6 Top Tips for Improving your Email Deliverability

∞MMUNICATOR

Experts in email performance

What's the point in sending awesome email campaigns if they don't reach your recipients?

Answer?

None whatsoever!

That's why it's important to work on your email deliverability.

Deliverability is the ability to get an email into the intended recipient's Inbox

There are steps you can take and key changes you can make (some of them really quick and easy) so you can sit back and relax knowing your emails are going to end up where you wanted them to go.

The topic of delivery can often be a minefield of technical jargon but it really isn't rocket science, so we've pulled together our top 6 tips explained simply to ensure your emails reach your recipients' inbox.

1 Grow your mailing list organically

2 Use a double Opt-in sign up process

3 Set up private domain support

4 Be more relevant

5 Continuously segment your mailing list

6 Manage risk

1 Grow your mailing list organically
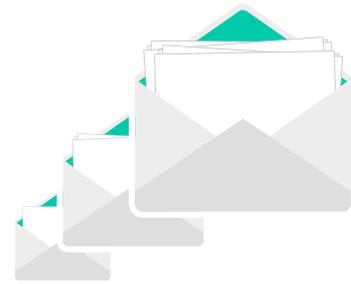
It can take time to grow your list organically. It won't happen overnight, however there's no real substitute for taking the time to obtain your own list of email addresses, using your own sign up form on YOUR website. Once this list is collected you have the peace of mind that your audience matches what your business needs. The people on it have explicitly requested to receive communications from your company.

The happier your recipients are to receive your emails, the more they'll open and interact with them, which reflects positively on your sender reputation. Happy recipients provide you with the perfect foundation to build upon this initial trust as you learn more about them throughout their customer lifecycle.

## Tips for growing your mailing list

- Make sure that there's plenty of opportunity for people to register their email address throughout your website.

- Integrate offline growth campaigns with email registration by directing people to a sign up form on your landing page.

- Provide an incentive as part of your existing direct mail or print advertising campaigns to register online with your brand.

- Keep the initial sign up process simple by only asking for names and email addresses, further information can be collected at a later date.

- After your initial email, request further information to collect your subscribers' preferences and build your knowledge of each recipient. This will help you to target future communications.

Download our free guide to increasing your subscriber numbers for more hints & tips.

2 Use a double opt-in sign up process
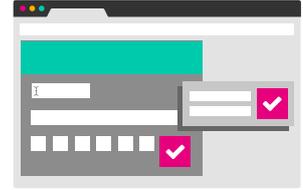
It's easy to mistype an email address. Typos during sign-up don't just lead to an increase in bounces; those typos may mean that you send emails to the wrong person, resulting in complaints and delivery problems. Worse still, your customers will think that you don't love them anymore. When they don't get any emails from you, it's highly unlikely that they'll consider that they may have provided you with the wrong email address, so there's a good chance you've lost them forever!

Double opt-in is the only genuine way to confirm both email validity and email address ownership. Subscribers complete a Double opt-in by first of all completing your sign up form and then later confirming subscription to your list. This is usually carried out by sending an opt-in confirmation email after your subscriber's entered their details on your website.

Other advantages of the Double Opt-In method in relation to delivery

- When you use this method, you can rest assured that you're only contacting people who really want to hear from you. Double opted-in lists have higher engagement levels which also translates into more opens and clicks and fewer bounces and unsubscribes

- As you need a valid email address to confirm, people won't be able to sign up with fake or old addresses which could lead to a bounce

- If a person, or a spam bot enters an address with a typo, you're protected against accidentally sending emails to people who never opted-in to receiving your emails in the first place

- You can only sign up with your own email address reducing the risk of people signing other people up to receive your communications. This reduces the risk of spam complaints which can devalue your sender reputation

3 Set up a private domain

A private domain is an email address which features your name as the sender, rather than the email service provider. For example, if our clients use a private domain, their recipients will receive emails from x@companyname.com instead of x@communicatoremail.com.

Personalising your sender domain creates a good first impression as your recipients will instantly recognise who the email is from and they're therefore more likely to open your email. It's also a good idea to personalise your from address with a name. For example, instead of customercare@companyname.com use a real name such as sophie@companyname.com

Advantages of using a private domain in relation to delivery

- A better recipient experience with your emails, as well as protecting and enforcing your brand in the inbox

- Increased click-through rates due to recognition and ultimately increased revenue

- If our clients use a private domain, all inbound mail, bounces and replies are handled by Communicator, removing the need for our clients to manually monitor mailboxes

4 Be more relevant

Improving the relevancy of your emails will improve delivery, response and retention rates and on the whole will increase the effectiveness of your email campaigns. The DMA report that the value of one size fits all campaigns is continuously decreasing, so it's important to understand the value of individual and targeted communications.

How to send more relevant emails

- Collect additional preferences at every touch point throughout the customer journey. By collecting just a couple of pieces of information at every opportunity it enables you to build an invaluable bank of information about each individual subscriber to inform future campaigns

- Track web behaviour and use it to determine the behaviour that leads to sales. Look at preferred products viewed and use this information to trigger automated product-specific offers. Also look to implement sales recovery emails to recoup potential revenue

- Listen to your subscribers, listen to their actions as well as their feedback. Are they actually clicking on your messages? Do they buy only once a year? Build a preference centre so you're able to collect their choices and adjust the frequency of your emails to match their actions

- A little bit of content goes a long way. Add tips to your promotional messages, add a humorous story or a quote to your template, include testimonials and reviews. Content possibilities are endless and it keeps your emails fresh and new with each communication

- Better subject lines improve relevancy. If you can do nothing else to customise your emails then segment your mailing list to include product names, city, gender etc. in your subject line. "25% off everything" can be improved, just by using "Stop shivering, Cardiff. 25% off all extreme weather gear"

- Thank your customers. It's a good way to stay in touch. You don't even need to include offers and discounts, just be sincere

- Treat your customers and prospects differently. Your customers need a different email journey than your prospects. Customers should be made to feel special and prospects should be educated to move them through the appropriate sales funnel so tailor your emails accordingly

5 Continuously segment your mailing list

Subscribers go through a lifecycle whilst they're in your mailing list. By intelligently identifying, targeting and supressing lifecycle segments, a mailing list can become more effective and campaigns much more successful. In simple terms, the more people you have opening and interacting with your emails, the better your sender reputation the better your inbox placement.

If you've never segmented your mailing list before, we'd suggest you split your subscribers into four main categories; new subscribers, recent openers, long-term non-openers and subscribers who used to open who haven't opened recently. You can then target these segments within your mailing list.

How to further segment your data

- **Send new subscribers a welcome programme**

  This is really easy to implement and could be automated so that every new sign up triggers one or more welcome emails. Don't assume that your new subscribers know all there is to know about your brand and website. A short series of emails over the first couple of weeks could include informative content and helpful hints about key features to introduce them and build your relationship from the offset.

- **Remove non-responsive subscribers, expired email accounts and spam traps**

  Maximise the potential of your campaigns by removing non-responsive subscribers and only sending your most frequent mailings to recently active and new subscribers. You're wasting your time sending to inactive people and you'll be better off taking them out of your mailing list.

- **Send your recently active subscribers your best offers**

  The subscribers who are opening and clicking on your emails now are your most valuable. You need to make a real effort to keep them loyal, happy and engaged as they're the guardian angels of your revenue, your social sharing and your delivery rates. Send them targeted emails featuring your best, exclusive offers and they'll thank you in the long run.

- **Target subscribers who haven't opened anything after a period of time**

    Targeting previous openers with campaigns to re-engage them can be a lot more effective than trying to get new subscribers into your mailing list.

    Before you give up on non-responsive subscribers, give them a couple of chances to interact. Think of why they're no longer opening; do you send them the content that they want to receive? Have you recently increased your email frequency and are you in danger of bombarding them with the same content time and time again? Try removing these people from your main campaigns and then target them with very specific content to attempt to re-engage them. Ask them if they'd like to change their preferences or to confirm that they're really interested in your emails.

    Remember, these people haven't been opening and clicking for a while, so you need to give them a good reason to want to open again. Think clever personalisation and compelling subject lines. If your efforts are still in vain, now's the time to remove them from your mailing list completely.

6 Manage your risk

It's important to effectively manage the things which will have a direct impact on your sender reputation. Sender reputation is affected by the following;

Hard Bounces

A Hard Bounce is an email that's been returned due to the recipient's mailbox being invalid or unreachable. This usually occurs if the domain doesn't exist or the mailbox doesn't exist. If you experience a sudden increase in hard bounces you should investigate:

- Any new data which has been imported recently as this may contain invalid contacts.

- The origin of the data. For example, was it purchased from a data vendor?

- Check if the data has recently been 'unbounced'.

- Get in touch with your ESP who can update you on any recent changes to email validation rules which could be affecting your delivery.

- Check the ISP/domain of the bounces as there may have been a recent change to policies and standards.

Soft Bounces

A Soft Bounce is an email that's been unable to be delivered due to temporary failure. Your email service provider will usually try to send to the specified address for up to 48 hours. Once this time is up, the message will then be reported as a soft bounce. This usually occurs when a recipient's mailbox is full or their mail server is temporarily unavailable. If you experience a sudden increase in Soft Bounces, it's a good idea to investigate the cause to see if it's something you can prevent.

Third party data

Third party data should be handled with care. There are steps you can follow to minimise your risk;

- Before handing over any cash, get proof from your data vendor that the data is valid, recent and relevant to the campaign you wish to run.

- Send several test dispatches prior to using any new 3rd party data for bulk emails - no more than 50,000 emails per day.

- Cancel the campaign if you experience delivery problems.

- Analyse the delivery of the test dispatches.

- Revert back to the data vendor if there are serious delivery issues.

- Separate all of the deliverable email addresses from the mailing list and only use these for your campaign.

Recipient fatigue

There may come a time when your recipients are simply no longer interested in your communications or at a point where they need to take a break (decreased opens and clicks, increased unsubscribes and complaints or increased soft bounce rates can all indicate this). The key to avoiding this situation is to ensure your recipients remain engaged with your emails. Take another look at your customer lifecycle; recent purchasers may wish to suspend emails for a couple of months – this is common in the travel sector. You may wish to provide options for people to change the frequency they receive your emails – opting down instead of opting out. Or it may be time to implement a re-engagement strategy for inactive addresses so you're able to permanently remove addresses that remain inactive and reactivate the dormant ones.

Putting it into practice

It's not too difficult to see the importance of making sure your emails end up where you want them to go. If you follow these simple guidelines you should be well on your way to delivery success.

Deliverability can often be quite a technical topic and we've given a fairly general overview here; if there's anything you'd like explaining in more detail or if you have any questions, get in touch and we'll be happy to share further delivery expertise!

For any of the guides mentioned throughout, visit

www.communicatorcorp.com/resources