

THE RULES OF EMAIL MARKETING

By Sandy Spadaro

Getting and Keeping Permission

The increased focus on spam in email marketing also means an increased focus on getting permission first. We need to remain diligent in our efforts to earn and keep the permission of our subscribers to the best of our ability.

What are the best ways to earn and keep permission?

Be Specific

When people sign up to be on your email list, allow them to select -precisely -their areas of interest (e.g. newsletters, sale notifications, new product or service announcements, event invitations etc.). You can make subscribers feel more comfortable by specifying what they will receive and when they will receive it (e.g. "Sign up for Our Weekly Concert Announcement"). Also, be specific about who you are and what address your email is coming from. You may want to let subscribers know what your emails will look like in the "From:" and "Subject:" line so that they will be expecting you.

Be Respectful

Permission can be given, and it can be taken away. It is very important that every email you send has the option for the recipient to unsubscribe or "opt-out." Interests may change over time and communications may no longer be valuable to a given subscriber. Those subscribers are entitled to withdraw their permission at will.

Be Trustworthy

Your privacy policy should be clearly posted. It adds credibility to your company and your email even if recipients do not click on the link. Some subscribers will reply to an email to unsubscribe instead of using the automatic unsubscribe link. Monitor your inbox for un-subscribers, and complaints, then make sure you remove unsubscribe addresses right away and take action on any grievances.

Be Interested

Are your email communications of value? Is the frequency right? A survey is an inexpensive, easy and immediate way to find out how your customers really feel about your company and your email communications. So, when you do a survey, don't forget to ask how your customers feel about your emails.

Be Current

People change ISPs, jobs and email addresses at random. Often, you'll be the last to know. Ask for updated information and give subscribers an easy way to change

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their email address. This will ensure that your communications continue to be received if, and when, they make a change. In addition, provide a way for your subscribers to change their interests and preferences. This will help you continue to provide the information most valuable to them, and target the right audience for each campaign.

Be Considerate

Respect the privilege of communicating with your customers and prospects by taking care not to communicate too often. Gratuitous emails are not met with gratitude. Think carefully and plan how many, and what kind of communications you send to your subscribers.

Note: As a rule of thumb, if you are sending consumers promotional emails about products and services, you should be emailing no more frequently than three, maybe four times per month. A rule of thumb always has an exception, and every audience is different, so make your decisions based on your own unique business.

Beware of Strangers

Permission is not transferable. Today, subscribers want to receive email from those companies they have subscribed to, not an unknown third party.

List buyer beware! Many email marketers become accidental spammers by making the mistake of buying a list. Permission is not for sale and is not transferable. When searching for a list, don't be fooled by offers of targeted, clean lists for sale on a CD or other wise. If anyone claims you can "Blast your ad to over 1000 safe addresses for only \$5.00!" or "Buy a CD with 10,000,000 email addresses for only \$99!", this is too good to be true. These lists are not permission-based -they are spam lists.

While it stands to be truth that email marketing has been the most effective way to advertise to mass markets since the invention of the television, the rules are important to adhere to in order to grow and maintain a solid, positive reputation. The alternative is certainly not worth the risk.