

Point-of-View



# Getting in the in-box: relevance and reputation

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## **OVERVIEW:**

Over the past few weeks, Microsoft and AOL have announced changes to the way they process e-mail for delivery. These changes include throttling IP volume, blocking images and links, grey listing and other similar techniques. They have done this to effectively separate fraudulent messages from legitimate ones sent to their servers, and thus protect their consumers from Spam, viruses, phishing, etc. Surely there will be more widespread adoption of these practices across the ISP community in the coming months, making them part of the new IP acclimation process for all e-mail marketers regardless of who sends their mail. However, there is little reason for marketers to be alarmed by these changes if they are optimizing their e-mail campaigns for relevancy.

Moreover, in many respects the industry should embrace these more stringent deliverability requirements because they motivate marketers to send the most intelligent e-mail they can in order to build and maintain a solid IP reputation for themselves. It's this reputation, combined with authentication and accreditation that will get e-mail delivered to the inbox and ultimately, advance the perception of e-mail marketing on the whole.

### **An Historical Perspective: Relevance Trumps All**

To explain why marketers should not be alarmed by these changes, it is helpful to put them in perspective with the historical trends of e-mail marketing and delivery.

#### **2000-2003: E-mail batch and blast**

E-mail marketers mailed the same message to their entire database, leading to consumer resentment toward unsolicited e-mail.

#### **2003-2004: Legislation**

Governments in several countries responded to consumer concerns by enacting legislation limiting the types of messages that could be sent, who they could be sent to and the respective data protection and privacy specifications. Legislation includes CAN-SPAM in the United States, PIPEDA in Canada, and the EU Data Protection Act.



### **2005-2006: Authentication and accreditation**

Technology emerged that allows ISPs to verify the sender of a message, including SPF, SenderID and Domain Keys. Commercial certification solutions also became available, such as Habeas, GoodMail and Sender Score.

### **2007 and Beyond: Reputation**

ISPs began to look at the overall reputation of a marketer's IP. Reputation is based on a variety of metrics including: volume of mail sent, longevity of the IP, list hygiene, authentication, accreditation, delivery/bounce rates and complaints. Delivery, deliverability and subsequent conversion metrics are contingent on reputation.

Each of these phases has brought about new deliverability challenges, but through them all one overriding best practice has helped marketers consistently get their mail delivered: relevance.

### **How Relevance Influences Reputation**

Briefly stated, relevance is sending the right message to the right person at the right time. But while content is key, target audience selection is also significant to achieving relevancy. Marketers need to continually capture e-mail preferences and customer profile information in order to build and maintain relevance. They also need to regularly analyze non-responders and undeliverables and cull e-mail lists of all the names that aren't likely to continue being customers. This has immediate benefits:

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



ISPs have increasingly begun to use the reputation of sending IP addresses to determine whether or not to accept e-mail from them. Your IP reputation is based on a combination of factors including:

- *Volume/frequency of mailings*
- *Delivery rates*
- *Complaint rates*
- *Presence of spam traps*
- *Block/black listings*

Though not a direct performance metric for IP reputation, relevance has a significant impact on deliverability. Sending the right information to the right person at the right time will result in fewer complaints, less bounces, no trap addresses, higher address book penetration, consistent AOL EWL (Enhanced Whitelist) listings, links and images will be enabled, and mail will be delivered to the inbox.

Does this mean marketers mail less often or to fewer people? Not necessarily. It means they send the right content, the right volume, at the right frequency, to carefully identified segments of their list. Sending this data-driven, relevant e-mail will build a good reputation. Opens, clicks, conversions will follow, and ultimately revenue will increase.

**For more information on this or other deliverability-related subjects please contact Rick Buck, director of privacy and ISP relations for e-Dialog: 781-372-3317 or [rbuck@e-dialog.com](mailto:rbuck@e-dialog.com).**