

# Guide to Email Marketing

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

We don't claim to have *all* the answers, but at Sabal Strategy we do have answers for the most commonly asked questions! We've put together this guide to help you understand the basics of email marketing. Just keep in mind that we're not attorneys, and this guide is not intended to provide legal advice. All email marketers should consult their in-house privacy department before making any changes to their email operations.

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## **What is the difference between email and direct mail marketing?**

There are a number of significant differences, including cost and return on your investment. Email marketing gives your audience more control because there is a penalty for sending email too frequently or sending irrelevant email. Direct mail doesn't carry a similar penalty.

If your audience doesn't want your email, they can delete or mark your emails as spam, which will negatively impact your ability to reach the inbox.

Email and direct mail marketing both require actively managing your list to keep it free of out-of-date or undeliverable addresses. Email design is also much different than designing a mail piece because of issues like image suppression, preview panes, and variations in email rendering across different email clients. Plus, there's more clutter in email inboxes because of its low cost versus direct mail, so messages need to be succinct and compelling.

## **What do I need to know about CAN-SPAM and other laws?**

The Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing Act of 2003, and updated in 2008, is better known as CAN-SPAM. The law set national standards for the sending of commercial email.

Four key provisions were updated in 2008:

1. An email recipient cannot be required to pay a fee, provide information other than their email address and opt-out preferences, or take any steps other than sending a reply email message or visiting a single web page to opt out of receiving future email from a sender. In other words, unsubscribing should be really simple for the recipient.
2. The definition of “sender” was modified to make it easier to determine which of multiple parties advertising in a single email message is the “designated sender.” This is important because the designated sender is responsible for complying with CAN-SPAM Act’s opt-out requirements. This provision is important if you send email to your list on behalf of third-party advertisers.
3. A “sender” of commercial email can include an accurately registered post office box or private mailbox established under United States Postal Service regulations to satisfy CAN-SPAM Act’s requirement that a commercial email display a “valid physical postal address.”
4. A definition of “person” was added to clarify that the obligations outlined in CAN-SPAM are not limited to natural persons.

If you would like to read more about CAN-SPAM, we recommend:

[FTC Approves New Rule Provision Under The CAN-SPAM Act](#) (press release) from the Federal Trade Commission

[Definitions and Implementation Under the CAN-SPAM Act](#) full ruling (downloadable PDF) by the Federal Trade Commission

## **Do I need to get permission in order to email customers?**

Legally, you do not need their permission but we recommend asking or letting them know you may email them. Under the US Federal CAN-SPAM Act, you are only required to merely have a “pre-existing business relationship.” However, it is considered best practice to operate above the legal standard and obtain their permission. Email is a very personal form of communication. If you haven’t been given express permission to enter someone’s inbox, then your primary focus should be asking for that permission! Sending email to customers or prospects with an unwelcome message can lead to spam complaints by your recipients. If enough of your email messages are marked as spam, your email will be blocked by ISPs, which will decline deliveries from your domain. The golden rule in email marketing is to respect your subscribers’ preferences and always allow them to unsubscribe from your emails. That means sending only relevant and timely messages your

audience wants to receive. When you do that, you will be rewarded with higher response rates and lower ISP complaint rates.

## **Is it okay to email people who I haven't emailed in more than a year?**

While not illegal for US companies, it's generally not a good idea. That's why it's considered a best practice to verify and update your email addresses to prevent damage to your sender reputation because of a spike in bounces and spam complaints. ISPs see both evidence of irresponsible mailing practices.

There are three dangers in using an old email list:

1. People change their email addresses fairly often so older lists are more likely to contain inactive and dead addresses that will produce bounces.
2. Inactive or dead addresses may have been turned into "honey pots" or "spam traps" by ISPs. If you send email to a honey pot, ISPs see this behavior as the same behavior that real spammers do and will block your email from delivery as a result.
3. Subscribers are more likely to forget they gave you permission to email them if you wait for long periods between emails. And if they forget, they're more likely to mark your email as spam. You should consider that permission expires when it goes unused. At a certain point you have to either update or abandon unused addresses. You should also know that laws outside of the U.S. vary on this issue.

## **Everyone in my list opted in, so why am I getting spam complaints?**

The most common factors driving ISP complaints (when a subscriber clicks the "report spam" button) are:

1. Infrequent email leading them to forget they gave you permission or no longer have an interest in hearing from you.
2. Too many email messages and they're getting annoyed with your brand.
3. Email that is not relevant to the recipient. Lack of relevancy occurs when you fail to make it clear how often or what content will be delivered, following through on those promises, and using the data you have about each recipient to make their experience unique.

## What factors may affect my inbox deliverability rate?

Nearly 20% of permission-based email gets blocked or filtered into a spam folder by ISPs and corporate system administrators. Whether your email is sent in-house or through an email service provider (ESP), getting blocked results in lower response rates and reduces your program's effectiveness. The key factors that ISPs and other receivers use to determine your deliverability rate are:

- The number of complaints (subscribers who click on the "report spam" button) for the email
- Poor or lack of bounce management by either someone in house or through your ESP
- Being added to real-time blacklists as a spammer by ISPs
- A spam trap (also called a honey pot) is an email address that is actively monitored but is not routinely used
- Infrastructure issues
- Volume and frequency are both considered too high
- Email that contains profanity, text strings or objectionable images indicates undesirable content
- Your sending constancy is too irregular or too frequent

## What is Sender Reputation?

Every email sender has a "sender reputation," just as every consumer has a credit score. Your reputation is a reflection of your mailing practices. The data each ISP uses to determine your Sender Reputation helps to ensure trusted messages reach the inbox. Sender Reputation is compiled by each ISP/receiver differently, but is based on a combination of complaints, content, infrastructure, list hygiene (bounce processing and spam traps) and sending permanence or consistent cadence of sending email.

## Can you give me a list of spammy words to avoid?

Content filtering isn't as prevalent as it once was; today, it is primarily an issue in the B2B market where corporate email servers often filter email by content. If you have a good sender reputation, you can generally use the words you'd like to use. When in doubt, follow best practices for writing. Avoid over-promising or using bait-and-switch language. Above all, avoid using all profanity.



## How much does it cost to buy a consumer email list?

Too much, no matter what the price. We believe you should never buy a consumer email list. Lists available for purchase are filled with dead addresses and “honey pots” or ISP-identified spammers. Sending an email campaign to a list you’ve purchased is a surefire way to get blacklisted by ISPs. However, renting a list from a reputable vendor like Sable Strategy is an effective option. Reputable vendors will not release the email addresses to marketers, which controls and prevents over messaging. A reputable vendor also maintains good relationships with the various ISPs to ensure their email campaigns are delivered.

## What is the best way to build my email list?

There are three ways to build your list: organically, by word-of-mouth or going viral, or through paid acquisition. The only way to know which one is right for your brand is by testing all the possible combinations.

Most marketers aim to optimize organic growth by placing an email sign-up on every page of their website, using a dynamic acquisition page, and leveraging their call center and sales team. Retail stores and other offline venues can also be strong contributors to your email list growth. If you are speaking at an event, pass a sign-up sheet among the attendees, or if you’re an exhibitor, ask for business cards from interested attendees. In each instance, you’ll want to let your potential audience know they’re opting in to your email list. It’s also advisable to offer them a special research report or other content in exchange for their time and attention.

Viral marketing is difficult, and the results are unpredictable. However, you’ll need to have the proper infrastructure in place before you publish your campaign. Make it easy to forward the piece to a friend by having social share widgets in place. Then create your message with a strong emotional appeal with a message that resonates with your audience. Building your email list by building a strong network on LinkedIn and an audience on Facebook is also easy and cost effective.

Paid strategies include email-append (if you happen to have a strong postal database), email list rental, search pay-per-click ad campaigns and co-registration. Every company, division, and email communication stream is different though, so be sure you test a number of different methods before settling on what you think may work best.

If all of this sounds difficult, ask Sabal Strategy how we can help you grow your email database.

## What is the average rate of list churn?

Generally speaking, each year email marketers can expect to lose roughly one-third of their email addresses to list churn, which is the number of subscribers who leave an email list. Churn may be the result of bounces, recipients choosing to unsubscribe or marking your email as spam. Marketers with stronger brands or stronger email programs will see lower rates of churn.

## Why do people unsubscribe?

People unsubscribe for a variety of reasons but the two primary reasons are, according to Jupiter Research, the content is irrelevant (53%) and they receive your email too frequently (40%). Creating a subscription preference page where subscribers can indicate how often they'd like to receive emails and what topics they're interested in is a smart way to lower your opt-out rate and give your subscribers more control. People may also unsubscribe because they change their email address, so offer your subscribers an opportunity to update their address.

## How can I get my email message delivered to a prospect list?

When you rent email addresses from an email compiler, the price includes the delivery of your email message. Email compilers will take care of all the details of email deployment (which some call an email blast or broadcast). Be sure you understand exactly how you need to deliver your message and if there are any technical constraints you must follow.

## What does the email list rental service include?

Sabal Strategy's service includes the following:

- Identifying your best target audience (consumers or businesses) by using high-quality third-party opt-in email databases.
- Setting up your email message, using the creative provided by you or developed by our creative services team in consultation with you. This format includes coding for an HTML message and a text message backup for those recipients who cannot receive HTML email messages.
- Sending test emails for the campaign in order to check the functionality of links in the message, and ensure that the opt-out function is working. We will get your approval before sending the emails to your list.
- Sending the email.

- Monitoring replies. Track all bounces, opt-outs, unique click-throughs, link specific click-throughs and how many opened the HTML messages.
- Providing tracking reports for each campaign.

## Will you create an HTML version of my message?

If you provide the message as HTML, we will set up your email in HTML format. If you do not provide your message as HTML, we can create an HTML version of your message. The average fee ranges from \$350 to \$450 per hour, and the average time required is 1-2 hours depending on the complexity of your message and design. Image hosting may require additional fees.

## How much time does it take to put together an email launch?

The launch itself can be put together in 2-3 days. The creative work and the list need to be prepared beforehand. Once the HTML or plain text work is done, the email must be tested and approved. Each of these steps determines how quickly we can deliver your email message to your list.

## What should I do first?

Compared with other direct marketing channels, email blasts can be put together relatively quickly and easily. But before you do anything, you need to determine your marketing objective for the campaign. While the ultimate goal might be a sale, it may take multiple touches before your recipient actually makes a purchase. Until your prospect warms up to your brand and your offer, there is no sale. If you're doing an initial campaign to a cold list, then one of your main objectives should be to gain their permission or have them opt in for future marketing communications and lead nurturing.

It's really a courting ritual between you and your audience:

1. First, there's eye contact and an introduction
2. Second, each learns about the other
3. Third, as you get to know each other, you may enter into a mutually beneficial relationship.

An effective email campaign can make eye contact and deliver clicks to get you past step one and maybe to step two. But it's unlikely an email can bypass steps one and two resulting in a sale at step three.



So think about what you can realistically accomplish with this eBlast. Are you prospecting or re-activating, or cross-selling? Is your email intended to introduce or to remind? Do you want the recipient to open the email and click on a link? Do you want them to visit your website, fill out a form, request information, make a purchase ,or opt in by sharing their email in order to receive future messages from you?

No matter which objective is your primary reason for the email, your goal will shape the message, the offer, the subject line, the list content, and the way you measure results.

## **What is a seed list and why do I need to provide one?**

A seed list is a list of email addresses that you want to receive the creative test. The ideal number of seeds is 8 or fewer.

Sabal asks that you provide seed emails from a variety of domains in order to test how your message is rendered across multiple providers. This will provide helpful insight regarding the successful deliverability for your audience list.

## **Are there any restrictions on subject matter for a subject line?**

Issues of good taste and legality are obvious restrictions in the subject line. Sabal Strategy recommends keeping it to 35 characters or fewer. The subject line is the most important element governing the Open Rate of your messages.

## **Why is the subject line important?**

From a marketing point of view, the "Subject" line functions in the same way that teaser copy does on an envelope. Its primary purpose is to entice the reader to open your message. It should not be misleading or vague. It should not promise one thing and offer something else. And it should correlate directly to the content of the message.

## **How can I improve the relevancy of my email program?**

Even though subscribers choose to sign up for much more email than they actually want, marketers are not doing enough to help them. We continue to send messages that are generic, badly timed, and focused on us. To boost the relevancy of your email program, try a combination of the following strategies:

- Present a clear and compelling benefit statement for signing up.
- Establish value from the very start through a compelling and relevant welcome email and engagement email series.
- Send more messages when the subscriber is actively engaging with your email, and fewer when they are not.
- Segment the file in order to customize the message flow.
- Respond to the subscriber's profile, behavior and place in your company's customer lifecycle.
- Give subscribers control by creating an effective preference center.
- Adopt a cadence that supports effective storytelling through relevant content.
- Vary the type of message you send, e.g., newsletter, promotion, behavioral trigger, and give subscribers the option of choosing each type in the preference center.
- Surprise subscribers with a simple "thank you" every once in a while.
- Clean up your subscriber list and delete all subscribers or prospects who ignore your messages or have not opened or clicked in the past six months.

## Is it better to send HTML emails or text emails?

Since the advent of business use of email in the mid-1990s, there's still no clear answer to this question. Let's look at the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Plain text emails are just plain text with no links, no images, and no specific formatting such as bold, italics or font. The major disadvantage to text emails is the inability to track key metrics since there are no links or call-to-action buttons. The advantages of text emails include they're personal and direct, they are easy to compose and they have universal readability. Because there are links or images, they're not treated as commercial email and have a higher rate of deliverability. When your audience is more likely to be reading your email on their phone or a smart device like their Apple watch, text emails can be more effective. This is especially true in the B2B sector.

HTML emails have everything a text email lacks, including hyperlinks, images, specific formatting and graphic design to present a complete experience for the reader. The major advantage of HTML email is that it can be tracked, so you know how many recipients opened it, read it and clicked on specific links and CTA buttons. In addition to the better storytelling and branding that HTML offers, it also creates a richer experience for the recipient, leading to higher ROI. However, the disadvantages of HTML emails include the time it takes and the cost of designing the email, the need to test and ensure there are no broken links (which will get your email treated as spam), and

deliverability issues. Occasionally antivirus software will strip out all of the CSS coding, leaving behind an unreadable result.

To avoid issues of deliverability, you should send your HTML email in the form of a multi-part Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions (MIME) email. This bundles together the HTML version with a plain text version. Essentially, this approach means your email can be read by nearly every email client. If one cannot handle the HTML version, the plain text version will be delivered. Second, you should give subscribers the opportunity to indicate their preference for either HTML or text emails when they sign up and in your preference center. Third, when designing HTML emails, use as much HTML text as possible and avoid being overly reliant on images in case the recipient is blocking images (about 50% of recipients do this). And fourth, test to see whether your subscribers respond better to HTML or text emails.

## **Is it possible to embed videos in emails?**

While it is possible, it is not advisable because support for video is blocked by nearly every email client. The best practice is to add a link to a video within the body of your email message. You can boost clicks to the chosen video content in three ways. You can use a strong visual cue such as an image from the video placed within the frame of a media player or with a play button in the center of the image. The image can then be linked to the actual video. Second, you can mention the video in the subject line and provide the link in the body of the message. Third, instead of using a single, static image from the video, you could create an animated gif composed of several images from the video. Place the gif in the body of the email with a link to the video in order to draw the eye and increase the likelihood of clicks to view the video.

## **How often should I email subscribers and prospects?**

The frequency of your email campaign will and should vary by brand, file, message type and audience. The best way to know what's best for your brand and your campaigns is to test and monitor your metrics for signs you're sending too frequently. Red flags are complaints, unsubscribe requests and high list churn. In general, Sabal Strategy recommends B2C marketers should start with sending weekly or twice a week, and B2B marketers with twice a month. However, you should be aware that there are certain types of messaging that are welcomed by subscribers more frequently. Other messages should be sent less frequently. This is why we recommend offering your subscribers the ability to determine the cadence.

## What is the best day of the week to send email?

It really depends on your business, your audience, and your message. For B2B campaigns, Tuesday-Thursday are more effective. For B2C campaigns, the best day varies greatly. The problem with declaring a “best day” to send email is that everyone begins sending messages on that day, making it less attractive. Think of it as a “rush hour” for email marketing. When you send your message at the same time as every other email campaign, your message is more likely to get lost in the clutter and experience slower delivery times.

For a more effective campaign, begin by considering your message or offer. If your call-to-action is time sensitive, you’ll need to take that into consideration. Then consider your audience and their email reading behavior. This is why it’s vital to monitor your engagement and conversions. Based on the hard data, you can determine the best day of the week to send mail for each of your distinct audiences and for each distinct email campaign. Testing can help you uncover trends that work for your audience.

## What is the best time of day to send email?

The short answer is that it depends. In general, the best time to send B2B email is during business hours. If you’re sending B2C email, mornings and evenings are considered better. It is worth noting that for large batches of email, your vendor will require throttling, which means they will send your email to portions of your list in chunks over a period of several hours or days to optimize delivery. This is why the time of delivery cannot be guaranteed for large campaigns.

## Is there a ‘magic’ word that will produce a higher response?

The short answer is that there is no magic word that can guarantee higher responses or conversions. Some experts will tell you that using words like “free” and “new” can produce a better response. But the reality is that it might work but it depends on the industry. For example, offering “free shipping” produces higher responses for ecommerce. And, of course, you must follow through and actually offer free shipping.

The best way to determine if there are any ‘magic’ words for your business is by researching the most popular search terms for your industry and for your company. By understanding which key search terms are driving the most traffic to and within your site, you can leverage those words and phrases in your email messaging to increase opens, click-throughs, and conversions.

## How do I convince my boss that a lifetime value approach to email marketing generates better long-term results?

The typical senior executive is impressed by the numbers. When you make your case, offer a balanced scenario that spells out the lifetime value (better long-term results) versus more aggressive campaigns that generate revenue in the short term at the expense of more list churn. Take time to demonstrate that you're measuring your program in terms of lifetime value instead of simply the size of the list or fast you grow the list.

If you can demonstrate spending more on automation or web analytics creates enough relevancies that your response rates grow (and convert) at a higher rate, then you are more likely to convince your boss to give you the necessary resources to focus on the subscriber experience.

If you can demonstrate that sending email too frequently is likely to reduce inbox deliverability and/or increase list churn, then you can prove that not following best practices actually costs more than the cost of following best practices. As marketers, we need to be advocates for our subscribers. By tracking the right metrics, we can demonstrate that relevancy and respect result in higher revenue, better deliverability, and lower churn, and that means we are speaking management's language.

