

Point-of-View

Four Essentials for Managing Your E-mail Reputation for Best ROI

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E-mail reputation is not just a technical issue between big e-mail service providers, marketers, and ISPs like AOL, MSN or Yahoo!. Your e-mail reputation reflects on your brand as well as impacts your e-mail efforts. It is to your advantage, therefore, to manage your e-mail program to ensure you maintain a topnotch e-mail reputation. Here's how you do it:

To start, understand that senders of e-mail are identified by their IP address and domain name. ISPs track the complaints they get and the undeliverable mail they pass along. Excessive complaints, undeliverable mail, or the presence of spam traps (e-mail addresses used specifically to catch spammers) associated with your IP address and domain can quickly give you a bad e-mail reputation and result in your e-mail being delivered to a junk folder or worse, blocked.

ISPs take fraudulent e-mail very seriously. Therefore, your reputation is critical in ensuring consistent deliverability to an inbox. Improving your e-mail reputation requires that you leverage the following best practices:

1. Check that your list is highly deliverable. ISPs want to see at least a 90% delivery rate. 100% delivery is probably not attainable due to the natural attrition rates of e-mail addresses. In truth, many businesses do much worse: According to Jupiter Research less than one-half of marketers report delivery rates higher than 80%; one-third struggle with less than 80%, and roughly one-quarter don't know.
2. Build up your credibility as an e-mail sender. ISPs want to know that your IPs and related DNS information are authentic and accountable. This can be accomplished by authenticating your outgoing e-mail with one or more of the current technologies such as SFP, Sender ID, Domain Keys and soon DKIM. Your credibility and reputation as a mailer can be further enhanced through companies like Return Path, Habeas and Goodmail that for a fee certify your e-mail or IP address and ensure deliverability to the inbox at the ISPs they respectively service.
3. Minimize complaints. Send relevant, targeted information on a timely basis. Complaints typically result from sending inappropriate or irrelevant mailings, sending too frequently, or by questionable list-building practices. Complaints not only tarnish your reputation with ISPs they also influence the content filters that flag your e-mail as spam.
4. Most importantly, take a hard look at your customer database. Relevance and targeted audience selection are key. You need to be ruthless about culling your e-mail lists of all names that aren't likely to continue to be customers. These are the people who have ignored your multiple mailings over the past two or three years. Remove them from your active mailing list. This is very difficult because nobody wants to drop customers, but the reality is that they are already gone.



Eliminating the deadwood from your list has immediate benefits:

- *It removes all of the people who don't respond and changes your measurement denominator so that all other metrics go up (opens, clicks, conversions and sales).*
- *It lowers the potential for complaints.*
- *It reduces your risk of mailing spam trap names.*
- *It enhances the reputation of your IP address and increases the potential for delivery.*

Do the above and your response rate and e-mail reputation will improve. That's a sure ROI win.