



15 Ways To Improve Your E-mail Delivery Rates

By Alan Sharpe

Delivering e-mail newsletters and sales messages to opt-in subscribers and clients is getting more exasperating—and more expensive—by the day. Delivery rates for e-mail have gone through the virtual floor. According to MarketingSherpa, one out of every six people who asked to be on your mailing list won't receive your e-mail newsletter or marketing message because a spam filter blocks it by mistake.

Why You're Just Not Getting Through To Them

As you probably know, the challenge you are facing is primarily spam filters, electronic and human. And no wonder. Consider these sobering numbers:

- 10 out of 12 messages reviewed are considered spam (Postini.com).
- Average users receive 42 unwanted sales pitches a day (Jupiter Research).
- 70% of all e-mail messages will be spam by 2007 (Radicati Group).

Your e-mails fail to reach your subscribers for three basic reasons. Either the e-mail is blocked by the subscriber's ISP or enterprise firewall (in which case it never gets delivered), the e-mail is blocked by the subscriber's spam filter (in which case it gets delivered but is never seen) or the e-mail is deleted by an irritable subscriber with an overzealous delete-key-finger who does not recognize your *From:* address or mistakes your e-mail subject line for something unwelcome.

But take heart. You can employ the following tactics today to increase your e-mail deliverability scores and reach your newsletter subscribers and contacts with the e-mail messages they have asked you to wing their way.

1. Hire Someone To Monitor Your Mail.

Your most expensive option is to retain the services of a third-party vendor to monitor your e-mail deliverability. For a fee, ReturnPath.net, PiperSoftware.com, Deliverability.com, DeliveryMonitor.com and other companies will seed your mailing list with hundreds of e-mail addresses from a variety of domains. When your e-mail arrives, these firms record the time, count the number of e-mails that escaped the spam filters, and generate a report that shows deliverability scores for each ISP. These reports help you notice which ISPs are blocking your messages or are only allowing a few to get through before blocking the rest. You can then take the steps needed to improve deliverability.

2. Test Your E-Mail Messages For Spam Before Sending.

The above companies and a host of smaller software firms let you run your e-mail message by a spam filter before sending. They search for *free*, *buy now* and other words that trigger spam filters. That way, you can see if your message is likely to be flagged as spam somewhere enroute, and tweak

where needed to improve your score before hitting Send. Try the free service at www.ezinecheck.com.

3. **Make Sure Your ISP Is Not On A Blacklist.**

Spammers may have abused the servers of the autoresponder or listserver service that you use. As a result, the major ISPs may have blacklisted or blocked e-mails from these servers. To discover if you are blacklisted, find the IP address of the e-mail server and do a spam database lookup at www.DNSstuff.com or www.OpenRBL.org.

4. **Slow Down Your Email Send Rate.**

Some ISPs set a threshold for how many e-mails you can send during one session. If you exceed this threshold, their software flags you as a spammer and blocks the remainder of your messages. One way around this wall is to send your messages in small bursts, say 200 at a time, with a pause of a few minutes between bursts. The other solution is to host your list on a reputable listserver. The more popular ones include Constant Contact, AWeber, Topica, and GotMarketing Campaigner.

5. **Send Your E-Mail When It's Most Likely To Get Read.**

If you send your message to businesses on a Friday afternoon, chances are that your recipients won't check their e-mail until Monday morning. Your message will be buried way down the list with a ton of spam ahead of it (assuming the recipient's inbox is sorted by date). The most recent messages will get the attention, and your message will likely get overlooked or deleted in the rush to start work. The open rate for e-mail is strongest within the first two days of delivery. Then it drops off a cliff.

6. **Mail On The Best Days.**

Online marketers have discovered over the years that B-to-B e-mails are read most often when they arrive on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, around noon. Mondays are too busy. And Fridays are too close to the golf course.

7. **Use The Right E-Mail Service.**

Choose a reputable service provider who is respected by the major ISPs. They will work on your behalf to keep you off blacklists and deliver your messages on time.

8. **Help Subscribers Change Addresses.**

In every e-mail message, tell your subscribers where they need to go to change their address or modify their subscription. You'll reduce the number of bounce-backs you receive each mailing.

9. **Use Creative Copy Tactics To Circumvent Spam Filters.**

Spam filters block your e-newsletters and marketing messages in a number of ways, and one of them is looking for words that are found in most spam. These include perfectly legitimate words and phrases, such as *free*, *opportunity*, *multi-level marketing* (okay, that one is debatable), *compare rates* and *free installation*. Most of these words you can manage by employing a thesaurus. For example, instead of saying *free*, say *complimentary* or *no charge*.

10. **Get Your Subscribers To Whitelist You.**

When your subscribers opt-in to your list, immediately tell them to add your sending e-mail address to their whitelist or *allowed senders* list so your messages are never blocked by the subscriber's spam filters.

11. **Use A Distinctive, Predictable Subject Line.**

Include a phrase in every subject line that shows at a glance who you are and what your message is about. Subscribers get used to recognizing each message from you. For example, one popular e-newsletter includes the phrase *DM News-iMarketing News Daily* in every e-mail subject line.

12. **Welcome New Subscribers Immediately.**

As soon as someone signs up for your e-newsletter or opts-in to your list, send them a welcome e-mail. Immediately establish a connection between their opt-in action and your e-mail that confirms their membership.

13. **Make Your E-Mail Welcome Message Look Like Your Sign-Up Page.**

Help new subscribers to recognize you in their in-boxes by branding your online sign-up page and your welcome e-mail with the same colors, images and typography.

14. **Send From The Same Domain That Signs Them Up.**

The domain in your welcome message and subsequent messages should match the URL of the webpage that subscribers used to opt-in to your list. Otherwise, they may not recognize you as the sender and they will delete your message by mistake.

15. **Consistently Use The Same *From:* Address**

Keep your *From:* address constant. This helps subscribers who have added your e-mail address to their whitelist or "allowed senders" list.

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