

AOL Enhanced Whitelist and Goodmail Systems' CertifiedEmail

Executive Summary

On January 30, 2006, AOL announced its adoption of Goodmail Systems' CertifiedEmail Service. This is a significant new direction for how AOL will manage spam and further separate legitimate e-mail marketers from the illegitimate ones who send high volumes of e-mail to its Members.

Although good progress has been made in the last couple of years to diminish unsolicited and fraudulent e-mail from reaching consumers' mailboxes, the problem is still huge. AOL's announcement is an evolution in that effort with an entirely new twist. In simple terms, it requires large mailers to pay a fee for guaranteed delivery into AOL inboxes. This does not mean that not paying the fee will prevent mail from going through. It's just not *guaranteed* to go through. As you can imagine, this has raised a lot of controversy in the industry and has left many questions unanswered, such as exactly what the fee will be and if the untested solution will be effective.

In mid-February, e-Dialog hosted a client-only Webinar featuring Charles Stiles, AOL's Postmaster, as guest speaker. Stiles provided an overview of the current state of e-mail delivery to AOL members, stating that the company has seen a 75 percent reduction in unwanted e-mail over the last three years due to its spam-fighting tactics. This has led to improved AOL customer satisfaction. He also discussed AOL's various e-mail delivery options, including the whitelist programs and CertifiedEmail, explaining that all mail delivered to its members is reputation based. Most importantly, Stiles noted that companies that are already whitelisted on AOL will see no effect on delivery.

Following are the facts as they are currently known. Since all of e-Dialog's clients are permission-based marketers, we do not expect any immediate negative impact on the effectiveness of your e-mail going to AOL subscribers. We are aggressively participating in all relevant conversations with AOL, Goodmail and industry groups to fully understand the program and to influence the most optimum outcome for our clients.

Overview

AOL is adopting Goodmail Systems' CertifiedEmail Service because it determined that, with the increasing growth and sophistication of fraudulent e-mail behavior, it must take additional steps to assure the highest degree of AOL Member protection.

AOL's partnership with Goodmail Systems promises to provide a premium delivery service that will help shield its Members from fraud and phishing and allow them to be comfortable that commercial CertifiedEmail messages are from qualified senders and are authentic and safe to open. In return for paying for the CertifiedEmail Service, marketers will be guaranteed inbox delivery with a CertifiedEmail seal, as well as fully enabled links and images. (See * below for more information on guaranteed delivery.)

CertifiedEmail Summary:

- Messages will display fully functional images and links by default.
- Messages will bypass AOL volume and content filters ensuring delivery to the inbox.
- A CertifiedEmail trust icon will be displayed in the inbox list view and in the non-spoofable area of the message window to indicate that the message is from a CertifiedEmail accredited sender.

- *CertifiedEmail messages may still be blocked if AOL has enabled an IP-level block.
- Certification process takes about 30 days for the due diligence and implementation to be completed.
- Important Note: While this POV primarily speaks to changes with AOL, please note that Yahoo! will also be using CertifiedEmail. Yahoo!'s implementation date has not yet been released. As we learn more about Yahoo!'s implementation plans, we will communicate those updates to you.

If you do not use CertifiedEmail: AOL will still allow bulk e-mail to be delivered without the CertifiedEmail symbol. However, e-mail without the CertifiedEmail symbol will be screened by the same criteria (volume, content filters, user settings, whitelisting, etc.) as AOL has done previously.

- Being listed on the general Whitelist gets you past the initial network level filters.
- Being listed on the Enhanced Whitelist (EWL) will automatically enable links and images.
- If you are in the recipients' address book your images and links will render regardless of your whitelist status and you are likely to be delivered to the inbox – based on the individual recipients' browser settings.
- Links and images can always be enabled by the end user on a message-by-message basis or by adding the sender to the address book.

What is the AOL Enhanced Whitelist?

The Enhanced Whitelist originated shortly after AOL released the 9.0 version of its browser. The default security settings block HTML images and clickable links from all senders not in the individual recipients' AOL address book. The intention of this feature was to protect Members from embarrassing images and links in their browsers. However, it was not well received by legitimate advertisers on AOL's site and subsequently AOL introduced the EWL.

The EWL is a subset of the regular Whitelist. This initial Whitelist program was set up to discriminate good and bad mailers coming into AOL servers. If a marketer qualified for the general Whitelist their e-mail was allowed through the standard filters, though still subject to individual users' filter settings. The EWL was set up for bulk e-mailers and e-mail marketers who met strict delivery standards based on complaints to AOL. Inclusion in the EWL is done automatically based on the average complaint/million ratio for an IP over a rolling 30-day period. If the IP is on the EWL, images and links are enabled regardless of being listed in the recipient's address book.

EWL status has no correlation with deliverability. Being on the EWL automatically renders images and links. It does not impact delivery to the inbox or filtering to junk/bulk folders.

What is Goodmail Systems' CertifiedEmail Service?

The Goodmail CertifiedEmail service is a new and previously not widely supported technology that promises to provide a safe and reliable class of e-mail that will help shield consumers from spam, fraud and identity theft. The service involves placing a "trust symbol" in the e-mail that designates mail as certified. This enables it to bypass filters that often relegate legitimate e-mail to the spam pile.

- **Sender/Domain Accreditation:** Goodmail's accreditation process authenticates the identity of the sending entity and confirms that the sender meets the highest standards of e-mail sending behavior. This ensures that only qualified senders are allowed to send

CertifiedEmail messages and that the sender identity displayed in a CertifiedEmail message (name and e-mail address) is accurate and legitimate.

- **Cryptographic Secure Tokens:** To ensure message security, a cryptographically-secure token that cannot be copied or stolen is inserted into each message and makes certain that the Goodmail CertifiedEmail message cannot be tampered with, forged, or spoofed.
- **Inbox Authenticity Labeling:** A distinct trust symbol in the e-mail user interface allows consumers to easily distinguish legitimate e-mail from spam and feel safe opening these messages. Placement of the icon in the e-mail user interface, rather than in the message itself, ensures that it cannot be spoofed by fraudulent senders.
- **Reputation and Enforcement:** Because a token is embedded in each message, Goodmail can manage a certified reputation and enforcement system built on measurement of the actual message volume of a CertifiedEmail sender. This, combined with consumer feedback, establishes an objective and accurate reputation score for each sender and assures that only senders who adhere to the best sending practices continue to enjoy the privilege of sending CertifiedEmail.
- **Cost:** Goodmail and AOL have not announced the actual cost of participating in this program. They have explained that the pricing model for CertifiedEmail is based on a charge for all tokens redeemed each mailing. The speculated pricing range is \$.0015 - \$.005 per token embedded. If for example, a marketer mails to 1,000,000 AOL addresses the additional charge for CertifiedEmail would be \$1,500 – \$5,000.

Conclusion

e-Dialog has been reviewing GoodMail, Bonded Sender and Habeas, as well as other authentication and reputation proposals. On a technical level we support these services in our e-mail and believe they are an important part of the evolution of eradicating spam. Further, we continue to be strong advocates working with industry players to find a universal and non-fee based solution for identifying authentic and reputable e-mail.

Goodmail's program is the latest attempt to eliminate spam by holding marketers accountable for the e-mail they send and giving consumers a safety net for the e-mail they receive. e-Dialog will consult with you as your needs dictate about which of these services are best or necessary at this moment in time. Ultimately, if you are in the recipients' address book or on the Whitelist your e-mail should be delivered successfully and completely enabled to your customers' inboxes. Your account team can work with you to set up "add-to-address book" programs.

We will continue to share news and opinions with you about the ever evolving challenges of the e-mail channel. For more information on this or other deliverability-related subjects contact Rick Buck, Director of Privacy/ISP Relations, at rbuck@e-dialog.com. Additional POV documents are also available at our resource center at http://www.e-dialog.com/resources_prvcyisp.cfm.