17 Checks You Must Make Before You Hit Send (Or Your Email May Never Arrive)

Most marketers focus on creating emails that their audience will be excited to read. Obviously, that's a big key to building a responsive, profitable list.

But here's something else: you need to make sure that your emails get to their intended recipients. After all, if your emails aren't getting delivered, then no amount of good copywriting or building relationships will help you generate sales.

So, with that in mind, check out these 17 things you need to do before you hit the "send" button…

1. Review an Email's Spam Score

Many email service providers (ESP) let you check an email's spam score directly from the dashboard. This is a tool that lets you see if you've inadvertently created an email that's going to trigger spam filters.

For example, if you so much as make a joke about Viagra – even in the context of an otherwise innocuous email -- the spam score will go up because so much spam centers on Viagra and other pharmaceuticals.

> TIP: If your ESP doesn't let you check the spam score, then you can use a third-party tool like mail-tester.com.

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2. Check Your Sender Score

Another check you'll want to make periodically is your sender score. This is a score that shows the overall reputation of your email address or domain. If you end up with a bad score, this site gives you tips on how to improve it so that your emails end up in the intended recipients' inboxes.

Here's the link: https://www.senderscore.org/

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3. Educate Readers About Whitelisting

Many people have inboxes that require them to whitelist an email address in order for the email address to arrive in their inbox (versus a spam/bulk email folder). However, many people also have no idea what whitelisting, why they need to do it, or how to do it.

With that in mind, you'll want to tell new subscribers to whitelist your email address, otherwise they won't receive your emails. You can then give them instructions for popular email clients such as Gmail, Yahoo, and similar.

> TIP: Be sure you're also following sender guidelines in order for your emails to get to inboxes. Here's more info about Gmail's sender guidelines: https://support.google.com/mail/answer/81126.

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4. Use a Reputable ESP

A good third-party email service provider will devote considerable resources to complying with laws, whitelisting their IP, and generally improving deliverability. That's why you'll want to choose an ESP that prides itself on deliverability (like Aweber, GetResponse, iContact and similar).

5. Optimize Your Opt-In Process

Two things to keep in mind:

1. Set the right expectations regarding what sort of content people will receive. For example, if someone is signing up to receive a lead magnet from you, then make it absolutely clear that they're also going to receive email from you. Indeed, you can frame the follow up emails as a benefit, in that they'll get ongoing training and recommendations for trusted resources.

2. Select a confirmed opt-in process. That way, only people who want to be on your list will be there (and you don't have to worry about nefarious people adding "spam trap" emails to your list, which would automatically get you blacklisted everywhere the next time you send an email).

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6. Send Targeted Email Only

Every once in a while, you may be tempted to email something that's not entirely targeted. For example, maybe your really good friend had a fire destroy their home, so you set up a GoFundMe to raise money for the family. Naturally, you want to reach as many people as possible, so you're tempted to send the fundraiser to your list.

Don't do it. If, for example, your newsletter is about weight loss and you send out this untargeted fundraiser, you're likely to have people hit the "spam" button your email.

It doesn't matter if it's for a good cause, a good friend, or anything else – avoid sending untargeted emails in order to protect your sender reputation.

7. Offer Options to Subscribers

The idea here is to let your subscribers decide what sort of emails they receive from you and how often they receive them. You can offer these preference options when the new subscriber is signing up, plus you can offer them again when someone is unsubscribing (as sometimes people don't want to unsubscribe – they just want less email).

For example, let's suppose you send three emails per week to subscribers. You can give them the option of receiving:

- All three emails per week.
- One email "digest" per week.
- Only the most important emails (which may be two or three per month).

- One email digest per month.

That's just an example. You can set up options that work for your list. End result? Fewer unsubscribes and fewer people getting overwhelmed and hitting the "spam" button.

8. Clean Your List

I've mentioned this before in another guide: be sure to clean your list from time to time to get rid of cold or bouncing email addresses. That's because a lot of bounced emails will ruin your sender score, so it's good to clean them out monthly.

9. Avoid Purchasing or Sharing Lists

The big problem with purchasing an email list is that it may contain a "spam trap," which are email addresses that spam activists plant all around the internet. Whenever someone sends a commercial email to one of these spam trap addresses, the sender gets blacklisted. It's difficult to get off these lists, so protect yourself by only gathering emails yourself from your website (and avoid purchasing lists).

Secondly, don't share lists with your joint venture partners. If a recipient doesn't recognize the sender, they'll hit the spam button, and your sender score will plummet. If you want to work with JV partners, then offer to place advertisements in your newsletter (as allowed by your privacy policy), rather than giving others access to your list.

Likewise, don't engage in co-registration practices. This is where you let subscribers check a box on the opt in form to join more than one list at a time (such as your JV partner's list). Problem is, a lot of subscribers don't realize that they're subscribing to multiple lists, so they end up clicking the "spam" button on emails coming from unrecognized lists.

If you want to do a list-building joint venture, then promote your partner's list from within your email list, on social media or other platforms. That way, subscribers know exactly what they're signing up for, which creates a cleaner list.

10. Stay on Top of Email Best Practices

One of the best places to get information about email best practices, laws, new technology and other changes is through your email service provider. That's because it's their job to stay abreast of the changing landscape, and they'll pass this information on to you via their newsletter, blog and social media pages (be sure to subscribe to all three).

Even if you're not a customer, many of these companies (such as Aweber, MailChimp, CampaignMonitor.com and similar) publicly share this information, so be sure to follow and subscribe. In addition, you may check out industry leaders, such as the email marketing section of Entrepreneur.com: https://www.entrepreneur.com/topic/email-marketing.

11. Follow Applicable Laws and Regulations

Elsewhere in these guides we've talked about laws and regulations such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulations, the US's FTC.gov regulations for marketers and similar. It's worth repeating: be sure to follow these regulations, or risk damaging your sender score.

12. Review Feedback Loops

Many ISPS offer information about spam complaints they receive from their users. These complaints are called feedback loops, and you can generally check on the feedback loops with regards to your domain/email addresses. You'll need to go directly to platforms like Yahoo, AOL and similar to get the information.

NOTE: Gmail only lets email service providers gain access to feedback loops, so generally you won't be able to gather information directly from Gmail.

13. Be Careful With Contest Entries

Although a contest can build your email pretty quickly, the problem is that a "sweepstakes" style contest often creates a poor list. That's because people

will enter the contest using multiple emails. Some of these emails are throwaway emails, which may eventually start bouncing and creating problems with your sender lists. In other cases, someone who entered the contest may not be interested in what you're offering, so they'll hit the "spam" button when you start sending emails about anything other than the contest.

Here are dos and don'ts for running a contest without damaging your sender reputation:

- Don't give away cash, gadgets or "general interest" prizes. Doing so will attract a lot of interest from untargeted participants. Instead, offer prizes that are of interest to people in the niche (such as your products).

- Don't merge this list with your regular list. Keep it separate/segmented so that you don't risk "contaminating" your regular list.

- Do offer extra contest entries. For example, you can use a tool like Rafflecopter.com, which lets you give contestants extra contest entries for sharing your content on their social media pages.

- Do send a welcome series to your contest list while the contest is running. You want to provide a lot of value at this point when you know people are opening your emails, which will help you build a good relationship (and make them eager to remain subscribers even after the contest is over).

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14. Don't Add People to Multiple Lists

Some marketers add subscribers to multiple lists, and then start sending the subscriber multiple emails from these multiple emails. Don't do this, as your list members are likely to view email coming from any other list (and any other "from" field) as spam.

Instead, segment your list. You can then send targeted content to your different list segments, but they all come from the same sender (same "from" field). This also ensures you're not overwhelming prospects with multiple welcome series emails and promos.

15. Email on a Consistent Schedule

Before you even set up your mailing list, decide how often you'll email your subscribers, and make this information known on your lead page as well as in your welcome series. Then stick to this schedule, being sure that you're sending emails consistently and regularly (e.g., once per week).

The reason this is so important is because emailing your list sporadically or erratically tends to generate spam complaints. If you're emailing sporadically, people will forget that they ever signed up for your list. They'll forget your name and branding. So when they see you promoting something, they'll hit that spam button.

Point is, keep your name in front of your audience and provide a lot of value so that subscribers remember you and are eager to open every email you send.

16. Check Blacklists

Is your domain on any blacklists? If so, your emails aren't going to get to their intended recipients. That's why you'll want to check the blacklists, which you can do using the following tool:

https://mxtoolbox.com/blacklists.aspx

And finally…

17. Create Test Emails

Another way to monitor your email campaigns for potential problems is to join your own list using a variety of emails (such as Yahoo, Gmail and

similar). Check your sending list to see what sort of emails your subscribers use so that you know what types of emails to test.

You can start by testing the opt-in process to see if the initial confirmation email gets to your inbox with these different platforms. You can then monitor these different email addresses every time you send an email, which will alert you to any potential problems with a platform.

Now let's wrap things up…

Conclusion

Deliverability is an important part of managing your mailing list. As you just discovered, there are several steps you can take to protect your sender reputation and ensure your emails reach their recipients. That's why you'll want to put these 17 tips and ideas to work to boost the number of your emails that land in inboxes rather than spam folders!