The Complete Guide To Optimizing Email Marketing For Conversions

How To Grow Your Email List, Increase Engagement & Ensure Deliverability

HubSpot

CATALPHA
ADVERTISING & DESIGN

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Introduction

No matter what happens in the world of digital communication, there is one constant – email marketing. Contrary to annual predictions that email marketing has peaked, the numbers tell a different story. A fairly recent DMA study found that 76% of marketers use more email than they were three years ago. In terms of numerically-based predictions, Forrester Research forecasts that investment in email marketing will to grow from $1.3 billion in 2010 to $2 billion in 2014.

Knowing that email marketing will not only continue but also increase, how can it be integrated into a successful inbound marketing strategy?

In this eBook we will look at the reasons for incorporating email into your inbound marketing strategy and ways to make this integration most effective.

WHAT IS INBOUND MARKETING?

It's almost the opposite of outbound marketing, which likes to interrupt consumers in the hopes they will suddenly see the light and want to buy that product.

Inbound marketing is about getting found by those who are looking for a solution that you offer, converting that person into a lead or sale, and then analyzing their behavior so you can learn how to attract more people who might be looking for your solution.

To learn more about how inbound marketing really works and can help you, request a free HubSpot 30 day trial.

HOW TO GROW YOUR EMAIL LIST

Who you send to is more important than what you send. It doesn't matter if your list is 1,000 or 100,000; your email marketing is only as good as the quality of your recipient list.

The reality is that we live in a world where people change jobs, get married and change names, where companies go out of business, merge and relocate, and where interests and needs change.

That means that lists have natural decay. On average, marketing lists have a tendency to expire at a rate of 25% a year.

So if you aren't working at cleaning your list and pursuing new prospects to join your lists, chances are the effectiveness of your email marketing will only decline.

We have found that marketers grow their lists in two ways: the bad way and the good.

Growing Your Email List The Bad Way

While we can't say you won't build your list if you buy third-party email lists, we can say that to do so comes with a number of risks. Or put another way, we wouldn't do it.

Warning - You Can Alienate Recipients: It does not make people happy to get emails with irrelevant ads or marketing messages from companies they have never interacted with. This is the exact opposite experience they get with inbound marketing, where they seek you out. Being interrupted creates annoyance and few, if any, quality leads.

Warning - You Could Get Blacklisted Or Marked For Spam: You don't ever want to negatively affect your deliverability rate. We'll cover this more in the next section, but using a third party list can do more damage in deliverability than good.

Warning - Bought Recipients Aren't As Engaged As Opt-In Recipients: Not only are click-through rates dramatically worse with third party lists than opt-in lists, but even when they convert, the quality of leads are also much worse.

Warning - It Undermines Your Inbound Marketing Strategy: Buying and using a third party list can undercut your company's reputation as a helpful inbound marketer. As an inbound marketer, you want to attract leads through useful, valuable content rather than harassing prospective customers with ads or direct mail they never asked for.

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Growing Your Email List The Good Way

If you provide value and relevance to your prospects, they will eventually convert into quality leads. The best way we know how to attract them is through inbound marketing.

If you want to start generating leads through inbound marketing launch a blog and fill it with good, useful, search-friendly, content.

Don't Hide Your Subscribe Box

A good blog and website should act like a magnet for potential subscribers. When they get to your blog, don't assume they can intuitively find their way around. If you make it hard for them to find your subscribe box, odds are they won't sign up.

To make sure your subscriber box is optimally placed try A/B testing its placement on your site. A good place to start is putting your email submission field in the top of your blog and remove any other distractions.

Consider Partnerships

Non-competing companies often share the same market audience. So figure out which non-competing company wants to reach the same audience as you, and ask them to partner in co-hosting a webinar or another marketing event.

Both companies will reach out to their own lists. During the webinar or event participants will be encouraged to opt-in to hear more from each company.

The end result is that both companies will end up with new and engaged subscribers.

How To Reduce Unsubscribes

Growing your email list is a lot like two steps forward and one step back. You are going to get unsubscribes. What's important is to try to minimize them. Here are a few tips on how to reduce your unsubscribe rate:

Optimize The Unsubscribe Process

The top two reasons email users unsubscribe from a business or non- profit email subscription are:

1. Too many emails (69%)

2. Content that is no longer relevant (56%) (Chadwick Martin Bailey).

So take that knowledge and use it to your advantage. During the unsubscribe process give them the option to receive fewer emails or emails about specific topics.

They still might want to unsubscribe. But how do you know if they have really lost interest in you or if they just don't like email marketing? Give them a way to follow you through your social media sites.

Conduct A Frequency Study

You can sit back and wait for them to unsubscribe or you can be proactive.

Survey your subscribers about how often they'd like to hear from you.

With that information test what the survey results tell you with a higher and lower frequency rate. Then analyze which frequency results in more conversions and fewer unsubscribes.

If you are looking for benchmarks, according to Marketing Sherpa, the average unsubscribe rate for more than 80% of the companies they surveyed was less than three percent.

Focus On Targeting

Irrelevance will kill your lists. According to Marketing Sherpa's Wisdom Report in 2011, 40% of subscribers mark emails as spam because the communication was irrelevant.

In the same report, those who send emails targeted to through segmentation to specific audiences get 50% more click-throughs than those who don't.

So analyze the data on how your subscribers behave and focus on the relevance of your emails to your segmented lists.

HOW TO INTEGRATE EMAIL INTO INBOUND MARKETING

Digital marketers use many different tactics to market their products – search, social media, mobile, analytics, advertising to name a few..

Email should not be viewed as a separate entity. It is most effective when it's integrated with the rest of your marketing. In this chapter we show you different way to integrate email with your other marketing assets.

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Email & Social Media Integration

Numbers rarely lie. In a recent study from Aberdeen Research, 65% of the top 20% of B2B marketers who use social media for lead generation choose to integrate email with social media.

The nice thing is that you can mimic the success of this group more easily than you think. **Here are some tactics to get you started.**

Add Social Media Sharing Buttons To Your Emails

If you are interested in extending the reach of your email and expand the visibility of your content and brand, try adding social media sharing and follow buttons to your emails. It's simple, easy to do and effective.

Send Email Based On Social Media Insights

If you use integrated marketing analytics you can determine which leads or subscribers have mentioned you on Twitter. These are highly engaged leads and deserve targeted sends.

Grow Your Email List Through Social Media

We've found that those who engage with you on social media are excellent leads. So give them a reason to subscribe to your email list. Offer them a tantalizing call-to-action on your Facebook page, and be sure to make it clear why signing up for an email subscription will benefit them.

Email & Search Integration

You know that link at the top of many emails that offers people a chance to view the email on their web browser? Not only does this help people who have trouble viewing the email in their inbox, it can also help with your search optimization.

When you host an html version of your email on the web, you are creating an archive of that email that is accessible to search engines. **Because of that, make sure your email content follows SEO best practices such as:**

- Use your best keywords

- Anchor text when constructing the body of the message

- Ensure all images have alt-tags

- Include social media sharing buttons to stretch the content further.

Integrated Analytics

The online behavior of your customers and prospects is seamless. They go from social media to a website to opening an email to clicking through to a landing page to a download and back to Facebook. They don't cover their tracks because they don't have to. But in today's world of analytics, you need to be able to see the integrated connection between all of these activities, and relying on individual analytics for each channel won't help. **You need a multichannel view that helps you find out information such as:**

- The number of people that clicked through but did not convert

- The number of people who converted on your website that came from social media, and, of those, the number that actually opened your last email campaign.

- Which tactics result in more leads; PPC, organic search, email or social.

One of the real benefits to integrated analytics reports is that they help you get more targeted in your email sends. With integrated marketing analytics, you can segment your mailing list and send communications based on the lead's history of downloads and pages viewed.

With integrated analytic software like HubSpot's, you can see how email fits into the inbound marketing puzzle, giving you the context you need to make smart decisions on segmentation and nurturing.

Integration With Mobile

More and more people open their emails through their mobile devices. Depending on the industry, that number can be as high as 50%. And once they've opened your email on their mobile, chances are they won't reopen it on their computer.

So what do you need to do to make your email strategy mobile?

- Start by testing your email templates to see how they look in different mobile devices.

- Make sure your call-to-action buttons and links can be easily clicked by readers using touch screens.

- Offer both plain text and html versions of your email.

- Since your images may not display, pay attention to the descriptions of your alt text under the images.

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■ Remember your email is just the beginning of the process. Don't forget to optimize for mobile the landing pages and forms your email links to.

Look into getting marketing software that automatically optimizes your emails and landing pages for mobile viewing.

Deliverability: What Is It & How To Get It?

Just because you sent it doesn't mean it got there. According to theinteractivemarketingjourney. com, approximately 17% of all emails don't arrive. You can blame it on a number of factors – spam traps, defunct emails, firewalls to name a few.

If you want to keep your deliverability rates as high as possible, you need to

1. Keep your email lists clean

2. Ensure you've properly warmed up your IP when starting with a new email service provider

3. Follow best inbound marketing practices for email

Keeping Your Email Lists Clean
Eighty-three percent of the time you can blame non-delivery to your sender reputation, which is defined by the Sender Score.

What Is A Sender Score?
A free service of return path, the Sender Score algorithm rates the reputation of every outgoing mail server IP address on a scale from 0-100. It gathers data from more than 60 million mailboxes at big ISPs like BellSouth and Comcast. It looks at where people unsubscribe or report spam from certain email senders. It then assigns a Sender Score based on that monitoring.

Like your credit report, your sender score changes. How it changes all depends on the way you send your emails and how people respond to your emails. If you constantly send them information they don't want, they will unsubscribe and that will impact your score.

It's important to keep track of your Sender Score since that score often dictates how mail servers will deal with your emails.

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You want your Sender Score to get as close to 100 as possible. The closer it is to zero, the harder it will be for you to get your emails into someone's inbox.

Scores are calculated on a rolling, 30-day average. Your score ranks your IP address against other IP addresses, much like a percentile ranking.

If you use an email provider to send emails for your, it's your provider's IP address that you need to worry about, not your company's. Ask them what their Sender Score is, and make sure it is in the 90's.

There are many email networks and ISPs that don't query your Sender Score. That should not influence your wanting to have a high Sender Score since as a free email sender reputation tool, it helps you to be aware of and have the opportunity to fix any deliverability problems.

How To Tell If You've Got A Good List

So how do you know if your list is good or not?

Answer these five questions and you will get a good idea of where you stand.

1. **Does Everybody On This List Have A Prior Relationship With Your Business?**

   If the answer is No, either get rid of the list or all the people you don't have a relationship with. Without a prior relationship they won't be expecting your email. For them it will be spam and many of them will mark it as such. That, in turn, will damage your Sender Score, which will make delivery of your email harder.

   If the answer is Yes, then good job. Read the next question.

2. **Do You Have An Unsubscribe List?**

   If the answer is YES, then go to question 3.

   If the answer is NO, then you might be breaking the law when you send. Every company has people who have unsubscribed to their emails. These people do not want to see your emails again, and you need to respect that. If you don't, you're breaking the CANSPAM law and your upping the odds of people reporting your email as spam.

   Every time you load a list into an email system you need to load both the master list and the unsubscribe (suppression) list. This way you can avoid sending emails to those who don't want them.

3. **Did You Purchase, Rent, Or Lease The List From A Third Party?**

   If the answer is YES, then realize that when you send emails to this list you are increasing the chances of getting flagged for spam. These lists come from many places. The better ones had people give their address to somebody else, but they are expecting email from them, not you. The worst ones harvest addresses from directories and those people on that list are definitely not expecting any type of email.

   If the answer is NO, then go to question 4.

4. **Will The People On The List Be Expecting (Not Be Surprised) By Your Email?**

   Hopefully the answer is yes. If it's not then your need to build your list using inbound marketing and names that come from opt-ins.

5. **Have You Emailed These Contacts Within The Last 12 Months?**

   If the answer is NO, then odds are recipients will have forgotten about you and will be surprised to get your email, but not in a good way. You are not some long lost relative or friend. When they get your email, even if they recognize your company name, they might mark it as spam.

   If the answer is YES, and you have answered the other four questions correctly, then you are ready to create some awesome emails filled with highly useful content that will increase your conversion rates.

What To Know About Server IP Addresses

A server IP address is a series of numbers that uniquely identify the server that's sending your emails, e.g. 172.16.254.1 Every email campaign that is sent out is associate with an IP address.

Your sender reputation is associated with that given IP address. Knowing this, you can either opt to have a dedicated IP address for your email sends or use a shared IP address. Here is some information that will help you make that decision.

1. **Dedicated IP**

   A dedicated IP is just that – an address that is completely unique to you. Because it's only yours, you have the sole power to influence its reputation. That's a big advantage, but there is a cost associated with that. Dedicated IPs tend to be very expensive. Furthermore, if you

don't send enough emails, your IP won't even register on the Sender Score scale. While having an unknown sender score isn't necessarily a bad thing, it is still better to have a high score registered.

2. **Shared IP**

When you send your emails through a provider like HubSpot, Constant Contact, Mail Chimp to name just a few, you are sending through a Shared IP. It's called shared because it uses one IP address to send emails for multiple companies. More affordable than dedicated ones, they also have the scale of sends to actually register a sender score. The downside is that, because you are sharing, make sure you ask your email service provider about their highest and lowest sender scores on record.

Warming Up Your IP Address

It's an odd thought, the idea of warming up a set of numbers. But there is a reason why you want to slowly build up your total sends over time, and it has to do with spammers.

Spammers move around, and quickly. They use one IP address, send out millions of emails, shut it down before it gets blacklisted, then onto the next cold IP address. Because of this, companies set up automatic blocks to limit or reject large-scale email sends coming from brand new IP addresses.

So when you start with a new IP address, "warm up" your IP by slowly building up your total sends over time. Luckily, you only need to warm up once. After you have been sending emails from your IP address for a while, you are ready to go.

5 SAVVY WAYS TO SEGMENT MARKETING EMAILS

For your marketing to succeed, it needs to be relevant. Sounds obvious, but you would be surprised how many companies take their relevancy for granted, and as a result their marketing efforts suffer.

The reason why 40% of email subscribers mark email as spam is not because they did not know who sent it, but because what was sent irrelevant to their needs.

Targeting through segmentation is one way to make your emails more relevant. Here are five great ways to create more tailored and effective emails.

1. **Geographic Segmentation**

   If you are going to segment geographically, think about how the buyer's location influences his or her purchasing decision. Here are a few examples for segmenting by geography:

   - When sending invitations to special events.

   - When what you are offering has geographic limitations such as a regional sales event.

   - When you are limited to an area as is the case for local landscaping companies, cleaning services, or restaurants.

2. **Industry/Role Segmentation**

   This applies more for B2B companies. Your customer's company is made up of different divisions. The way you relate to a sales person is different from the way you would talk to an IT person, or marketer for that matter. They have different goals, and different interests in your company. Targeting these specific interests can increase your click-through rates.

3. **Content Interests**

   Determining who your customers are is often influenced by their past. So use your analytics to determine what interests your leads. Look at the content they have viewed or downloaded and segment your lists accordingly.

   A simple way to start is to pull a list of people who have downloaded a certain whitepaper or other marketing offer. Then using that content as an indicator of what interests them, create a targeted email or lead nurturing campaign that addresses that interest. Marketing software like HubSpot's let you to do this type of segmentation by easily creating a list based on recent conversion event.

4. **Behavior-Based Segmentation**

   Some leads are further along the sales cycles than others, and you can often determine the level of interest they have about your products based on their activity on your website. For example,

the way you would communicate with someone who has only seen a few pages on your site is different from someone who has downloaded five whitepapers and visited 50 pages.

Your analytics should help you distinguish the browsing behavior of different website visitors. Use this information to make your communications more relevant to how far along the recipient is in his or her purchasing decision.

5. **Segmentation By Brand Advocates**

   Those who advocate for your brand want to feel the love. They want to believe you understand them. **So who are they?**

   - Frequent buyers

   - Social media fans

   - Customers who have recommended you to others

   - Non-customers who have advocated for you online

   These brand advocates need to be carefully nurtured. You emails need to acknowledge them, which you can do by sending thank-yous, advanced notice on new services or products, requests for feedback, and rewards. If you recognize them and show how you appreciate them, they will continue to spread the word.

When it comes to segmentation and personalization, look at what differentiates your subscribers and leads and see how you can address those needs or interests. You can start small - even the slightest segmentation can increase your email success rates. The five suggestions above are just a starting point. As you become more involved with segmentation you will discover more ways to target the individual characteristics of your audience and your industry.

Conclusion

Email marketing should work to support your lead generation and conversion efforts. It should increase your sales cost effectively. In this eBook we elaborated on key ways that you can accomplish this:

- By growing your email list and reducing unsubscribes.

- By integrating your email with the rest of your marketing efforts.

- By improving your deliverability and ensuring that your subscribers receive your communication.

- By segmentation and personalization.

These are foundational principles that will have a positive effect on your email marketing. Apply this information to your email marketing and watch those leads convert into sales.

For more information about how email marketing optimization can help your business grow request a free 30 day HubSpot trial.