

Getting to the Inbox

“83% percent of the time, email doesn't make it into the Inbox.”
 – George Bilbrey, President of ReturnPath

If you want your email to have an impact on your recipient, the first priority is making sure they even get the email in the first place. More than ever, email spammers are trying different things daily to get their junk email through. They make their content look legitimate. They hijack the look and feel of trusted brands. As a result, Internet Service Providers ISP's have intervened to put a stop to abuses such as spam, phishing attempts, and other security challenges. However, this also makes it challenging for legitimate email senders to cut through the noise and deliver relevant messages to their targeted audiences.



Email Deliverability Checklist

As Ranked by Return Path, Eloqua’s deliverability ranks top in the industry. This playbook, however, is intended to break down the dimensions of email deliverability that you can influence to increase results from your email marketing communications. We will review each element and provide tips to improve your overall reputation as an email sender.

Reputation	Lists	Content
<input type="checkbox"/> Know Your Score <i>What is your current email sender score?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> List Sources <i>What is the source of your list?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Reinforce Expectations <i>Does your email clearly communicate expectations and how-to manage preferences?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Authentication <i>Is it clear who the email is actually from?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> IP Warming <i>Do you have an IP warming process in place for new email IPs?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Optimize Content Relevancy and Frequency <i>Are you sending right content at the right time?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Control Complaints <i>Are you processing complaints made to ISPs?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Bounceback Processing <i>Are you monitoring and processing bouncebacks?</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Permissions <i>Is your email in accordance with permissions, preferences, and expectations?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Activity Filtering <i>Are you sending emails to inactive recipients?</i>	
Report & Optimize		

Step 1: Manage Your Reputation

The number one reason your email does not make it into the inbox is based on your reputation as an email sender. As spammers adopt strategies to appear legitimate, spam filtering is moving towards more of a reputation-based system (and away from content scoring) in order to better catch bad senders and leave the good ones alone. Today, the industry is reviewing email sender behavior with a Sender Score, much like a credit score accounts for financial behavior in the US.

Know Your Score

For senders, this score represents the overall health of your email communications as they appear to receiving systems. It consists of a few different measureable behaviors.

- ▶ All scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100, where 50 denotes a neutral score. Anything above 50 is considered a positive score and anything below is negative. You can measure for free it at <http://www.senderscore.org>.
- ▶ Scores are based on your behavior as an email sender and considers: complaints, hard bounce rates, blacklistings, inactivity, volume consistency, unsubscribe capabilities, etc.

Authenticate Your Email IP

Email authentication is used to verify the identity of an entity sending email. It simplifies and automates the process of identifying senders, and improves the likelihood that legitimate email will get through to the intended recipient.

- ▶ Publish IP-based Solutions like Sender Policy Framework (SPF) and Sender ID Framework (SIDF); and Cryptographic Solutions like DomainKeys Identified Mail (DKIM).
- ▶ Create separate records for each type of email communications such as corporate transactional email, promotional marketing email, newsletter email, etc.

Control Complaints

Many ISP's offer to their clients a "this is spam" button. When people click that button it becomes a negative statistic against you.

- ▶ Complaints can happen for many reasons including the perceived email frequency is too much, the email content is irrelevant, or the recipient cannot quickly determine who the sender is.
- ▶ Monitor trends in complaints through each email campaign. Eloqua automatically removes complainers and reports it to you.
- ▶ Do not get on blacklists. Monitor at <http://www.dnsstuff.com>.

Permissions

Permission-based email marketing is the key to building a strong reputation as an email sender.

- ▶ Only send marketing communications to those who have explicitly asked to receive email from you.
- ▶ For “neutral” contacts that have neither opted in nor opted out, target them uniquely with the goal of achieving permission.
- ▶ For inactive contacts that have previously opted in, confirm subscription status 1 – 2 times a year as a tactic to re-engage them.
- ▶ For active opt-in contacts, build the relationship by soliciting feedback on the quality and frequency of your communications. Encourage your subscribers to tell you their communication preferences; confirm preferences with the recipient, and then comply communications accordingly.
- ▶ Don’t assume you can just change their needs without permission. Send them what you said you would send them during the sign-up process.

Step 2: Manage Your Email Distribution Lists

Good list management ensures you are sending relevant, requested, and targeted campaigns to the right recipients. Make quality over quantity your priority.

List Sources

First things first, it is important to understand your data sources. Many lists can contain bad data, spam trap email addresses, etc. – all which could put your sender reputation at risk.

- ▶ If you have to purchase lists from a company, make sure you understand:
 - *Source of data;*
 - *Age and last usage date of records;*
 - *How they monitor and remove complainers; and*
 - *How they verify and maintain opt-in status.*
- ▶ Only send to email lists that you can verify are recently compiled.
- ▶ It is illegal to simply harvest email addresses from websites.
- ▶ Expect to see higher complaints when sending to rented or purchased lists.

IP Warming

New sources of email are normally treated with caution by anti-spam systems and receivers. Be sure to perform an IP warming process on new IP's before a full campaign launch.

- ▶ Send to email addresses that are best possible subset of contracts with as few hard bounce backs as possible.
- ▶ Ensure the list doesn't contain previously unsubscribed addresses.
- ▶ Use recent contact only (1 - 6 months old) and possibly segment by domain to further cleanse the list.
- ▶ Use HTML with simple design, minimal images and short on content/purpose.
- ▶ Check reporting after each send for potential problems.

Bounceback Processing

One of the most important ways a receiver determines if you're a good or bad sender is how much of your list is bad email address.

- ▶ Remove hard bounces immediately. Receivers watch for IP's that constantly hit email addresses that are bad and have been bounced as such in the past to your install.
- ▶ If more than 10% of your campaign is bad email address, you can expect spam protection blocking on your email. Keep bouncebacks under 10% for each campaign.

Activity Filtering

Sending email to those who really want to see it will result in opens and clicks. By monitoring opens and clicks, you can determine who is interested and who is NOT. Continuing to send to those who are not responding can damage your reputation.

- ▶ Behavioral segmentation and offer targeting based on Digital Body Language will help you to reduce complaints and improve your reputation.
- ▶ Filter Contacts that have not opened or clicked on an email within the past 3-6 months. Send a separate campaign asking them to remove themselves or tell you what you can change to make them more interested.
- ▶ If after several unsuccessful contacts to obtain open, clicks, or unsubscribe, suppress contacts from future distribution lists.
- ▶ Spamtraps do not open and click. By removing non-clickers you are removing people who are just hitting the "this is spam" button and never looking at your message because they don't care or are a potential Spamtrap.

Step 3: Optimize Your Content

While content is no longer the prime indicator of spam, content is still important to building a relationship with a subscriber and getting them to engage with your email. You simply have 3 – 5 seconds to persuade an email recipient to take action.

Reinforce Email Expectations

Communicate clearly to your subscribers on what types of email content they can expect to receive, how often they can expect to receive it, and check in to get their feedback and insight to their expectations.

- ▶ Clearly communicate your privacy policy and email marketing culture to encourage people to subscribe. Be clear on the types of content they can expect to receive and when.
- ▶ For new email subscribers, send a welcome message with housekeeping instructions on how to ensure emails keep coming to their inbox and what the benefit is to the subscriber. For example, “Add info@company.com to your address book to ensure specials and latest content always makes it to your Inbox in a timely fashion.”
- ▶ Check in with contacts to make sure they like what you send and provide an option for them to change their communication preferences.
- ▶ Consider moving your subscription management options to the top of the email versus buried at the bottom.

Optimize Content Relevancy and Frequency

Monitor your customers’ needs so that you can better segment your email campaigns. By doing this, you are not sending unnecessary or irrelevant emails to those who will likely complain if they see something they don't want.

- ▶ Test frequency in automated programs to determine the optimal mix for your target audience.
- ▶ Ask for input and feedback on relevancy and frequency.
- ▶ Make sure you are communicating unique value proposition clearly, even with images turned off.

Step 4: Report & Optimize

Continue to monitor your email campaign performance to look for cues that may indicate challenges or improvements in deliverability to your distribution lists.

1. Bouncebacks – **Keep bounceback rates under 10%**. Some reports to help you monitor include:
 - Bounceback History by Contact List – Show me all of the Contacts that generated a bounceback.
 - Bounceback History by Email/Email Batch/Email Group – Show me the details of the Bounceback Types.
 - AutoTracker Email Overview – Show me Bouncebacks generated from an email sent from EMSO.
2. Complaints – **Keep complaints under .1%**. One report that can help you monitor:
 - Spam Unsubscribe – Show me all of the Contacts that have reported us as “spam” after receiving one of our emails.
3. Unsubscribe – **Your unsubscription rates should be under 1%**. Monitor your unsubscribe rates as a trend:
 - How does this email’s unsubscribe rate trend against average performance? If there is a dip or a spike – what was different about this campaign in terms of list quality, content, etc.?
 - Is my unsubscribe rate trending upward? If so, that may be an indicator of a frequency or relevancy problem.