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5 SIMPLE TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR EMAIL OPEN RATES
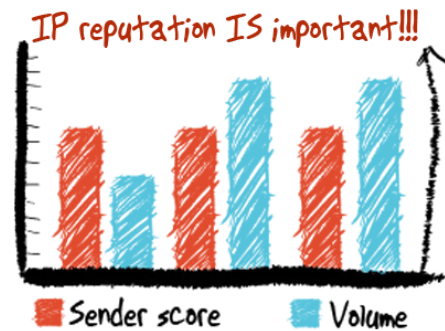
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5 SIMPLE TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR EMAIL OPEN RATES

1. IP REPUTATION (YOUR "SENDER SCORE")

Email open rates are impacted by more than just your reputation scores (i.e. Sender Score).

The reason we refer to the Sender Score, in particular, is because it is widely used in the industry for overall evaluation of the health of your email campaign.

While a bad overall reputation can almost guarantee low open rates among other things, a good reputation doesn't guarantee inbox placement and subscriber engagement.

Having said, that... your IP reputation IS important. And this is really the first place you want to look when examining the health of your program.

This is where EmailDelivered comes into play, with the goal of obtaining - and maintaining - reputation scores in the 90s. This requires a lot of proactive management, ensuring that your list hygiene is optimal, spam complaints are low (and complainers immediately removed from your list), and regularly monitoring blocks and bounce logs to resolve any issues quickly.

So... the first step is to find out what your IP "score" is and take any necessary steps to improve it.

NOTE: If you are using an ESP (email service provider), you are probably rotating through dozens, if not hundreds of IP addresses that you're sharing with dozens, if not hundreds (maybe even THOUSANDS) of other marketers.

Assuming that your scores are 90 or greater, these primary issues are probably not a factor with regard to your email open rates. (If your scores ARE lower than 90, you will need to correct some fundamental issues first and foremost.)

Low scores are often due to poor list quality (old, outdated, lists with a lot of bad email addresses,and often spam traps) and spam complaints. Naturally, if your messages aren't making the inbox, your email open rates are going to suffer.

NOTE: Even if you are using an ESP, you'll want to pay attention to list hygiene (although they typically have pretty strict rules in place to guard against this particular issue) and spam complaints.

Spam complaint may not only cause the ESP to shut your account down, but also provide some valuable insight into your marketing campaigns.

Not to mention, both of these things play a crucial role in where your messages wind up.

If they don't make it to the inbox, your subscribers can't open your messages, read them, or take action on them.

Again, complaints and list quality are important whether you're hosting your own email or using a 3rd party email provider (ESP).

If you are hosting your own email, you'll also want to verify that you have the proper headers in all of your emails including DKIM, domainkeys, SPF and SenderID.

Now... if all of these are in place and you are still concerned about overall performance including email open rates, click throughs, etc., there are several things to look at:

- List Quality
- Subscriber Engagement
- Message Content
- Timing

2. LIST QUALITY

Are you uploading old leads? Leads that you have purchased? Co-reg leads? (Basically any leads that did not specifically opt in to your list or engage within the past 12-18 months.)

For obvious reasons, you will see lower email open rates here simply because the relationship is stale.

Segment these leads from your current/ high quality leads so that you can get a realistic picture of what's going on with different segments of your list.

Consider sending from different IPs/domains based on engagement AND creating a re-engagement sequence for older leads.

NOTE: If you are adding a lot of these leads to your existing list, not only can this affect your open rates, but it can also affect the overall inbox placement of your emails.

The ISPs pay attention to engagement metrics and are doing so more and more as of late. (See the next section).

3. SUBSCRIBER ENGAGEMENT

Subscriber engagement is key, and it is becoming more and more important as the ISPs change their algorithms.

In the past, you could continue to mail to subscribers as long as they didn't opt out or complain that your messages are spam.

However... that's changed!

For example, say that your entire list is double-opt in. If, over the years, subscriber A stops opening your emails, eventually, all of your emails for that sub-

scriber will be filtered into his/her junk folder.

When this happens on a large scale, overall inbox placement can be affected - even if you have an absolutely perfect reputation.

To help combat this, consider teaching your subscribers to whitelist your email address at the point of opting in. Here is a free subscriber-level whitelist generator you can use:http://www.emaildelivered.com/whitelist-generator/

TIP: Be sure to use the "From" email address that your emails come from in the generator.

The other thing to consider with regard to subscriber engagement (i.e. increasing email open rates, clickthroughs, etc.) is where you are getting your metrics.

For example, many ESPs provide you with TOTAL opens while many self-hosted email applications provide unique opens. If this is the case, then naturally, when comparing old

results to new, there may be a skew.

So, you may not be comparing apples to apples if you're using different systems to compare your results/trends.

4. MESSAGE CONTENT

Split test subject lines...

Subject lines are the single most important "content" factor when it comes to improving (or even maintaining) your email open rates.

Review your content...

Make sure that it's relevant to your subscribers and in line with what was promised at the point of opting in. Consider dropping your less frequent openers to a lesser frequency and/or putting them through a re-engagement series. We cover message content in greater detail in a number of other articles. And certainly this is a big deal when it comes to clicking through.
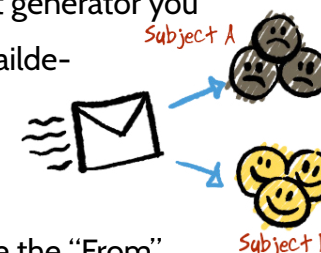
5. TIMING

Test the days of the week and times of your emails. What works for one marketer does not necessarily work for another.

We have clients that have better results mailing between 2-4pm Eastern while other customers with the same general market have best results mailing at 4am. TEST FOR YOUR LIST.

The other thing to consider is time of year. Overall Internet activity declines over the summer. Open rates drop, interaction drops, etc. People are simply not as engaged during the summer months.

Conversely, in the fall and winter, engagement tends to increase.

In addition, during times of year when email volume is at it's peak (i.e. Thanksgiving through New Years), email open rates are often down because subscribers are getting much more email than they do during other times of the year.

NOTE: DO NOT use misleading subject lines simply to get the open! This increases spam complaints and can do more harm than good in the long term (not to mention, misleading subject lines are an absolute violation of CAN-SPAM).

Bonus TIP: Follow Best Practices

Lastly, it is always a good idea to verify that you are following the best practices for the ISPs. All of the major ISPs provide specific best practices and it's a good idea to review them regularly. This impacts deliverability, inbox placement, and consequently clicks through rates and email open rates. If you find that you have high reputations and are not hitting the inbox, we can contact the ISPs and request whitelisting of your IPs.

However, you are limited to 1 request per ISP every 6 months with several ISPs, so if you are not following all of the best practices for a particular ISP, this can cause more harm than good.

One Final Note!

One final note... ISPs often tighten their filters from time to time. Generally, within 2-3 weeks, things go back to normal, but in some cases, they may actually change their recommended best practices.

Our goal as your email partner is to help you achieve the best results with your email marketing by managing your reputation, keeping your scores high, alerting you of potential problems, and going to bat on your behalf with the ISPs.

As the marketer, it's important to constantly be looking at your list quality, interaction, relationship with your list, and overall campaign strategy.

Engagement is becoming more and more important so be sure to include a "subscribe-based whitelisting" strategy, re-engagement campaigns for people that haven't opened your messages within a certain time period, and to regularly test, re-test, and test again.

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- Increasing subscriber engagement...
- And much, much more...

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In addition to done for you management services, EmailDelivered also provides consulting, training, and email campaign design.

For more information on how EmailDelivered helps you take back control over your email marketing (and not be held hostage by your email provider) visit us online at http://www.EmailDelivered.com today.

About the Author

Heather Seitz is the co-founder, and Marketing Director at EmailDelivered, an email deliverability management and consulting company based in Austin, Texas. Their sole focus is on getting your emails delivered!

Heather has worked with top online business owners and marketers around the world to help solve delivery problems and improve the results from their email programs.

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