

E-mail – avoid spam and improve opening rates

Avoiding e-mail spam

Spam is a fact of internet life and according to recent figures from the security software industry, more than 80% of e-mail traffic is made up of spam. To fight the spam menace, here are ten ways to help prevent your e-mail address from becoming a target to spammers.

- 1) Do not post your e-mail address in an unprotected form on the internet. If you need to post your e-mail address, format it so that it cannot be easily harvested such as "name@hotmail.com". If you need to include your e-mail address in your signature, include a small graphic image containing your e-mail address.
- 2) Check to see if your e-mail address is visible to spammers by typing it into a Web search engine such as www.google.com. If your e-mail address is posted to any Web sites or newsgroups, remove it if possible to help reduce how much spam you receive.
- 3) Many Internet Service Providers (ISP's) provide free e-mail addresses. Set up two e-mail addresses, one for personal e-mail to friends and colleagues, and use the other for subscribing to newsletters or posting on forums and other public locations.
- 4) Many ISP's also offer free spam filtering, so if this is available, use it. Report missed spam to your ISP, as it helps reduce how much spam you and other members of the same ISP receive. If your ISP does not offer spam filtering, use anti-spam software to reduce the amount of spam delivered to your inbox.
- 5) Never respond to spam. If you reply, even to request removing your e-mail address from the mailing list, you are confirming that:
 - a.) your e-mail address is valid.
 - b.) the spam has been successfully delivered to your inbox.
 - c.) the e-mail was not picked up by a spam filter.
 - d.) you opened the message and read the contents.
 - e.) you ultimately responded to the spammer.

Lists of confirmed e-mail addresses are more valuable to spammers than unconfirmed lists, and they are frequently bought and sold by spammers.

- 6) Do not open spam messages wherever possible. Frequently spam messages include "Web beacons" enabling the spammer to determine how many, or which e-mail addresses have received and opened the message. Use an e-mail client that does not automatically load remote graphic images, such as the most recent versions of Microsoft Outlook and Mozilla Thunderbird.
- 7) Do not click on the links in spam messages, including unsubscribe links. These frequently contain a code that identifies the e-mail address of the recipient, and can confirm the spam has been delivered and that you responded.

- 8) If you have an e-mail address that receives a very large amount of spam, consider replacing it with a new address and informing your contacts of the new address. Once you are on lots of spammer's mailing lists, it is likely that the address will receive more and more spam.
- 9) Make sure that your anti-virus software is up to date. Many viruses and Trojans scan your hard disk for e-mail addresses to send spam and viruses. Avoid spamming your colleagues by keeping your anti-virus software up to date.
- 10) Do not respond to e-mail requests to validate or confirm any of your account details. Your bank, credit card company, HMRC, etc., already have your account details, so would not need you to validate them. If you are unsure if a request for personal information from a company is legitimate, contact the company directly or type the Web site URL directly into your browser. Do not click on the links in the e-mail, as they may be fake links to phishing websites.

Improving your e-mail opening rates

If you contact customers by e-mail newsletter or use other forms of e-mail marketing, it is essential to monitor how effective it is. By using the right subject lines, an attractive design and sending messages at the right time, you can increase the number of recipients opening your e-mails. Follow these ten tips to improve your open rates:

1.) Segment your database

Collect customers' e-mail addresses and monitor their buying habits. Divide your database into groups based on their needs and interests, so that you can target groups with specific characteristics with different content. Bear in mind that under the Data Protection Act, you are obliged to provide customers with a simple way to opt out from receiving e-mails.

2.) Purchase e-mail addresses for your target group

Consider buying customer e-mail address lists from suppliers. Consumer lists typically cost £80 - £150 for 1,000 addresses and business-to-business lists £200 - £350. You can purchase lists based on variables such as location, interests, gender or industry.

3.) Send e-mails from a known person

If the customer is in contact with a particular employee, the e-mail should be from them, otherwise use your business name. If the sender is unfamiliar, recipients will probably delete the e-mail.

4.) Choose your subject line carefully

Summarise the value the e-mail offers. You could also try using the customer's name and making it more personal. Test the most effective subject lines by randomly dividing your mailing list into two groups, sending each the same e-mail with a different subject line and comparing open rates.

5.) Include your branding and key message above the "fold" in the page

The preview will often display the first part of your e-mail, so draw customers' attention by making your logo or main message visible. Use attractive images, layout, colour and fonts. Remember that you cannot monitor open rates for plain text e-mails, it is the graphics loading that counts.

6.) Ensure your e-mail offers value

If customers like what they have read in previous e-mails, they will open more in the future. Make sure the information is useful, and is not just a sales pitch.

7.) Use technology to engage customers

Use alternative media in your e-mails, for example, links to videos or your social networking profiles. However, avoid embedding the video as many ISP's will block it, use a graphic of the first frame instead and link that to the video.

8.) Send regular emails, but don't spam

It is essential to contact customers regularly. However, do not bombard customers with daily e-mails as they might feel "spammed", so instead, send carefully timed e-mails weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

9.) Perfect your timing

Generally, the best days to send e-mails are Tuesday to Thursday, either first thing in the morning or immediately after lunch. However, recent research found that 48% of e-mails are opened outside traditional office hours, so try out different times and see what works for you.

10.) Monitor your open rates

The cheapest option is a hosted e-marketing service which tracks e-mail open rates, costing £3 upwards. Choose one with inbox delivery confirmation, and delete addresses where e-mails bounce back. Average open rates vary from 20% to 40%, depending on the industry.

REMEMBER!!!

Whether we like it or not, e-mails form a fundamental part of any company's communication and marketing strategies. To that end, it is important that companies understand the psychology of e-mail spamming and protect themselves to prevent time wasting, and more importantly, avoid security breaches.

When using e-mails as part of a marketing strategy, it is essential that companies get value for money for money, and to do that they have to be opened by the target market. Remedy has access to strategic partners who supply lists of e-mail addresses at very competitive rates, and they are regularly updated and constantly "cleansed" to keep them accurate.