



webbula

Inbox Pros & Webbula present



Increased
Deliverability
Starts With Good
Email Hygiene

Email Hygiene: Best Practices to Boost Deliverability

Marketers face greater challenges when it comes to deliverability due to email providers becoming more and more savvy to the type of content recipients want to see in their inboxes. Webbula and Inbox Pro's are teaming up to present useful and actionable information on how you can increase Email Deliverability with good Email Hygiene.

Let's draw a picture first: According to E&S Solutions, "Email Contact Databases degrade by an average of 22.5% each year". What's is going on? Here are a few reasons why your contact database is affected.

Abandoned Email Addresses: On an average people have three or more email accounts linked to them. Which means some are used more often than others. Contacts Change- Americans change jobs on an average of 10-15 times in their careers.

Hidden Email Threats: They are lurking within in your email lists that can damage your ability to use your data properly, impact your Sender Reputation, and directly affect revenue. Some could be Disposable Domains, Zombies, Bots, Phishing Attacks, Honeypots, Malicious Moles, Seeded Trackers, Screammers, and more.

Why Email Deliverability?

Why NOT Email Deliverability? So many marketers are unaware of the difference between the word 'delivered' and 'deliverability'. What does the word 'deliverability' really break down to? The definition of the word 'delivered' is how many emails just made it to the intended recipient's mailbox.

The word 'deliverability' is the measure of how many emails make it to the actual inbox. You hit the send button and you don't think twice about it; all you know is that you want that person to read it. But are you truly aware of all the things an email goes through before departing your mailbox and arriving in your recipient's inbox? Your carefully crafted marketing emails are no good to your audience if they end up anywhere besides their inbox.

What's Causing Your Poor Deliverability?

Unfortunately, there isn't just one single answer and more often than not, it's caused by the person and/or team sending emails. This isn't to point the finger, but it really does boil down to following Email Best Practices. Say, for example, you're learning how to hit a baseball and you strike out every time. Your coach - the expert, suggests a different way to hold the bat, change your feet positioning, or even swing two seconds later than you're used to. Your end goal is to see it through and execute, make contact, and see it soar through the air and land in the

glove of a lucky fan resulting in a homerun for your team. Think of the glove of the fan being the inbox and the glove of the opposite team being the spam folder). I use that analogy because you can hit a grand slam or strike out by simply tweaking a few things.

As stated before, the answer to this question is not singular. There is a multitude of dots that make up deliverability and they are all connected and intertwined somehow to make up the bigger result of causing poor deliverability.

A few examples of things that cause poor email deliverability are (but not limited to):

1. Sending spam

If you are sending all image emails or all text emails, this is against a sending best practice. The standard image to text ratio is 30:70 or images will be clipped. Try to avoid using words or characters in your subject line such as: free, winner, !!!, %%%, etc. This isn't to say you can never use the word "free" or "winner", just know that ISPs have filtering systems that can recognize that most emails who have these words implicated in the subject line are marked as spam by recipients. Unsubscribe buttons are a big one, too. If you don't give the user an option to stop communication with you or it's not easily accessible or hidden in an image, you will be more likely to be reported as spam or get a complaint.

2. Not having proper email authentication set up

There are three email authentication factors that ISPs look for: SPF, DKIM, and DMARC, with SPF and DKIM being the most common. To find out if you have proper email authentication, they are located in your email header and you should see "PASS" or "FAIL" next to the the authentication name.

- SPF - (Sender Policy Framework)
- DKIM - (Domain Keys Identified Mail)
- DMARC - (Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting and Conformance)

3. Poor List Hygiene

List hygiene is just one facet of email deliverability but it is so extremely important to obtaining and keeping good deliverability and sender reputation. One of the biggest no-no's in email deliverability is to buy or scrape lists. That is a complete recipe for disaster. It's easy to go down a rabbit hole when it comes to list hygiene and segmentation. Questions you should ask yourself when it comes to lists are, "Did this person choose to receive emails from me?" Or, "Are my emails relevant to the sender to whom I am sending emails to?"

What is the Importance of a Clean Email List?

Words that come to mind when I think of poor email lists and deliverability are words like blacklist, spam traps, complaints, and bounces. Ultimately, your IP or domain can end up resulting in your IP or domain being placed on a blacklist if you get enough of those. Let's go down the rabbit hole for a moment.

Each year, up to 33% of consumer email addresses change resulting in sending email to addresses that no longer exist. In many cases ISPs (especially Yahoo and Hotmail) keep some of these old email addresses active and use them as spam traps. Many ISPs consider such sending practices to be the hallmark of spam or poor data management. However, good list-hygiene practices help facilitate message delivery and aid in, reduction of invalid users, spam traps, and black-list appearances. Some think there is no harm in list buying but we say quite the opposite. "Purchased contact lists are 15 months old at the point of sale (at best) and continue to deteriorate at a rate of about 25% per year", according to Sirius-Decisions.

Each ISP, or Internet Service Provider, has a variety of filters they use to detect spam emails. Gmail may look at one thing whereas Yahoo might look at something else. The constant variable in all ISPs are spam traps. To clarify exactly what a spam trap is- they are real email addresses that do not bounce. They are created secretly and monitored by the ISPs and blacklists and are used to identify email marketers with poor permission and list management practices.

There are three major types of spam traps:

Human error is one of the leading causes to hit a trap. This trap is called a Typo Trap. Pretty self explanatory and are normally due to a "fat-finger" error by the user, the error in that email address causes you not to receive those emails resulting in the store or website where you entered your incorrect email address on possibly hits a typo trap with the ISP. This is the most common type of trap. When entering data into your database, make sure that is it valid and correct. Examples of this are if you type in "Comnast" instead of Comcast" or "Gmail" instead of "Gmail". Sending to these email addresses will result in a hard bounce which indicates a permanent delivery failure.

The second type of trap is called a Grey or Recycled Trap. These are email addresses that, although were once active, have been out of use for a period of time. ISPs take inactive addresses that should have bounced over that period of time and re-activate the accounts. Sending to invalid addresses also results in a hard bounce. A rise in bounces affects your reputation and leads to deliverability issues. Note that not all invalid email addresses will bounce. If they don't they have probably been reactivated and used as a spam trap. If you're into list buying, think of how many of those email address may be used as spam traps.

The third and last type of spam trap is called a Pristine Trap. These are real email addresses that have never opted into any email communications from you. These addresses have usually been scraped from a blog, forum, or chat room, etc. While these email addresses are valid, sending to users who have not opted-in to hear from you will most likely result in the user marking your email as spam, therefore, your future emails being blocked by ISPs and landing in the spam folder. Again, with list buying, none of the email addresses have opted in to receive information from you. Doing that long enough will become more than just a deleted email, but also a complaint and marking you as spam.

Email Best Practices

1) Email Hygiene

Email Hygiene was created from the industry reliance of Verification, which is a solution to solve deliverability issues. It is a type of service that identifies a valid or invalid email addresses, typos, and greylisting. Verification simply “verifies” that the email addresses on your list are connected to an active inbox. That’s all.

With Verifications limited amount of threat detection, there soon needed to be another solution to detect all the other hidden threats in email data just waiting to damage your valuable reputation. Verification can’t detect spam traps, moles ,bots, honeypots, screamers and more. The reason for that? Well for screamers, there are real people behind these emails, who are complaining to the FTC or a blacklist about receiving your emails. How could verification detect a screamer when its real person behind the email? Or Spam traps for example, which includes Seeded trackers, blacklisted emails, moles,honeypots, and Typos. Out of all examples, Verification can detect typo’s, but what about the others?

Honeypots are invisible to the human eye. There could be 1,000-50,000 hidden in your email data without you even knowing it. It’s important to understand verification cannot detect honeypots.

Seeded trackers are addresses used in marketing campaigns to track delivery rates. Nothing is horrible about seeded trackers, they are used for the simple reason of someone tracking your activity.

How about the malicious moles? These are an email that reports campaign statistics to real-time blacklists. It works in much the same way as a mole used by the police to catch criminals.

All of these examples are real threats that could be hiding in your email data right now, that a simple verification provider cannot detect. This is where email hygiene became the best solution for detecting the unwanted hidden threats in your email data.

Email Hygiene is the process of identifying “problem” email accounts from email lists. Email Hygiene can go beyond the simple verification and identify harmful email addresses hiding in your list that verification can’t detect such as the spam traps, bots, honeypots, phishing attacks, moles, screamers and more.

A “clean list” means that you have a better chance of getting your emails delivered. You want to make sure that when your subscribers grant you permission to send them email, that you deliver on what you promised, which in turn will help you earn their loyalty. But even engaged subscribers may change their behavior over-time. These formally interested subscribers can become unengaged and begin to hurt your list’s overall performance, so it’s vital to keep tabs on yours to maintain a healthy email list.

Email Marketers were even struggling, and needed a solution to overcome the issues and challenges that affected their deliverability. Email hygiene met these challenges better than verification, which was one of the best ways to increase deliverability.

Sending emails to nonexistent addresses or to spam folders dings your IP reputation. It’s a vicious cycle: a lower reputation results in lowered deliverability, and even fewer emails actually reaching your customers.

Best Practices to Improve Email Hygiene

- **Remove inactive Subscribers:** If a subscriber has been inactive for 6-12 months they should probably be removed from your main list. We recommend a step-down approach to removing inactives, take them from your main list and put them on a step-down program. Send them a win-back campaign, or, if necessary, removing them from your list entirely.
- **Use better list building Best Practices and avoid spam traps which can cut deliverability quickly:**
 - Use double-opt in which increases engagement and confirms an email
 - Never use handwritten forms, 10-20% will be input errors.
 - Never buy email lists which increase spam complaints and contain spam traps
 - Be careful using Sweepstakes or Promotions, respond to email to enter
 - Ensure subscribers are able to update their email address, either through a preference center or Email Change of Address (ECO) service.
 - Offer a global unsubscribe option and allow subscribers to unsubscribe from specific email streams via a preference center.
 - Sign up for all available feedback loops and promptly remove subscribers who complain

What kind of Problems does Email Hygiene Solve?

Email Service Providers (ESPs) are making sure relevant and valuable emails are arriving to recipients inboxes, and unwanted emails are placed in the junk folder. The process for this is tracking and quantifying the number of emails that are opened, how many unsubscribe, and track the inactivity. Email Hygiene is marketers number one friend to help overcome the challenges by maintaining a clean list and keeping the email providers happy. Email Hygiene eliminates the nasty threats hiding in your emails that simple verification cannot detect.

How does it help Deliverability?

Every email sender has an email 'sender score' between 1 and 100. A sender score reflects the 'trustworthiness' of the sender; the higher the score, the better reputation they have for sending high-value, non-spam emails. Like a credit score, it's easy to lose points on your sender score but considerably more difficult to improve your score once it's been damaged. Your sender score can be the deciding factor that determines if a webmail (or ISP) provider places your emails into the recipient's inbox or spam folder. Once you accumulate enough complaints, bounces, and emails marked as spam, your sending IP or domain may potentially become blacklisted. While it is possible for you to de-list your IP or domain, if your sending practices don't improve, it will be harder each time to be granted permission to start sending again. Reputable blacklist sites include SORBS (which was bought by Proofpoint and has since also acquired Cloudmark), SpamCop, and Spamhaus. It is recommended that you keep your bounces under 4% and your complaints under .03%. You should consistently be removing email addresses from your CRM or lists that haven't been engaging with your emails (this prevents them marking you as a spam sender if you continuously keep sending to them) and remove contacts that have recurring bounces. Normally, if you see a contact has "globally bounced", that is a good indicator that the email address you have been trying to send to is no longer active and the person may have left the company.

In addition, while we don't like people to opt-out of communication with us by unsubscribing, unsubscribes do not always hurt us. What it shows to the ISP is that people are opening and engaging with the email and it beats someone marking your emails as spam or sending in a complaint. Under CAN-SPAM regulation, you must honor unsubscribes within 10 days, which again, is why it's imperative to have easily accessible unsubscribe links or an option for the recipient to edit their preferences to how they would like to communicate with you.

2) Define Your Target Audience

After making sure that you have good contacts in your database, the second step is just as important- list segmentation within your database. List segmentation comes after you have determined who your buyer personas are and go hand in hand with defining your target audience- who you are trying to reach. So, what good is list segmentation if you don't have working contacts? And what's the point in working contacts if you're just going to send them irrelevant emails. They will turn into non-working contacts sooner rather than later. The purpose of creating lists is to keep things relevant for your intended recipients, whether your B2B or B2C. The relevance of your emails has a 45% impact on the likelihood of your emails reaching the inbox. Whereas, discussed just prior to this, a clean and up to date list has a 58% impact on your emails having good deliverability.

Data Points are great to use when segmenting people into lists to launch relevant campaigns. A few that we recommend so you don't go wrong are: Geo-Location/ Time Zone- this is good for sending targeting emails to people to locations where better engagement is seen. Last Purchase Date or Item- these are good for reminder emails if it's been a while since someone has bought something from you or you can recommend other items similar to the one they purchased last time. App or Website Login Data- also good to use as a reminder or re-engagement email to come back to your site if it's been a while since you've seen them log in. Open History- this segmentation is based off previous users who have opened and engaged with your emails before. If they are more receptive to one email rather than another you sent them, continue to send them what they are more interested in. The goal on this one is to continue to get people who are already responsive to stay that way based off what you send them. Product Purchase Reviews- also a great re-engagement email. Use their last purchased item to create an email where they give a review on it. Offering incentives for customer feedback is always a plus.

There are cases where the previous data points apply to B2B senders but we do find that there are many B2B companies that target different companies and they segment lists based off the type of organization. The three largest that we see are government, healthcare, and education- other examples are religious and non-profit organizations. Create different lists, content, and campaigns for each of these so they stay relevant to the contacts on that list.

3) Email Optimization from a Deliverability Perspective

After you have determined your contacts are valid, your database is up to date, you have your target audience and your email is ready, there are a few things you can look at to help reassure that your email will make it to the inbox.

We touched briefly on subject lines and images/text in emails. ISP's are very much looking at what you are sending when it comes to subject lines and your content. You know now what not to use in subject lines. That said, approximately 47% of people open an email solely based on subject line. Once an email has been opened, you have about 8.25 seconds to capture the reader with your content before they move on. Next time you are designing an email, don't underestimate the impact the subject line has.

We know it can often be tricky getting the right balance of images and text. I recommend having a minimum of 500 characters in the body of an email. This roughly equates to two full size tweets. Reiterating that the image to text ratio should be 30:70, I'm sure everyone has seen the message "images cannot be displayed". Many ISPs will not display images by default and for this reason it is important to have some text so that the email is digestible if a reader cannot enable images. However, I do understand the email marketing world is moving towards having more image heavy content. Having positive and consistent engagement allows for the ISP to provide a bit more leeway to this ratio.

One thing to keep in mind is to avoid an all image campaign design as stated before. This is common practice among spammers to circumvent text filters that ISPs have in place. An interesting function some ISPs have begun to adopt is called content fingerprinting. In a nutshell, this function can scan text and even an image to make connections between senders. This fingerprinting plays a large role in identifying specific spammers even if they attempt to hop to new IPs and domains.

Everyone knows about personalization already but it's a good thing to touch on. Using a "Hi (insert first name here)" for whatever reason makes us as the reader feel a little better even when we know that same email was just sent to thousands of others. Importantly, too, using an actual person's email address as the from sender helps as well. Studies show these personalized messages actually increase engagement by 29.3%.

The majority of people don't just check their emails on desktops or laptops anymore. Over 50% of emails are opened and interacted with through mobile devices today. It is projected that by the end of 2018, there will be 2.2 billion mobile email users. Having beautiful content designed for a monitor is great but having content dynamic that is ready to be viewed on a mobile device is even better. Email on Acid is a great tool we use for email rendering to view how a message looks on different devices and browsers. You want to make sure people can easily view and

engage with your emails regardless of where they are looking at it from.

Lastly, create two different versions of your email. A/B testing is a great tool. Whether you change something as small as an image or the subject line, or you decide to send all at once or in increments, monitor how they do and that will be a indication of how future emails will perform. Marketing is trial and error, after all.

Takeaways

We hope that we have stressed enough on email best practices for it to make an impact. It's important to understand that it really is quality over quantity. Sending a blasted email to a list of 300K with high negative engagement hurts your reputation more than if you send to a list of 2K with low positive engagement. The quality of your lists is the keystone to having good deliverability. It's the foundation in which your email is built. At the end of the day, you could have the most amazing, interactive email but what good comes of that if your database isn't where it needs to be? A domino effect takes place when deliverability is involved. Poor lists result in poor inbox placement which funnels into poor reputation, blacklisting, etc.

Now that you're aware of the things you should be asking yourself and things you can be actively looking for within your own sending infrastructure and sending practices, you can take a first step to improvements. Should you start to examine these areas and find that you already have an array of deliverability issues and not sure what to tackle first or how to, Inbox Pros works with multiple B2B and B2C companies to help improve overall deliverability. We have worked with companies such as Gainsight, eharmony, US Weekly/Rolling Stone Magazine, RentPath, and many more. Whether it's an email audit to look at the overall infrastructure or consulting hours to focus solely on one area that you need help with with no term contracts in place, the deliverability experts can help. We take a white-glove approach when it comes to servicing our clients and strive to truly educate companies on deliverability so they can start to fix from within and apply best practices to really demonstrate the concept.

Should you seek help in email verification and email hygiene, Webbula – The Data Quality Experts are the industry leader for the most comprehensive email threat verification solution. Whatever term you happen to use, validation, verification, bounce check, or some variation on that theme - email hygiene is the cornerstone upon which every email marketing campaign should start. Quite literally, your reputation rests on the quality of the data you use to send your campaign, conversions, conversations, engagement, or other emails out to your customers, prospects, subscribers, or whoever else you need to communicate with. Your sender reputation is even at stake, which could effect your marketing budget.

Threats are evolving almost daily, and the consequences of ignoring data quality can impact more than just your reputation. It is critical that you can trust someone to ensure that your data is as close to perfect as it can be. That is why email hygiene is so critical.

About Inbox Pros

Inbox Pros is a multiple award-winning Atlanta-based Email Deliverability & Compliance Consulting company. We have worked with companies such as Gainsight, eharmony, US Weekly/Rolling Stone Magazine, RentPath, and many more. Whether it's an email audit to look at the overall infrastructure or consulting hours to focus solely on one area that you need help with with no term contracts in place, the deliverability experts can help. We take a white-glove approach when it comes to servicing our clients and strive to truly educate companies on deliverability so they can start to fix from within and apply best practices to really demonstrate the concept. Our services include evaluating mailing infrastructure set-up, email authentication, sender reputation, bounce and complaints, list quality and permissions, email compliance, and message content. We also provide ISP remediation, domain specific volume and policy guidelines, and email industry updates. We have created the world's first [Email Deliverability Certification Class](#) and strongly believe in educating our clients and companies about deliverability so they may understand and incorporate their knowledge on deliverability into their current sending practices so they continue to strive towards better deliverability.

About Webbula

At Webbula we are passionate about truth in data. For over eight years now we've been going above and beyond the industry standards to provide our customers with the very best, most reliable, trusted products to ensure that passion. We don't believe that standard validation, verification, or bounce checks are enough any longer. We believe it's time to move past the simple verification and that is why we built Webbula cloudHygiene. Built on over 30+ individual filters (including verification and bounce checks), including several exclusive partnerships that are available nowhere else in the industry, Webbula cloudHygiene is as close to data perfection as we can get it. We are not resting on our laurels however, like all of our products, cloudhygiene is constantly being tested, challenged, and improved. The world is changing quickly and we remain on the leading edge of those changes. Always one step ahead.



Inbox Pros

Inbox Pros
1995 North Park Place
Suite 300
Atlanta, GA 30339

info@inboxpros.com

(678) 214-3739



webbula

Webbula
5000 Stonewood Drive
Suite 310
Pittsburgh, PA 15090

sales@webbula.com

(888) 993-2285