



Optimizing Deliverability & Subscriber Engagement

A checklist to help you optimize your emails to avoid the spam folder, get more emails to the inbox and increase subscriber engagement.

Sending an email to your subscribers is an exciting moment. With all of the work you put into crafting the perfect message, you expect it to bring joy and, most importantly, *inspire action*.

But have you ever sent an email, only to find that the opens and click-throughs *didn't* come pouring in? Your open rate increases slowly and never quite picks up to the double-digits. Your click-through rates hover around one or two percent. Instead of the cheers of appreciation and spike in sales, all you hear are crickets.

What gives?

Well, it could be a variety of factors – all of which can be summed up in your deliverability.

Issues with deliverability often come up in ways that aren't as obvious as spam complaints. In fact, challenges like low open and click-through rates can also indicate issues with deliverability.

We recognize, however, this area is often a mystery, making it difficult to navigate for even the most experienced email marketer.

It's doesn't help that there are so many factors that contribute to whether or not your emails make it to the inbox. From the content in your emails to the internet service providers (ISPs), like Gmail and Yahoo, that monitor them and

determine your reputation to your subscribers' interactions... there's a lot that's both in and out of your control.

To help you improve what you *can* positively affect, there are email marketing best practices that will guide you towards creating and sending emails your subscribers will want to engage with – which in the end, is what matters most when it comes to deliverability.

But it goes beyond just email content. Your sign up form, list building tactics and more can all impact your deliverability.

And that's why we created this checklist to help you optimize your email marketing for success. Use it as a resource for yourself or your team as you build your audience, create and send valuable emails and improve your strategy over time.

Sign up form and list building

Your deliverability is impacted even *before* someone signs up to your email list. How is that possible, you ask? Well, it comes down to whether or not you're setting accurate, clear expectations for people as they sign up to your email list.

Make sure the following information is clear in your sign up form:

- ☒ Are you providing information in the content of your form about the benefits of your email list and what people can expect?
- ☒ Do you communicate how often subscribers will get emails from you?
- ☒ Are you only sending emails to people who chose to opt-in to your list?
(Sending emails to purchased lists is a big no-no!)
- ☒ Are you using confirmed opt-in?
Sending an automated confirmation message filters out bots, spammy email accounts or addresses that aren't spelled correctly. This way, your emails are delivered to the people who want it most!

Email content

Once your sign up form is optimized for success, it's time to make sure your content delivers what you promised. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- ☒ Do you have an automated welcome email set up for you email list(s)?
 - ☒ Does your welcome email repeat the value of your emails and introduce your business?
 - ☒ Do you ask your new subscribers to whitelist your email address (i.e., add your email address to their address book) to ensure your emails get delivered to their primary inbox?
- ☒ Are you emailing the content you promised subscribers in your sign up form?
- ☒ Is the content you're sending providing *value* to your audience?
- ☒ Is your subject line compelling enough?
- ☒ Does your subject line accurately tell subscribers about the content in the emails?
- ☒ Do you include an unsubscribe link and is it easy to find?
- ☒ Make sure you don't include any free link shorteners, like Bit.ly
- ☒ Do you send a balance of educational content and promotional offers?
Before asking subscribers to do something for you (like purchase a product), make sure you deliver value with no strings attached, first. Sending recent blog articles and free ebooks, for example, are all risk-free benefits for subscribers to enjoy. Then, you'll be able to balance that interaction with a promotional message that emphasizes the value of your company and products.
- ☒ Are you CAN-SPAM Act compliant?
 - ☒ The CAN-SPAM Act is a US law that regulates commercial emails to protect consumers. To avoid penalties, review the law's requirements and stick to them!

- ☒ Sending emails outside of the US? [Learn about anti-spam laws in other countries.](#)

Sender information

Details such as the email address you associate with your account play an important role in ensuring your emails make it to the inbox. Check the following to make sure you're good to go!

- ☒ Is your email "From Name" consistent and recognizable to subscribers?
When in doubt, use Name @ Company (e.g., Tom @AWeber).
- ☒ Use your domain-based email address as your "From Address" to build a good email sender reputation.
We strongly discourage using free domains (e.g., @gmail.com, @yahoo.com).
- ☒ Does your domain-based email address include the name of a relevant person (e.g., mark@companydomain.com)?
We do not recommend using generic email addresses before the "@" sign, like "noreply@companydomain.com," "donotreply@companydomain.com," "marketing@companydomain.com" and "info@companydomain.com"

Send schedule and planning

Maintaining a consistent email send frequency is important because it ensures you deliver valuable content to subscribers and prevents them from forgetting about you and your emails. It also lets ISPs know that you're communicating regularly with your subscribers, which boosts your sender reputation and gets more of your emails into the inbox.

Here are some things to keep in mind when it comes to send frequency:

- ☒ [Are you regularly emailing your subscribers](#) with a frequency that matches what you promised in your sign up form or welcome email?

- ☒ If not, are you sending emails to subscribers at least once a month?

- ☒ Have you tested the frequency of your email sends to help improve engagement?
Some subscribers might not open or click links in your emails because they either miss them in the inbox or are too busy at the time to take action. For example, if you send a weekly newsletter, some subscribers might prefer to receive daily updates instead. Ask them and/or test your emails to find out! Or, try sending a text email in addition to an HTML version to drive more action.

- ☒ Do you send valuable, educational in addition to promotional emails bonus content and exclusive offers to increase engagement?

List management

Healthy check-ups are just as important for your email list as they are for your physical health. This ensures you have the right people on your email list, and removes anyone who is no longer interested in what you have to send.

- ☒ Are you regularly removing inactive subscribers every six months?
Maintaining regular list hygiene ensures you only have subscribers who want to be on your list. To do so, consider running a reactivation campaign to your inactive subscribers every six months.

Create different subscriber segments based on who hasn't opened or clicked an email in the last six, nine or twelve months. Send an email to subscribers asking them if they'd like to continue receiving emails from you. Remove any subscribers who remain inactive.

- ☒ To increase the relevancy and value of your emails, have you tried sending targeted emails to specific segments of subscribers?
Creating subscriber segments allows you to send hyper-relevant content to those who want in most. For subscribers who haven't purchased a product, for example, send this segment a checklist on its value and how to get started.

Email performance

Sending valuable emails isn't a choice you make once and then never think about again. Your subscribers' needs and interests will naturally evolve over time, so it's important to ensure your emails do the same.

By reviewing your email analytics like opens, click-throughs and revenue per email, you can gauge whether or not your emails are effective. With that information, you'll be able to make insights into the kind of content your audience truly wants.

Plus, subscriber engagement is more important than ever when it comes to your deliverability. Internet service providers (ISPs) deliver mail to subscribers based on the way they interact with your emails – and if a large chunk of your audience isn't opening your emails, that tells ISPs to send more of your emails to spam, even if a subscriber *wants* to receive it.

To help you stay on top of your email game and boost performance, be sure to review the following:

- ☒ Are you reviewing your emails to check on engagement?
 - ☒ If so, are you gathering insights on trends you see to make improvements and continue sending content subscribers engage with?

- ☒ Do you regularly review your email analytics to check spam complaints?
If spam complaints are higher than usual, review the email you sent. Did you send anything different than usual? Compare it to other email sends to see how it may have come across as spammy to subscribers. Then, consider how you can present the content in a different way so that it emphasizes more value to subscribers. Or, avoid emailing that content in the future.

- ☒ Do you regularly check your list of unsubscribes?

While people will naturally unsubscribe from your list over time (which is a good thing for your list health!), look for spikes. Think about the emails you've been recently sending and see if there's anything that might not align with your subscribers' expectations.

For subscribers who opt-out because they receive too much email, try offering your emails at a less frequent schedule. Including a link to a subscriber preference center page ([like the examples shown here](#)), gives them the option to reduce the number of emails they receive, as opposed to unsubscribing from your list altogether.

Additionally, consider adding a question on your unsubscribe page to learn why people are leaving your list. If there are big trends, incorporate their feedback into your email strategy to prevent others from leaving as well.

- ☒ Do you re-send emails to subscribers who didn't open a previously sent message or click a link with revised content to re-engage them?

Email service provider

Choosing an email service provider (ESP) that sets you up for deliverability success is key. Does yours keep up? Review the checklist below and ask them these questions to be confident with your choice of partner.

- ☒ Do they have a dedicated team that's focused on building and managing relationships with major ISPs (e.g. Google, Yahoo, Comcast)?
An ESP with a dedicated, experienced team in deliverability is a good sign.
- ☒ What is their process for managing your reputation with the major ISPs?
Your ESP should have a system that easily identifies and removes low quality senders so your email deliverability is not impacted.
- ☒ Do they own their own technology and infrastructure that delivers email to the ISPs?

Some ESPs rely on third party and outsourced partnerships to manage the important delivery function. This type of a situation is a risk for your business.

- ☒ Do they require (confirmed) opt-in email?

Requiring double opt-in email provides you with a higher quality list and audience. Whether you're just starting your list, or migrating a list from another ESP, this is a good thing!

Have more questions about ESPs & deliverability for AWeber? [Contact us here.](#)

Glossary

Bounce rate. This is the percentage of sent messages that can't be delivered to a subscriber's inbox. There are two different types of bounces: Hard bounces and Soft bounces. Hard bounces happen when an email is attempted to send to an invalid email address. A soft bounce happens when there is an issue with the email server, such as a mailbox that has reached capacity.

CAN-SPAM Act - The [CAN-SPAM Act](#) is a law that regulates commercial emails to protect consumers.

Click-through rate - The percentage of how many subscribers click a link in your email divided by the total number of subscribers on your email list. (Note: This definition varies across ESPs. Please check with your ESP to identify how they calculate this number.)

Confirmation email - An automated email sent to subscribers right after they sign up that asks them to confirm they want to receive emails from you.

Confirmed Opt-in - A process (and email marketing best practice) that requires new subscribers to confirm they want to be on your email list.

Domain-based email address - This is an email address that is set up under your website domain. An example would be: *yourname@yourwebsite.com*.

Deliverability - The amount of email that gets delivered to the inbox instead of the spam folder. This rate is impacted by a variety of factors, including IP reputation, the sender's "from" name, email content, subscriber engagement and more.

Email delivery - The acceptance of emails sent to an Internet Service Provider, regardless of where it ends up.

Email provider - The service an individual uses to receive and send emails (e.g., Gmail, Outlook, Yahoo, Hotmail).

Email sender reputation - The reputation of your IP address and domain name, as calculated by an algorithm created by ISPs and email providers. The algorithm takes into account subscriber behaviors, like whether or not they open an email, click a link, report a message as spam and more. If engagement is good, this tells the ISP/email provider to route future emails to the inbox instead of the spam folder. If a subscriber isn't engaged with your emails, ISPs will route them to the spam folder. If this happens to a lot of subscribers, it can hurt your sender reputation in the long run by making it more difficult for those who *want* your emails to receive your emails.

Email Service Provider (ESP) - An email marketing service from which you can create and send mass emails to subscribers (e.g., AWeber).

Internet Service Provider (ISP) - The company an individual uses to access the Internet.

List hygiene - The regular efforts that are done to maintain a healthy email list, such as re-engaging inactive subscribers and removing those who no longer want to receive your emails.

Open rate - The percentage of how many subscribers open your email divided by the total number of subscribers on your email list.

Spam - Any email that a subscriber does not want or expect to receive.

Spam filter - A program that detects and prevents unsolicited and unwanted emails from an individual's inbox.

Website domain - The name of a website address. An example would be www.aweber.com.

About AWeber

AWeber is an easy-to-use email marketing tool that allows business owners and entrepreneurs to cultivate relationships with their customers. Since 1998, AWeber has

been the email engine powering the growth of organizations around the world, including leading sites like Social Media Examiner and ProBlogger and industry influencers like Ann Handley.

Today, more than 100,000 businesses, entrepreneurs, agencies and nonprofits are making the most of AWeber's sophisticated segmentation and analytics capabilities, extensive template libraries and industry-leading deliverability and live support.

It's time to send emails from a platform that sets you up for success.

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