITY

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Did you know the average open rate for marketing emails is 19.7 percent? *According to Silverpop,* the top quartile boasts a 35.7 percent stat while the bottom quartile squeaks in at just 8.2 percent. Where do you fall in this range? Chances are no matter if you are at the top or the bottom, you want to improve your open rate and thus your click and conversion rates. Now is the time to take a detailed look at your email deliverability and how it can be improved.

Think of deliverability as overcoming all of those pesky reasons your emails never make it to buyers' inboxes, including bounces, spam filters, and complaints. With so many challenges, it is imperative you, as an email marketer, take action to ensure more of your carefully crafted emails reach the people signing up for them.

To enhance your email deliverability and improve your inbox placement, follow these 21 steps for success:

1

Set expectations

Any time you ask for an email address, inform the person how you will use it and what type of content to expect. If they didn't know they were going to be subscribed to your newsletter or that you'd be sending them daily deals, there's a good chance they'll be clicking the spam button.

2

Collect opt-in emails only

For the most engaged audience, require visitors to actively agree to receive your email messages by clicking a box labeled "Yes" or making some type of positive response. At a minimum, let them uncheck the box that would subscribe them to your list. This helps to ensure you are communicating with your preferred audience and your messaging will not be labeled as spam. Similarly, do not purchase prospect email lists.

3
Apply an email validation and correction tool to new emails

A real-time verification and correction service **recovers what would be lost leads,** because customers may mistype email addresses on your webpage (up to 8 percent*) or store clerks may improperly enter email addresses (up to 25 percent!*). It can also stop spam traps and fraudulent emails from getting on your list and hurting your email reputation.

4
Mail newly acquired data immediately

Don't give contacts a chance to forget about you. Once they have opted to receive your messaging, immediately send them an automated thank you or welcome email that outlines the benefits of being a subscriber. Likewise, mail to them on a regular basis so that your messages are not unexpected or unwelcome, and make sure your branding is prominent and consistent.

5
Authenticate outgoing emails

Email authentication reduces spam and phishing by verifying the identity of a mail sender. There are several different standards including SPF, SenderID, DKIM and Domain Keys. Ensure you have at least one of these in place so ISPs trust your messages. Here's a handy list of which ISPs support which methods.

6
Be relevant

Relevant emails are read, driving engagement and conversions. Irrelevant emails are ignored, leading to unsubscribes or, worse, spam complaints. Stay relevant by personalizing and segmenting your messages based on behavior, demographics, and interests. In addition, deliver them in a timely manner based on your subscribers' last interaction with you or the content they've engaged with in the past.

7
Monitor your email's response rate

Take a detailed look at who opened your email, who clicked through, where it was opened (mobile versus desktop), and when it was opened. Use this information to segment leads accordingly, optimize your campaigns, and maximize future communications.

8

Implement ISP feedback loops

Most ISPs have a mechanism for notifying senders like you when recipients have marked email as spam or junk. It is likely these addresses do not wish to receive further communications from you, so unsubscribe them immediately to reduce future complaints. Your email service provider should do this automatically for you, but, if you are doing your own mailings, you'll need to setup the feedback loops yourself. If you receive a large of amount of complaints, make the effort to understand why and adapt your email marketing strategy. This will help reduce your complaint rate, improve your sender reputation, and, most importantly, better engage buyers for higher returns.

9

Remove hard bounces

Hard bounces occur when an email server permanently rejects your email – perhaps the domain is not found or the user is unknown. It is important to immediately stop mailing these addresses because bounce rate is a key factor in your email reputation and you will be penalized if it's too high.

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Review your ESP's soft bounce policy

A soft bounce indicates your email was rejected due to a transient error, such as a full mailbox or a temporary issue with the server. You should try sending again to soft bounces, but after a certain point additional bounces are not worth the drag on your sending reputation. Email service providers (ESPs) or email software have varying settings on when and how often they will retry mailing to a soft bouncing address. We don't advise mailing a soft-bouncing address more than three times.

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Track results by source

Compare the delivery, open, unsubscribe, and complaint rates from each of the sources that you obtain emails from. If you are collecting email addresses from several places, including your brick-and-mortar stores, your website, contests and sweepstakes, and co-registration with another company, there is a chance not every channel is providing good data. Perhaps the emails manually entered via sales associates have a high bounce rate or the sweepstake participants are mostly inactive. If so, it's time to make adjustments to improve your list quality for the benefit of your deliverability.

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Create a policy for managing inactive subscribers

First, define what inactive means to your company; how much time should pass before they cross the line from subscriber to inactive subscriber? Next, create a plan to win them back. This will need to be a dramatic approach—perhaps an exclusive, enticing offer or a more personalized approach to your communications. Try testing different frequencies to see if inactive subscribers respond to more or less communications. If nothing works, it is time to delete these contacts, particularly because some ISPs, such as Gmail, are starting to filter email based on user engagement. Inactive users aren't engaging with your content and thus can impact your delivery.

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Segment addresses that fulfill a functional role

Emails to role-based accounts are more likely to be flagged as spam because they are usually read by more than one person. These include emails such as sales@, info@, and support@. If you choose to send emails to these addresses, omit personalization. If you are having deliverability issues, suppress these addresses entirely.

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Consider confirming your opt-ins

Also known as double opt-in, this method requires subscribers to confirm their email address by clicking a link within a verification email before they are added to your email list. Email lists that use double opt-in have no exposure to spam traps and minimal complaint rates. However, many people never click on the confirmation email, so most organizations don't use double opt-in because it significantly reduces list size.

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Clean old and stale data and replace it with current data

Did you know about 30 percent of email addresses change each year? Not to mention misspellings, typos and human error. It is important to remove invalid and fraudulent emails, but you can also fix those pesky errors and replace outdated emails with current addresses. Improving the quality of your data will result in more opens, clicks and conversions.

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Take heed of blacklisting and the risk of typo traps

As an email marketer, being blacklisted may be your worst nightmare. If your company's name appears on a dreaded blacklist, it can be tough to have it removed. So it is imperative to avoid spam traps and other practices that may put you at risk. One particularly tough trap to be careful of is typo traps (to learn more, click here). An email validation service can help avoid these roadblocks to successfully getting your email to customers' inboxes.

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Warm up new IPs it won't have an established reputation

If you start using a new IP address to send email, it won't have an established reputation, and ISPs will block it if they start receiving a lot of emails out of nowhere. Establish a reputation for the new IP by sending your best quality of data over it at first and limiting the size of your mailings.

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Mail transactional emails on a different IP than your marketing messages

Ensure buyers receive your transactional emails by using a different IP to send them. If you often send out promotional or marketing emails to a large list, there is a chance it experiences occasional blocking. Transactional emails typically contain important information and are welcomed by the recipient. By using a separate, clean IP to deploy them, they are more likely to be received.

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Put subscribers in control

If the people on your list feel they can control the type of messages they get and how often they receive them, they're less likely to unsubscribe or complain. Start by having a clear and simple method for opting out, then you can either use a preference center or use your unsubscribe page to give subscribers options.

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Remember, engagement matters

Like a romantic relationship gone wrong, if email subscribers have been too silent for too long, it may be time to let them go. The point of emailing buyers is to communicate with them. Of course you want your subscribers to buy your product, but you also want them to engage with your messaging by forwarding to friends, posting on various social media sites and sharing in other creative ways.

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Monitor your reputation

To stay on top of email deliverability issues, check your reputation and monitor it on an ongoing basis. If you see any blips on your record, investigate the possible causes and address them. However, if you follow these recommendations, your reputation and your email marketing success should only get better.

To learn more about improving your email deliverability, contact TowerData at 1-866-377-3630 or info@towerdata.com.

*Source: TowerData clients aggregated, Feb 2013

About TowerData

TowerData works with marketers, database analysts and IT professionals to improve their contact databases by validating email addresses for better deliverability, providing email intelligence to improve personalization, and adding email addresses to extend their marketing reach. Combining the industry-leading email database with a dedication to exceptional client focus and the highest accuracy, we have been the go-to email data resource since 2001.

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