## DON'T BE AN ACCIDENTAL SPAMMER!

Email "spam" is in the eye of the reader—one person's valued information may be another person's spam. You know your list is truly opt-in, but people are so sensitive these days that you risk being branded as a spammer even if you believe you've done nothing wrong.

So what's a poor marketer to do? Use common sense and follow these guidelines to reduce the likelihood that your email is perceived as spam:

### 1) Renting email lists

**a.** If you are renting a list, do a lot of due diligence on the list provider. Check their opt-in practices very carefully, and make sure the list is not $3^{rd}$ generation (i.e., they opted in to a list you bought from a now-dead company) or too general (i.e., they opted in to get information on "technology" as opposed to "email marketing software"). Ask for a spam guarantee—if you get any complaints, the list and/or mailing is free.

**b.** If you have any suspicions at all about the list you've just rented, try a very very small campaign first just to be certain you haven't been fooled. Your reputation is too important to risk on a large mistake.

### 2) Remind the reader of your relationship with them

**a.** Tell people up front, at the beginning of the email, why they are getting your email. Example: "You are receiving this email because you recently purchased a gas grill from us, and we'd like to make you this special offer." Put them immediately at ease, remind them of their relationship with you, and the rest of your message will be read from a completely different perspective.

**b.** If they did not opt in to you directly, tell people how you got their email address. Example: "You are receiving this email because you signed up to receive special offers from partners of ABC Company," or "We got your email addresses from a rental list owned by ABC Company." That way, if they do think it's spam, they'll know who the real spammer is.

**c.** Even if people did subscribe to you directly, sometimes they forget. A simple reminder is always a good idea. Example: "At the CRM seminar you recently attended in New York, you asked us to keep you up to date on new products and services via email."

**d.** Tell them what email address they used when they subscribed. Example: "You subscribed to this newsletter as abc@gotmarketing.com. Make sure they send unsubscribe requests using that same email account.

**e.** Your "from" field should also reflect your relationship with your reader. If you've been using your company name, don't suddenly stop. Many people prefer to get email from a person (probably because it looks less like spam), so consider what your readers might like to see… better yet, ask them.

### 3) Opt-in is better than Opt-out

**a.** If you use the Opt-Out method of collecting permission (ie: you will get our emails unless you tell us you don't want them), you run a greater risk that some people will have missed the Opt-Out and will be annoyed.  Opt-in (where they overtly tell you they want to hear from you) is a better process to use to collect permission.

**b.** Send a confirmation email when someone joins your list. Its good manners and it will give people an opportunity to respond before they start getting emails from you on a regular basis. This is especially useful if they've been signed up by a someone else.

**c.** Better yet, use a double opt-in subscription method, where people must reply to a confirmation email before they can be added to your list. That way, you'll know they entered a valid email address—and if they tried to sign someone else up without permission, that someone can simply disregard the email.

### 4) ALWAYS put an unsubscribe option in every email.

**a.** Put the unsubscribe instructions in plain view. Don't try to hide them.

**b.** Make it easy to unsubscribe. Include both a one-click link to unsubscribe and an option to reply with "unsubscribe" in the subject. The former makes it easy if they are online, the latter makes it easy if they are offline and want to save their request for later uploading.

**c.** If people do unsubscribe, honor their requests. It's reasonable to send one more email confirming that they want off your list, but after that, you're a spammer. Don't risk it.

### 5) Manage frequency expectations ahead of time

**a.** Tell them what to expect from you in future mailings. Is it is a periodic update, a weekly newsletter or a one-time promotional offer? Once a month may be "just right" for some, "too much" for others. Let them decide before they get overwhelmed—and annoyed.

**b.** If you just started building a list but aren't exactly sure how you're going to use it yet, include a field in your opt-in form that asks, "How often would you like to receive email from us?"

### 6) Make it easy for them to contact you

**a.** Include your contact information in the email. Put a link directly to your "contact us" page on your website, or better yet, include a street address and phone number directly in the email text.

**b.** Make sure that [postmaster@yourcompany.com](mailto:postmaster@yourcompany.com) or [abuse@yourcompany.com](mailto:abuse@yourcompany.com) are valid email addresses so people can complain if they want to.

**c.** Never send an email that does not offer a reply mechanism, a link to feedback or some other way for the reader to tell you what they think.

### 7) Spend time on your subject line

**a.** If you're like me, you get a lot of spam email. I'm getting pretty good at telling that it's spam before I even open it, so take a minute to examine your own inbox.  Look at the emails you just "know" are spam and see what they have in common. Make sure you don't use the same words in your subject line as these emails, and avoid getting deleted before your email is even opened.

**b.** Avoid subject lines that include exclamation marks, dollar signs, the words "free", "extra income", and any other words that you think will make your readers turn away. These words often trigger spam filters anyway, so even a permission-based email could end up in a spam folder or, worse yet, in the trash.

**c.** If it's a newsletter you're sending, consider putting the name of the newsletter in the subject line with a hint about the contents. Subscribers will immediately recognize your newsletter's name (very important if you have more than one) and get a taste of what's in that issue. They'll be more likely to open it.

### 8) Manage your list carefully

**a.** Continually check your list for suspicious or duplicate addresses, and then verify or remove them.

**b.** Clean up your list on a regular basis. Remove email addresses that keep bouncing back before they get out of control, or your ISP will label you a spammer before your readers do.

**c.** NEVER put your entire list of recipients in the "to" or "cc" fields, for two reasons: (1) Everyone on the "to" or "cc" line can see every email address in those fields, and use those addresses in any way they see fit—ethical or otherwise; and, (2) If someone hits "reply all," everyone in the "to" and "cc" fields will receive the reply, whether that person intended them to get it or not. Put your own email address in the "to" field, and then email software that is smart enough to send individual emails to each person on your list.

### 9) Cherish their privacy

**a.** Unless you have clearly stated that the email addresses you collect will be shared with other companies, NEVER EVER rent, sell, sway or giveway your email list – it is one of your most important business assets. Cherish it and treat it carefully and with great discretion.

**b.** Always include a privacy statement or a link to your privacy policy on your website. If you don't have a privacy statement, it's time to create one and publish it online.

**c.** Never encourage your readers to sign up their friends to receive emails from you. Encourage them to forward your email intact so their friends can make their own decision on whether to sign up themselves.

**d.** If you use an email service, make sure that whoever sends your email for you understands and has implemented the following procedures:

- ✎ All email must be RFC compliant. (Refer to http://www.rfc-editor.org)
- ✎ All email servers used to send emails must have valid reverse DNS lookups.
- ✎ All email servers used must be closed to 3rd party relaying.

Any email marketer who thinks it's "easier to ask forgiveness than permission" is sadly mistaken and will feel the repercussions on their brand and their bottom line. To avoid being labeled a spammer, honesty is your best policy. In all your email marketing efforts, be straightforward and take responsibility for your actions. Follow the guidelines above and strive to find the right balance between the needs of your business and the needs of your readers. Above all, do your homework before sending any campaign. When targeted messages are sent to qualified permission-based lists using the guidelines above, everyone can win.

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