



# Biggest Email Marketing Mistakes (and how to avoid them)



**How to Leverage your List and  
Get Your Emails Opened**



YESDATA

Despite its age relative to other platforms, email continues to dominate the digital marketing landscape. The Direct Marketing Association reported that email campaigns have an ROI of around 4,300%, and a study by Gigaom Research showed that marketers consistently rank email as the number one digital marketing tactic for awareness, acquisition, retention and conversion.

One big barrier to effective email marketing is the prevalence of spam traps, inbox filters, and other protocols meant to prevent unwanted messages. While these measures help cut down on malicious spam and email viruses, they also prevent well-intentioned marketing messages from reaching people who want to receive them.

If you want to be successful with email marketing, you must ensure that your messages don't get blocked by spam filters. Here are the **12** most common mistakes and how to correct them in each phase of your email marketing campaign.

## Before You Send

1

**Sending to web-based email addresses like Gmail, Yahoo, AOL, Hotmail, etc.**

Many of these email providers have spam filters set up to reject mass emails. While some people do conduct business from addresses like these, the more email addresses with web-based domains you have on your list, the more likely it is you will be marked as a spammer or receive complaints from recipients.

*Solution: Create a filter on your lead capture forms that does not allow sign-ups from people using web-based email domains. Periodically check your list to ensure it doesn't have any of these addresses.*

2

**Getting your domain flagged as a spammer**

If enough people mark a message from your mail domain as spam, it can greatly reduce your chances of making it into your recipients' inboxes. This is a serious problem because once you are marked as a spammer, it can be difficult to restore your domain's reputation.

*Solution: Monitor your domain's reputation using a tool like MX Toolbox to ensure it isn't on any blacklists. To make sure you don't get flagged as a spammer or if you already have been, consider using an alternate domain to send marketing emails. For example, if your domain is Acme.com, create AcmeCorp.com for your email campaign.*

3

**Having a poor email server reputation**

This mistake is similar to number 2, with one key difference: if you are using a shared email server, it's possible your delivery rates will be impacted by the actions of someone using the same server who is sending spam or illicit messages. If your email server has a poor reputation (sometimes called a "dirty server"), your chances of reaching your intended recipients are much lower.

*Solution: Use a tool like SenderScore.org to monitor your sender reputation and make sure you aren't flagged as a spammer. If your email server does get flagged, talk to your ISP about getting onto a new server or having a dedicated server for your emails.*

4

**Not keeping your list healthy and up to date**

Undelivered emails or "bounces" might not seem like a huge problem, but they can seriously impact your reputation. If you continue sending emails that aren't delivered, it will negatively impact your sender reputation and cause your messages to get marked as spam automatically. Eventually, your internet service provider (ISP) may restrict your ability to send outgoing messages.

*Solution: Find a company that can verify (or clean) your list(s) to ensure they are accurate. Consider using an email automation platform with a higher tolerance for bounce rates to verify the accuracy of your list first, before switching to a provider that is more stringent on bounced messages. When emails to addresses aren't delivered, immediately take them off your list.*

## As You Send

### 5 Including too many pictures

Pictures can be a great way to express your brand or catch the attention of your recipients. Unfortunately, they are also used by spammers and hackers to transmit viruses, meaning many email providers automatically block or request permission to load pictures in email correspondence. Email servers view every picture as an opportunity for a malicious event, so chocking your messages full of pictures may earn you a trip to the spam folder.

*Solution: Use pictures very sparingly – only include them if you feel it is absolutely necessary, and limit the number of pictures you include in each message. When in doubt, text is always safer than pictures. Also consider image placement: don't put them in a place where it will push the rest of your message down in a preview window, as this will look bad if the picture doesn't load. Ideally, place pictures to the right of and below the text.*

### 6 Using too many links

It's important to have some links in your emails; you want readers who are interested in your content to easily continue to your blog or company website. But when a message includes too many links, email filters often mark it as spam. Including too many links can also confuse your recipients about which link to click on, lowering your click-through rate (CTR).

*Solution: Limit the number of links in your email marketing correspondence. One to two links per message is a good number; never include more than four links per email.*

### 7 Putting spam keywords in your subject line

There are some words and phrases used so often by spammers that email providers automatically mark messages with them in the subject as spam, whether they are or not. This is one of the easiest ways to get your emails relegated to the spam folder.

*Solution: Avoid using spammy words and characters in your email subjects, including but not limited to:*

- Free
- Amazing
- Act now
- Limited time
- Buy
- Cash
- Insurance
- Winner
- Excessive '\$' dollar signs
- Excessive '!' exclamation marks

### 8 Not following CAN-SPAM guidelines

The CAN-SPAM Act was ratified as a U.S. law in 2003, to cut down on the amount of unwanted email sent and received on the Internet. It applies to any commercial message sent out through email, not just mass messages. If you are found guilty of a CAN-SPAM violation, you could face a fine of up to \$16,000 per email.

*Solution: To avoid penalties and fines under the CAN-SPAM Act, make sure every single email you send out includes the following:*

- An accurate subject line that does not trick or mislead recipients
- A valid, real-world mailing address
- An actual return email address that can be replied to
- An opt-out that allows people to no longer receive messages from you

*Also keep in mind that CAN-SPAM law does not allow you to contract away your legal responsibility, meaning you are still accountable to its rules even if you hire an outside company to handle your email marketing.*

## Common Mistakes to Avoid

### 9 Sending at the wrong time

Authentic marketing messages should be sent when people are at the office and likely to read them. Marketing automation tools allow us to send emails around the clock, but just because you can doesn't mean you should. If

you send messages late at night or very early in the morning, they may be flagged as spam.

*Solution: Pick a time to send your emails that at least makes it seem like you are writing and sending them manually, even if you are using an automation tool to schedule your messages. Any time during normal business hours is fine – Tuesday mornings are generally considered to be a good time slot, as most people receive lots of emails at the beginning of the week.*

## 10 Sending too many messages

While automatic spam filters and traps may not have parameters relating to frequency (although many do), overwhelming your recipients with email correspondence is a good way to get your messages flagged as spam. People who are annoyed at the frequency of your email will often mark them as spam, even if they opted in to receive your communications.

*Solution: Be aware of how many messages you have sent and who you have sent them to. Use your own judgment by putting yourself in the shoes of a recipient – if you wouldn't want to receive a certain number of commercial emails over a specific timeframe, your recipients probably wouldn't want to either.*

## 11 Sending to email seeds and spam traps

Spam traps and email seeds are two types of “hidden” email addresses that you won't find on lists or receive from website visitors. Spam traps are email addresses that are not owned or used by a real person: they are usually placed on email lists that are not given out manually, but instead are harvested or purchased without permission. Email seeds are similar – these addresses are not owned by anyone, but are set up to allow marketers to test the deliverability of their emails and prevent unauthorized list use. Sending to either type of address will usually get you flagged as a spammer.

*Solution: Be vigilant about how you acquire email addresses, and only use legitimate methods to purchase or collect them. Pure spam traps and email seeds are never given out to marketers, so you'll only run into them if you are scraping email addresses from places you shouldn't be. You can also fall victim to a recycled spam trap, an old email address that was once valid but has been inactive for so long that the email provider turned it into a spam trap. To avoid recycled spam traps, make sure to keep your list healthy and regularly delete old and inactive addresses.*

## 12 Sending to catch-all addresses or many people at the same domain

It's never a good idea to send your marketing correspondence to an address like “sales@[domain]” or “support@[domain].” These addresses are usually checked by many people or are forwarded to other email addresses, so there is no way to ensure that your correspondence reaches the right people. That's why many filters associated with addresses like these automatically flag marketing correspondence as spam. Similarly, lots of corporate email servers are set up to block messages sent to a large number of people at the domain, since it's unlikely that dozens of people in different departments at one company would be interested in the same marketing message.

*Solution: Never accept catch-all addresses onto your list: ask individual subscribers to provide an address that goes directly to them. In case they somehow get on your subscriber list, make removing these catch-all addresses a part of your routine list cleaning process. If you're sending to many people at the same domain, make sure they have all opted-in separately.*

## Conclusion

When used appropriately, email is one of the most powerful and profitable marketing tools available to today's businesses. By avoiding these twelve mistakes in your email marketing campaigns you will keep a good reputation as an email marketer, reach more qualified prospects, and grow your business through effective, targeted marketing.

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