

2 Dozen Ways to Improve Your E-Mail Marketing Results

I suppose I can title this article "25 Email Marketing Mistakes I've Made." But rather than focus on the negative, below I've outlined the best practices I've come to adopt over the years. Hope you find something here useful.

1. Diversify your Content: If your entire email focuses on one product, service, or topic, you risk alienating all but the few people who will be interested. Unless you have segmented your database based on previous behavior, do not send an email on only 1 topic. I consistently find that the click through rate increases in proportion with varied content.

2. Don't Stress about Spam Words: Many experts will tell you to avoid words like "free" or "sale". In my opinion, ISPs tend to be moving away from content based spam filtering in favor of reputation based filtering. In other words, your sending IP address and from email are more important than whether or not your email contains certain words. Personally, I've used words like "free" in the subject line without any affect on delivery rates.

3. Make it Readable with Images Disabled: Always take into account the appearance of your email with images disabled. For email clients such as Outlook, this is now the default feature. Even popular web mails like Hotmail now disable images unless the sender is in the address book of the recipient. The best tactic to create readable emails with images block is use an alt description.

4. Create an Online Version: Always provide an online version of your email for users having trouble viewing images. I've calculated from emails I've sent in the past that around 5% of users will use this feature.

5. Remove Inactive Subscribers: Inactive subscribers are the most likely to get you in trouble by clicking the spam button. Consider automatically removing a subscriber that hasn't opened an email in several months.

6. Proofreading: Always have every email proofread by at least 2 detail oriented people. There's nothing more embarrassing than a typo in an email blast.

7. Monitor Replies: When you send out thousands of emails, you're bound to get a few replies. Occasionally, you'll get some good feedback from your subscribers. In addition, some people reply with unsubscribe requests.

8. Unsubscribe at Top: I know what you're thinking, "At the TOP!?" Yes, at the top. Lazy unsubscribers have a tendency to click the spam button instead scrolling down to find the unsubscribe link. By placing the link at the top, you might increase your unsubscribe rate, but that's better than an inflated spam complaint count.

9. Don't Over or Under Mail: If you send too much, you'll get deleted or marked as spam. Oddly enough, if you send once every 3 months you may have the same problem. Keep your brand top of mind for your customers by finding the perfect balance between over and under mailing.

10. Forward to Friend Feature: Many users automatically do this, but it doesn't hurt to ask. First time potential customers can be very open to a company when it is introduced by a friend or colleague.

11. Subscribe Feature for Forwards: Make it easy for potential new subscribers to subscribe if they receive your email as a forward. Include somewhere in the body a subscribe link.

12. White List Reminder: If you want your subscribers to add you to their white list or address book, you need to ask. Sure, not everyone will add you. However, those who do are likely the people who care most about receiving your emails and, therefore, you have the most to lose if your emails get flagged as spam.

13. Single Click Unsubscribe: I generally recommend keeping the unsubscribe as simple as possible. However, you may want to confirm the action if you place your unsubscribe at the top of every email in case users click the link on accident.

14. Privacy Policy: Always place your privacy policy at the bottom of every email. Assure customers that you obtained their email address in a legitimate fashion, and you will not sell their personal info.

15. Don't Rent Lists: Some may disagree on this, but I've never seen anything good come from a rented list. Don't risk your sender reputation with emails from questionable sources. If you want to reach a new audience, consider a joint venture with another firm in a similar but non-competing industry.

16. Develop your Brand: Remember that your emails will slowly build your brand in the minds of your subscribers. Even if they never click-through and make a purchase, be sure to keep a consistent and accurate corporate image with your email content.

17. Call to Action: Each section must contain a specific call to action that avoids vague phrases like "click here." You'll be surprised how an effective call to action button or link can improve your click through rate.

18. Mix Freebies with Products: Too much selling can burn people out. Engage your subscribers with useful, free content. For example, if you sell home theater equipment, send out an article on the explaining the benefits of newer technologies. When you provide additional value to your customers with learning resources, they are sometimes even willing to pay more for your merchandise. In addition, strategies like this keep your brand top of mind.

19. Find Your "Tuesday": For the eCommerce sites I've worked with, Tuesday morning has always resulted in the best open, click-through, and conversion rates. However, every company is different.

20. Same Day, Same Time: Be consistent in the time you send your emails for two reasons. First, the ISPs see inconsistency as a possible spam flag. Spammers can care less when they send out mass emails. Second, your customers will begin to anticipate your emails at a certain time each week, possibly increasing the likely hood of them opening and clicking through.

21. Keep the Good Stuff above the Fold: Remember that many email clients will obscure a large portion of your email unless the user scrolls down. Make sure the top 400 pixels are as engaging as possible. I can't tell you how many times I've had to send artwork back to the design department because the top of the email failed to grab your attention.

22. A/B Test 1 Variable at a Time: It took me far too long to learn this. For years, I would change several factors in each successive email blast, but never could find that perfect mix. If you really want to find out what works, you can only change 1 variable. For example, should the subject line be short or long? Keep the same content and split your list in 2, sending half a longer subject and the other half a shorter one. Do not change any other variables!

23. 600 Pixel Width: Due to the limitations of many email clients, stick with a width somewhere between 500 to 600 pixels wide.

24. Experiment with Subject Lines: I wish there was a magic principle I can share with you about subject lines. Unfortunately, there isn't. The best we can do is test, test, and test again. Sometimes short subjects are better, sometimes long, sometimes intriguing, sometimes urgent, whatever works best for you. Here's a great article on email subject lines.

25. Begin Segmentation & Personalization Now: In a few years, email marketers that don't practice segmentation and personalization will be left in the dust. There are an endless number of ways to segment your email list. Some popular ways are by purchase behavior, geography, or ordering frequency.

As a long term strategy, I would also greatly encourage researching transactional and trigger based email marketing, as they tend to product much better open, click-through, and conversion rates. To learn more about eCommerce Email marketing, please visit the Palmer [Ecommerce Marketing Blog](#).

Justin Palmer offers expert eCommerce consulting services and Do It Yourself search engine optimization lessons. In addition, Justin is the eCommerce director for C28.com, which sells Spiritual t-shirts and Witness wear.