

15 Email Marketing Best Practices: From Deliverability to Creative

By Sari Tamilio

August 28, 2009

While the marketing world is "all atwitter" over social media, email marketing remains the workhorse of online marketing — highly engaging, highly profitable and growing, even in these challenging times.



As direct mail costs increase, marketers are shifting their budgets and expectations to the email channel. Executing email marketing well, however, isn't always a straightforward process. The rules of the email marketing game are complex, sometimes bewildering, and often subject to sudden and unanticipated changes, especially on the part of internet service providers (ISPs).

Seasoned email marketers, however, know that setting up a process of continuous review and measurement against industry benchmarks and their own previous performances helps keep their programs on track to generate optimal results.

Deliverability and reputation

The critical first step to email marketing success is ensuring that emails reach consumers' inboxes. While the industry average for deliverability falls somewhere in the 88 percent to 97 percent range, email marketers should aim high and challenge themselves to beat even their own best deliverability rates.

Deliverability is influenced by many factors, not the least of which is maintaining a good reputation with ISPs. But reputation, whether in high school or on the internet, is a powerful, subjective and movable concept, so marketers need to take steps to establish their reputations and stay vigilant to keep them as marketing programs grow and evolve. Deliverability best practices include the following:

1. **Strictly comply with CAN-SPAM rules and regulations.** Always provide an unsubscribe mechanism, postal address and a clearly defined "from" address. Also, make sure your subject lines and from addresses aren't misleading.
2. **Adhere to good email address hygiene practices.** Keep "one source of truth" for opt-ins and opt-outs, and institute proven protocols for removal of bounces and the timely implementation of opt-out and opt-down requests.

3. **Send an email communication to your entire list at least once a month.** This keeps your brand top-of-mind with consumers and identifies email addresses that are no longer deliverable, alerting you to communicate with those customers through other channels.
4. **Use sender authentication protocols to confirm and protect your sending domains.** Sender Policy Framework and Domain Keys Identified Mail accomplish the same thing, but because there's no one universally accepted method of authentication, email marketers should employ both.
5. **Establish central control for all email marketing messages.** To avoid putting CAN-SPAM compliance and brand integrity at risk, *never* permit individual stores, locations or divisions to deploy email campaigns independently or maintain their own email contact lists.
6. **Implement ISP feedback loops to remove email addresses that have reported your message as spam.** Every email marketer's goal is to avoid the attention of the "sheriffs of the internet." But with more than 200 self-regulated blacklists operating today, this may be unavoidable. Have protocols in place to suppress the email addresses of consumers unhappy about receiving your mail.

*This is the first of a two-part series on best practices in email marketing. The second part — which will appear in the Sept. 11 edition of **All About eMail** — will offer the remaining nine best practices around campaign management and creative.*

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