The Ultimate Guide to Email Marketing

Everything You Need to Know about Successful Email Marketing

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Comm100

100% Communication, 100% Success

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In This Section: If you haven't incorporated email or electronic newsletters into your marketing plan yet, you may be wondering why email is important to a marketing mix. This introductory section explains the history of email marketing and the benefits of email marketing and concludes with useful case studies about how email marketing has improved revenue and sales for specific companies.

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SECTION 1.1
The Story of Email Marketing: Evolution of Email Communications

In This Section: It's always important to understand the history of something in order to understand why it's important! Learn about how email marketing evolved as well as the challenges of offline direct-to-consumer or direct business-to-business marketing communications that email marketing has provided a solution to.

Remember the Days of Postal Mail Marketing?

Take a minute and take a walk to your mailbox. No, we don't mean walk to your computer to check your inbox. We mean a walk to your actual, physical mailbox where people mail you paper letters and packages. Now take a moment to sort through the mail that you find there. Chances are that you will find several promotional or marketing flyers which are trying to sell you localized services. However, you may also find catalogs and promotional postcards for global or larger brands.

Now, take a moment to consider what the world would be like if postal mail to your physical mailbox were the only way to send you customized communications to market products and services. It would be a highly inefficient system. Because postal mailings need to be printed in bulk to reduce costs, your message could only be mildly customized to include your name. Then, whoever wanted to advertise to you would have to pay for not only the printing of the postcard, flyer or catalog to be mailed, but also for all of the stamps or postal costs to send the mailing. Finally, the marketer who sent the mailing would have to wait for a period of time for you to receive it. It may be several weeks until the post office delivered it, and it may be even longer until you removed the mailing from your mailbox and read it. Because of that timing, the offer that the marketer was sending to you couldn't be specific and time relevant. Finally, the marketer had no way of knowing if the postal mailing had had any impact on you unless you then used a specific promotional code included on the mailing. There was no way to know if you'd even looked at or received your mailing!

Does this sound like an ineffective way to market your products or services to a mass consumer audience? Well, until as recently as the 1990s, it was largely the only way to get a marketing communication into the hands of a specific individual. Marketers came up with many ways to attempt to make postal marketing mailings more personalized and to better track their response rates, but the truth was that once you sent a postal mailing, figuring out if it worked or didn't work was more guess-work than actual facts. The entire process was, and is, expensive, time consuming and difficult to judge the success of.

Fortunately for you and your consumer or business-to-business marketing needs, the 1990's happened and the internet was born. Soon after, email began to become a primary form of both personal and

business communications. Not long after the popularity of personal email exploded, email marketing became a specialty area for those with marketing expertise because of its improved capacity for customization, segmentation, frequency, relevancy of communications and, most importantly, tracking capabilities.

1991: The "Birth" of the Internet

While there are many people who "claim" to be the founder of the internet, experts say that the internet as we know it began in 1991 when CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research) publicized a paper known as the New World Wide Web Project. Though a British scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, had actually been creating html, http and the world's very first web pages at CERN as early as two years prior to the paper, the publishing of the paper is considered the "birth" of the internet. Not only did the internet change life as we know it, it also changed marketing as we know it!

Over the next decade, many experts estimate that the internet grew as much as one hundred percent per year in terms of bandwidth used. The greatest spikes of growth were seen in 1996 and 1997. Today, of course, you would have a hard time finding anybody who does not admit that the internet plays a key role in their daily lives, from information gathering to processing communications, primarily through the use of email and, more recently, social media.

1996: Hotmail Becomes the First Web-Based Email Service

One of the greatest benefits of the rise of the internet was the ability to use email, or electronic mail, to communicate with people. Email was fast, free and could speed up communications across the world in a way that most people had not previously imagined. However, during the first years of the internet, email was only available to people who fit into specific groups: college students using their college email address or employees who were able to use corporate email addresses. The second group typically had significant limitations on how they could use their email and whom they could communicate with. While some individuals could also get email services provided by their Internet Service Provider (ISP), those services typically required that you checked your email specifically from the computer that was supported by your ISP. Email was not a "pick up and go anywhere" type of communication.

Then, in 1996, Sabeer Bhatia and Jack Smith launched what was then called HoTMaiL (with the letters being a reference to html). It was the first web-based email system, and suddenly email was available to anybody who had access to the internet. That didn't just mean people who had home computers that were internet wired. It also meant anybody who could use a public computer at a library or business center. Suddenly, email was no longer limited to just a small group of people who needed to communicate primarily with each other. Email was out of the bag to the public, and anybody who wanted to communicate with anybody else could do so via HoTMaiL. Not surprisingly, people loved the service and flocked to it. A year later in 1997, Microsoft purchased HoTMaiL for four hundred million dollars and renamed it MSN Hotmail.

Just How Many People Use Email Today?

Today, Hotmail is still technically the largest web-based email service in terms of raw users, according to the most recent comScore data (August of 2010). Hotmail is reported to have three hundred and sixty-four million users. Yahoo! mail is the second largest with a reported two hundred and eighty million users, and Google's Gmail is third with one hundred and ninety-one million users.

The Birth of Email Marketing

While email began as a communications tool for academic and business purposes, it soon became a tool for personal communications among friends, relatives and even people who had never met in real life! As people began to spend more and more time using email as their primary communications tool, smart marketers realized that email communications were the future of marketing communications and began to make the shift into using email as a way to effectively communicate with customers. Email marketing, even it its earliest days, presented a number of benefits over both postal marketing and telesales as a form of direct-to-consumer or direct business-to-business communications. We'll look at those benefits in detail in the next section of this book, but today email marketing is a robust portion of any complete marketing plan and has entire industries built around helping businesses of all sizes effectively email market.

Comm100 would, of course, be an example of this. Comm100 works to develop email products that streamline the sending of email to consumers or business contacts with customized messages and complete tracking. In addition to companies that focus primarily on developing email marketing solutions, individuals have become email marketing experts as well. Most mid-sized or larger companies employ at least one email marketing specialist and may have as many as several employees who focus on nothing but creating effective email marketing strategies and campaigns.

Of course, you may not need an entire staff, but you do need to understand the basics of email marketing strategy, benefits and tactics of email marketing. We'll cover all of those in this book to make you your own email marketing expert by the end!

Next Up: *What are the benefits of email marketing?*

SECTION 1.2
The Benefits of Email Marketing

In This Section: Why is email marketing more cost effective than postal print mailings or telesales and why does it drive better returns on investment and customer engagement metrics than other marketing techniques? This section explains the many benefits of email marketing.

Why does email marketing present such a benefit over other more traditional forms of marketing? Why would you invest the time and resources to develop an email marketing program at all? When compared to other forms of marketing, email marketing presents a number of benefits to your company or business that you should consider, including….

Reduced Time & Effort to Get Your Marketing Message to Consumers
Take a moment to think about the time and effort involved in structuring a direct-to-consumer or direct business-to-business campaign using one of the two most common offline direct marketing communications techniques:

> **Print Postal Mailings**: You'll need to allow time for a designer to create the mailing, typically through several lengthy revisions. Then you'll need to allow time for the print mailing to be printed, cut and, if necessary, stuffed into envelopes. There will be time while the marketing collateral is being transported via the postal system and then time while you wait for the consumer to retrieve it from the mail box.

> **Telesales Campaigns**: In addition to having to construct a telesales script, you'll have to wait the time out while your sales agents dial through cycled call attempts to all of the sales leads or customers on your target list.

With email marketing however, you can turn a marketing communications piece out in typically less than two hours. Using recurring email templates, all you'll need to do is approve the copy for the email and any changes to graphics, use easy database list queries like those available in the Comm100 system to decide whom to send to, and then just hit send. Weeks' of work can be accomplished in just a few hours and by a single employee.

Ability to Send Real-Time Messages
As we talked about above, with a print mailer or telesales campaign, you'll need to select marketing campaigns and specials that have a "long tail" because of the extended period of time between campaign development and implementation. Because a marketing email can be completed in just a few

hours, you can literally send "day-of" messages to help reduce stock or promote a limited time special as needed. You can even send unique real-time messages to customers that arrive on their birthdays or anniversaries. With email marketing, short time frames are your friend, not your enemy.

Improved Ability to Personalize Messages

Because print mail campaigns, telesales campaigns and even print, television and radio advertising campaigns must be done in a mostly "one-size-fits-all" format, it's difficult for you to speak directly to your consumer in a personalized way. However, email marketing presents many dynamic opportunities. Not only can you personalize email marketing messages with your user's name or login name, but many email marketing solutions offer the ability to feed in personalized information such as sales or purchase history. Also, because creating separate email sends is significantly less challenging than creating separate postal mail, print mail or advertising campaigns, you can segment your customer list into smaller lists and send very personalized messages. For example, you can select all of your users or customers who are from New York City and then write your email marketing copy to speak directly about New York City. With email marketing and communications, you can easily speak to your customers in a very personalized and intimate way that is not possible with other marketing channels and avenues.

Easier Capability to Segment User and Customer Database Information

As noted above, because you can segment your database of customers or users with email, you can send extremely targeted marketing campaigns that will result in increased sales conversions simply because they are so specific. For example, if you sell flowers, you can find everybody in your database who ever bought daffodils and then send them an email in April when the first daffodil shipments come in. You're then using your customer database to put the most relevant message in front of the customers who are most likely to respond to it, and that's what good marketing is all about.

Ability to Send More Frequent Communications

Because email takes less time to create and send than other marketing and advertising channels do, you can communicate with your customers more frequently. Instead of only being able to send them a flyer or catalog once a month or once a quarter, you can easily send them offers once a week. You could, of course, send them email even more frequently than that if their email activity supports making that decision. You may want to note, however, that it's a typical email best practice to not send customer emails more than once a week. However, gone are the days when you were lucky to get a message in front of your customers once a month. Via email marketing, you can communicate with customers weekly or even daily!

Easier Capability to Test Marketing Messages

Good marketing always means being able to test things! With email marketing, it becomes incredibly easy to see what graphics, headlines, offers and even colors your users and customers will respond to. It's incredibly simple to simply send one version of an email to one part of your list and a second version of an email to a different part of your email list. Then, through the very precise tracking tools that email marketing offers, you can figure out which marketing message worked better to convert sales or user

actions. We'll talk in detail about both the great tracking tools that email marketing offers as well as common email marketing tests later on in this book.

Ability for Users to Share Information Easily with Friends and Family

When was the last time that you saw a customer hand over a postal mailing that they'd received to a friend who might be interested? Or have you have seen somebody clip an ad from a magazine and send it to a family member who may want that product or service? However, forwarding an email with an enticing or useful offer or piece of information only takes seconds and many users will do it. That means that your marketing effort has not only a wider reach but also a networked reach with people who, by forwarding the email, are now acting as your brand advocates.

Significantly Reduced Overhead Costs

Email marketing can be done at a very low overhead cost! You don't need a ton of employees, designers, or marketing analysts. You don't need to pay for printing, postal mailing costs, phone lines, or advertising rates. In fact, there are services, such as Comm100, that allow you to host your email marketing entirely for free using professionally-designed templates that you can then just alter to your own needs. An effective email marketing program really only needs a great email marketing platform or service and a good marketer who knows how to put the right offers and the right copy and graphics in front of the right portion of your user or customer list. There is no marketing channel in which you'll spend less to get greater returns on your investment than email marketing.

Save the Planet with Email Marketing!

It may seem like a minor part of the big picture, but we're all trying to be more environmentally friendly these days! When you optimize email marketing as your primary customer communication and direct-to-consumer or direct business-to-business marketing method, you'll help save the planet by reducing the number of trees killed for print marketing pieces. We all want to help save the planet, and making a responsible decision about your marketing tools can help you to do just that while also improving your business's success.

Exponentially Better Ability to Track Sales and User Engagement

There may be no better marketing channel from which to draw precise and usable tracking information to help you figure out what's successful and what's not than email marketing. Well-developed email marketing platforms such as Comm100 can provide tracking information on how many people opened an email, how many people clicked a link in an email, which specific link within the email was clicked, how many people complained that an email was spam or unsubscribed and, of course, whether your email even made it into your recipient's inbox. Combine that with a business's ability to track sales back to a source and you can identity customer engagement and response through an entire cycle with clear, easy-to-understand metrics.

Those are a lot of measurable benefits of email marketing over other marketing channels! Of course, we recommend that email marketing be an important part of your marketing mix – not the only ingredient in it.

However, as you can see, if you're not incorporating email into your marketing plan, then you're missing out on a number of benefits that can improve your overall sales and user engagement for a very low overhead cost and, in many cases, a very limited amount of time and effort to get set up and launch.

Next Up: *How do email marketing and social networking work together?*

SECTION 1.3
Email Marketing Versus Social Media

In This Section: Social networks have become an important part of the internet and online marketing landscape in the last decade. How do social networks impact email marketing, and is email marketing still relevant in a world full of social networks? We explain why email marketing is more important than ever in a socially-networked landscape.

MySpace. Facebook. Twitter. Google Plus. There are an increasing number of social networks that, at one time or another, dominated internet traffic. Of course, marketing via social networks has increased too, which is an obvious necessity since so many consumers and customers spend so much time on social networking sites. Does it make sense for you to allocate all of your marketing resources to marketing through social networking? No! Email is still a very important part of any complete web marketing strategy. Of course, in the socially-networked world, you'll need to combine your email marketing strategy and your social networking strategy to meet different goals. Here are some tips and advice on how and why to incorporate email marketing with your social media strategy.

Email Marketing Still Provides the Highest Return on Investment

The reality is that everybody from comScore to Marketing Vox have run studies and surveys of top marketers and one statistic remains true – no matter how big the social networks have gotten, email marketing still returns the greatest return on investment. This makes sense when you think about how little overhead or time it can take to send an extremely targeted email to a very specific group of customers or users. If for no other reason than because you are a smart business person who appreciates the importance of a strong ROI number, email marketing should be at the top of your list of important direct sales and marketing communications channels.

Consumers and Users Do Not Switch Email Addresses – But They Do Migrate Social Networks

Do you remember MySpace? What? You don't? But that was just a handful of years ago when MySpace was the most popular destination on the internet (other than Google) and everybody had a MySpace profile and spent hours every day on the dominant social networking site. Then, of course, Facebook arrived and became wildly more popular. At the time of this writing, it seems unthinkable that anything would take over Facebook's position, but it's entirely possible that, by the time that you read this, Google Plus will be the social network that everybody spends all of their time on. If there is one thing that seems to be true of social networks, it is that users will eventually migrate to another social network.

That, however, is not true of email addresses. Certainly, sometimes people change their email address. But more frequently they simply add a secondary email address and use their older email address less often or for different purposes. The reason that Hotmail remains the largest web-based email service in the world is because it is the oldest, and, even if they don't check it daily, most people still check their old Hotmail address at least periodically.

An email address isn't as permanent as a postal address, but once you have a customer's email address, you have a fairly assured way of getting a message in front of that customer. Changing email addresses is cumbersome. You need to notify all of the people whom you email with regularly and you lose what is often an emotional email history. Unlike social networks, which have so far proven to be transient at best, an email address is an almost assured way to be able to reach most customers or users eventually if not immediately.

Messages Do Not Disappear from Inboxes

Once you send an email marketing message to a consumer, customer or user, that message remains in that individual's email inbox until the individual either reads it or actively chooses to delete it. That means that even if the user hasn't read the email, your subject line is still there in the inbox reminding the user of their relationship with your brand. A message on a social network is not permanent. Once you post a message, you are reliant on your user or consumer being logged into the social network in a time frame that allows them to see the posting. No matter how many times per day your business updates Facebook or Twitter, you may not get the message across to a large group of your desired consumers. However, whether it's actually read or not, email gets to your user or customer and reminds them of their relationship with you.

Email is Targeted. Social Networking is "One Size Fits All"

The nature of social networking is to protect a certain degree of privacy. Additionally, people do not always provide the most truthful information about themselves on a social network. However, your email database contains information that allows you to segment and target communications based on facts such as purchasing history, gender, age, and even geographic location. The most effective marketing messages are the most targeted marketing messages. Social media and social networks do not allow you to target messages effectively.

Social Media is a Brand Engagement Tool. Not a Direct Sales Tool.

At the heart of the matter, however, is the role of social media in your marketing strategy. Most marketing experts agree on one thing – social media is a branding tool, not a direct sales tool. A great part of the reason that email marketing continues to deliver the highest return on investment of all marketing channels is that how users behave on social networks does not translate into direct sales. Social network users gather information and discuss products, they don't necessarily buy products. Social media is important for brand engagement. It is not, however, typically a direct sales channel like email marketing is.

Email Marketing and Social Media Need to Work Together

Any good marketing plan is a comprehensive marketing plan. That means that your social media and your email marketing platform should work together. There should be opportunities for users to share email contents via social networks and opportunities for users to join your email list via social networks. One strategy does not mean that the other strategy doesn't need to exist. However, the existence of social networks certainly does not take away the need for a strong email marketing program and strategy!

***Next Up*:** *Examples and case studies of how email marketing improved revenue for companies.*

SECTION 1.4
Email Marketing Case Studies: Improving Revenue with Email

In This Section: A full example of how email marketing has improved revenue or lead generation results for a real company.

How email marketing can improve your business, product or service's success will very wildly depending on your marketing goals and the purpose of email in your marketing mix. However, what cannot be debated is that email marketing and email communications to customers absolutely deliver results. To get you started thinking about some of the many ways that email marketing and email communications can make a difference for you, we've provided a compelling case study about how email marketing delivered results for an organization.

Case Study: How Four Emails Boosted End of Year Revenue for a Non Profit by 50%

The following case study was originally published in the July 26, 2011 edition of Marketing Sherpa. We strongly recommend Marketing Sherpa for always ongoing, up-to-date information on the latest in email marketing regulations, techniques and new developments, as well as frequent case studies on successful campaigns.

> **The Challenge**: For any nonprofit organization, December is an important month to generate donations. People are in a holiday spirit and, in the United States, the realization that a nonprofit donation can be a last-minute tax write-off can be a compelling reason to donate. For HealthConnect One, which promotes the health of mothers, infants and families, December is a critical month for donations that will fund the nonprofit organization for the next year. While many nonprofits send postal mailings in December, HealthConnect One was worried that their postal mailing would get lost in the shuffle of holiday mail. So, in order to reinforce the message of the postal mailing, HealthConnect One began its first full-scale email marketing campaign.

> **The Campaign**: HealthConnect One planned a four-part email series. The emails would get sent throughout the month of December. The first part of the email series would be designed to supplement the postal mailer, which included information, a call to make a donation and was personalized by using the recipient's name and home address in the upper left corner.

The corresponding email campaign, however, had the flexibility to be more emotive, and the marketing team settled on the theme "Have You Ever Been a Baby?" to show that everybody had a way to related to the important work that HealthConnect One was doing. It was also a theme that the marketing team believed would stand out both from the nonprofit's industry group (often focusing on heart-wrenching

personal stories) and the flood of consumer email that is delivered to inboxes during December, the heaviest email marketing month of the year.

The team focused on the following keys in developing the email campaign:

Keeping It Simple: Each email template was simple. A large header graphic with a logo, a single picture of a baby, a headline, three to four sentences of copy and a link to donate (the only link in the email). There was also a "P.S." statement to keep the email feeling personal.

The Four Emails: The four emails that the team sent used the following four subject lines: "Have you ever been a baby?", "Over 143,000 babies were born in the U.S. since our last email!", "We were all babies once!" and "Happy New Year from HC One!". Though each email had completely unique copy within the body of the email, the copy all highlighted the same four points: many thousands of babies are born in the US each year, not all babies have the support that they need, HealthConnect One helps provide support to families, and that donating to the organization would help those families and babies get the support that they need. The "PS" statement enforced that all donations would be matched.

What Next?
The HealthConnect One team then "scrubbed" their email list (we'll discuss this technique later in the book) and determined which portion of their database was best to select to send the email to. They then developed a landing page exclusive to the email campaign that reinforced the message of the campaign and included easy ways to donate money to the organization. Finally, the discussed and planned the proper timing of the sending of the emails, working both to space the emails out over time as well as to avoid holiday "slow periods" when people are not necessarily checking their email.

The Results
The results of this well thought-out email showed not only in the key metrics used to determine email success rates, open rate and click-through rate (CTR). They also showed in the overall revenue gained. All of the emails except for the email sent on December 23 received an open rate of greater than twenty percent and a click through rate of greater than four percent. More importantly, HealthConnect One exceeded its goal of $15,000 in donations and generated fifty percent more revenue in their December campaign than they had the year before. The ability to communicate multiple times with unique, personalized content that told a story and made donating simple resulted in a comfortable and successful December donations campaign for HealthConnect One.

Section Summary

In this summary, we gave you the background that you need to understand why email is an important part of any company's marketing mix, from large companies to small businesses and everywhere in between. The key points of this section included:

- Email marketing has evolved over the last several decades to be one of the most cost-effective and high-return marketing channels available. While previously only marketing channels with high overhead, limited tracking capability and limited personalization and targeting ability were available, the growth and development of email marketing has created opportunities for low-cost, high-return customer communications that drive revenue-generating actions.
- Email marketing and email customer communications offer a number of benefits that other marketing channels cannot offer. These include: reduced time and effort, the ability to send timely and personalized messages, the ability to easily test marketing concepts and offers, the ability to create offers that are passed on to family and friends, environmental benefits and the ability to easily track user behavior and response rates.
- Even though social network marketing is a key element of any complete marketing mix, email marketing and email customer communications still generate a higher return on investment and drive more tangible customer actions.
- Email marketing and email communications are a proven method of generating customer response, as shown by the example case studies.

In the Next Section…

Continue reading on to Section Two in order to learn about the various types of email communications that you should consider implementing into your marketing mix when beginning to consider the role of an email campaign in your marketing mix.

SECTION 2: Email Marketing 101

In This Section: So now you understand why it's important that you include email in your marketing plan. After all, the effective return-on-investment, proven staying-power and flexible marketing opportunities of email make it an undeniably powerful factor in any marketing mix. But what kind of email marketing should you implement? What basic information do you need to know to get started? In this section, we'll give you the basics – the very basics – of the first thought processes that you need to go through to implement an email marketing program. We'll help you decide which types of email marketing to use, how to integrate email marketing into customer lifecycles, basic terminology and some laws and regulations that you'll need to know about in order to effectively email market.

Section 2.1 Types of Email Marketing
   Section 2.1a Customer Acquisition and Sales Generating Email Marketing
   Section 2.1b Customer Loyalty and Brand Email Marketing
   Section 2.1c Customer Retention Email Marketing
   Section 2.1d Customer Win-Back Email Marketing

Section 2.2 Newsletters vs. Direct Sales Emails

Section 2.3 Auto Responders

Section 2.4 CAN-SPAM and Email Privacy Laws to Be Aware Of

Section 2.5 Email Marketing Glossary: Terms to Know Before You Get Started

Section Summary

SECTION 2.1
Types of Email Marketing

In This Section: Are there really "types of email marketing?" Isn't sending an email to a customer list just a process of plugging in some content and then hitting "send"? Isn't the purpose of email marketing all the same? No! The answer to all of these questions is "no." Email marketing is, like most marketing channels, extremely nuanced and judged based on different goals, which are accomplished using different processes. In this section, we'll take a look at four different types of email marketing, what their purpose is, and the basic ways that most companies implement them.

The best email marketing programs integrate all four types of these formats for email marketing, typically based on where a user or customer is in their customer lifecycle. We'll cover the customer lifecycle in detail in Section 3 of this book. However, after reading Section 2.1, you may want to take some time to think about what role email should play in your marketing mix and which types of emails will serve both you and your clients best over the long term.

SECTION 2.1a
Customer Acquisition and Sales Generating Email Marketing

By far, the most common type of email marketing is email that is designed to directly generate new revenue for your company by either converting non-existing users or members to paying customers or by convincing existing customers to make an additional purchase. Of course, at the end of the day, all email marketing is essentially about creating productive and profitable customers. However, some email formats and strategies involve a more direct route to attempting to generate revenue or sales.

Who Receives a Customer Acquisition or Sales Generating Email? Typically, your user demographic for an email that's designed to directly generate sales or acquire customers will be one of three groups. The first group will be a list of potential customers who have never been exposed to your product before. You will typically rent or purchase this list from another company (we'll discuss how to grow your email list later in this book). The second group may be people who signed up for information about your product or filled out an interest form but have never purchased your product or service. The final group will be customers who previously purchased or visited your website and who may be interested in a follow-up purchase or visit.

What Is the Content of a Customer Acquisition or Sales Generating Email? The content that you include in a customer acquisition or sales generating email will be content that will inspire the user to visit

your website or take a purchasing action. Typically, this will include a discount or sales offer, but there may be instances where simply providing information about your product, service or website is enough.

Customer acquisition and sales generating emails are the backbone of driving direct revenue and return-on-investment from email marketing. However, they are most successful when you incorporate them with the other types of email marketing discussed in the following pages.

SECTION 2.1b
Customer Loyalty and Brand Email Marketing

Have you ever received a news letter from a company that you've patronized that seemingly had no solicitation for sales or other action on your part? What about a happy birthday email from a company you've done business with that offers you a discount on your birthday just for having done business with them in the past? These types of emails are considered customer loyalty or brand building emails. The purpose is to keep your brand in the mind of your customers, to have your customers feel like they are building a relationship with you and, as a result, to have your customers stay loyal to using your website, product or service rather than instead go to a competitor. These emails may not have any direct revenue value for you, but the relationship that they're building with your customer and the brand relationship and awareness that they're creating means that your customers will remain your customers for longer, spend more money with you over the long term, and are more likely to recommend your brand or company to a friend, family member or colleague.

Who Receives a Customer Loyalty or Brand Building Email? Typically, the best recipients for your brand awareness and customer loyalty emails will be your most active clients or your "short-term lapsed" clients. While it may be tempting to send customer loyalty or brand building emails to your entire email database, emails that generate low open rates or high spam complaints can impact your ability to get your email delivered to inboxes in the future. For that reason, you should target customers and users who want to have an ongoing relationship with your brand and build on that loyalty and awareness.

What Is the Content of a Customer Loyalty or Brand Building Email? The most common type of content in a customer loyalty or brand building email is newsletter content. Providing customers or users with useful information that is entertaining, informative and written in the voice of your brand will cause them to build an affinity for your brand or business. It will also create high email open and click-through rates. Other common types of customer loyalty and brand building emails include holiday and birthday greetings, thank you emails, company status updates and tips and advice emails.

It may seem as though customer loyalty and brand building emails do not have a direct return on investment. However, email is one of your most direct channels to build a relationship between your brand and your customers. That relationship, in the long term, can only help to grow your business, revenue and client base.

SECTION 2.1c
Customer Retention Email Marketing

So you have customers, but now how do you keep customers? Customer retention email marketing is any email that takes existing customers and tries to ensure that they remain customers who keep coming back to purchase or visit your website again and again. Unlike customer loyalty or brand building emails, customer retention emails will prominently feature a product or offer. However, unlike pure sales generating emails, those offers will typically be tailored to appeal specifically to repeat customers and will likely be less generous in nature. In essence, this segment of your email marketing program is the segment that is designed to maximize the actual revenue or page view value of any previous customer or site user.

Who Receives a Customer Retention Marketing Email? In short, any customer who has ever made a purchase with your or registered at your site and has a viewing history of your website should be on your customer retention email marketing list. However, ideally you'll segment this list further into types of customers to retain (we'll talk about list segmentation later in this book). For example, if your business is a pet business, you may want to send a different customer retention email to customers who have previously purchased cat products than you would to those who have purchased dog products. The best way to retain customers is to incentivize them to remain customers by putting the most targeted information and offers possible in front of them.

What Is the Content of a Customer Retention Marketing Email? Because a customer retention email is specifically designed to spur multiple purchases from a returning customer, the content of a customer retention email is almost always an offer, sale, discount or free gift. However, it is possible to use content that simply makes customers aware of new products that they may be interested in as a method of retaining them.

The most profitable customers are customers who make multiple purchases. However, sometimes customers need to be reminded that they want to make multiple purchases or incentivized to do so. That's why having a strategic plan for customer retention email is such an important part of any email marketing plan.

SECTION 2.1d
Customer Win-Back Email Marketing

The final common type of email marketing is customer win-back email marketing. This is email that is designed to take customers who were once customers or users but have "lapsed" or otherwise abandoned your product, service, business or website and to "win them back" as customers or users. It is frequently the type of email marketing with the lowest response rate and should therefore be minimized in use so as to not create poor email metrics for you. However, it is always more cost effective

to retain or win-back a customer than it is to acquire a new customer. For that reason, customer win-back email should always be a part of your email marketing mix.

Who Receives a Customer Win-Back Marketing Email? Any customer who was once a regular purchaser or site user should be on your customer win-back email list, unless they have specifically unsubscribed from emails from your company. However, it is often most effective to group these lapsed or abandoned customers into groups based on how long it has been since their last interaction with you. Customers who haven't had a purchasing action in a short amount of time (typically three months or less) will require a less aggressive offer or sale than customers who have not interacted with you in more than a year. By splitting out your email list of inactive customers by time frame, you can create a more impactful email campaign.

What Is the Content of a Customer Win-Back Marketing Email? A customer win-back offer will need to incentivize a customer who has not interacted with you in a very long time to return to you. For that reason, these types of marketing emails must include offers, sales, free gifts, free shipping or other exclusive opportunities that are not available to the general public and that are incredibly compelling to the user.

Your list of inactive customers may be one of your best marketing tools, but your response rate will always be somewhat low. That's why email marketing is such an effective way to attempt to win-back customers. The cost of sending an email to a lapsed or inactive customer is incredibly low, so even if your response rate is low your return on investment will be positive.

Now that we've talked about the most common types of email marketing, you may want to take a quick break to think about how these types of email marketing can work with your business or marketing goals and where your resources should go. When you're done taking some time to think about the various types of email marketing, then return to this book. While the remainder of the Email Marketing 101 information in this section is critically important to your understanding of email marketing, you may want to skip ahead to Section 3, which talks more specifically about the nuances of a customer lifecycle and then return to this section if you are not already familiar with marketing basics regarding customer lifecycle points.

Next Up: *What is the difference between a newsletter and a direct sales email and which one do you need to focus on?*

Section 2.2
Newsletters vs. Direct Sales Emails

In This Section: One of the most common questions that people who are new to email marketing typically have is whether their email marketing program should feature a newsletter or a direct sales email … or even a hybrid of both. Of course, the most effective email marketing programs will contain a combination of both types of emails. However, it's also important to take the time to think through what the difference between an email newsletter and a direct sales email is. With the information that you gained in the previous chapter about the different types of email marketing, their users and the types of information contained in them, you'll then be able to read this section and begin to visualize what your email marketing program should look like.

From here, we'll take a look at newsletters and direct sales emails in detail. You can then use this information to help determine what type of email content you should send to for the various goals of your email program and to which user lists.

Email Newsletters: Content Is Still King

The purpose of an email newsletter is to provide users with relevant information that will accomplish the following goals:

- Cause subscribers to think of, be aware of and build a relationship with your brand
- Create continued exposure of your brand and products in a customer's mind for the time when they are ready to purchase
- Drive page views to your website
- Create viral awareness of your company, product, or brand through email forwards of useful information
- Generate sales through product features and advertised specials

What is the Typical Content of an Email Newsletter?

While the specific content of an email newsletter will be largely driven by industry, the segment of users on your email list who receive the email newsletter, and your own in-house testing of what content your users respond to, the following is a list of the most common types of content that can be found in an email newsletter.

- Articles about issues related to your industry
- Opinion columns from experts
- Tips and advice columns that will be useful to the consumers of your product
- Question and answer columns
- Product testimonials

- Product reviews, features and announcements of new products
- Upcoming events calendars
- Special offers and discounts
- Featured quotes
- Featured customers or users
- Links to partner websites
- Links to useful sections of your website
- Links to social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube
- A call-to-action to forward the newsletter to friends

Of course, the more creative and unique you get with your newsletter content, the more engaged your users will be. Consider this list a "jumping off point" in order to get you thinking about what the content that your readers would like to see in your newsletter would be.

Email Newsletter Pros and Cons

Like any marketing decision, the decision to include an email newsletter in your marketing mix will involve balancing some pros and some cons. Here are some things that you'll want to keep in mind as you determine whether a newsletter format is the right format for your email marketing campaign.

Email Newsletter Pros

The following are the pro-points of sending an email newsletter:

- Engaging content means that users are more likely to open, read, and click through your email than they would a direct sales piece
- Customers respond well to feeling as though not every communication from you is a solicitation for them to buy something and this causes them to advocate your brand
- Sales are generated, though typically not in as high a volume as with a direct sales email
- Newsletters are the most effective email type for generating page views to your website, which is important if your business model is dependent on page views or impression-based advertising
- Because a newsletter is not a pure sales tool, you can rent or sell advertising space to partner sites within the email itself as you are not reliant on raw sales figures to determine the success of the email
- Unlike sales emails, newsletters are typically not as time sensitive and therefore retain their value even if they sit unopened for several weeks before the user reads them
- The longer content form of an email allows you to promote more items, website sections, and even company personalities as well as to write in a voice that reflects your brand or company

Email Newsletter Cons

The following are the con-points of sending an email newsletter:

- Because a newsletter email is not a direct call-to-action to purchase, your generated sales will be fewer
- There is an increased effort in creating a newsletter, as it requires content generation, editing and inputting as well as typically the creation of multiple on-site web pages to host full versions of articles and columns
- Because email newsletters have many sections, it is more difficult to test the effectiveness of changing anything within the body of the email such as the headline of a section or a single image.

In short, an email newsletter may require more work in its creation than a direct sales email would and still result in fewer direct sales. However, email newsletters build customer loyalty and ultimately drive sales both in the short and long term. When considering the pros and cons of an email newsletter, consider your in-house content resources as well as your need to drive immediate revenue from a newsletter via email.

Email Newsletters and the Types of Email Marketing

When thinking about the types of email marketing described above, newsletters are best for emailing as part of your customer loyalty and brand building email program. They may also play a role in customer retention email marketing. However, they are typically considered under-performing for customer acquisition, direct sales, or customer win-back email programs.

Email Newsletter Best Practices

While we will cover various email best practices in extensive detail in Section 5 of this book, here are the top five best practices that you should always consider when thinking about and designing an email newsletter.

1. Excerpt Content and Link to the Full Version: If you are including a column or article, always simply include an excerpt or "tease" within your email newsletter and then link to the full article or column on your website. Not only does this drive valuable page impressions to your website, but it also avoids your email newsletter being flagged as spam instead of going to the inbox because of a questionable word usage in your full content.

2. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links: Make sure that all links to your website, partner sites or other locations are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition. Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, in email design it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

3. Prioritize the Content That Users Will Care About in the Top Three Inches: In a typical email preview pane, you will have approximately three inches to display your content and allow a reader to decide whether to read the full email or not. Make sure that your most engaging newsletter content

appears within these top three inches and do not waste the space with graphic headers or filler "welcome" content.

4. Use a "Table of Contents" or "In This Email": Because email newsletters tend to be longer and users tend to scan them quickly, use a table of contents or a quick list of what's in the email near the top so that users can quickly refer to it to see what content they may want to read.

5. Allow Readers the Option of Reading the Newsletter on a Webpage: Particularly for users who read their email on their mobile device, the option to click a link and instead see a hosted version of the newsletter on a webpage instead of having to read the entire newsletter within their inbox is a huge benefit. Offering this option will significantly increase the number of users who explore your newsletter.

Email newsletters are a great way to provide users with the history, resources and emotional motivation to make purchases or visit your website. Though the time-to-produce an email newsletter can be lengthy, the ultimate benefits are also long term.

Direct Sales Emails: One Action, One Result

Unlike an email newsletter, a direct sales email has one goal: to drive sales and revenue of your product or service for clicks to your website. How you do this may vary with the specific content or tactic of your direct sales email, but the beauty of a direct sales email is that its purpose is simple. That also means that tracking its success is simple, either it generated sales…or it didn't.

What is the Typical Content of a Direct Sales Email?

With a direct sales email, the content will often be driven by seasonality, industry, the segment of your email database that is being sent to, internal sales goals, and revenue targets. However, the following are typical types of content and promotions that you may see in a direct sales email:

- New purchaser incentives
- Percentage discount off (automatic or via coupon code)
- Dollar amount discount off (automatic or via coupon code)
- Free gift with purchase
- Buy one, get one free
- Free shipping
- Free shipping upgrade (to priority or expedited)
- Clearance item notification
- Bonus dollars or bonus points offers
- Refer-a-friend offers
- Free trails
- Sample products
- Exclusive VIP offers
- Seasonal products

- New product announcements
- Product testimonials and reviews
- Celebrity endorsements

Direct Sales Email Pros and Cons

Direct sales emails have their own list of pros and cons to consider when putting them into your marketing mix. As you determine the roll of direct sales emails in your email marketing plan, consider the following key points:

Direct Sales Email Pros

The following are the pro-points of sending a direct sales email:

- A direct sales email requires less effort to produce than a newsletter, with reduced copy and image needs and typically only a single web-based landing page
- Because a direct sales email only has a single call-to-action (typically), it is easier to segment your user list and put the most appropriate offer in front of them
- Revenue and sales numbers generated will be higher with a direct sales email than with a content-driven newsletter
- Because a direct sales email is shorter in content and includes only one call-to-action, testing individual elements of the email such as headlines and images becomes easier to accomplish

Direct Sales Email Cons

The following are the con-points of sending a direct sales email:

- Direct sales emails can often generate higher spam complaints and opt-outs from users.
- Direct sales emails can often cause "ad blindness" among subscribers who may stop opening emails altogether if they begin to feel that each communication from you is simply a solicitation to purchase something
- Direct sales emails focus on a single task, which means that they do not offer an opportunity to cross promote other sections of your website, partner sites or content.

Direct Sales Emails and the Types of Email Marketing

When thinking about the five types of email marketing described previously, direct sales emails are best for customer acquisition, revenue generation and customer win-back. Direct sales emails may also have a role in your customer retention plan but should not be used as the exclusive means for retaining customers via email communications. Direct sales emails should not be used at all for customer loyalty and brand building email efforts.

Direct Sales Emails Best Practices

In Section 5 of this book, we will cover email best practices in great detail. However, here are five key best practices for direct sales emails that should be practiced.

1. One Call-to-Action: Though you may feature multiple products in a direct sales email, do not ask customers reading the email to do anything other than purchase as you will distract them from the intended goal. Do not clutter your direct sales emails with content links, information links or even social media links.

2. Use Equal Amounts of Text and Images: Though it is important to use images to show your product or engender emotion, always remember that many email clients do not display images. Always make sure that there is an amount of text equal to the amount of space taken up by images so that users can know what the offer or product feature is without having to load images into their email browser.

3. Be Careful of Spam Words In Your Text: We'll talk about common spam words later, but a direct sales email has a higher risk of using words that may trigger email provider spam filters. For example, words like "free", "sale" and "discount" can result in your email going to spam if not used properly.

4. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links: Make sure that all links to your product purchasing pages are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition. Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, in email design it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

5. Put the Best Offer at the Top and In the Subject Line: Offers are what sell products, so be sure that if you're making multiple offers or promoting multiple products, your best offer is not only first on the list, it's also featured in the subject line.

Direct sales emails are a key method of driving and increasing revenue, sales and page views. Any email marketing mix will include them. Simply always be aware to be tasteful, aware of spam issues, and do not overwhelm your email subscribers with too many offers.

Whether you decide to emphasize a content-driven newsletter or more direct-sales driven emails, your ideal email marketing mix will include both used at appropriate times. Take some time to think about the different versions of emails and how they fit into your email marketing goals, the size and content of your email database, and your own in-house resources. Now you can begin to fully visualize the types of emails you may want to send. However, there is still one more factor to consider, and that is the use of an auto-responder email program.

Next Up: *What is an auto-responder and should you be using them as part of your email strategy?*

SECTION 2.3
Auto Responders

In This Section: One of the more current developments on the email marketing front is the use of auto responders, or automated emails, that happen in a set sequence after a user's email address is captured. Typically the end goal of an auto responder email series is converting that user to a purchaser or customer. In this section, we'll introduce you to what an auto responder is, how to use them, the pros and cons, and some basic best practices. Auto responders offer unique benefits in that they can produce results with a limited amount of effort on your part after the initial build out of the program. However, auto responders also present some challenges and best practices that should be considered when determining the role of an auto responder in your email marketing mix.

What is an Auto Responder and How Does it Work?

An auto responder is exactly what it sounds like – it is an automated sequence of emails that are triggered when a user signs up for an email list or provides an email address to your company. Typically, the process works like this.

Step One: A user submits an email address and receives a welcome email (most likely after a confirmation opt-in email, which we will cover in detail in Section 7 of this book).

Step Two: Usually one day after the customer signs up for the email list and receives the welcome email, the first of a series of "auto responders" is sent. This first email contains either the information or offer (or both) that the subscriber was interested in.

Step Three: Following that, an average of ten to nineteen emails are then automatically sent to the subscriber, most often with several days between each email send. The further the sequence gets, the longer the space between emails is. For example, within the first three or four emails, there may only be a day or two between each email send. However, as you get into the latter emails, it is common to leave a week between email sends so as not to encourage the subscriber to become frustrated and mark you as spam or unsubscribe from future mailings.

How Do You Develop an Auto Responder Program?

The first thing to do, of course, is consider whether you want to include auto responders in your marketing mix. You'll need to be sure to find an email marketing provider that supports auto-responder functionality (not all of them do, though Comm100 does support auto-responder functionality). Then,

when considering developing an auto responder program, you'll want to consider all of the following points:

- How many emails should be sent?
- What should be the time frame between sends?
- How should you balance useful content with solicitations for sales or offers?
- How do you minimize unsubscribe requests and spam complaints?

Of course, all of the other concerns of email marketing, such as template design, spam rating scores and subject lines (as well as many others, which we'll cover in Section 5) apply. But the four concerns listed items above are unique to auto responder email programs. Let's briefly cover each in turn.

How many emails should be sent? It is possible that the answer to this question will be determined by the email marketing service provider that you choose. Some email marketing service providers will only allow you to send a maximum of ten auto responders in a sequence. This is typically done to reduce spam complaints and preserve the IP that the email marketing provider is using. Most studies have shown that the ideal number for an auto-responder program will be between 12 and 15 emails. Ten is often not quite enough to convert a user, but more than fifteen increases opt-outs and spam complaints as subscribers who haven't converted then begin to become frustrated. Ultimately, the number of emails that you should send should be based on your content, its engagement level and the amount of time needed to convey it.

What should be the time frame between sends? At the beginning, you want to ensure that you do not take too long between sends. Your subscribers have just signed up and are enthusiastic about receiving your communication, so take advantage of that enthusiasm. While once daily is too frequent, you can begin by spacing your emails out with only a day in between. After that, extend the time between to three days. As you get to the tail end of your auto responders, meaning that you are getting to the least engaged customers who have not converted and may mark you as spam or opt-out of the email, begin to stretch things out by five days or even a week. Many email marketing service providers will allow you to also mark days of the week that you don't want your auto responders to send, so you may want to eliminate weekend email sends of auto responders. Email open rates are lower on weekends.

How should you balance useful content with solicitations for sales or offers? One of the greatest risks of an auto-responder program is having users become frustrated with hard-sales attempts and subsequently marking your email as spam, opting-out, or simply not opening future emails. All of the aforementioned activities can lower your quality score with email service providers and make it harder for your email sends to get into the inbox. Therefore, it's very important that your auto-responders actually contain useful information. While it's acceptable to include a sales offer along with useful information in each email, it is not advisable for you to make a sales-only email any more frequently than every fifth email in the series in order to protect your email sender reputation.

How do you minimize unsubscribe requests and spam complaints? The best way to minimize the risk of unsubscribe requests, spam complaints, and non-opened emails with your auto responder program is the same way to minimize those risks with all email marketing. Provide useful, engaging content and good offers that your subscribers will care about. You can also use the best practices for managing unsubscribe requests, opt outs and spam complaints that we'll discuss later in this book and which include: prominent and easy-to-find placement of the unsubscribe link, proper opt-out and opt-in messages and asking users to "white list" you in your initial email.

Auto responders are essentially just like any other form of email marketing, but because they are not as carefully monitored and not personalized to specific list segments, they can pose greater risks and yield lower returns if not properly thought through in the developmental phase.

What is the Typical Content of an Auto Responder?

An auto responder is generally more similar in content to a newsletter than it is to a direct sales email, though it combines many of the elements of both. The content can vary wildly though based on your industry segment and what you've promised subscribers. The most common type of auto responder content will be tips or advice, but you can also do great things with recipes, serial fiction pieces, inspirational quotes and a variety of other topics. Essentially, you are looking for content that will engage users over a period of time while also providing a platform to encourage sales of your product or service or visits to your website.

Auto Responder Pros and Cons

Auto responder email programs often seem as though they may be all upside because they require very little maintenance. However, when determining if you want to invest your resources into an auto-responder program, there are both pros and cons that you should consider.

Auto Responder Email Pros

The following are the pro-points of sending email auto responders:

- After the initial time and resources required in order to build out your auto responder program, you will have an ongoing communications channel with your customers that can happen with little or no maintenance from you.
- An engaging, compelling auto responder program can generate not only sales but also brand awareness and user referrals
- If your auto responder program is successful at converting subscribers to customers, you can operate at a very high return-on-investment as convincing a user to sign up for a free email program is much easier that acquiring an initial paying customer
- Auto responders are a great solution for small businesses with extremely limited resources for email marketing and content generation

Auto Responder Email Cons

The following are the con-points of sending email auto responders:

- Unlike traditional email marketing, email auto responders cannot easily be segmented to a single portion of your list (such as cat food buyers versus dog food buyers). Auto-responders by nature are generalized and will therefore convert at a lower percentage than will targeted, traditional email marketing campaigns.
- Auto responder campaigns can put the sender reputation of your email program at risk as auto responder programs tend to have higher opt-out, unopened and spam complaint numbers. These user actions can make it more difficult for even your non-auto responder emails to make it into the inbox.
- The initial build out of an auto responder campaign can be labor intensive, requiring content for multiple emails all at once and several weeks of monitoring in order to determine if there are "problem" areas in your timing or content before you are able to allow the program to run automated on its own.

In summary, auto responders present a great opportunity if you have limited time and resources to create email marketing campaigns. However, because they are less targeted, they may also be less effective and can put your email sender reputation at risk if they do not provide subscribers with engaging, useful content.

Auto Responders and the Types of Email Marketing

When thinking about the five types of email marketing described previously, auto responders are almost exclusively used for customer acquisition email marketing. Your existing customers may respond well to an auto-responder campaign, but chances are high that the best place in your marketing mix for auto-responders is when trying to acquire new customers.

Auto Responders Best Practices

In Section 5 of this book, we will cover email best practices in great detail. However, here are five key best practices for auto responders that should be practiced.

1. Always Include the Auto Responder Name in the Subject Line: Because you are sending multiple emails spaced out over multiple days, you always want to include the name of the auto responder program that your subscriber signed up for in the subject line so that they recognize you in the inbox.

2. Be Sure to Have Subscribers White List You: Because auto responders run a higher risk of unsubscribe requests and spam complaints, be sure to ask users to add you to their contact list or address book in the first welcome email that they receive to help negate the chances that you will end up in their spam or junk folder.

3. Do Not Overdo Offers: While the ultimate goal of your auto-responder program is to generate sales or revenue, too many offers can result in subscribers fleeing from your list early in the auto responder sequence. Present offers contextually and don't create auto-responders that look and feel like repeated direct sales emails.

4. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links: Make sure that all links to your product purchasing pages are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition. Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, in email design it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

5. Use Personalization Fields: While always important in email marketing, because an auto-responder list can not be easily segmented, be sure to use the features of your email marketing program, such as those at Comm100, that allow you to personalize fields within your auto responder email with the subscriber's first name, handle, user name or other submitted information.

Auto responders present an excellent opportunity to create email marketing results with minimal effort after the initial build out. However, the key to success is to think through the process during the build out and to monitor the program carefully for the first several months in order to optimize it. We'll discuss auto responders throughout the remainder of this book when talking about email design, implementation, tracking and optimization.

Next Up: *What is CANSPAM and why do you need to understand it before you begin to email market?*

Comm100

SECTION 2.4
CAN-SPAM and Email Privacy Laws to Be Aware Of

In This Section: Much like privacy laws regarding postal and privacy, sending email also has binding privacy legislation that must be followed. These laws are referred to as the CAN-SPAM Act. If you're going to be sending email to subscribers, you need to know about CAN-SPAM and how to be complaint.

CAN-SPAM: A Brief History

CAN-SPAM is a shortened version of the name of Public Law No. 108-187, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush on December 16, 2003. The full name of the law and bill was **C**ontrolling the **A**ssault of **N**on-**S**olicited **P**ornography **A**nd **M**arketing Act of 2003. Of course, the name was also a play on the fact that unsolicited and unwanted email is typically referred to as "spam." The law gives the U.S. Federal Trade Commission the right to enforce the standards of the law (which we'll discuss in detail below). You may think, based on the amount of unwanted and unsolicited email that you receive daily, that the law is not particularly effective. However, as a sender of email, you are still governed by it. If the proper complaints are filed against you and you are found to be in violation of CAN-SPAM, then you are subject to large fines. Fortunately, being in compliance of CAN-Spam is quite simply if you follow a few basic rules.

What Type of Email Sending Does CAN-SPAM Cover?

It's also misleading to think that CAN-SPAM only applies to large bulk email sends. CAN-SPAM covers all commercial email messages. What does that mean? According to the wording of the law, it means "any electronic mail message the primary purpose of which is the commercial advertisement or promotion of a commercial product or service." That includes email that promotes content on a commercial website, so if your website makes any money at all and your email links back to it, you are liable under CAN-SPAM.

What Are the CAN-SPAM Fines?

Each separate email in violation of CAN-SPAM is liable for a fine of up to $16,000.

How Do I Make Sure that I'm CAN-SPAM Compliant?

There is good news. It's very easy to be CAN-SPAM complaint. Here are the steps that you need to follow.

- **Don't Use False or Misleading Email Header Information:** This one is easy. Your "From", "To" and "Reply-To" fields on your email as well as the routing information (which includes the domain

name and email address) but accurately identify the business or person who initiated the message. That mean's if you own JoeSchmoe.com and want to send an email to your users, the email has to come from JoeSchmoe.com and not from another url or domain.

- **Don't Use Deceptive Subject Lines**: Your subject line must accurately reflect what's in the content of your email. If your email contains an offer for 10% off of a Persian rug, your subject line can't say that the Persian rug is free or talk about a completely unrelated topic just to incite people to open the email.

- **Identify That the Email is An Ad**: You can do this in very subtle ways as the law is not detailed on it. However, somewhere your email must reveal that the message is an advertisement. A "brought to you by" at the close of the email is often considered sufficient.

- **Provide a Physical Location**: You must let recipients know where you are physically located via a physical postal address within your email. This is not optional. It can be a street address or a postal box address. However, you must provide a way for users to reach you via registered postal mail.

- **Let Recipients Know How to Opt Out of Future Emails:** This is completely non-optional. Your email must always provide recipients with a clear and conspicuous explanation of how the recipient can opt-out of getting any email from you in the future. It must be easy for a person to recognize, read, and understand. The best methods, which are usually automatically handled by email marketing platforms such as Comm100, will provide either a return email address or an easy-to-click-to web page where users can quickly unsubscribe from future mailings. You are allowed to create a menu in which users can opt-out of only specific types of mailings, but you are always required to give the user the option of opting out of ALL future mailings from you (called a "Universal Unsubscribe").

- **Honor Opt-Out Requests Promptly and Honorably:** Whichever opt-out mechanism you choose to use must be able to process opt-out requests for at least thirty-days after you send your email message, and users' requests to opt-out must be honored within ten business days. You are not allowed to charge a fee or require a recipient to give you any personally identifying information beyond an email address. You may not make a recipient take any step other than to send a reply email or visit a single page on a website as a condition for opting-out of an email list. After people have opted out of an email list, you cannot sell, rent or transfer their email addresses, even if those are contextualized as part of a postal mailing list. The ONLY exception to this rule is that you may transfer the email addresses to a company that you have hired in order to help you be CAN-SPAM complaint.

- **Monitor What Others Do On Your Behalf:** Even if you have hired another company to do your email marketing, you are still the responsible party under the law as both the company whose

product is being promoted as well as the company who sent the email are legally responsible. This is a particularly important point if you run an affiliate marketing program as one of your marketing channels.

Being CAN-SPAM complaint isn't actually too difficult, and it's made easier with an email marketing platform that monitors your CAN-SPAM compliance elements where possible such as Comm100. However, just because it's simple, it doesn't mean that it's not important. Being CAN-SPAM complaint is one of the most important things that you can do as part of your email marketing program. After all, $16,000 per separate email based off of one error or customer complaint can add up quickly. Don't be a spammer! Send your marketing email in compliance with the law.

Next Up: *A glossary of terms that you'll need to know in order to be fully email marketing educated!*

SECTION 2.5
Email Marketing Glossary: Terms to Know Before You Get Started

In This Section: Now that we've covered some of the basics that you'll need to think about as you decide how to develop your email marketing program, it's time to give you the most comprehensive list that we can think of that includes all of the terms that you'll need to know as you get into the details of learning about email marketing. You may want to refer back to this section at various points if you come across a term later in the book and are confused!

Above the Fold: When talking about a webpage or landing page, this is the portion of the page that appears in the user's web browser without the user having to scroll down. When talking about an email, this is the portion of the email that appears in the email client's preview pane without the user needing to scroll or open the full email.

Auto Responder: This is a series of emails, typically between ten and twenty, which are automatically triggered and automatically sent after a user signs up for an email list with no ongoing effort by the sender. They are covered in detail in section 2.3 of this book.

Black List: In email marketing, being on a black list means that an email service provider has identified you or your company as spam and will no longer allow your emails to be delivered to users' inboxes, instead sending them into the spam or junk folder.

Brand Building: This is any activity that serves to make a product or company's brand name more prominent among users or the public. In specific to email marketing, it refers to emails that do not overtly strive to sell a product or

service but instead work to build a relationship between the customer and the brand or company.

Call-to-Action: Any portion of a landing page or email that drives a user to take a specific action, such as to click a link or to purchase a product or to provide an email address.

CAN-SPAM: The U.S. law which governs the rules of privacy and consumer rights regarding the receipt of promotional email. It is covered in detail in section 2.4 of this book.

Customer Acquisition: The process of finding, converting and acquiring new customers who have not previously been exposed to your brand, product, company, or website.

Customer Loyalty: The process of building a relationship with customers so that they continue to patronize your brand, business, product, service, or website rather than switch to a competitor.

Customer Retention: The process of ensuring that customers who have made a first purchase

are retained in such a way that they make future purchases, site visits, etc.

Customer Win-Back: The process of converting customers who have lapsed or abandoned your product, service, brand, website, or business back into active customers.

Direct Sales Emails: Marketing emails that have the sole purpose of using a single call-to-action to convert users to purchasing a product or service or filling out a lead generation form.

Double Opt-In: This form of opting in to an email mailing list requires a user to confirm twice that they want to be included on the email list. The first time is when they click their acceptance of the terms and conditions and add themselves to the list. The second time is when they click a confirmation link sent to them in an email immediately after signing up. While this may reduce overall quantity of email sign-ups, it often increases overall quality of sign-ups.

Email Personalization: This is the act of using client information, such as a first name or user name on a site, to personalize an email template. Many email marketing platforms, including Comm100, offer this personalization feature which can increase user engagement and conversions.

Email Service Provider: Any company that provides email services is referred to as an email service provider (ie: Hotmail, Yahoo!, Netzero, Gmail, etc.)

From Field: The section of your email that identifies whom the email is from. To be CAN-SPAM complaint, this field must accurately

represent the individual or business that sent the originating email.

Gmail: The third largest Email Service Provider in the world. Gmail typically strips out email formatting and images, so your email must look acceptable primarily as html text in order to appear appealing in Gmail.

Hotmail: The world's largest and first free email service provider. Hotmail is known for having one of the most sensitive and restrictive spam filters of any of the email service providers.

HTML: Short for Hypertext Markup Language, it is the programming language that web pages and email templates are typically written in. To be a proficient email or internet marketer, you should have an understanding of basic HTML commands.

Image Links: Clickable links that are shown using a gif, jpg or png image on a web page or in an email. While image links are quite effective on web pages, they are not recommended for email due to the fact that many email service providers do not show images within emails by default.

Junk Folder: The folder or section of an inbox where an email service provider sends emails that it considers to be spam or junk mail.

Newsletters: When referring to email marketing, these are emails that contain useful information and may or may not also include product, service, brand, company, or website promotions.

Opt-In: The process of giving consent to be added to an email list.

Opt-Out: The process of telling the sender of an email that you no longer wish to receive emails from them. To be CAN-SPAM compliant, you must offer all subscribers to or recipients of an email an opportunity to opt-out of future emails.

Outlook: The email reading program of the Microsoft Office suite. It is important because most email campaigns should be optimized to present the most important information in the space that is the size of a standard Outlook email box preview pane.

Pixels: A unit of measurement of length or height for web pages and graphics. For example, a typical email header graphic should not be more than 700 pixels in width.

Preview Pane: The section of an email that is seen in an email client before a user opens up the full email. Typically, this preview pane is no more than three inches in height and approximately seven hundred pixels in width.

Reply To Field: The field of your email that tells a user where to "reply to" or that is the address that fills out when a users clicks "reply to" in their email client. Typically, a marketing or mass email will not have an active reply-to address that goes anywhere. However, to be CAN-SPAM complaint, your email reply-to address must accurately reflect the company or individual who sent the original email.

Sender Reputation: A metric that is used by email service providers and that is tied to your domain name and the IP address from which you sent your email that allows the email service provider to assess the likelihood that your email is spam or wanted by recipients. Sender reputation is compiled using data that includes,

but is not limited to, spam complaints, email open rates, unsubscribe requests, IP address, the size of your email list, and the quality of your email list.

Single Opt-In: A method of opting into an email list where a user simply confirms that he or she wants to be on the email list when he or she signs up and is not required to click a second confirmation link in an email that is sent to him or her afterwards.

Spam: The common name for unwanted or unsolicited email that makes its way into a recipient's email box.

Spam Folder: The folder or section of an inbox where an email service provider sends emails that it considers to be spam or junk mail.

Spam Score: A variable ranking of your email, usually factored pre-send, which determines the likelihood that the email will be considered spam by email service providers. Factors that determine the spam score include the content of the email body, the content of the subject line, and a number of other smaller factors.

Subject Line: The subject line of your email that appears in a user's inbox when he or she receives your email. To be CAN-SPAM compliant, the subject line must accurately reflect what will be in the content of the email once opened.

Text Links: Links to web pages that are contained in text rather than in images. In email design, text links are preferable to image links since not all email service providers display images automatically in emails.

To Field: The field in your email that identifies the user or address that you are sending the email to.

Unsubscribe: Another term for opting-out, or otherwise telling the sender of an email that you no longer wish to receive future emails. To be CAN-SPAM complaint, you must offer all recipients or subscribers a valid and easy way to opt-out or unsubscribe.

Welcome Email: The first email that a user or subscriber receives when he or she signs up for an email list. This email typically includes a confirmation link for the user to click as well as a request for the user to white list the sending address of the email.

White List: In email marketing, white list can mean two things. The first is that your domain or company is on the "white list" of an email service provider, which means that the email service provider always sends your company's emails to the inbox rather than the spam folder. The second meaning is that individual users have "white listed" your email for safe delivery into their individual inbox by adding your send-from address to their contact list or address book. It is typically considered an email best practice to always ask users to add your send-from address to their contact list or address book in your welcome email.

Yahoo! Mail: The second largest email service provider in the world. Yahoo! Mail is one of the few email service providers that typically displays images by default.

Section Summary

In this section, you learned the big picture elements of email marketing 101 that you'll need to know in order to begin to develop an idea of what you want your email marketing program to look like and which you will also need to understand in order to begin the more detailed discussion of email marketing that will happen in the upcoming sections. Primary and key points included:

- There are four primary types of email marketing.
- Customer acquisition and revenue-generating email seek to convert new customers or drive direct revenue generating action
- Customer loyalty and brand awareness email seek to develop a relationship between customers and your brand.
- Customer retention email seeks to turn one time customers into repeat, high-value customers.
- Customer win-back email seeks to turn abandoned or lapsed customers back into active customers.
- A newsletter is a content rich type of email used for all email types other than customer acquisition and which includes content as well as offers and solicitations.
- A direct sales email is a single call-to-action email that seeks to incentivize a customer to make a purchase or take another desired action
- An auto responder is a series of automated emails, typically designed to convert a recipient into a purchasing client, which are automatically triggered and automatically sent when a user subscribes to an email list.
- CAN-SPAM is the U.S. Federal Law that governs the privacy and user rights of those who receive email. Being CAN-SPAM complaint is a requirement for sending email marketing.
- You also were provided with a comprehensive glossary of terms you'll need to know to progress in this book.

In the Next Section…
Continue reading on to Section Three in order to learn about how email can be used at various points in the customer lifecycle to accomplish specific goals to increase customer value and overall revenue.

SECTION 3: Email and the Customer Life Cycle

In This Section: Having learned the basics of email marketing 101, you may feel as though you're ready to go out and design your email marketing program. However, if you don't have a comprehensive understanding of what a customer life cycle is and when (and how) the appropriate way to contact a customer at various points in that life cycle is, then you may do more damage with your email communications plan than good. If you've already got a rather deep online marketing background and understand the customer life cycle and the role of customer communications within it, then you can easily skip this section of the book. If not, we strongly recommend taking the time to read and understand the marketing theories of customer life cycle and communications.

Section 3.1
What Is a Customer Life Cycle?
Section 3.2
Acquiring New Customers and Email Marketing
Section 3.3
Email Communications through the Active Customer Life Cycle
Section 3.4
Retaining and Winning Back Customers
Section 3.5
Getting to Know Your Customers through Email
Section Summary

SECTION 3.1
What Is a Customer Life Cycle?

In This Section: A customer life cycle can also be thought of as the length, arc and nature of a customer's relationship with your brand or company. Much like a "human life cycle" or a relationship between two people, this customer life cycle is marked by ups and downs, different phases and different periods of activity. Also like a human life cycle or a relationship between two people, you want your customer's life cycle to be as long and as fruitful as possible. How do you accomplish that? While the quality and value of your company and brand goes a long way to building long customer life cycles, not unlike in real life communication plays a key role as well. Because you won't experience real-life, real-time, one-on-one communication with the majority of your customers very frequently (if at all), your corporate communications, particularly your email communications, can fulfill the relationship building need here.

In this section, we'll talk you through various phases in the customer life cycle. In the sections following, we'll discuss how to integrate email marketing efforts into the various points in the customer life cycle.

Prospective Customers: The First Phase of the Customer Life Cycle

Before your customers are actually your customers, they are simply prospects who may or may not be aware of your product, brand, or company. Your job, as a marketer, is to first make them aware of your product, brand, or company and then peak their interest enough that they will convert to an active customer or user. Once you have their interest peaked, of course, your next job is to provide the trust, security, and incentive that they need to overcome any barriers or obstacles and become a registered or paying user or customer. This phase of the customer life cycle – the process of converting a prospect into a customer or user - is often the most challenging. It involves a marketing acquisition budget as well as an awareness of what will transition prospects from "just interested" into fully engaged. Many marketing books have been written about the techniques and challenges of acquiring new customers. While it is an important part of the mix, email marketing is only a portion of the many marketing activities you'll need to master in order to effectively convert prospects to customers.

Another common term you'll hear used referring to this part of the customer life cycle is "leads." Leads are the names and contact information (typically in the form of an email address) of people who have shown an interest in your product, service, or brand. Often, they have done so by signing up for a special offer or even a piece of free content. Leads may also be purchased from data companies. However, if you are purchasing a lead list, we recommend that you be extremely careful and research that the data

you are buying is from a reputable company and won't put you at risk of violating any CAN-SPAM or privacy laws.

New Customers or Users: The Second Phase of the Customer Life Cycle

So, now you've converted a prospective customer or lead into a paying or registered customer. That's great and shows that you have some real marketing skills. However, ideally you want your new customer or user to be a customer or user who has a long term relationship with you, not just one who purchases one time and then never returns. Think of this phase of the customer life cycle as though it's like the early phases of dating. Your new customer has been "sold" enough on you to go out on one date or make one purchase, but they're not sure if you're a long-term commitment yet! It's your job to build a relationship with them so that they continue to return, interact, and purchase from you for a long time to come. Again, the quality of your product or service will certainly matter here, but so will the way in which you communicate with your customer and show them that you respect their privacy, time, and, most importantly, business.

Active Customers or Users: The Third Phase of the Customer Life Cycle

Now you've converted a prospective customer into a paying or registered customer. This is the stage at which you need to not only impress the customer with the quality of your product, but also follow-up with them to build a relationship, make them feel important to you, and ensure that, when they think of you, they think of returning to you. If we're still using the dating analogy, think of this as the time when you make sure that you're always being polite and wearing your best clothing when you communicate with the customer!

Repeat or Loyal Customers or Users: The Fourth Phase of the Customer Life Cycle

If you've managed to get a customer over the first two hurdles, converting them from a prospective customer or lead to an active customer and then from an active customer to a repeat customer, you should be congratulated! Earning loyal customers who will make repeat purchases or visits to your website or service is quite a marketing accomplishment. Once your customers become repeat customers, the aggressiveness and frequency with which you want to communicate with them will diminish, but it certainly won't disappear. You'll want to make sure that customers are being reminded that they are important to you, as well as being given reasons and incentives to remain loyal. There's always a competitor out there ready to move in on your user or customer base. Your best tool to retain customers who have become repeat or loyal customers is to keep an ongoing dialogue with them through all of your marketing communications channels, including email.

Lapsed Customers or Users: The Fifth Phase of the Customer Life Cycle

Unfortunately, even a loyal or repeat customer may eventually lose interest or contact. When a customer has gone a significant amount of time without interacting with your brand or company or purchasing a product, they are referred to as a "lapsed" customer. In most cases, you will break your lapsed customers down into two to three groups. It's common to consider short-term lapsed, long-term lapsed and "seasonally lapsed" customers differently. However, how you define what those groups are (and

perhaps how you develop your own segmentation for lapsed customers) will depend greatly on your product, industry segment, or customer base. If, for example, you sell shoes, a customer who didn't purchase from you once a quarter would easily be considered lapsed as shoes are a constant and ongoing need. If, however, you only sell snow boots, you wouldn't expect customers to purchase from you over the summer, so the time between purchases to define a lapsed customer and the point in the year when you would want to contact lapsed customers would be different. Essentially, a lapsed customer is a customer who has not made a repeat purchase within a time frame that you have defined as the time between which active customers typically make purchases.

Inactive or Abandoned Customers or Users: The Sixth Phase of the Customer Life Cycle

Of course, some lapsed customers may eventually turn into inactive or abandoned customers who no longer purchase or interact with your company. Some of these inactive customers will have reasons for no longer having a relationship with your company that you cannot control, such as a bad experience with customer service or a change in their financial situation. However, many inactive customers may simply have forgotten about you, been lured away by competition, or simply need an incentive to re-purchase for you. Customers in this phase of the customer life cycle should be divided into two groups – customers who should not be communicated with at all any more and customers that you hope to win back via a customer communication or marketing campaign.

Of course, within this customer life cycle, different customers will have different values (some will spend more and be worth more to acquire, retain or win-back). However, no matter how big or small the value of the customer, their life cycle and relationship with your company, product, or brand will most likely follow the cycle or path outlined above. Fortunately, if you know the likely life cycle or pattern of a customer, you can make changes to your customer communications or marketing strategy to try to optimize the length of time and the value that a customer brings to your business.

Next Up: *What are some specific email tactics to use with the challenging process of converting leads or prospective customers into active customers?*

SECTION 3.2
Acquiring New Customers and Email Marketing

In This Section: As previously discussed, one of the most challenging, if not the most challenging, portions of the customer life cycle is the process of acquiring new customers. Customers who have not yet developed a relationship with your brand, product, or business need to be convinced not only that they need to purchase or register for your offering but also that they can trust you with their money, personal information and expectations. How can you use email marketing to help with converting leads and prospective customers into active and paying customers? Here are the most common (and successful) techniques for doing so.

Provide Leads and Potential Customers with Valuable Content Free of Charge via an Email Newsletter or Auto Responder Series

Many times, potential customers or leads may not be ready to make a purchase, but they will have an interest in information that you can provide that is relevant to their lives and related to your field of expertise. For example, if you sell farm equipment, potential customers may not have an immediate need or comfort level purchasing a tractor from you. However, those potential customers or leads may have a significant interest in valuable content that is related to farming, such as weather predictions, crop prices, and updates on legislation about agriculture.

A common technique for using email marketing to convert prospects or leads into active or paying customers is to offer a free newsletter or auto responder series that provides valuable information along with promotion of your product in the body of the newsletter or auto responders. To get prospective customers or leads to sign up for this email product, you can offer a sign-up directly on your website pay for advertising on AdWords or other online media sites in order to directly solicit prospective customers or leads to sign-up for your email list, or purchase or rent an email list. Again, if you choose to purchase or rent an email list, please be diligent about ensuring the source of your list is legitimate.

If you develop your lead or prospective customer list by including a sign-up on your website (or by collecting emails at a physical place of business), then there is no cost associated with the emails you collected and any customers that you convert to active customers will be pure profit. However, if you build your email list by buying advertising or by renting or buying email names, then you'll need to figure out how much you can afford to spend per email sign-up to break even on your conversions. We'll cover how to build an email list in greater detail later in this book. For now, just be aware that offering free information to users via an email product in order to build a relationship that will hopefully translate into sales can come with costs involved.

The key to successfully using an information-based newsletter or auto responder series to convert customers involves two elements:

- The information you provide must be useful, engaging and valuable to your subscribers
- You must integrate product promotions into your emails in a way that will convert without being obtrusive to the subscribers

The first point is, in fact, the more important point. The only way to convert leads or prospective customers to active customer via an information-based email program is to ensure that subscribers continue to open your email and then begin to feel a relationship between themselves and your company or brand. If you do not provide valuable and engaging content, your subscribers will stop opening and reading your email long before they convert to paying or active customers.

Provide Leads and Potential Customers with a "Can't Resist" Offer Via Email Promotion

Just as common as converting customers through extended information email programs is the idea of converting leads or potential customers into active customers through emailing them a "can't resist" offer. You may email this offer to subscribers who have signed up for your informational email but haven't converted to customers yet, or you may email it to a rented or purchased list. When emailing a "can't resist" offer, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Don't Send Too Many Offers Too Often

While great offers are often one of the most effective ways to convert leads or potential clients to active or paying customers, you can over do it. Once you become the email sender who has an offer in subscribers' inboxes every day or every other day, you will see a spike in subscribers marking you as spam or unsubscribing from your email list. This can not only be damaging to the future of your email program, it can also be damaging to your overall business reputation. Limit the number of times that you send offers via email and pay close attention to your email metrics when you do!

Do the Math of Your Offer

In today's cluttered online marketing world, you often need an explosive offer or incentive to really stand out. In many cases, this offer will need to be a loss leader, or an offer on which you actually lose money if customers act on it but make money in the long term based on customer repeat business. No matter what your offer is or how aggressive you need to be with it, make sure that you have done the math on what makes the offer successful before you send your email campaign. You need to know how many conversions you need to get and what the value of those conversions needs to be over an extended period of time before you put your offer out there in the world. Don't just send an offer to leads or prospective customers to convert them to active customers until you are sure that you can make money off of it in the longer term!

Be Careful With Your Email Wording

Emails with special offers can be particularly susceptible to ending up in the spam or junk folder because they are often filled with words that email service providers have flagged as "spam" such as "free", "discount" "special offer" and "on sale." Be careful when constructing your special offer email so that you use trigger and action words without creating an email that email service providers will think is spam. Your email can only be effective if it actually gets into your targets' inboxes.

Make Terms and Conditions Available

Most importantly, surely any offer you present will have terms and conditions applied to it. After all, you don't want potential customers to be able to buy ten products all at an eighty percent discount off! Make sure that the terms and conditions of the offer are easy for your leads and potential customers to find so that you don't experience a bad customer service backlash later.

Presenting leads and potential customers with great offers via email can often result in fantastic conversions to active or purchasing customers. However, the process isn't as simple as just sending an email with a strong offer in it. Be sure to put thought and research into developing your offer, the metrics you'll use to judge its success, and the creative for your email. A great offer can go badly if you miss a step in the process!

Customer Conversion Email Best Practices

Because converting leads or prospective customers to active or registered customers is one of the hardest parts of the marketing cycle, it's important that you optimize any of your customer conversion emails as much as possible. Here are five important best practices to keep in mind when creating customer conversion emails, whether they are information-based or offer-based.

Personalize Your Emails

Everybody responds better when you call them by their name! If possible, capture a subscriber's first name or user name when they sign up for your email list and use an auto fill feature, such as the one available with the Comm1000 email products, to present the user's name or user name in the subject line, the welcome line of the email body, or both.

Consider Sending from a Personalized Source

Because with a customer conversion email you are trying to instill trust and confidence and build a relationship that will lead to purchases, consider sending the email from a "personal" source. A special offer sent from the president of your company carries more weight than just a generic offer in an email, especially given how many offers many of us receive in our email each day.

Single Call to Action in Offer-Based Emails

If you are sending a special offer email rather than a series of information-based emails, use a single call-to-action to streamline user into purchasing rather than distracting them with other options.

Provide Company Contact Information

Leads or prospective customers aren't tied to your product or brand yet, so you want to make it easy for them to contact you with questions as well as to know that you are a legitimate business. Make sure that your company contact information is easy to find and clear in your email. And, of course, because you want to be CAN-SPAM compliant, make sure that your physical mailing address or business location is included.

Segment Your List When Possible

In many cases, you won't have much information to work with when dealing with a lead or prospective customer email list. After all, because you want to make it easy for people to give you an email address, you don't want to ask for too much information when you request the email address. However, if you are able to get any type of information from your leads or prospective users when they sign up for your email, such as gender or geographic location, try to segment your lists before you send the email to put the most targeted information possible in front of people. If you k now, for example, what the gender of your subscribers is, then you can use language and graphics that will appeal specifically to each gender.

Converting and acquiring customers is challenging, but email marketing provides a low-cost, high volume marketing channel to convert leads and potential customers into active customers. Over time, you will learn which types of information and which types of offers convert the best. The flexibility of an email marketing platform will allow you to easily change your campaigns to support those discoveries.

You may find that customer conversion email operates with one of the lower conversion rates of any of the types of emails that you use at various points in your customer's life cycle. However, you will certainly find that, compared to other forms of customer acquisition, email marketing performs with a high return-on-investment and significantly higher conversion rate than many other forms due to its ability to speak directly to customers in a personalized and segmented way as well as its ability to react to specific market conditions.

Next Up: *Where should you and what are the best ways to implement email marketing communications throughout a customer's life cycle?*

SECTION 3.3
Email Communications through the Active Customer Life Cycle

In This Section: Now you understand the customer life cycle, and we've covered in detail how to utilize email marketing techniques in order to help acquire new customers or to turn leads into active users or customers. But how do you utilize email techniques in the other parts of the customer life cycle in order to optimize customers? In this section, we'll talk about how to use email through the active customer life cycle (before you need to focus on retaining or winning-back a customer) in order to optimize their value and build brand loyalty.

What is the Active Customer Life Cycle?

The active portion of a customer's life cycle is, in short, when the customer is actively purchasing products with you or engaging with your brand or website. This could mean many things, and the time span involved could vary significantly depending on your product or service and its seasonality. Remember the example used earlier of the difference if you sell shoes versus if you sell snow boots? The easy way to think of a customer's active life cycle is "Am I worried that I have lost this customer's attention?" If the answer is "no," then that is an active customer. And if a customer is active, then your motivation with your marketing communications and email strategy should be to optimize the customer's value to you and his or her loyalty to your brand.

Using Email Marketing to Increase Customer Value

While brand and company loyalty is important, it's no secret that the primary objective of almost any customer activity is to increase the monetary value of a customer. After all, it's ultimately revenue that drives and grows a business. So at what points in the customer life cycle can you use email to increase your customer's value to you? Here are the most common points and methodologies for using email to increase your customer's value.

Post-Order Satisfaction Follow Up

One of the most overlooked but effective touch points in the customer cycle is the opportunity that exists immediately after a customer has placed an order or taken an action. If the customer has had a positive experience with your company, you want to make sure that that is what stays in his or her mind. Alternatively, if the customer has had a negative experience, you want to ensure that you discover that fact and then work to remedy it. Implementing an email program that will email customers within a week of a purchase or action can have great impact. Include in your email both a solicitation to provide feedback or the product or the customer's experience with your company. Then, of course, offer an incentive for a repeat purchase or another product that they may enjoy or be interested in. While this email also works to build brand and company loyalty, the most likely point for a customer to make a

repeat purchase is shortly after they have been satisfied by an initial purchase. Take advantage of this by being sure to offer a customer communication during that time.

Customer Surveys via Email

Similar to a post-purchase follow-up, contacting your customers with satisfaction surveys via email can ultimately serve as a way to increase monetization. The need to gain customer information and the need to boost sales can work hand-in-hand. By incentivizing customers to fill out satisfaction or informational surveys with a discount code or with special sale item if they complete the survey, you can both gain valuable customer information as well as incentivize sales.

Cross Sell and Up-Sell Emails

You might also have heard of these called "You Might Also Like…" emails. While presenting cross sells and up-sells on your website itself is a common best practice of ecommerce, you can also utilize your email (and a well-segmented database) to send cross sell and up-sell emails to your customers. If you know that a customer has purchased a great deal of a specific brand of product that you offer on your website, be sure to email them with other products by that brand manufacturer that they may like. If you know that a group of customers have all purchased a cheaper version of a type of product, email them to suggest that they might benefit from buying the upgraded model. If you know what your customers purchase and how they behave, then emailing them with related or improved products based on what they already buy during their active life cycle with you can increase their overall value both in the number of times that they purchase as well as in the dollar amount of products that they purchase.

New Product Announcements

Often, customers and clients won't return to your website or business on their own, and therefore they may miss out on new products and releases that you have available. Using email to alert customers and clients of new products and releases can increase purchase frequency and amount simply by letting them know that there are more purchasing opportunities available.

Sales and Special Offers

The most obvious way to use email during the active customer life cycle is to send your customers and clients sales and special discounts and offers. These could be standard alerts of clearance items or regular monthly sales. They could also be special offers available only for specific client segments or based on a need to generate revenue or clear products. Whether your offer is a percentage discount, a dollar discount, free shipping or a free gift with purchase, you can always increase sales in a spurt through offering clients a discount or sale.

VIP Offers

It's often said that twenty percent of your customers will account for eighty percent of your business. If this is true in your case (and it likely is), segmenting out your most valuable customers from your email database and sending them special VIP offers that are specifically designed to spur activity from high

frequency or high dollar value purchasers can not only increase your revenue, it can also reward your most valuable customers.

Birthday or Anniversary Emails

Whether the birthday or anniversary in question is the actual birthday or anniversary of the customer or client, or whether it's their birthday or anniversary of their first transaction with your company, an email on the "big day" with a discount or promo code to celebrate can spur not only sales but also customer loyalty.

Seasonal Offers and Reminders

Of course, as a sub-section of special offers and promotions, you'll want to coordinate seasonal offers based on your product or industry segment. Regardless of your product or industry, certain holidays always suggest the sending of a seasonal offer. However, your industry segment may have seasonality as well. For example, if you sell farm equipment, then you should be sending a seasonal offer as spring approaches to capture users or customers during their time of primary need.

With a little creativity, of course, you most likely can think of a number of other reasons to contact your customers during their active customer life cycle to incentivize them to either purchase more or purchase higher-value dollar products. However, all of the above listed techniques have been proven in numerous case studies to increase sales and revenue via email marketing.

Best Practices for Revenue Generating Email Marketing During the Active Customer Life Cycle

Best practices for emails designed to increase sales or generate revenue are incredibly similar to those used to acquire new customers. However, here are five important ones to keep in mind.

Make the Call-to-Action Clear: Ultimately, you want clients to do one thing when they get a sale or revenue generating email, and that's make a purchase. Make the call-to-action to buy or purchase clear in a text link (not an image link) and don't clutter the email with too much information or other options for the customer to get distracted by.

Segment, Segment, Segment: The more you can put the exact right product in front of the exact right customer, the more you will convert sales. Avoid, when possible, sending one blast email to your entire database. Instead, split the database into segments and give them the most topical or useful information and products for them.

Don't Overdo the Images: While it's true that images sell products, remember that many email clients do not download your images and therefore your subscribers may not see the images that you're hoping will sell the product. Make sure that you include compelling copy that will make them want to either click through to your landing page or alternatively download the pictures in the email.

Be Careful of Spam Words: Much like with customer acquisition emails, sales and revenue generating emails during the active customer life cycle can run the risk of using too many words like "free" and "on sale." Be careful that you don't load your email up so much that it ends up in a spam or junk folder.

Make Unsubscribing Easy: Also not unlike customer acquisition emails, sales and revenue generating emails during the active customer life cycle can run the risk of being marked as "spam" by users if the users feel that you are sending them too many offers, too frequently. In addition to monitoring your email metrics and calendar, make the unsubscribe link easy to find to avoid being marked as spam rather than simply unsubscribed from.

Using Email Marketing to Increase Brand Value and Customer Loyalty

In Section 2 of this book, we discussed what a brand building or customer loyalty email is and the best practices surrounding sending them. However, as a brief overview, the following are all techniques for using email communications to increase customer loyalty or brand awareness.

Informational Newsletters

Newsletters are, obviously, the most common form of brand building and customer loyalty email. While newsletters can result in sales spikes or user activity, their primary purpose is to build a relationship between an active customer and a brand or company.

Thank You Emails

You may be surprised how far simply sending a customer a standardized "thank you" email after a purchase or transaction can go in making that customer feel connected to your brand or company!

Customer Surveys

Though customer surveys can work hand in hand with offers and promotions to meet both of your needs during the active customer life cycle, simply sending customers surveys allows them to feel as though their voice is being heard in your organization. Using email as a two-way street to make customers feel as though you are in a conversation with them makes them feel invested in your brand or company.

Birthday and Anniversary Wishes without Offers

With or without the offer, recognizing a customer on a special or important day – again whether that is an actual birthday or anniversary or the customer's birthday or anniversary with your company – makes a customer feel like a person instead of an order number.

Event and Informational Alerts

Similar to how airlines send alerts about flight deals and notifications, emails that remind customers of upcoming events or other pieces of information in short email form can also work to keep your brand front-and-center in a customer or client's mind.

We've covered best practices for brand building and loyalty emails in section two of this book! Feel free to flip back there, or to Appendix A, Best Practices Summarized, for a refresher!

Actively emailing your clients or customers while they are engaged with your brand, product or company has a two-fold benefit and may be the most important segment of email marketing. It extends the customer's life cycle with you by extending their feeling of relationship with you. It also drives revenue and sales through offers and incentives. When planning your email marketing program, make sure to put great thought into email techniques during the active customer life cycle.

Next Up: *How to use email marketing to retain and win-back lapsed and abandoned customers.*

SECTION 3.4
Retaining and Winning Back Customers

In This Section: One of the most important marketing metrics that you'll ever need to memorize and learn is that it is cheaper to keep or win-back a customer than it is to acquire a new customer. This is true for several reasons.

Firstly, with an existing customer, even if he or she is lapsed or abandoned, you already have customer information. With a new customer, you need to go through the process of finding and collecting information such as a name, phone number or email address.

The second reason that retaining or winning-back a customer is more cost-effective than acquiring a new customer is that an old or abandoned customer will already have a relationship and a trust level with your brand, company or product. That means that convincing them to take an action or make a purchase will involve less work on your end.

However, when considering how to use email marketing to retain or win-back customers, there are several steps that you should follow. In this section, we'll describe how to best use email marketing to retain and win-back customers.

Step One: Identify What Makes a Customer a Retention or Win-Back Priority

This metric could vary wildly with your business and industry segment. For example, if you sell football-related merchandise, it may not mean anything if a customer doesn't make a purchase from you between March and June. However, in June you'll want to start "retaining" your customer by reminding them that you're still the place to go in order to find great quality and deals on football gear. If you sell merchandise that is valuable all year long, however, you may be concerned if you haven't had a customer purchase or interact with you in a month or more.

The first step that you will need to take is to map out the seasonality of your business as well as look at your existing customer metrics and determine what a normal time between purchases is for a customer. You'll also want to look at your existing customer metrics and determine when a customer becomes "inactive" or "abandoned" to you. Is it if they haven't purchased for three months, or is it if they haven't purchased for a year?

Unfortunately, there is no "cut and paste" answer to what makes a customer a customer that has lapsed, left you, or is at risk of leaving you. You'll need to really dig into your customer data and ask others in

your industry to determine what the timing on your customer cycles should be. Once you do, however, you'll have the information that you need in order to really dig into step two!

Step Two: Try to Identify the Tipping Point Where a Customer is At Risk of Abandonment

While winning back customers is much more economical than acquiring new customers, the best move is to retain customers before they have abandoned you. Looking at your customer data can help you to do this. If you determine that a customer who has not purchased for five months or more is likely to never purchase again, then your priority should be to win-back customers who haven't purchased in three-to-five months.

Again, there's no simple math here. However, your customer data and metrics, as well as information from others in your industry, can tell you a lot about where your win-back and retention priorities should be.

Step Three: Identify Customers You Will Not Be Able to Win-Back or Retain

With any win-back or retention email campaign, you risk some spam complaints and unsubscribe requests from customers who have simply determined that they want to end their relationship with your brand or company. To minimize this impact, you may want to consider cleaning your email database by flagging customers or having your customer service team flag customers that have a negative relationship with your company or brand. Customers who have been dissatisfied with a purchase, have sent negative complaints, and, of course, have asked to be removed from your mailing list. While winning-back or retaining customers is important, it's often not worth damaging your ability to effectively send email by getting a high number of unopened emails, spam complaints or unsubscribe requests.

Step Four: Determine Messaging and Offers

Obviously, however, it doesn't matter how clean your email list is or how smart your data and metrics are if you don't put the right offer in front of lapsed or abandoned clients. You may have some in-house data that helps you to determine what the best offer to win-back or retain your customers is, but the best bet is to test a variety of offers, messages, and products. Collect data as you go along until you have an in-house best practices list for sending retention and win-back email campaigns.

The Truth: Using Email to Retain and Win-Back Customers Requires Some Trial and Error

While all marketing is a process of testing and then determining best practices, retention and win-back campaigns vary the most based on industry and even the individual practices of your company. To develop a successful win-back and retention program for your email marketing platform, you'll need to evaluate your in-house data, available industry data, and even potentially customer service data. Then you'll need to map out a plan and test a variety of offers, messages, and techniques to incentivize customers to continue, resume, or come back to purchasing with you.

Having a robust win-back and retention segment to your email marketing strategy is critically important to your company's ongoing customer health and revenue. However, there isn't a convenient "This is the best offer to send at the best time!" strategy to use. You'll need to take the time to consider your customers' behaviors and preferences. However, all of the work will be worth it in the end when you increase your lifetime customer value and therefore your overall revenue!

Next Up: How can you use email to get to know your customers better and craft better marketing strategies?

SECTION 3.5
Getting to Know Your Customers through Email

In This Section: At the base of everything, the best way to extend your customers' life cycles and purchasing patterns with your brand, company, or product is to understand your customers and what they want and will respond to. In the final section of this book, we'll talk about how to track and test your email campaigns to optimize them. However, to get you started thinking about these things, here are ways that you can use all of the email methodologies available during the entire customer life cycle to get to know your customers. In this section, we'll talk about how to use email data in order to improve all of your marketing strategies.

What Subject Lines Will Get Your Emails Opened?

One of the greatest indicators of what your clients or customers care about will be what emails they open and which ones they do not. It's the subject line of the email that drives those opens (or lack of opens). Do your customers *only* open emails when a discount is mentioned in the subject line? Then you may be safe sending more deals and discounts without alienating them. Do your customers open more frequently when you populate the subject line with their first name or user name? Then you should make your marketing messages sound more personalized. Do they open emails about topical information, or do they like more generalized information? Do they have a specific celebrity, team or other figurehead that causes them to open? You can learn a great deal about what interests your customers or clients by tracking which emails they open. That data can give you great insight into what will cause them to not only open more email but also marketing messages will convert them more consistently from all marketing channels.

What Links Do Your Clients or Customers Click?

Similar to learning what your customers like by seeing which subject lines they open, you can also learn a great deal about your customers by tracking what links they click within your emails, particularly within informational newsletters. Most email marketing platforms, including Comm100, will provide comprehensive reports not only on how many clicks your email generated, but also on which links within the email were clicked. Say, for example, that you sell pet supplies and you have an email newsletter with an article on cats, an article on dogs, and an article on fish. If fifty percent of all of the links clicked in that email were on the article about cats, then it is safe to assume that your customers have a greater interest in specials on cat products and that you should feature more cat products and focus more on marketing cat products.

What Emails Cause the Most Unsubscribe Requests or Spam Complaints?

Much like it's important to understand what content and offers will engage your customers and which you should promote, it's important to understand what will alienate your customers or turn them off. In an email, there are several ways to tell this. The first is just to track the opposite of what we've described above. What subject lines performed poorly in terms of encouraging people to open emails? And what content or offers within an email did not incite people to click links? However, one of the most telling signs of what your customers *don't* want to hear from you will be paying attention to what emails generated a larger than average number of spam complaints or unsubscribe requests.

Because a spam complaint or an unsubscribe request is an action that a customer or client needs to proactively take, it means that there was something within the content of your email that not only didn't appeal to the customer, it actively angered or upset them. When you see a spike in email unsubscribe requests or spam complaints, you should make an internal note to stay away from similar messaging or offers in the future.

Of course, there are a vast number of email components that you can test to optimize your email, which will discuss later. However, paying attention to the relationship between the content of your email and your email's open rate, click-through rate, click-through destinations and spam or unsubscribe requests can give you useful, big picture information about what your customers do, and don't, want to hear about from you. That, in turn, can give you valuable marketing information to use in all of the avenues and channels of your marketing plan.

Section Summary

In this section, you learned how to utilize various email techniques throughout the customer's life cycle in order to optimize the customer's life time value and extend their relationship with your brand, company, product, or service. Key points included:

- Before customers commit to you, they are "prospective customers" or "leads".
- The best way to email to prospective customers or leads is to provide them with appealing offers or information that will truly be useful to them
- When customers begin to interact with your website or purchase from you, they become "active customers"
- The most effective way to use email with active customers is to use it to encourage repeat purchases or to build brand loyalty or a relationship between the customer and your company
- You can increase a customer's life time value by sending targeted, segmented offers and product emails
- You can increase a customer's brand loyalty by sending useful information or personalized emails
- When a customer ceases to interact with or purchase from you, he or she becomes a lapsed or abandoned customer
- Lapsed or abandoned customers are best retained or won back using enticing offers
- You can use email metrics to learn a great deal about your customers throughout their life cycle which can then be applied to crafting your entire marketing strategy

In the Next Section…
Continue reading on to Section Four. Now that you understand the elements you'll need to create an email marketing plan, you'll need to figure out what to look for in an email marketing platform to meet your needs.

SECTION 4: Setting Up Your Email Marketing Platform

In This Section: Now that you've either learned about or refreshed your memory about the customer lifecycle, customer communications best practices, and the basics of email marketing, you should have an idea in your head about what your email marketing program will look like and include. However, before you can dive into designing templates, writing copy, and figuring out subject lines and testing times, you'll need to figure out the mechanics of sending email. How do you send email? Is there a program that you should buy or should you use internal resources? If you are going to outsource your email sending program, what should you be looking for in an email marketing solution? In this section, we'll cover how to determine the best mechanics and technical solution for sending mass email.

Section 4.1
Sending Email Internally vs. Using an Outsourced Email Provider
Section 4.2
What Should Your Email Marketing Platform Do?
Section 4.3
Choosing Your Email Marketing Platform Priorities
Section 4.4
Testing Your Email Marketing Platform
Section Summary

SECTION 4.1
Sending Email Internally vs. Using an Outsourced Email Provider

In This Section: Despite the significant number of email marketing programs available for bulk, mass, or large send email sending, it's still common for companies to consider sending large email sends via internal resources. In some cases, this can be as dated as using the company's Exchange server to send emails to large groups of people. In other cases, companies will often create their own "home grown" email sending solutions. Why would companies do this, what are the drawbacks versus the benefits, and what's the right solution for you? In this section, we'll explore the various pros and cons of building your own in-house email sending system versus using an outsourced provider, such as the free, hosted email marketing services offered by Comm100.

Common Reasons for Building an In-House Email Sending Solution

As with any business decision, it's common that companies will have outlined a variety of reasons why sending mass email from an internally developed system is the best solution for them. Common reasons for establishing an in-house email sending solution include:

Cost and Budget Concerns: Budget, as is the case with any new marketing or business program, is certainly always a factor in determining if in-house or out-sourced resources are best used. Whether setting up an internal email sending platform or partnering with an outsourced platform, some degree of human resources, time, and even line item budgets will be required. The options usually factored against each other will be: the overhead cost of using internal technological and human resources to build and develop an in-house system, the cost of licensing or subscribing to an out-sourced email sending solution, or the cost of human resources and time to train employees on using a free, outsourced email sending solution such as Comm100. Each business will have to evaluate these needs separately and determine the most cost-effective solution for their company.

Data Privacy Concerns: Your email list is not only a huge asset to your company; it's also a way in which your customers have placed their trust in you. For that reason, many companies hesitate to partner with an outsourced email provider solution for fear of compromising their or their customers' data. While this is certainly a concern that should be evaluated in any plan to implement a mass email sending solution, data can be just as insecure on an internal server as it can be at an outsourced solution. Hackers do not differentiate! However, companies should always do substantial research to ensure that they understand the privacy policies and security measures that outsourced providers practice and implement for data privacy and security. Such as is the case with Comm100, outsourced email service providers should be Trustee certified.

Ability to Easily Integrate with Existing In-House Data: Another common concern, and often one of the most valid ones, is the ability to easily integrate your email sending solution with your in-house data. In truth, if you segment your list frequently and by narrow margins, it may be worth your time to build your own in-house email system that can query lists directly from your user database based on parameters that you determine rather than to have to constantly query and upload new list segments to an outsourced provider. However, as with anything, this will come with a certain cost associated with not only development but ongoing maintenance. You should take the time to evaluate whether your data is so specific and frequently altered that re-uploading lists to an outsourced provider will actually be a significant time and human resources drain before making a final decision.

Control and Flexibility: Finally, companies often shy away from using an outsourced email sending provider because they want the control and flexibility to build and change features within their email sending program based on their unique business needs. Again, on a case-by-case basis, this may make sense. However, most email sending solutions currently available offer a comprehensive feature set that can meet almost any company's email marketing and sending needs. Before assuming that an outsourced solution can't give you the control and flexibility that you need, be sure to take the time to list all of the features that you could imagine needing, both now and in the future. Then survey whether existing outsourced email marketing platforms support those needs. Chances are that you may discover that what you think you need is not as specialized and unique as you thought!

Building an in-house email marketing solution is a labor and resource intensive activity, and if you are not highly versed in the ins and outs of email marketing and sending practices, you may not find that an in-house email sending platform gives you the best possible results. However, in certain unique business cases, a proprietary system may in fact be the best solution. Be sure to take ample time documenting the pros of an in-house email solution versus the pros of an outsourced email solution (which we will discuss next!)

Common Reasons for Using an Outsourced Email Sending Solution

While the common reasons for building a proprietary in-house email sending solution include budget, data security, data integration, and flexibility/control, the reasons for selecting an out-sourced solution for your email sending needs can be just as compelling. Some of the most common ones include:

Budget: It's always about budget! In some cases, the cost associated with building an in-house email marketing platform may exceed those of either licensing, subscribing to, or choosing a free outsourced solution. As mentioned above, this will be different for every business. You will need to evaluate the cost and resources for each solution internally.

Reduction of Use of Company Resources: In addition to the resources that would be required to build an in-house system, managing your email sending program in-house can tie up valuable company resources. The most common resource drain can be on your servers and bandwidth while your mass

emails are being sent. In some cases, company employees may not be able to send or receive emails at all while your mass send is spooling. Managing your email sending program in-house means that you will need to employ graphic designers and html coders to create your email templates. While almost all outsourced email sending solutions offer you the choice to use your own, custom-designed templates, many also offer you pre-designed templates that are already optimized for inbox deliverability and display. Comm100 offers a wide variety of industry-segment specific templates that you can choose to work with if you do not want to design your own.

Control of Legal Requirements: Many of the reasons for logically choosing an outsourced email sending solution simply have to do with the learning curve. If you are not intimately familiar with the practice of email marketing, choosing an outsourced provider can ensure that you don't miss out on any key best practices. One of the most important areas of email marketing best practices that you want to be sure that you have covered is being complaint with CAN-SPAM as well as general privacy and information laws. By choosing an outsourced provider, you can ensure that your email templates and sending solution meet all legal requirements – even the ones that you may not know about.

Deliverability and Control of Sender Reputation: A second area of email marketing best practices that is often enhanced by using an outsourced sending solution is deliverability and control of your sender reputation (the degree to which internet service providers and email service providers consider you a trusted sender of email). An outsourced email marketing platform will have built in tools to help control your spam complaints, inbox deliverability and inbox performance. Most importantly, it will be the outsourced email provider who has to do the work to remain a trusted sending source with a high sender reputation, thus removing that responsibility for your marketing team.

Automatic List Maintenance: Finally, one of the most important parts of successful email marketing is maintaining the health of your email list. This involves removing unsubscribed addresses, removing non-active addresses, removing bounced addresses and generally pruning and cleaning the list regularly. Most outsourced email marketing and sending solutions, including Comm100, do portions of this automatically and make other portions of this activity as simple as one click. Managing list maintenance in-house can be time consuming and often leads to overlooked steps. Using an outsourced provider means a streamlined, proven list-cleaning system.

In summary, in addition to budget, many of the reasons for choosing an outsourced email marketing and email sending solution revolve primarily around the ability to leverage the knowledge, resources and best-practices of an outsourced solution rather than tying up in-house resources in an area that may not be the expertise area of any one individual in your company.

So Which Solution is Right for Your Company?
Every business has its own needs. For you, the expenditure of resources and maintenance to build an in-house system may make sense, particularly if you have an email marketing expert on staff. For many, however, an outsourced solution can take worry, stress, and work off of their hands. Make a list of the

issues that concern you most with an email marketing platform and then adequately research those needs. In the end, your business decision needs to be based on the criteria that are most important to you. However, be sure to make an informed decision. The capabilities and security of an outsourced email marketing platform such as Comm100 may surprise you!

Next Up: *What should an email marketing platform be able to do for you? A list of features to make sure to check for.*

SECTION 4.2
What Should Your Email Marketing Platform Do?

In This Section: Whether you've already got an understanding of the technical aspects of email marketing or whether you're just starting to learn the ins-and-outs of email marketing, having a checklist of what you should expect your email marketing platform to do, and what some bonus features of a good email marketing platform would be, is a necessary starting point for selecting or developing your email sending platform. Every marketing and email newsletter platform that you consider should offer features in four areas: sending capability, email design and creation, list management, and reporting and tracking. In this section, we'll explain each area and the features that should be supported in detail.

Required Sending Capability Features of an Email Marketing Platform

At base, your email platform needs to be able to send email! However, when you're talking about sending email to a large group of people, the solution may not be as simple as hitting a send button (even if it appears that way from your user-interface end). Here is a list of the basic functionalities that any email marketing or newsletter platform should offer you.

1. **Ability to Deliver Reliably to Users' Inboxes**

This is perhaps the most important part of selecting your email marketing and newsletter platform provider. Your email program will only be as effective as your ability to get your emails into your subscribers' inboxes. You want to thoroughly research your potential platform candidates to make sure that they maintain a high sender reputation with the various internet service providers (ISPs). If you are considering building an in-house email marketing platform, you should be sure that you understand how to maintain a high sender reputation yourself.

2. **Ability to Pre-schedule an Email Send or Instantly Send**

You will want the flexibility to either pre-schedule an email send based on a date and time that you feel is the best time to send or to send instantly for time-sensitive situations. Either way, the best email sending solution for you will allow you to choose from pre-scheduled sends or instant sends.

3. **Ability to Define Which Email List to Send an Email or Newsletter To**

You won't always want to send your email or newsletter to your entire email marketing list. The best email marketing or newsletter platforms will allow you to determine which portion of your database or pre-defined list you are sending to.

4. **Ability to Test Send an Email Prior To Mass Sending**

Finally, you'll absolutely want the ability to send the email you are about to send to your larger list to a smaller, internal seed list before you send it to the entire email list. This allows you to check inbox deliverability, display, and even do a final proof before you send your masterpiece to the entire world!

Sending email is the most basic part of email marketing. The three features above are critically important to your success, so ensure that your email marketing platform supports them!

Email Design and Creation Capability Features of an Email Marketing Platform

Designing and creating your email to not only look good and to be functional but also to have great inbox deliverability and be CAN-SPAM compliant can be a challenge. However, a good email marketing platform will offer you features that make email template and individual email creation not only easy but also effective and in-line with privacy and ISP regulations. Here's what you should be looking for in an email sending platform.

1. Ability to Modify "From" and "Sender" Information

There are some very basic things that any email sending platform should be able to do, and among them are providing you with the ability to modify both the "From" field (the field that shows your subscribers who the email is from) as well as the email address that you are sending from.

2. Ability to Modify Subject Line

Another extremely basic but absolutely required feature is the ability to modify the subject line of your email. You, obviously, want to have control over that!

3. Ability to Instantly Add Unsubscribe Link

Not only is it required by CAN-SPAM that you provide an easy way for users to unsubscribe from your email, but having an easy-to-use and easy-to-spot unsubscribe link in your emails reduces your overall spam complaints. Not only, as a function of list management which we'll discuss shortly, does your email provider need to be able to effectively remove people from the list, but it should also be able to instantly and regularly insert an unsubscribe link into your email. We'll discuss the best location for this later on in this book when discussing email template design.

4. Ability to Regularly Provide Your Physical Mailing Address in the Email

Your email sending solution should instantly and persistently place your physical mailing address in the footer of the email. You don't want to be responsible for having to remember to manually do it over and over again and potentially forget once. After all, your physical mailing address is a CAN-SPAM requirement.

5. Ability to Serve HTML Webpage Version of Your Email

Not all subscribers will be able to see your email in their inbox no matter how well the email is put together. Sometimes, an email service provider or software just garbles and email and there's nothing you can do about it. When that happens, you'll want to be sure that your email sending program both

provides and serves an html webpage version of your email and offers users the ability to click through to that webpage if they can't see the actual email.

6. Ability to Send Both Text and HTML Version of Your Email

Not all email clients support html email, and this is particularly true as more and more people read their email on their mobile devices. In a best case scenario, your email sending platform will send both an html and text version that is automatically created and will identify which email addresses should receive which. At a minimum, however, you want the ability to be able to send a text-based or html-based email.

7. Ability to Edit an Email in Either HTML or Wiziwig Format

This may vary depending on your in-house staff and skill set. However, ideally you'll have the flexibility to either edit your emails in pure html code for ultimate control or via a Wiziwig. A Wiziwig is essentially an "editor" in which you can do common editing tasks such as inserting images, bolding text, adding links, and defining styles without having to know html code. A solid, robust email marketing platform should give you both options as, occasionally, you may want to make a change to an email template that can only be done via html.

8. Ability to Choose Between Premade Templates, Upload Your Own Template, or Modify Premade Templates

Again, this will vary based on your in-house staff and skill set. However, you may want an email marketing platform that provides you with premade templates that you can simply change the images and text on so that you do not need to find html coders and designers to create templates. Alternatively, you may want to be able to simply upload your own, entirely branded template. Finally, you may want to take a pre-existing template and modify the code on it. Either way, a solid and robust email marketing platform solution will offer you the ability to do any of the above.

9. Ability to Load Images and Assign Alt Text behind Images

While you may not want to use too many images in your email (we'll discuss the use of images when discussing email template design later in this book), your email marketing and newsletter platform must not only allow you the ability to upload and use images either in a supported file format or as an image url, but it's essential that you be able to apply "Alt" and "Title" text behind the images for times when your subscribers' email service providers don't' load images.

10. Ability to Format Text and Links

While it may seem like an obvious statement, don't overlook the fact that you'll want to ensure that your email marketing and newsletter platform supports the ability for you to format text and links, in font, size, color, and style.

There are some other email creation features that you may want to check for and which may be important to you. We've covered these later on under the final portion of this chapter. However, in order to send effective emails, you'll absolutely want to have the above listed components.

List Management Capability Features of an Email Marketing Platform

The health of your email and contact database is at the foreground of the success of your email program. A bad, un-pruned database can lead to a decline in email metrics as well as potential deliverability issues and even legal issues if you do not honor CAN-SPAM and privacy laws. Your email sending solution should, without fail, offer the following capabilities.

1. Ability to Log and Remove Unsubscribed Members from Individual Lists or All Emails

Absolutely the most important thing that your email marketing and newsletter platform must be able to do from an email list management perspective is effectively and accurately remove unsubscribed members from either the individual list that they unsubscribed from or from all future mailings. Whether you allow users to choose a list to unsubscribe from or unsubscribe them from all future emails of any kind should be based on your individual business needs.

2. Ability to Prune Email Addresses from List After a Number of Undeliverable Sends

When you repeatedly send email to an email address that is ultimately undeliverable, it can impact your sender reputation. Therefore, an effective email marketing platform will automatically prune email addresses from your active list after a number of undeliverable sends. Typically, that number is set between three and five undeliverable sends to account for situations where a user may be away from his or her email for a period of time and experience a full inbox that creates undeliverable sends.

3. Ability to Allow You to Select Either a Single or Double Opt In for New Subscribers

When we discuss building your email list, we'll discuss the pros and cons of a single-opt in subscription or a double-opt in subscription. A single-opt in means that once a user signs up for your email, he or she immediately begins receiving email. A double-opt in means that once a user signs up for your email he or she will need to hit a confirmation link in an email sent to his or her email box before receiving any future email. While the right solution for subscription is based on your own business needs, a strong and robust email marketing provider will offer you both options.

4. Ability to Allow You to Create a Subscription Form with Confirmation Email

Obviously, you want to be able to create a simple email sign-up field on your website, and an email sending platform provider should not only be able to provide that feature but should make it easy. Similarly, a standard part of the program should be the generation of an automatic welcome email after signing up.

5. Ability to Collect Data Other Than Email Address

Ideally, you'd like to be able to collect some data with your email subscriptions beyond email address, particularly a first name or a user name on your site so that you can personalize email sends. What data you collect should be based on your own business needs. However, you'll want to ensure that your email sending partner supports the ability to collect additional fields of data and relate them to the email address.

6. Ability to Allow You to Upload Existing Email Contacts

Chances are that you have an existing email database that you will want to continue to work with, so it's important that you find an email sending solution that allows you to upload those clients to your contact list. However, almost any email sending solution will have limitations on contact uploads to prevent against the upload of spam addresses. Be sure to do your research about what your provider will or will not allow.

7. Ability to Segment Email Sending Lists and Create Different Lists

As you grow your email marketing program, you'll have fewer and fewer instances where you want to send an email to your entire list and far more instances where you want to send to a smaller sub-list or segment of your list. Make sure that your email marketing and newsletter provider supports having, creating and keeping track of multiple email lists.

8. Ability to Allow You to Search and Query Your Contact Database

Finally, you want to be able to search your user database and not only take actions but also see data. You'll want to be able to find a user by email, other data, sign-up date, or more and be able to unsubscribe or remove them manually or see data about their email engagement activity. Be sure that your email sending partner provides you with full visibility, access and ability to search of your contacts list.

Your email list is an asset to your company, as is the ability to effectively send to it. Don't overlook important list management features to focus on email design features. Maintaining the health of your list is one of the most critical parts of email marketing.

Reporting and Tracking Capability Features of an Email Marketing Platform

You can't improve your email marketing and newsletter program if you don't know what's working and what's not! Tracking and reporting is a key element of all marketing and particularly of email marketing. Here are the essential reporting and tracking components you should expect from an email marketing or newsletter sending platform.

Open Rate

You obviously want to know how many people have opened your emails – that's one of the most defining success metrics of email marketing. While open rate data is not one hundred percent accurate even in the best case scenario due to the pixel required to track it, trend analysis of open rates is hugely important and should be able to be reported on by an individual email send. Ideally, that open rate can then be broken down by ISP or email client.

Click-Through Rate

Additionally, you want to know how many people then clicked through your email to your landing page or website. There are two different ways to track click-through. One way counts only if an individual clicked

a link or not, and the other way combines all clicks, even if some of them were from the same user. Be aware of which way your email tracking works and whether that method suits your needs.

Links Clicked

In addition to knowing how many people clicked through your email, you ultimately want to know which links they clicked. Did one type of promo create a better response than a similar one? Did they click graphics more than text links, or vice versa? Find an email marketing or newsletter platform that tracks which links were clicked specifically and reports back on it.

Inbox Deliverability

How many of your emails actually made it into your subscribers' inboxes versus went into the spam or junk folder, or just didn't get delivered at all? You want to know how many of your emails were delivered, and you certainly would prefer to know, when possible, if they went to junk or to the inbox. Check the robustness of deliverability reporting when evaluating an email service platform.

Spam Complaints and Unsubscribe Requests

Both by an individual email send as well as by trend analysis, you want to know how many spam complaints an individual email or your program as a whole are generating. Similarly, you want to know the same data for unsubscribe requests. This data can help you identify email marketing content and tactics that your users don't' respond to and can therefore help you improve your overall email marketing program.

List Growth and Attrition over Time

As a trend, you want to see your email list's health over time. This includes whether the size of your list grew or shrunk and how engaged it was with your email products.

Reporting and tracking is what can take your email marketing or newsletter from good to great. Be sure that your partner supports basic and required tracking features.

Additional Desirable Capability Features of an Email Marketing Platform

While not absolutely essential in all programs, the following features are becoming increasingly common and desired and should be considered when determining the right email marketing and newsletter sending solution.

Mobile Capability

Both the ability to manage your email sending from a mobile device as well as email templates that have been optimized for viewing on mobile devices are features that you should consider the importance of when selecting an email marketing solutions.

Social Media Integration

The ability to post or share an email on Twitter or Facebook as well as easy options for promoting subscription to your email marketing list on social media channels is not only increasingly popular, it's increasingly important.

Advanced List Segmentation
The more data you collect from your subscribers, the more you will want to ultra-segment your email list. Being able to do this within your email sending platform rather than doing it manually and uploading it may, depending on your business needs, be a priority feature.

User Choice of HTML or Text Email
The ability to allow a user at the time that he or she signs up to determine if he or she wants to receive email in text or html form can ultimately increase user engagement with your email product.

Ability to Audit Email Content for Potential Spam Issues
Many email marketing and newsletter sending platforms can automatically audit your email for potential words or design issues that may cause you to end up in the spam or junk folder and provide suggestions to improve your deliverability chances. If you are concerned about your ability to write white list, inbox-style email, you may want to search for this feature.

Auto Responder Capability
As auto responders grow in popularity, the ability to support this style of email marketing is obviously increasing as well. Not all email sending platforms have implemented auto responder functionality yet, however. If auto responders are part of your email plan, be sure that your provider supports them.

Ability to Personalize Emails
Email marketing and newsletters perform best when you can insert a user name or first name into the subject line or email body. Check to see if your email marketing platform supports this type of dynamic content generation in your emails.

Forwarded Email Statistics
It's often useful to see how many of your emails were forwarded in order to determine your most popular content. Be sure to check and see if this is an included statistic in your reporting and tracking features if this data is important to you.

There may be other email features that you're looking for as well. Your company's business needs and the goals of your email marketing platform will ultimately determine which features are most important to you and which you can live without. However, the features covered above are all highly important, and you may regret it later if you don't focus on a provider that can handle the majority of them.

Next Up: What is the best process for determining what, specifically, you should prioritize in selecting an email marketing and newsletter sending platform?

SECTION 4.3
Choosing Your Email Marketing Platform Priorities

In This Section: It's entirely possible that much of this chapter of this book has been overwhelming to you! If you're not already at least somewhat familiar with the technical elements of email marketing and email newsletters, than absorbing all of this information can leave your head spinning. After all, you may have thought that you were simply going to have to determine what your email template should look like and what content you should put into it.

The good news is that a great outsource provider for your email marketing and newsletter needs can solve many of these problems for you and leave you free to think about only what content would be most compelling to your users. Armed with the information in this book, you can select a great email sending solution (or use these guidelines to build your own, if that's what's best for your unique business needs) and then get a full understanding of how to design, create content and test to optimize your email program. However, it may be that you're finding the process of even selecting an outsourced email provider daunting. In that case, we've provided this chapter, which is a brief outline on a great process for selecting an email sending solution for your company or business.

Step One: Set a Budget and an Estimated Revenue Goal from Your Program

Everything you do, even if your email program is entirely designed to simply improve brand loyalty, starts and ends with a budget. The very first thing that you need to determine is how much you are willing to spend on your email marketing platform. Don't forget when doing this to also include the cost of employee hours to develop, learn, or create emails and your email sending platform. If your email program is designed to generate revenue, also set key performance indicators (KPI's) to determine what a successful email program should deliver in terms of revenue generation. Then, you can easily include or eliminate email sending platforms based on their costs, which can range from entirely free, such as Comm100, to a high monthly licensing or subscription fee. Be sure when researching services that require payment that you also find out if you will be locked into a long-term contract or if you can exit at any time.

You'll also want to make sure that you've paid attention to any price increases that some services may charge you as your list size increases or the frequency with which you send email increases.

Now, you have a starting point, which is a list of email sending platforms that fall within your budget. That narrows the process immediately.

Step Two: Make a List of Email Programs that You and Your Staff Would Like to Emulate

As with many marketing programs, there's no need to entirely re-invent the wheel when it comes to email marketing or newsletters. Have you and your staff collect emails from brands, websites, or services that you and they subscribe to. You'll want to use these later on when determining how to design your email program as well as some of the subject lines and sending times, but for now you'll simply want to make a list of features that appear in the email. Do you love the way the email lays out? Are there great social sharing features in the email? Make a list of what you've seen other companies do that you would like for your company to emulate.

Step Three: Make a List of "Wish-List" Features and Prioritize
Now, using the list that you derived from your competitor research, the list of must-have features that have been provided in the book, and any additional features that you've been dreaming of, make a final list of everything that your ideal email sending platform would be able to support. That list is going to be very large, and most likely will contain some elements that just aren't feasible or reasonable. Go back through your list and prioritize which features are essential to you and which features you can live without. You may want to consider using a ranking system of one-to-ten or one-to-three. After you've completed your prioritized list, compare it to which email marketing and newsletter platforms offer which services. You may find that almost all services offer most of the features that you need, or you may find that several services just don't have the capabilities that you're looking for. Either way, you either know that you have many choices or you've narrowed your decision dramatically.

Step Four: Ask Other Professionals about Their Experiences
Now that you have a short list, before you contact or sign-up at any one service, ask your professional colleagues what their experience has been with any email sending platforms that they use. Nobody will be able to give you more real-world answers than customers who actually use the platforms that you're considering. If you don't have a robust group of colleagues to ask, there are plenty of online reviews or industry message boards that you can visit.

Step Five: Ask for a Trial
Ideally you'll want to try a service out before you commit to it. With a free service, like Comm100, this should be relatively simple. With pay services, you may have to do a bit of negotiating. You do, however, if at all possible, want to be able to see an email sending platform in action before you commit to it.

Finally, the Big Decision!
After you've taken all of those steps, you're finally ready to make your big decision. By this point, you should be confident that you've chosen the right email marketing and newsletter platform for your company or business because you put the time and research in to do it right. Now you can move on to the next exciting part, which is launching your email platform. Of course, as we'll cover in the final part of this chapter, there is one little testing step that you should take before you unleash your email marketing program onto the world!

Next Up: *Before you begin the full on process of designing and implementing your email marketing or newsletter program, a few quick days of testing can save you headaches and hold-ups in the process later on.*

SECTION 4.4
Testing Your Email Marketing Platform

In This Section: You've now selected the email marketing and newsletter sending platform that you'll be using and gone through the steps to set it up. However, in order to save yourself headaches and extra work later, it's advisable to go through a few simple testing procedures to ensure that everything is working the way that you want it to before you unleash your email program onto the public. Here is a quick checklist of tests to run so that you can rest easy that everything is working the way that you anticipated that it would work.

Test One: Email Subscription Test

The first thing that you will want to do is to test the subscription process using seed accounts. To do this, you'll want to set up "test" or seed accounts at the major ISP and email providers. Essentially, you'll want a hotmail address, a gmail address, a Yahoo! address and an AOL address. As email programs can launch quickly, you may also need another email address. You'll also want to sign up using at least one email that is delivered to an Outlook inbox.

Now, sign-up using your new email subscription form with each of these emails. Then, go back to the inbox in which you check those emails and make sure that you have received your confirmation email and that it went to the inbox instead of the spam folder. If you are using a double-opt in email subscription process then be sure to click the confirmation link in your email as well.

Now, go do your email sending platform's back end administration interface and make sure that all of the new email addresses (and any other information that should have gotten captured, such as first name or user name or email list preference) is recorded and in the database.

If any of these processes do not work as they are supposed to, make sure that they are fixed prior to launching your email program.

Test Two: Send an Email to Your Test List

The second test is to send an email to your test list using your email marketing and newsletter platform and using the same email template that you will later use for your mass sends. After you send the email, log into your test accounts and check for all of the following:

- Was your email delivered to the inbox or to the spam folder?
- Did the email include an unsubscribe link as well as your physical mailing address?

- Did the email display in the inbox as you wanted it to, or did the html or design break (Remember, your images may not show up. Images that do not display do not mean that your email is broken.)
- Is the "from" name and email address correct?

In short, you want to make sure that your email actually made it to your inboxes and that it displayed in the same what that you anticipated that it would display.

If any of these processes do not work as they are supposed to, make sure that they are fixed prior to launching your email program.

Test Three: Test the Tracking on Your Test Email

You have opened your email using all of your test accounts. Now, also click various links using your test accounts. Make sure to keep track of what links you clicked and how many times you clicked.

After you have done that, log in to your email marketing or newsletter sending platform's administrative back end and go to the tracking and reporting feature. You may need to wait up to twenty-four hours to do this depending on your service provider. Some email reporting features are not instant.

Make sure that the number of emails opened is at least close to the number of emails that you actually opened. You may not experience 100% accuracy with this metric. Open rate is most commonly tracked using a pixel (an image). Because not all email programs load images, some of your opens may go untracked. However, your tracking should be reasonably close.

Make sure the click-through tracking count is accurate, and, if your email sending platform tracks which individual links are clicked, make sure that that number aligns with what you clicked. Be aware of whether your email sending platform tracks clicks by an individual or total clicks basis so that you understand what the number should look like.

If any of these processes do not work as they are supposed to, make sure that they are fixed prior to launching your email program.

Step Four: Unsubscribe from Your Email List

Finally, you want to be sure that when people unsubscribe from your list that process is handled correctly. Go back and unsubscribe from your email list using at least one of your test accounts. Then log in to your email marketing or newsletter sending platform and confirm that the email you unsubscribed with has been removed from the proper list. Again, this may not be instant. Know what the time frame for managing unsubscribes is from your provider and be sure that any email addresses that you have unsubscribed with have been handled within this time frame.

If any of these processes do not work as they are supposed to, make sure that they are fixed prior to launching your email program.

Once you have completed these four tests, you can be assured that your email marketing or newsletter sending platform is optimally operational, and you can begin the next, most exciting process – designing your email campaigns!

Section Summary

In this section, you learned what an effective email marketing and newsletter sending platform should do and how to choose a platform for your business and then test it prior to launching your email program.

- Determining whether you should outsource your email marketing or newsletter sending platform or build one in house is dependent on your unique business needs.
- Common reasons for wanting to build an in-house email sending platform include budget, data privacy concerns, ability to integrate with in-house data and flexibility and control.
- Common reasons for choosing an outsourced provider include budget, reduction of use of company resources, easier ability to be CAN-SPAM and privacy compliant, sender reputation improvements and ease of list management.
- A strong and robust email sending platform should include capabilities for email sending, email content and design, list management and tracking and reporting.
- Key capabilities for email sending should include reliable inbox delivery, ability to pre-schedule or instantly send email, ability to define which list to send an email to and the ability to test an email prior to sending.
- Key capabilities for email template design and content should include the ability to edit the from address, name and subject line, the ability to instantly add an unsubscribe link and your company's physical mailing address, the ability to serve an html page link for your email, the ability to send both a text and html version of your email, the ability to easily create and edit template and the ability to create and format images and text.
- Key capabilities for list management should include automatic list pruning, rapid removal of unsubscribe requests, choice of single- or double-opt in, ability to easily generate a subscription form, ability to collect data other than email addresses, ability to upload existing emails, ability to query your contact list and ability to segment and create sub-lists.
- Key capabilities for reporting and tracking should include open rate, click-through rate, unsubscribe requests per email, spam complaints per email, list growth over time and deliverability statistics.
- To determine what email sending solution is right for you, take the time to determine what budget, features and perks you want and need and then seek advice from other industry colleagues.
- Once you have selected an email sending platform, be sure to test the subscription process, email deliverability, tracking and unsubscribe process before going life with your email plan.

In the Next Section…
Continue reading on to Section Five for an in-depth explanation of how to design and create the most optimized email templates possible.

SECTION 5: Designing Your Email Template

In This Section: It's time to design your email template! By now, you should have learned what makes an email marketing or newsletter program successful. However, when it comes down to it, the success of your email marketing, communications, or newsletter program will largely depend on the quality of your email or newsletter template. In this section, we'll discuss the myths and facts of what makes an email template successful. We'll give you proven techniques to improve the performance of your email template, and we'll summarize best practices for you. By the time you're done with section five of this book, you should have a clear idea of how to design an email newsletter or marketing template that will perform at a high level right from the very start or how to redesign your existing email newsletter templates and designs to optimize performance.

SECTION 5.1
What Makes an Email Template Successful?

> **In This Section:** The first thing that you'll need to ask yourself is, "What makes an email template successful?" Of course, at the end of the day, your email program and template will be successful if they inspire your users to action, generate revenue, or increase customer loyalty and awareness. That's certainly the bottom line. But on the way there, you'll need to consider many other metrics and elements that determine if your email is successful. Here are the most important ways to determine if your email is successful before you evaluate its ability to generate activity for your site.

Are Your Subscribers Opening Your Email?

Your email marketing program or newsletter can only be successful if your subscribers are actually opening the email. Most email marketing and newsletter providers such as Comm100 include open rate tracking as part of the standard metrics package for your email program. Open rate numbers are typically not one hundred percent accurate due to the image pixel method of tracking email opens (not all email service providers load images automatically, so not all opens are automatically tracked). However, at the most basic level, you need people to open your email in order for it to be successful. If your email is not being opened at an open rate that you feel is adequate (we'll discuss what a good open rate is when we talk about metrics in detail later in this book), then you should examine the following elements of your email template:

Spam Content and Coding: Is your email template (and your email marketing solution) designed to get into your subscribers' inboxes, or are you going to the spam or junk folder? While some spam issues will be due to the content contained in your email and the quality of your email database, html coding in your email template can also impact your deliverability rates. Before you assume that users don't want to open your email, be sure that they are actually receiving your email.

Value of Your Content to Your Subscribers: At the heart of user engagement with your email program will be the value of the content that you're providing to your subscribers. Make sure that your content is both well written and is content that your subscribers actually want, not what you think they want!

Quality of Your Database List: The quality of the names and addresses in your email database may also be an issue. Make sure that your list is up-to-date, fully opted-in, and optimally pruned and cleaned regularly.

Time and Date of Email Sends: The day of week and the time that you send your email can also impact how many subscribers open it. We'll discuss timing your email send in more detail when we discuss tests that you can run to optimize your email program later in this book.

Open rate is one of the most, if not the single most, important metric related to your email marketing or newsletter campaign. When designing your email template, you'll want to keep the first two elements – the content and coding of your template, in mind as they relate to spam, deliverability, and open-rate.

Are Your Subscribers Staying Subscribed?

Your email templates, and your email program, are successful if your subscribers neither unsubscribe from nor mark as spam your email messages. While it may seem as though the number of users who unsubscribe or file spam complaints is entirely related to the content that you choose to include in your email, there are other elements that you'll want to consider as well.

Placement of Content in Your Emails: When your subscribers open their emails from you, do they see content that will immediately engage them? You may be taking up too much room at the top of your email or high visibility areas of your email with hard sells, images, or meaningless introductory copy. Making sure that your subscribers see the content that will interest them will keep them active and engaged with your emails and your brand for longer.

Visibility of All Content in Your Emails: Much like the most important content should be immediately visible, the remaining content in your email should be easy to find. Is there an easy-to-see table of contents or listing of what's in the email near the top? Are you using too many images and people can't see the value of the email content? If you're losing users from your subscriber base, make sure that the content of your email is easy to see and find.

Quality of the Content in Your Emails: Of course, at the end of the day, what it all comes down to is the quality of your content. They say that "Content is King" for a reason. If your email is too sales-driven for your users, is full of grammar and spelling errors, uses boring, "content-farm" style content, or just isn't interesting, users will eventually unsubscribe. Worse, they may mark you as spam. You need to deliver a product that your users will want in their crowded inboxes.

Frequency of Emails: The frequencies with which you send emails can also negatively impact your database by encouraging unsubscribe requests or spam complaints. Make sure that subscribers know how often they'll be receiving email from you. Also, be sure to test sending less email if you see an increase in unsubscribe requests and spam complaints.

Losing names from your email database is one of the worst things that can happen to your business. Not only does it mean that you have fewer users to market to, but it also reduces the value of your list as an asset to your company's bottom line. When designing your email templates, keep the first two points in this section in mind in order to optimize email success.

Are Your Subscribers Forwarding Your Email and Content?

You may not personally care if your users forward and share the content of your email, but if they do they will ultimately increase your brand awareness and potentially the revenue-generating business for you. People take brand and product recommendations more seriously when they come from known connections, so if your users are forwarding your email newsletters or marketing offers, then your business is expanding with no additional cost to you. Consider the following:

Ease of Forwarding: Will it be easy for users or subscribers to forward or share your email? Is there an html link to the email in addition to the email itself? Are there prominent links to post to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or other social networks? Is it easy to join your email list from within the email? Are all of these elements accounted for in your email template design?

Quality of Content: We can't say it too often! The quality of the content or offers in your email will ultimately determine if subscribers want to share it with others. As we've said before, make sure that you are delivering an appealing email product.

Especially in the era of social networking, the potential to get a great viral impact from a forwarded and shared email promotion is significant. When designing your email template, consider the ease with which subscribers can accomplish that goal.

Are Subscribers Clicking from the Email to Your Landing Pages?

Similar to the idea that your email is only successful if subscribers actually open it, email is ultimately only successful if users then click from the email to your landing page or web destination (or, alternatively take another action such as calling your company or taking a coupon to an actual physical brick-and-mortar location). If your email is getting opened but nobody is taking action from it, consider the following:

Are Links to Your Site Clear and Easy to Find? You might be surprised how many times people aren't clicking through to your website simply because they don't' see or recognize your links. While a slick design is nice, links that people recognize because they are blue and underlined can often be more effective. Similarly, if too many of your links are in the form of image-based buttons, users may never see them if their email service provider does not load email images.

Are There Enough Places in Your Email to Click? You may also simply not have enough places for a user to click from your email to your site. You don't want too many links in your email because it may make you appear to be spam to email service providers. However, you also don't want your subscribers to have to work or look too hard to find a link. You want them to be able to click through to your site as quickly as possible when they are inspired to.

Is Contact Information Clear? In case there is a problem with your site, you want to make sure that your company contact information is clear in your email. Some users may even prefer to call or visit a brick-and-mortar location. Make sure that you don't lose any business by not making those options clear and visible in your email template.

Does Content Encourage Clicks? Finally, not only does the quality of your content matter, but so does its ability to use strong calls-to-action to encourage and incite users to click through to your website or business.

An email has a great deal of value simply as a branding, user-engagement, and customer loyalty tool. However, ultimately to drive actions directly from your email program, you'll need to be sure that users are clicking through to your website. When designing your email template, consider all of the points above to optimize click-through activity.

Are Your Subscribers Taking Advantage of the Offers You Promote?

Finally, if your bottom line is revenue or sign-ups, then what really matters the most to you is whether or not users are taking advantage of products or offers that you promote. If your response to offers or product promotions is not what you had hoped that it would be, consider the following:

Are Offer and Promotions Easy to Find? Similar to the note above regarding how to make sure that your most engaging content is noticed by users, the same can be said for your offers and promotions. Are your offers and promotions above the fold or in an easy-to-see location in your email? Do you reference them in the subject line? Is your entire offer or promotion trapped in an image that many subscribers may not see? Make sure that subscribers know to look for and can easily find the offers and promotions in your emails.

Is It Clear How to Take Advantage of an Offer or Promotion? Also similar to the note above regarding the ease of finding, seeing, and using links, the same is true of offers. Have you presented a great offer, but then the way to click to the landing page or to contact your company is hard to find? Be sure that subscribers can not only find your offers; they can also easily understand how to take advantage of them.

Is the Offer or Promotion the Right Offer or Promotion for Your Audience? Of course, in the end, your offer will be most successful if it's an offer that your audience wants. Is it the right merchandise for your users? Is the offer a good enough incentive? Is it a competitive offer? Is it time sensitive? You'll most likely need to do some extensive testing to find the right offer mix for different segments of your list. However, it will be time well spent!

If revenue or sign-ups are your end goal, whether or not your subscribers respond to your offers is mission critical. When developing your email templates, keep the points above in mind in order to optimize your email performance.

While an email program is ultimately only successful if it increases customer loyalty, retention, activity, and typically revenue, you'll need to master success in all of the areas above in order to reach the full potential of your email program. As you may have noted, most of the elements above are directly related to the design of your email template.

Next Up: *In order to decide which of these metrics are most important to the success of your email program, you'll need to define the goal of your email program.*

SECTION 5.2
Determining the Goal of Your Email Template

In This Section: Perhaps you read section, 5.1 about what makes an email template successful, and you said, "Really, I don't need to worry about all of those metrics because my email template doesn't need to do a lot of those things." That may be true. In fact, before you incorporate the design elements discussed in the previous chapter, you should take a moment to determine what the goal of your email is and which design elements are most important to its success.

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Is the Goal of Your Email Brand Awareness?

It's entirely possible that your email doesn't have any user-activity related elements to it at all. If you're sending newsletters or marketing emails that are only designed to give value to your subscribers in the form of useful or entertaining content that then develops their relationship with your brand, then you don't need to worry about metrics and success factors such as click-through rate or end-revenue. However, you do need to worry about the following:

Open Rate: Which ensures that both your content and subject line are engaging as well as ensures that your email is delivered to the inbox instead of the junk or spam folder.

Unsubscribe Requests and Spam Complaints: Which is related to content, content positioning, and frequency of send.

You don't need to worry as much about visibility of links, number of links, or even over-using images. If the purpose of your email is simply as a branding activity, then your email template can take a great deal more freedom with the elements that it incorporates.

Is the Goal to Drive Traffic and Impressions to Your Website?

It's possible that your business model isn't based on sales or revenue transactions but is instead based on the number of impressions that your website gets. For example, if you sell click-based or impression-based online advertising deals, your revenue is generated by the raw number of views that each page on your website gets. That would mean that the goal of your email or newsletter is to drive as many click-through actions as possible from the email to your website.

If the goal of your email is to drive impressions and views to your website, then the most important design element and metric that you need to worry about is click-through from the email to the website. Of course, open rate, unsubscribe requests, and spam complaints are still important to developing the health of your email program. However, the metric that you need to be most concerned about is click-through rate.

You'll want to pay extra attention to the design, placement, and number of links in your email. You'll want to make sure that they are prominent, text-based, and have strong calls-to-action around them. You'll also want to make sure that you have a high number of links appearing above-the-fold of the email.

Is the Goal to Drive a Revenue Generating Event?

However, if you're like most businesses, then the goal of your email marketing or newsletter program is ultimately to drive a revenue generating event. If that's the case, then you'll need to be concerned with all of the elements discussed in the previous chapter. After all, you need to get people to open an email in order to get them to click-through an email. And you need to get people to click-through an email in order to get them onto your website where they can enact their revenue generating event. And, of course, you also need to be sure that people stay on your email list so that you continue to have people to market to! Yes, making the end goal of your newsletter or email marketing program a revenue generating event means that you'll need to take a great deal more into account when designing your email template. However, the remainder of this chapter will walk you through all of the key points that you'll need to know to create an email template that delivers results from the time you that send it until the time that you generate a receipt for your revenue generating transaction!

Next Up: *HTML versus Text emails. What's the right solution for you?*

SECTION 5.3
HTML Versus Text Email

In This Section: The very first thing that you will need to determine when you're designing your email template is whether you want to send a multi-part message (an html email and a text email) or only a text email. To be clear, there won't be any instance in which you send only an html email. Almost all email marketing platforms and most email service providers require your email to come in both html and text formats for deliverability reasons. However, you may debate whether you want to invest time and resources into the html format of your email template or instead simply send text emails. Let's discuss the pros and cons by first discussing the benefits of a text email.

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What are the Pros and Cons of a Text-Only Email?

A text only email may seem boring and ineffective. Many of us are used to seeing images, different font sizes, different font colors, and a structured layout on our web pages, print mailers, and even many of the emails we receive. As we'll discuss shortly, there are many reasons to use an html email template. However, text-only email does have several benefits that you may want to consider.

No Display or Resolution Issues: No matter how many times you test your html email template and in how many email service provider scenarios you test it, it will not always display properly. Particularly as more and more people read email on mobile devices (many of which only support text-based emails), display and resolution issues may increase. Outlook email clients are particularly known for mangling the display of html emails. When you send out an html email, you can't be absolutely, one-hundred percent sure that it's displaying properly to all of your recipients. A text-based email will always display the same and you can be assured that your users will both see and be able to clearly read your message.

Maximum Inbox Deliverability: A text-only email faces far fewer challenges in getting into a recipient's inbox as opposed to their junk or spam folder. In fact, if your email program is experiencing inbox deliverability problems, one of the most common fixes is to reduce the number of html components in your email template. If you're worried about inbox deliverability or feel as though you may have a problem with getting into the inbox, text-only email is an ideal solution. It's also quite common to use text-only emails for transactional emails such as receipts or purchase confirmations in order to ensure that they arrive in the inbox with no confusion.

Faster and Easier to Create: If you're short on in-house resources, a text only email is certainly faster and easier to create. Even with an email marketing solution that offers free, fast, effective email

templates such as Comm100 Email Marketing, you'll still need to spend more time entering links and creating images. If speed is of the essence, text-based emails can be your friends.

Text-only emails are faster, simpler, and present less challenges for display and inbox deliverability. However, conversely, there are some draw backs as well.

Inability to Track: With a text-only email, you won't be able to track any of your email's performance. Because open-rates are tracked using a pixilated image, you won't know how many people opened your email. Because click-through is tracked based on links clicked, you won't ultimately know how many people clicked-through your email. You'll be limited to looking at trends that happened around the time of your email send in order to estimate effectiveness.

Reduced Response and Conversion: You also may not get the same response rate and conversion rate from a text-only email. Images, colors, visuals, and information organization sell products and concepts much better than plain text does. It's inevitable that you will see a reduced response rate from a text-only email unless it is replacing an html email that was unable to get into an inbox properly.

In short, text-only emails will not sell your product as well nor will they convert to sales or revenue-generating activities as well. However, they will have easier deliverability and resolution and require fewer in-house resources.

What are the Pros and Cons of a HTML Email?

HTML emails, on the other hand, offer many benefits that can't be emulated by a text-only email, including:

Information Organization: When you send a text-only email, you're essentially asking users to read long blocks of text. That's unlikely to happen on a regular basis. However, because an html email will allow you to use table structures to organize text into areas and blocks, it will allow you to use different fonts, font sizes, colors, and bulleted list to make information easier for your recipients to scan and see. It will also visually engage them. In short, it will be easier for the user to read and digest your content quickly. Since the average user scans a web page or email for less than eight seconds before deciding whether to read it or not, visual engagement and good information organization can be a huge competitive advantage.

Use of Images: Similarly, the use of images in an html email can dramatically improve user response and conversion. It should be noted that not all email service providers display images within emails, but for those that do the ability to show images of products, lifestyles or even branded logos and icons can inspire and entice subscribers to take action and purchase or view.

Easy-to-Click Links: With a text-only email, your subscribers will need to copy and paste any links that you use into a web browser (or, worse yet, type them in, meaning potential typo errors). However, with

an html email you can code text or images to link directly to your website. This means that users won't have to "work" to get to your landing page or website. All they'll need to do is "click", which is an action they are already used to.

Full Tracking Capability: An html email means that you will have full visibility into how your subscribers use and respond to your email. You'll be able to see open-rate trends and reports and have definitive answers to how many people visited your website as a result of your email. These will be important tracking statistics and metrics as you work to optimize your email program.

HTML email gives you more visual and marketing options. However, it does have a few drawbacks that you'll want to keep in mind.

Display Issues: Display issues with html emails can be a multi-tiered issue. Firstly, you'll need to check your email template in multiple email service providers to determine if it displays correctly in Yahoo!, Gmail, Hotmail, and all of the other major providers (including Outlook, which can be difficult to display properly in). Secondly, even if you think you have a perfect html template that will never break, you can never be sure. It's always possible that a small niche of your recipients is not clearly seeing the email properly. Finally, many email clients do not load images in emails, so if your email has been designed with too many images included, it may not be effective.

Deliverability Issues: HTML email also has increased deliverability issues. Bad code, too much bolded text, certain font colors, and images can result in your email going to the spam or junk box. While, obviously, html emails make it to the inbox regularly, you require more work and diligence to ensure that an html email doesn't end up in the spam folder.

In-House Resource Issues: HTML email requires at least a basic design understanding. While many email newsletter and marketing providers such as Comm100 will provide you with easy, pre-made html templates, you'll still need to do more work than just writing a paragraph of text. Image preparation, adding links, and formatting your email are not as quick as creating a text only email.

HTML email will allow you to better market your product, service, brand, or company. However, you'll have to do a little bit more work even if you have pre-made templates and a standardized way to send your html email.

What's the Best Solution?

Unless there's a very compelling reason why you need to send a text-only email, html emails are certainly the better option. However, you can do a few things to improve the performance of html emails when compared with text-only emails in terms of deliverability, display, and in-house resource allocation.

Limit the Use of Images: Marketers love images, but using too many of them in an email can backfire. Not only can it trigger spam filters, but it can also cause display issues and broken templates.

Additionally, if you have too many images, your email may end up simply looking like a blank white screen if your subscriber's email service provider does not enable images.

Keep Things Simple: Keep your templates simple. The fewer chances you give email service providers to mangle your display, the fewer template breaks you'll experience! Also users will respond better to simple templates where it's easy to find things and scan the content quickly.

Reuse Your Templates: Create email templates that you can reuse each time you send an email with only minor variations. That way, while it may take slightly longer than it would to create a text-only email, you'll be creating efficiencies and reducing the amount of time that you spend per email creation.

HTML email certainly gives you access to the important tracking and metrics that you'll need in order to create a fully optimized email marketing or newsletter program. If you use some restraint and best practices with developing the html portion of your email marketing program, you'll be able to overcome some of the minor obstacles associated with html email. As a result, you'll get the benefits of a more visually stimulating and exciting email newsletter or marketing template while minimizing deliverability and display issues.

Next Up: How to ensure that you've covered the legal requirements in an email template.

SECTION 5.4
Legal Requirements in Email Templates

In This Section: When designing your email template, there are legal issues (mostly regarding CAN-SPAM compliance) that you'll need to be sure to incorporate into your email design. They may be simple and easy-to-do, but overlooking them could inadvertently result in CAN-SPAM violations and huge fines for your company. In this section, we'll take a brief moment to highlight and point out the legal requirements that you must incorporate into your email template design.

Company Physical Mailing Address

The Requirement: CAN-SPAM requires that your email template include a physical, postal mailing address where your subscribers can reach you (a phone number is not required). You can use either a physical street address or a postal box, but subscribers must have a way that they can send you registered, tracked, hard-copy mail via the postal system.

Incorporating The Requirement: The common way to meet this requirement is to put your address in the footer of your email template. Don't bury it in a hard-to-read or incredibly small font. Subscribers and users will typically scroll to the bottom of the email to look for contact information. By putting your physical mailing address in the bottom footer of your email template, you're providing the required information in a location where subscribers would know to go look for it. You are also not taking up valuable real estate elsewhere in your email template.

Unsubscribe Request Information

The Requirement: Your email template must include a way for your users to unsubscribe from your email list either by simply sending a reply email or by clicking no more than one level deep to reach a page from which they can unsubscribe. The method that you use is entirely up to you. However, the law requires that the information be easy and clear for a subscriber to find. It also requires that it be simple for them to accomplish the process of unsubscribing.

Incorporating The Requirement: The most common place to find information on where to unsubscribe from an email is in the footer of the email. Again, you'll be providing the required information in a place where users know to look for it and while not taking up valuable real estate in your email template.

However, in certain circumstances, it may be advisable to consider putting the information about how to unsubscribe from your email product at the top of your email. If you experience any type of problem with frequent spam complaints, then making it easier for users to unsubscribe may reduce the number of spam complaints that you get. Nothing will impact your sender reputation with email service providers and internet service providers more quickly than a high volume of spam complaints. It may benefit you to

be able to minimize those spam complaints by making it easier for users to remove themselves from your list. If you are going to lose subscribers regardless, making every effort to ensure that you lose them via an unsubscribe request rather than a spam complaint is important.

Indication that Your Email is an Advertisement

The Requirement: CAN-SPAM also requires that you make it apparent that your email is an advertisement. This includes if your email is designed in any way to drive traffic to a website that you then make money from, so, even if your email isn't directly an advertisement, you'll need to note that it's an advertisement if it drives traffic to a monetizing website.

Incorporating The Requirement: Simply including a brief line of text in the footer of your email that says "This email was brought to you by Our Company, a company that specializes in certain activities" will fulfill this requirement.

It may seem like these three elements shouldn't be important enough to warrant an entire section in an email marketing guide book. However, failure to ensure that they are included could result in legal ramifications. Ensure that they are persistent, permanent parts of all of your email templates.

Next Up: How to use personalization and personalizing features in your email templates.

SECTION 5.5
Using Personalization in Email Templates

In This Section: As you develop your email templates, you'll want to consider whether or not you want to use personalization features in your email. This could include using a subscriber's first name or user name. It could also extend beyond that to using any data variables that you have collected in your email database. However, before you decide where, or even if, you want to use personalization in your email templates, there are a few things to consider.

How Does Email Personalization Work?

When using an email management system such as Comm100, you only have to create one email template. However, you are actually sending out as many individual emails as you have subscribers on your email list. Each email that goes out is its own html or text file. Your email sending or online newsletter platform may have the capability to read a variable within your html template and, in each individual html file sent, replace that variable with the associated database field. For example, you may have a database field for a user's first name. Your email sending platform may then have been programmed to understand that when it sees FIRSTNAME in your html email template, it is supposed to replace that variable with the database field for "first name" for the email address that it is sending to. In this way, you can send millions of emails from one template that all include a personal touch for each of your subscribers.

The Pros of Using Personalization in Emails

Most case studies have revealed that emails and newsletters that use personalization experience higher conversion rates. Using personalization in the subject line leads to increased open rates of your email, and the success of your email marketing campaign all begins with a user opening of your email! When users scan their inbox, they are more likely to notice an email with their name in the subject line. Then, you only have to have ensured that the rest of your subject line is enticing. After all, you've now won the first battle, which is to get noticed in a crowded inbox.

Using similar personalization in the body of the email can also be effective. When you refer to a subscriber by his or her name or user name, a positive mental association is made between the user and your company or brand. As simple as it may sound, including the use of a first name or user name can make a customer or subscriber feel like an individual person rather than just an anonymous recipient.

Between the increased open rates and the higher affinity rate of subscribers within a message when it is personalized, personalization within your email sends can improve email response and conversion by multiple percentage points.

The Cons of Using Personalization in Emails

There is, however, one con to consider when evaluating the role of personalization in your email templates. That con is your subscribers' sensitivity to privacy issues. Increasingly, people are aware of the information that's available about them via the internet. Simultaneously, they are wary of sharing or being asked for too much information. If you choose to include personalization in your email templates, then you company is either asking users for identifying information such as their name when they join your email list, or you are alerting them to the fact that you have a database of related information each time you send an email.

While, in most cases, the concern about privacy and information is far outweighed by the measureable improvements in email campaign performance when emails are personalized, there may be some exceptions. Particularly if your business or product is one that may have a user base that is highly concerned with their privacy, personalization may not be worth the trade off. Adult-only products, gambling, sensitive health information products, and financial information are just a few of the industries that may not be better served by using personalization in their email marketing programs.

You can see measurable results by incorporating personalization into your email templates. However, be aware of issues with your demographic or industry segment that may negate those positives. If you have not previously used personalization in your email templates, you may want to consider and isolated a/b test with only a small segment of your database getting the personalized email to begin with. We'll discuss testing in detail later in this book.

Best Practices for Email Personalization

Email personalization, outside of demographics and industries where there are extensive privacy concerns by users, can vastly improve email campaign performance. Always consider these best practices when implementing personalization into your email.

Personalize the Subject Line: Always, when possible, personalize the subject line of your email with a first name. It has been shown to consistently improve open-rates.

Personalize Above the Fold in Your Email: Within the body of your email, include first name or site user name personalization field above the fold so that it catches the attention of the reader immediately and engages them.

Don't Overdo It with Personalization: While personalizing emails can improve their performance, over-using personalization can leave readers and subscribers feeling as though you know a little too much about them! Include a touch or two of personalization, but don't fill up your entire email template with personalized facts.

Limit the Information that You Ask Subscribers For: In order to personalize your emails, you'll need to ask subscribers for information when they register at your site or join your email list. Only ask for what you need! The more information you request of users, the less likely they will be to complete your sign-up or registration process.

Personalization in emails can improve results exponentially. However, don't just use personalization features win without thinking them through first. As always, if you're unsure, test before you roll personalization out to your entire email database!

 Next Up: *Using images in email templates: how, where and how much to implement image files into your email templates.*

SECTION 5.6
Images: How Many & When to Use Them

> **In This Section:** In many marketing departments, the use of images in email newsletters and marketing emails is a hotly debated topic. Designers and traditional marketers want to include a heavy use of visuals and images for both aesthetic and brand purposes. Email marketing specialists want to minimize images for deliverability and display reasons. What should you consider when designing email templates that use images? What are the pros and cons of using images? What are the best practices for using images in an email template? In this section, we'll explain the how's, why's, and why-not's of images and email.

The Truth: Images Sell Products and Services

Images and visuals are absolutely a critical part of marketing your product or service. To send an email with no images would be both a branding and conversion error. The trick with email is to find a way to use images in a way that will benefit your email's performance rather than detract from it. And yes, images in emails can absolutely detract from your email's performance in many ways, which we will discuss within this chapter. However, as you begin to think about using images in your email, remember this: images are important and should be included in your email template design.

Remember: An Email is Not a Print Mailer or Brochure

One of the most important things to remember when designing your email template, particularly when it comes to the process of determining how and where to use image files, is that your email template is not a print mailer. It does not have the same flexibility of design that a print mailer would. Users will not navigate an email communication in the same way that they would a printed communication, both in how they respond to it and in how their eyes track through the design. Finally, email has many other usability factors to consider that a print marketing piece would not. Encouraging clicks, the need to sell subscribers on reading the email in less than two seconds within a preview pane, and actual inbox deliverability issues all regulate the use of images in an email. You cannot approach designing an email as you would approach designing a print marketing piece. That means that your design team, and even some of your executives, may be frustrated that your email can't "look as good" as a catalog or print mailer. However, at the end of the day, while your email certainly does need to look good, it needs to drive results. In fact, driving results is certainly more important. As you begin designing your email templates, remember that you are not designing a printed piece of marketing collateral. You are designing an electronic mail that has usability limitations.

Remember: Not All Email Service Providers Will Display Your Images

One reason that you do not want to rely too heavily on using images to convey the message within your marketing email is that not all email service providers display images by default in your email. Gmail and

Hotmail both default to turning images off and relying on users to proactively download images in order to see them. The reality is that many users will not download the images, so if you're relying on a picture or graphic button to convey an important message within your email template, then more than half of your subscribers may never see that message or request. You are including images in your email for the fifty percent or so of subscribers who see the images. Your email template, however, needs to be designed to appeal to your entire subscriber base, including those who do not see the images.

Remember: Images Can Send Your Email to the Spam Folder

A third important thing to remember about using images in your email template is that the use of images can result in your email going to the spam folder. It's not the use of images exclusively that can land you in the spam folder, but overuse, bad use, and certain other triggers when combined with your overall sender reputation and quality score can mean that emails hit the spam folder instead of the inbox. In fact, if you have started experiencing an inbox deliverability problem, then one of the first steps that you should take is to remove some of the images from your email.

With All of Those Concerns About Images, How Can I Possibly Use Images in My Email Newsletter or Marketing Email?

Did we scare you off from using images in your email with the above information? If so, that wasn't our intention. However, one of the most common mistakes in email template design is the overuse of images or treating the email template as though it is a replica of a printed piece of marketing collateral. But given all of the information above, how can you use images effectively in your email template? It's actually much easier to craft an email template with images that work in favor of improving conversion instead of causing email problems and issues than you think. Below, we've given you the best practices for including images in your email template. If you simply follow this list, you'll include enough images that are compelling to subscribers who see the images while also crafting an email template that appeals to users who don't see the image files.

Also, remember that, while you may need to minimize your use of image files, there are many things that you can do with formatted html within an email that will lead to an exciting design that compels opens, reads, and clicks. We'll discuss those best practices in an upcoming chapter.

Best Practices for Using Images in Emails

We promise that, if you follow this list, you will create the most optimized email template possible that also uses images! Print this list out and hand it to your designers! If your email newsletter sending solution offers premade email templates, such as Comm100 does, chances are that they meet all of these requirements. If you are designing your own template or modifying a premade template, you'll want to follow these basic rules.

1. Limit the Use Images in the Top Two Inches of Your Email Template

In the majority of cases, your subscribers will scan your email for less than two seconds before they decide if they want to bother reading it. Most of that scanning will happen within the email preview pane.

The typical email preview pane is horizontally aligned (Outlook offers an alternative vertical one) and less than two inches in height. That means that you have approximately two inches of space to convince a subscriber or user to continue reading your email. There's nothing wrong with using an image within the top two inches of space. In fact, we'd recommend it because it will have a positive impact and result on users who load images automatically in their email browser. However, because so many subscribers and users will not automatically, or possibly ever, see the images in your email, you need to be sure to get compelling text into the top two inches of your email template in order to engage them.

The most common way to address this issue is to use an email template header graphic, typically about 700 pixels across and no more than seventy-five pixels in height. The header graphic can be the same for every email send or can be different for each send. There are many other design solutions for incorporating a small but engaging graphic in the top two inches of your email template.

What's the most important thing to remember? You want to be sure that there is enough space in the top two inches of your email template for engaging and visually formatted text. Don't sacrifice that need for a bigger, brighter image.

2. Don't Send an Email That Is One Big Image or All Image Files

How many times have you opened an email that a company sent to you, and the entire thing was a blank white screen asking you to download images? That single image (or a series of smaller images built together using an html table to form a larger image), may be visually amazing. It may an exact replica or a piece of print marketing collateral that your design team spent months developing and that the entire company is proud of and excited by. It might be an image that promotes and offer that is so incredible that you're expecting to run out of stock because the offer is unmatched anywhere else. However, it doesn't matter how many of the previous things are true of your image. The only true fact that you need to worry about is that half (or less) of the people who you sent the email to never saw the graphic or message. Not only did the image not load when they opened their email, but also because there was no text in the top two inches of the email to tell them why it was important that they download the image, they never bothered to explore the email at all.

We've said it before, but an email newsletter or email marketing offer is not a print design piece. Your design team will need to create an alternate treatment of campaigns that relies more heavily on html and text and less heavily on a layered image file. If you send an email that is only images, then your email marketing results will be dramatically reduced.

3. Don't Trap Important Messages or Links in Images (ie: The "Click Here" Graphic Button Does Not Belong in an Email)

Similar to the reasons that you'll want to avoid sending emails that are entirely image files, you'll want to avoid "trapping" any messages that are critical for your users to get from the email in image files that they may never see. For example, on a webpage, using a graphic button to indicate that a user should click to "buy" or "read more" is highly effective. However, in an email template users may not see those buttons

and may be confused about where they should click within the email. Links in email templates should always be formatted text links. If you really want to use a graphic button to indicate a place to click, you should always include a text link below it.

Another example is messages about sales or discounts. If your email is promoting a sale or discount, then you want to ensure that the message is both indicated in a graphic and a text headline. For those who load images, the graphic will certainly be the first visual stimulation that gets them excited about the discount. However, for those who don't load images, you'll need to be sure that they still know what the offer is. The only way to ensure that is through a strongly formatted text headline.

What's the basic rule? If it's something that your readers or subscribers absolutely need to know, it needs to be in text, even if that text is in addition to a graphic.

4. Always Provide Alt and Title Text

Alt text is the html coded text that appears when an image doesn't load (it's short for "alternative text"). Title text is the "hover" text that appears when a user passes their mouse over an image. However, in some web browsers, such as Firefox, title text is used in the same way that alt text is. Why are alt text and title text important to you? As we keep mentioning, at least half of your subscribers and users will not see your image files. For those for whom images don't load, seeing an alternative piece of text that describes the image means that you have not wasted the space in your email template. You've used the space to convey an important message even if the image didn't load.

Of course, what you write for your title and alt text is equally important. If your email is an email asking people to donate money to help save the world's tiger population, then it's likely that you've used an image of a tiger within your email. Don't make the alt or title text (they can be the same content) say, "Image of a Tiger." Have it be a call to action to enhance the message of your email such as "Click the links in this email to instantly donate to save the tigers." Remember, if the images don't load, you are losing one of your most powerful methods for inciting action in your readers. You'll want to try to compensate for that with good, strong call-to-action alt and title text.

Some email marketing specialists like to use the alt and title text behind an image to ask users to download the images. That's certainly a valid technique. However, it's our belief that, given the speed with which users will scan your email, that you'll get better results by using the alt and title text to try to incite direction action.

5. Thirty Percent is a Good Rule

What's a basic, good rule to follow when designing an email template? Only use about thirty percent of your available space for images. A good design team can use even less than that and still make images effective. However thirty percent means that you'll still have enough images to entice users but you won't be in danger of either creating spam problems for yourself or presenting large, blank emails to people who don't use images.

For many designers, only using thirty percent of your available space won't feel like enough. That will mean that you may need to vary from some of the brand presentation that you use both in print and on your website. For example, navigation to sections of your website from the email itself should probably not be done using images, even if the navigation bar on your website is entirely image driven. Again, the important thing to keep in mind is that email neither operates like a print collateral piece nor like a pure webpage. It has usability and functionality issues that require design adaptations.

6. Do Not Make Images Files Too Large
Finally, for the images that you do use in your email template, avoid making the files too large. This is not only from a space perspective, but large image files can create significant spam and deliverability issues. Small, compressed, well-formatted images are the key to successful use of images in your email template.

In summary, remember all of the following key points when designing the use of images in your email templates:

- Do not overuse images in the critical top two inches of your email template
- Do not send emails that are entirely comprised of images
- Important messages and critical calls to action should not be "trapped" within images
- Always provide Alt Text and Title Text for your images
- Do not devote more than thirty percent of your email real estate to images
- Keep image files small, compressed and optimized

Images are an important part of a successful email template. Simply follow the best practices above and you'll be sure to find the middle ground between images that enhance your email template performance and images that create email deliverability and performance issues.

 Next Up: *How much text should you use in an email? What should you say? What are the best practices for text in an email?*

SECTION 5.7
Text: How Much to Use and What to Say

In This Section If there's one thing that we learned in the previous sections, it's that the text in your email is incredibly important. No matter how you integrate images and even video into your email marketing, email is still primarily a text medium. So how do you optimize your use of text in your email template? This section will summarize all of the best practices of email text.

Font Style, Color, and Size. What's Best to Use?

For the purposes of your email template, the font style, color, and size that you use only needs to meet one criterion. It needs to be readable. In general, a font size of ten or eleven and a non-serif font such as Arial in a traditional black color will be most readable in the smaller resolutions of many email viewing devices (remember, these days, your email may be getting read on a tablet or even smaller mobile device). We will talk later about the best ways to code your email templates, but if you are not using a pre-made template then it's always best to code your fonts using <font> tags rather than CSS. Gmail, in particular, will force you to use inline CSS which makes it just as time and control valuable to simply use font tags.

If your brand guidelines dictate the use of another font size or style, consider using that font size or style for headlines. Do some testing of display and readability and remember that designing an email template is not the same as designing a webpage or piece of print marketing collateral. You may want to allow some flexibility with brand font guidelines to improve email display rendering and response rate.

Headlines: How Big?

As we previously discussed, headlines will be incredibly important in inciting customer action in emails, especially when your images may or may not load in various email service providers. How big should your headlines be? And what color? Again, the most important thing in this case may not be brand adherence. It will be display rendering in the email as well as the ability to draw attention to the headline. In truth, the amount and placement of the headline real estate will also matter. To a certain degree, so will spam and deliverability concerns.

Let's discuss the spam and deliverability concerns first as they are fairly simple. If you use too many headlines in your email in relation to the full content of the email, then you may suffer a spam score penalty. Additionally, the excessive use of red fonts has also been proven to be on the "spam watch list" for several email providers. What's the importance of this? You want to use headlines, but not in abundance. When possible (and it should always be possible), you should play it safe and not have your headline be in a red font.

Real estate in the email is also important. It's important to have at least one headline above the fold in the top two inches of your email to ensure that the most important message gets seen in the preview window. However, the more large headlines that you put in the top part of the email, the less overall information that you can convey. Make sure to include a headline in the top section of your email, but don't use so many headlines that it's not possible to give more information to your users or subscribers than just the headline content.

In terms of size and color of email headlines, you simply want to ensure that the headline is big and bold enough to draw attention without being so big that it becomes the only focal point in the email template. Use your best design judgment.

How Much Text Should You Use?

When deciding how much text to use in your email template, it's actually a fine line to walk. You certainly want enough text included to engage users and incite them to either make a purchase or click through to your website. However, the more text that you include in the body of your email, the more you risk being flagged by spam filters at various email providers.

One solution, and the one that we would recommend, is to use sections of teaser copy that then provide "read more" or "learn more" or "read the rest of this article" links to full pages on your website. After all, the primary goal of your email is to drive users to your website or landing page where they are ultimately more likely to convert to purchasers or to give you a page impression. Blocks of text of a hundred to a hundred and fifty words are often more than sufficient to convey the message or information.

Remember, most users will scan your email for less than two seconds before they decide to read it or to delete it. If you include too much text in the email, they may simply decide that it's "too much to read." Select the most enticing sales points of your text and convert them into teaser blurbs that then link to landing pages or your website.

What Should You Say?

What should you say in your email? The basic answer to this is, "Whatever your customers want to hear!" Of course, that's not entirely true. Determining what text will resonate with your subscribers and cause clicks and conversions is, unfortunately, a long testing process in most cases. The more that you can test different theories of content and find out what words, content categories, offers, and article types get the best response from your email recipients, the better. Once you've determined that information, you can craft a forward-looking email content plan. On a basic level, however, here are some key points that you should keep in mind:

- Seasonal content is always a good idea. If the holidays are right around the corner, incorporate holiday messages into your content plan so that you're writing about things that are relevant and on your customers' minds.
- The baseline for content should always be: Is this something that will be valuable to my users?

- If you are emailing an offer that has terms and conditions, make sure that the terms and conditions are mentioned in the email. That may simply mean including a line that says, "This offer subject to terms and conditions as listed on the website," or it could be comprehensive. If you do not include a statement of terms and conditions, however, you're setting yourself up for customer service phone calls and emails later on.
- The more that you can craft content that will stand out in the inbox, the better. It's a crowded email marketing world out there. If your competitors are all emailing about advice on toasters, be sure to email about advice on how to make the best toast instead!
- Do some competitor research to get good content ideas. Especially if you have competitors with a well-established email program, they may have already researched what makes great newsletter content. Taking a look at what they've done can save you time and effort.

What Should You Not Say?

What should you not say in your email text? The rules are pretty simple!

- Don't lie or mislead customers. Not only could this ruin your brand reputation and create customer service nightmares, but in certain cases it could ultimately get you into CAN-SPAM trouble.
- Don't say things that are offensive or hateful. While there's nothing legally preventing you from doing so, it's just not nice!
- Don't use words that may trigger spam flags. As a general rule, if your email reads like spam email that you've received in the past, it will likely be treated as spam email.

Other than that, you are entitled to your free speech in your email newsletter or marketing email. Be honest, be nice and be aware of what words may get you into the spam or junk folder (hint: free!).

Using Font Styles or All Caps

Using various font styles and all caps can certainly help your email's performance. Because subscribers and recipients will scan your email quickly, using bolded fonts and all caps fonts on key, important words and phrases can make those words and phrases jump out at a user and make them aware that there is something of interest to them in the email. Select the words that you know (or suspect but have not yet tested) will engage your users. For example, pretend that you sell stuffed unicorns and you know that a stuffed pink unicorn is very rare to find and desired by your users. In any email that you send out, the words "stuffed pink unicorn" should be bolded and/or listed in all caps. That way, your users will see when scanning the email that there is a reference to a product that they have a high interest in.

It's best to bold some words and use all caps for other words and then, occasionally, use both. Not only does mixing up the font styles (and in some cases colors or sizes) help to draw user attention to important keywords and concepts, it also makes the email more visually interesting to scan. This is especially important if you've chosen to dramatically reduce the use of images in your email template for

the purpose of deliverability or usability. Don't use the same font style technique to highlight every instance. Mix things up to create a visually arresting email.

Don't overdo it though! If you cram stylized font treatments into every tenth word, you'll ultimately make the email template harder to read. You'll also take away the importance of the words that are using the stylized font, and readers will have a harder time telling what's most important to them in your text.

Finally, don't rely too heavily on italicized fonts. In the context of an email template, which typically has smaller chunks of text in smaller spaced, italicized text can actually present a readability problem.

The Call to Action

Of course, potentially the most important text in your email newsletter or template will be the call to action. Depending on the design and purpose of your newsletter or marketing email, you may have a single call to action or multiple calls to action. Whether you're only asking users to click one link or whether you're providing multiple opportunities for them to take advantage of offers, buy products, or click-through to read the full version of an article, there are some basic keys that you should keep in mind with the text for your call to action.

- Keep it short. The longer you make the call to action, the more likely it is to be misunderstood or overlooked by your readers.
- Bold your calls to action.
- Make sure that your calls to action look like a link. Don't sacrifice making it easy for readers and users to know where to click to take the action that you want them to take from your email for slick looking design. Blue, underlined call-to-action links will still work best.
- Separate your calls to action out from the surrounding text with a paragraph or line break.
- Don't be afraid to tell users to click! In basic web design, using the words "click here" is often frowned upon. However, in an email template where ensuring that you drive clicks is so critically important, the words "click here" can keep a call to action both short and effective.

As a general text design rule, you want your calls to action to be highly visible, not buried within the text and to use words that make it clear to users what you want them to do.

Should the Text in Your Text Version Email be the Same as the HTML Version

Whether you choose to only send a text-based email or whether you're sending a multi-part message that's part text and part html, you should take a moment to think about the content in the text version of your email. In some cases, email marketers choose to simply default to the text that they used in the html version within the text version and use text copies of links instead of coded calls to action where there would have been html links in the html version of the email.

Given the increasing number of people who will be reading your email as text only on a mobile device, it's worth your time to put some more effort into the text included in the text-only version of your email. Nobody wants to look at an email of typed out links!

In general, the best practice for the text in a text based version of an email will be to write a somewhat shortened version of the text that you used in your html email, and at both the bottom and the top of the email provide the url where users can see the online version of your email.

It's also important that urls that you provide in the text-based version of your email are short and easy to remember! You'll be counting on users to actually type (or potentially copy-and-paste) those urls into a browser. In some cases, you'll be counting on users to remember those urls once they close their email. Make urls promoted in text-based versions of your email short for optimum usage.

Email Text Best Practices

We just covered a great deal of information about using text in an html email or a text-based email. Here's a summary of the best practices to remember regarding using text in emails.

Keep It Readable: No matter what your brand or font usage on websites or in print marketing collateral, the most important thing about the text in your email is that it is readable. Arial font in a ten to eleven point size in black typically reads the easiest in most email clients.

Not Too Many Headlines: Using multiple headlines is fine, but don't over-clutter your email with them. It will make the email less readable and may count against your spam score.

Avoid Overusing Red Fonts: Too many red fonts used in email text have been shown to trigger spam score increases. Use an off-shade of red or an alternative color if you're using multiple headlines.

One Headline Above-the-Fold: Try to get at least one headline in the top two inches of your email template to excite users. However, don't make that headline so big that you can't get

other information into that extremely valuable section of the email template.

Don't Make Headlines Too Big: Don't make your headlines so big that they break the design of your email template or otherwise clutter it and make it difficult to read.

Limit the Amount of Text: Include as much text in your email as you need to in order to make your point and get users excited. However, remember that the more text that you include, the more you run the risk of going to the spam or junk folder. Consider teaser sections of text with links to full landing pages or article pages.

Compelling Content: Seasonal content, content that competitors with successful email programs have promoted, and content that will stand out in a cluttered inbox and should all be incorporated into your email content plan.

Include Terms and Conditions: If you are emailing an offer that includes terms and

conditions or limitations, be sure to mention or include them in the email promoting the offer.

Don't Overuse Spam Words: Words like "free", "$" and "credit" can trigger spam filters. That doesn't mean that you can't use them in your email, just be wary of how much and how often you use them.

Use Font Styles, Colors and Caps: Mix up the visual presentation of your email by pulling out "trigger" words for your users and putting them in a bolded font, a font that is a separate color, an all-caps font or any combination of the above.

Avoid Italics: Italics in an email client can often negatively impact readability.

Calls-to-Action: Calls-to-action should be short, should be bolded, should look like links, should be separated from the surrounding text with a paragraph break, and should clearly tell users what you want them to do.

Text Versions of Your Email: When creating the text-only version of your email, shorten the copy and use short-version, easy-to-remember urls to increase user return.

Next Up: Using links in your email template.

SECTION 5.8
Links: How to Code Them, How to Phrase Them

In This Section: After inbox deliverability and open-rate, the most important metric driving the success of your email marketing or newsletter campaign will be click-through rate. It doesn't take a great deal of intimate understanding to know that if you can't convince subscribers or readers to click from your email to your website or landing page, you can't monetize them. Since, in almost all cases, the end goal of your email marketing campaign will be increased revenue either through transactions or page impressions, driving traffic from the email to the webpage or landing page is absolutely essential. The use of links is the primary driver of traffic funneling from your email to your webpage.

Content and Calls to Action Matter To!

We don't want for you to read this section and think that links are the only thing that matter in terms of driving traffic from an email to a landing page. If that were the case, there wouldn't be any reason to send an email that included anything but links! The quality of your copy and its ability to excite and incentivize users to click certainly matters. So do the offers that you may promote in an email marketing piece. Finally, writing and using good calls-to-action both around and in the content of your links can make a significant difference between an average click-through rate and an outstanding click-through rate. All of the elements of your email template design and content work combine to improve your click-through rate. However, there are some tried and true elements to keep in mind!

Links and Images

We discussed this previously when discussing the best practices for using images in emails, but as a general rule you do not want to use images as a way to indicate to readers that they should click something. Graphic buttons that say "buy now" or "click here" work great on web pages. However, since many email service providers do not automatically load images when an email loads, your readers may never see the "click here" or "buy now" or "join now" or "sign-up" button and may actually not know where to click. Make all of the images in your email links just in case they don't load and users click them. Also, and more importantly, make sure that your main links are always text links. If you must use an image link (for example, if your design department insists on it), be sure to have a text link directly beneath it.

Formatting Links

It's incredibly important that the links that you use in your email template both stand out from the text around them as well as appear in a way that users immediately recognize as links. The most "fool-proof" way to accomplish this is to use a traditional link-style. That, of course, means using a blue, underlined font. It's also a great idea if all of your links are bolded. If you can't use a blue underlined font, it's

strongly suggested that you, at a minimum, use an underlined font. Web users are trained to understand that "underline means link" even if the color is not blue. Bolding your links will help them stand out.

If your design standards don't underline or bold links, it's strongly suggested that you make an exception within your email template. Again, even more-so than on a web page, the funneling of users from your email to a website or landing page where you can monetize them is the ultimate key to success.

Finally, if your web style guide involves denoting links by changing their color or style when a user passes his or her mouse over the links, do not replicate that in your email. CSS use in an email template, which would be required to create that effect, can breakdown in various email service providers. Additionally, you're then relying on users and readers to actively mouse over your email text in order to find links. You want the links to "pop" and be obvious immediately when a user scans your email so that he or she can transition from the email to the web page as quickly as possible.

What to Say in Your Link

Your link should be your call-to-action, and we'll discuss optimizing calls-to-action later in this book. Don't make links single words, and certainly don't make them too long. Nothing is harder on the eyes than three lines of bolded, underlined link text! In short, the best links are ones that tell users what they will be doing when they click them. "Buy Now." "Click Here." "Join for Free." A strong, brief, clear call to action is the best text for your link!

Where to Place Links

There's really no set rule as to where to place links within your email template, but there are some basic trips and tricks that can increase click-through rate.

Don't put links within big blocks of text. Instead, use your text to lead up to the link and then separate the link with a paragraph break so that it stands out.

Don't put too much space between text and an associated link. You want users to understand that the link is related to the text.

Don't put links in headlines – the conflicting styles may confuse users.

Make sure you have at least one, if not more, links in the top two inches of your email template. You want users who don't scroll below the preview pane to still have opportunities to click through to your webpage or landing page.

As noted above, make sure that all images are also links.

We'll also discuss below using permanent and static links in the header, footer or side column of your email.

Density of Links in Your Email

The question of how many links to put into your email template can be a tricky question. On the one hand, the raw numbers game says that you want as many links as possible. The more opportunities that you give readers to click-through to your website, the more likely they are to do it. However, if you load an email up with too many links, you risk triggering spam filters. Finally, if you put too many links into an email, you'll ultimately deteriorate the readability of the text in the email. That may not sound like a situation that could really harm you, but you may be surprised at how important text can be in selling your product or service.

A safe rule of thumb is no more than one link per every fifty words of text. However, there's no hard-and-fast rule here, either. Your best bet is to start with fewer links in your email templates and then continue to add links with each send until you reach a click-through rate that is your desired click-through rate.

Permanent and Static Links

Many email templates are designed using permanent and static links in the header, footer, and side bar. These links may be navigational clones of your primary site to help create familiarity with users between the site and the email. They may be links to social media elements that you want to persistently promote. They may also be links to customer service or other pages on your website that provide information that users consistently search for. Designing your email template with these types of persistent links can dramatically improve your click-through rate. The information or pages that the links drive to are content or destination pages that you've identified as high user interest. In addition, these persistent or permanent links also increase the number of links in your email, which, in turn, increases the number of opportunities that your readers have to click through. There's really no downside!

The same rules apply to persistent or static links as well. Don't trap them in images. This is true even if you are trying to clone your website's navigation within your email template and the navigation on the website uses images. Make a temporary presentation adjustment and design something "close" to your site's navigational structure that uses text instead of images. The only best practice noted above that does not necessarily apply to permanent or static links in your email template is in regards to formatting. While you still want your links to look like links, because these are not your primary links you may not want to bold them or make them "pop" too much. You do not want your static, persistent and navigational links to detract from the offers or information in the email, so it's perfectly fine to use a more subtle visual approach with them.

Links and Spam

Too many links in your email can trigger spam filters and alerts. We've already suggested that, if you're just starting your email marketing program, you begin with templates that have fewer links and then build your way up. Another technique for determining how many links you can have in your email without creating a spam problem is to do some testing pre-send. Create an email with as many links as you want and test send it to your seed or test addresses. If it goes into the spam or junk folder (and if you're sure

that there wasn't anything else in the content of the email that would have created a spam problem), then remove half of the links and test it again. You may find that you're suddenly inbox-ready just by removing some links!

Links in the Text Version of Your Email

Obviously, it's not possible to put actual links in the text-only version of your email. Whether your text-only version is the singular version of your email or whether you're sending a multi-part message with both html and text components, it's worth it to take some time to clean up the urls in your text-only version. Here are a handful of best practices:

Keep URLs Short and Memorable: From a text-only email, you'll be relying on people remembering, typing-in, or copying and pasting urls into a web browser to get to your webpage or landing page. Keep urls short and easy-to-remember to optimize visits to your webpage or landing page from your text-based email.

Space URLs Out From the Text: Because you can't use any type of formatting to make your urls stand out in a text-based email, make sure that there is a full paragraph break between the text above and the text below a url so that users can easily spot and find it.

Put Your URL at the Top and the Bottom of the Email: You'll want to make any urls from the email easy to find in the text-based version. Make sure there is one above the fold and one at the bottom of the email so that users can find the destination url quickly and easily at the beginning or the end.

Best Practices for Links in Emails
A good structured use of links in your email template can vastly improve your email's click-through and conversion statistics. Here are the best practices to keep in mind:

Don't Rely on Images to Tell Users Where to Click: Not all email clients will load your images, so if you're relying on users to click on buttons or graphics, you'll lose click-through counts. Use text-based links, augment image-based links with text links below them, and make all images clickable just to be sure.

Format Links So That They are Obvious: Don't get too fancy with your style sheet or brand requirements. Make sure that links look like links. Making links bold and underlined is the best way to do this, and if possible format them in a blue font as well.

Use Calls-to-Action for Link Text: The best content for your link will be a call-to-action that tells users exactly what they are doing when they click the link.

Place Links Where they are Visible: Don't trap your links within big blocks of text or formatted headlines where users may not see them. Space links out from the text around them so that it's easy for users to spot them.

Don't Use Too Many Links: Too many links can make an email hard to read and can also set off spam filter triggers. Use enough links that your readers will have lots of opportunities to click-through, but not so many that the email is simply a listing of links.

Do Use Permanent and Static Navigational Links: Permanent and navigational links in your email are a great way to increase the number of opportunities that your readers have to click-through an email without cluttering your template design. Don't format these links using images or using obtrusive fonts and styles that will draw away from the main content or offer of your email.

Make URLs in your Text-Only Emails Clear: In the text-only version of your email where you can't use links, make sure that urls are short and easy to remember, spaced out from the text around them, and included at both the top and bottom of the email.

Next Up: *What is the best width and height for an email template?*

SECTION 5.9
Width and Height of Your Email Template

> **In This Section:** The good news about email template design is that there are some things that have straight-forward answers. One of those items is the height and width dimensions of your email templates. While content, format, links, images, and many other elements of your email template may be filled with variables, knowing how wide and how tall to make your email template has clear answers!

The Ideal Width for an Email Template

The ideal width for an email is between 550 and 600 pixels, though we have seen emails that operate just fine at as much as 700 pixels! Why is this fixed width important? Remember that your email will not be displayed as an entire screen. It will be locked within the size of the display box of an email service provider or Outlook client. While the size of those boxes may vary, 600 pixels is a safe width to use to ensure that the entire width of your email displays in a user's preview box or email pane. Remember, nobody is going to use a horizontal scroll bar within an email.

The Ideal Height for an Email Template

Obviously, your email template can be as long as needed to accommodate the amount of text that you put in it. Just remember that the longer your email is, the less likely users are to see the content, offers, or promotions that are at the bottom of it. Also, remember how important it is that the most important text be shown above-the-fold, or in "email speak" within the preview pane of a typical email client. That preview pane will usually be between 300 and 500 pixels high. Be sure to optimize that space to feature as much content, promotion, and teaser as possible to encourage users to scroll further.

Predesigned Email Templates

If you're using an email marketing platform that uses pre-designed templates, such as Comm100, then the chances are good that your email template meets the above width requirement and is already designed to be optimized within the height of a preview pane. However, as you're scanning email templates available in your email marketing platform's selection or as you're designing your own, be sure to keep the height and width requirements above in mind.

Next Up: Is a one-column or two column email template better?

SECTION 5.10
What Works Better: One Column or Two Columns?

In This Section: Fortunately, much like "What is the proper height and width for an email template?" some other questions about email template design are also easy to answer. The question of one-column or two columns in your design is also a question that typically has a straight-forward answer. Of course, there are a few points you'll want to consider when determining whether to use a one column format or a two column format for your email marketing or newsletter template.

What Gives You the Most Content Above the Fold?

The most important part of your email will be the top two to three inches (about 500 pixels) that displays in the email preview pane of an Outlook or web-based email browser. When evaluating whether you would like to use a two column format or a one column format, one of the primary things that you will want to consider is which format allows you to display more content above-the-fold or in the preview pane. While this is entirely dependent on your email design, typically a two-column format will allow you to break content display into segments or "boxes" in this key area to display not only more content, but also a larger preview of what the content below in the body of the email may be. Because a side column is typically more navigational in nature, you can display a table of contents or "in this email" list in the column to entice users to keep reading while still using the primary column to display your main message or offer. A two column format typically will give you a greater opportunity to display content above the fold or in the email preview pane.

What Has the Least Chance of Breaking?

Of course, you also want to design email templates that will not break in appearance in various email clients. All email service providers support the use of nested tables (the html code that will build a two column format). However, if your code is sloppy, an email display will not be as forgiving as a web browser might be with your html errors. It's much more likely that an html email template that uses a table to create two columns may break, and finding the part in the html code where it broke may be more challenging than finding a bad line of code in a simpler, single column format. While any pre-designed email templates provided by your email marketing partner will certainly be coded to display properly across all email service providers, if you're designing templates in-house, base your one column or two column decisions on your html proficiency.

The Purpose and Content of Your Email

A final thing to consider is the purpose and content of your email. If your email is a single-call-to-action sales-based email, adding a second column full of navigational links may not be in your best interest. After all, as we've discussed, in a sales or marketing driven email the less options or opportunities for

decision making that you give your readers, the better. If you are sending an email specifically to promote a product, sale, or other revenue-generating event, a single column email may be better for you. It means that there will be fewer distractions from your main message and less of a chance that your readers will click to go to a page other than your primary landing page or offer page. While a two-column email format gives you the opportunity to present more information, a one-column email format will likely funnel users to your desired destination page more effectively.

Which side for your second column?

If you do decide to use a two-column format, then which side should you put your smaller column on? Typically, a user will scan your email with their eyes in a downward diagonal pattern from the upper left-hand corner of the email to the lowest visible point in the lower right hand corner. That means that you want your most important information in the upper left-hand corner of the email. That information may be the table-of-contents or "what's in this email" section of the template. It may also be the larger column that has your promotion or headline in it. Only you can determine which column of the email contains the most important information. However, whichever column contains the information that it's most important for users or readers see immediately should be placed on the left side of the template.

So, One Column or Two?

The answer, actually, is fairly simple. If your email does anything other than promote a single call-to-action sale, event, or product, two columns is better. Why? You can fit more information into the email preview pane. If your email is a single call-to-action promotion or if you're designing your template in-house and have limited html skills, consider a one-column alternative.

Best Practices for Column Layouts in Email Templates

Whether you use a one or two column format, here are some best practices to keep in mind.

Most Important Content Goes on the Left: Regardless of which column format you use, the most important information in your email should be in the upper left corner. Users will scan content in a downward diagonal pattern from upper left to lower right.

Test for Breaks: Before you send your email, be sure to test it across multiple email service providers to ensure that the column format doesn't break. Don't just check for broken column format. You'll also want to check to make sure that your font style remains consistent in each table cell.

One Column for Single Call-to-Action Emails: If your email only features a single promotion or call-to-action, use a single column format. There's no need to distract users with other content and options.

Two Columns for Information Emails: If your email contains a great deal of information or content, use a two-column format in order to get more content above-the-fold or into the email preview pane.

Next Up: *Important points to remember when designing your email template for various email service providers.*

SECTION 5.11

Designing Your Email for Different Email Service Provider Platforms

In This Section: If the world were perfect, your email would look exactly the same whether you opened it in an Outlook email client, Hotmail, Yahoo! or Gmail. However, in truth, your email template may display entirely differently in each of those email clients. To add to the challenge, how an email displays in an email service provider is somewhat of a moving target since email service providers themselves often change their parameters and rules. What you're reading today may be entirely out-of-date in less than a year. However, most of the tips and tricks below have been fairly consistent for years now. While it's always important to test your email template across several major email service providers, here are some things to keep in mind when designing for the big email service providers.

Decide Which Email Service Providers are the Most Important

The first step that you'll want to take is to examine your current email marketing list and determine which email service providers are important enough to design an email template based on. Chances are that the bulk of your email list is Hotmail, Yahoo! and Gmail. However, if you are a b-to-b email marketer, you may find that you have a significant number of users who are using Lotus Notes. In the near future (possibly already depending on when you're reading this), you may be sending to a Facebook email address. Take a look at the list of email names you have (and perhaps a second look at the list of the most active email users that you have). Then determine which email service provider or providers are most important for your email to display perfectly in. If you don't have an existing email database list to study and are just starting to build your contact list, then it's safe to assume that Hotmail, Yahoo!, Gmail, and any email address viewed in an Outlook client will all be important to you.

Should You Segment Your List by Email Service Provider?

Some companies will go through the trouble of segmenting their email recipients by email address and sending slightly modified templates to each. For example, since Yahoo! displays images by default, their email to their Yahoo! clients may include more images. If you have a large email database and a significant in-house resource pool to create multiple copies of emails, this process may be worth your time. However, as a general rule, it's better to design one email template that will appeal to all email service providers.

Tables are Your Friend!

Almost all email clients respond well to tables built with html to format your email. In fact, it's almost imperative that you use tables because Gmail and certain versions of Outlook don't support html commands like float, margin, and padding. However, even when using tables to create your html email layout, there are inconsistencies in how html commands such as width, margin, and padding are handled

in various email clients. Don't worry, you can still create a table layout that will look mostly consistent across all of the major email service providers if you keep the following key points in mind:

Assign Width in Each Table Cell: It's a not uncommon practice when developing an html table to assign the table's width in the main <table> tag. Unfortunately, when you create an html email that includes table widths, <td> widths, <td> padding, and even CSS padding commands, your email will almost certainly look different in just about every email client. It will probably also break in at least one email client! How can you avoid this? Set the width in individual table cells rather than in the table itself. If you're familiar with html code, here's how it should look.

```
<table cellspacing = "0" cellpadding = "5" border = "0">
<tr>
    <td width = "100"></td>
    <td width = "200"></td>
</tr>
</table>
```

Most importantly, remember that if you forget to specify the width in an individual table cell, the email client will most likely not figure it out and your email will break in appearance in most clients. Also, do not use percentage based assignments for your table cell widths. Several email clients (particularly Outlook) don't recognize or support percentage assignments for tables.

CSS is Not Your Friend!

Using CSS in an html email template is, unfortunately, a poor idea. Many email clients, particularly Gmail, will overwrite your CSS with their own formatting. While CSS is a great, reliable, efficient tool for designing web pages, remember that an html email template isn't a web page. You'll want to follow these solutions for not using CSS when designing your email template.

Use a Container Table to Assign a Background Color: Several email clients will completely ignore background color commands in your CSS or even your html <body> tag. However, you can use a container table (a table that "contains" all of the other tables nested within it to create your email layout) to assign a background color. This would be the only instance in an email where it's safe to use a percentage to assign your table width and to assign the width within the <table> tag itself. Why is that? Because you're assigning a background color (or image, though that is unadvisable) and you want the table to take up the entire background of the email no matter what size the email displays at. Here's how the code should look.

```
<table cellspacing="0" cellpadding="0" border="0" width="100%">
<tr>
  <td bgcolor="#000000">
  Your email code goes here.
```

```
    </td>
</tr>
</table>
```

That said, as we're about to note, you may want to avoid background colors in your emails.

Avoid Light Fonts on Dark Backgrounds: A dark-colored background with a white or light font may work great on landing pages and web pages. In fact, often a dark background with a bright font can cause products and messages to "pop" effectively. However, when you use this technique in an html email template, you run the risk of a serious break in your email display. Even if you assign the font color and the background color inline and using tables rather than CSS or <body> tags, the variability with which email clients display html can mean that for your subscribers the email may appear as a white background with white text or a dark background with black text. With email templates, it's always safer to err on the side of "somewhat more boring" but most likely to display correctly across all email clients. Sticking to light backgrounds and dark fonts will mean that even if the email client overwrites your background or font color with the standard white background and black font, your email is still readable to users.

Use Font Tags Instead of CSS: Gmail strips all CSS from both the <head> and <body> tags. That means that if you're going to use CSS to assign font properties, you'll need to do it by assigning the CSS "inline," which means to assign it on the paragraph or table cell level. However, even then you run consistency risks. While CSS is supported by all major email service providers, it's also an imperfect science in the world of email templates. While it's a bit "old school," using a <font> tag to control your font size, color, decoration, and weight is a more consistent and safe way to ensure your email displays as desired across multiple email service providers.

Other Cross Email Service Provider Design Issues
While it's nearly impossible to provide a comprehensive list of tricks for ideal display across multiple email service providers, especially because the rules frequently change, here are a few other key points to keep in mind.

Spacer Images: It's common to design a web page using spacer images, or clear gifs that are the dimensions required to create a desired buffer space between text blocks or areas of the webpage. Do not replicate this process in designing and html email template. Because in most email clients images do not load, you may be creating either a broken display or a display that appears to users as a high number of unloaded images.

Image Dimensions: Always assign height and width dimensions to your image. If the image doesn't load then at least your email template's layout and format will hold.

Use of Images in General: In general, remember that the vast majority of email clients don't load images; therefore it's in your best interest not to design around including them. In particular, don't use a background image!

Overwrites: In some cases, the best advice is to accept that an email service provider will overwrite your html and style commands with their own. This is particularly true in the case of links, which many email service providers automatically overwrite with a blue, underlined format. You may save yourself hours of headaches and grief if you simply accept that your email may not display using your exact desired methods in certain email clients and not take hours and days to battle for your specific branded design elements!

Training Your Design Team: Finally, if you are designing your own email template in-house, it's probably worth your time to train your design team on the limitations and best practices of designing an html email template versus a webpage. Otherwise, you may have frustrated designers who don't understand why they can't match your brand requirements in an email or who design non-optimized html email templates because they don't know the limitations. If you're using a pre-made email template by your email marketing or newsletter platform, it has likely been designed with all of these concerns in mind. However, an in-house design team may not include an expert on the ins-and-outs of creating an html email template.

Best Practices for Creating Effective Cross-Platform Email Templates

It's unlikely that you'll ever be able to create an html email template that looks exactly the same across all email service providers. However, you can create an email template that looks great in all email service providers! Here are the best practices to keep in mind.

Use Tables: Using nested tables to create your html layout may seem somewhat outdated when it comes to web pages, but it's the best way to create an html email template that displays consistently and doesn't break in size or width dimensions.

Assign Width by Table Cell: Do not assign widths using the <table> tag. Assign each width individually in *every* <td> tag.

Do Not Use Percentage Assignments for Table Cell Width: Do not use the common and more flexible percentage assignment for table cell width. Use specific pixel count widths every time.

Avoid CSS or Use Inline CSS: In general, CSS can cause display malfunctions in many email service providers. However, if you must use CSS instead of individual font assignment tags, apply the CSS inline. Gmail will strip CSS out of the <head> or <body> tag and your email will be entirely unformatted as a result.

Use <font> Tags: Instead of CSS, use old-school <font> tags to determine font size, decoration, color and weight. Your display will be more consistent.

Avoid Dark Backgrounds: Because some email clients may strip your background color or your font color, a dark background with a light

font may end up looking like a dark background with a black font or a white background with a white font. Use light background colors (or no background color at all) and black or dark primary fonts.

Be Responsible with Images: We've covered images in great detail previously, but remember that most email service providers don't display them. Don't design your html email template using spacer images and be sure to practice all best-practices for images.

Test. Then Retest. And Test Regularly. Most importantly, test your email template regularly across all primary email service providers to check how it's displaying. Testing before every single send is recommended.

There's no such thing as a perfect html email template that displays exactly as you envisioned it in every single email service provider. However, that doesn't mean that your html email template can't look great and be effective across all email service providers.

Next Up: How to integrate social sharing into your email template.

SECTION 5.12
Integrating Forwards and Social Media Sharing

In This Section: There's no denying that we live in a social media world. While email and newsletter marketing has still been shown to give the largest return on investment for both expenditures and effort, it would be a bad business practice to not consider how to implement social sharing and the opportunity to grow your social network base into your email templates. Not only is it ideal to encourage the sharing of your email content through social networks, it's also great to encourage your email subscribers to join your social networks or to use social networks to convert other members to sign up for your email list.

Sharing Your Newsletter Content via Social Networks

Any time your company creates content, whether it's for the website or for an email marketing piece or newsletter, you want for that content to get shared across as many social networks as possible. While including social share buttons on any landing pages or content pages themselves is an important part of this process, allowing users to share content directly from your email is equally important. How do you do this? There are two steps.

Make Sure There is an HTML Webpage Copy of Your Email: It should really be a best-practice that you're following regardless to ensure that there is a standalone html webpage version of any email that you send that users can view if they are unable to see your email in their email client. Many email marketing platforms, such as Comm100, provide this automatically along with a link at the top of the email to "Visit this url if you cannot see this email." However, if you're not creating an html web page copy of your email, you'll need to do that in order to optimize the chances for a social share of your email newsletter or marketing email.

Code Your In-Email Sharing Buttons Properly: Next, you'll need to ensure that your social sharing buttons in an email template are coded to share that html webpage. You don't want to make users visit a separate html webpage and then hit a "Tweet" or "Facebook Share" or "Google +" button in order to share your content or promotion with others. If you're unsure of the proper code to use to tell a "share" button what url to share, then we suggest asking your in-house development team to research it. It's too complicated and specific to cover in this book, and it also changes rapidly. However, many email marketing platforms will provide this feature by default.

In today's internet world, never waste content! You want to make it as easy and as seamless as possible for users to share your email across the internet via all possible social networks.

Enticing Newsletter or Email Subscribers to Join Your Social Networks

While your email marketing list will almost always give you the highest return on investment per contact, growing your social networks is also important to your company. Not only does it give you a secondary customer win-back and retention tool, but it also improves viral brand marketing and can have a significant impact on search engine optimization (SEO). It's never a waste of real-estate in your email template to provide buttons or text links to encourage subscribers to join your social networks.

Encouraging subscribers to join your social networks isn't unlike any other value proposition. Particularly given that your email subscribers may already feel as though you have access to communicating with them via email, you'll need to take a tiny bit of extra effort to "sell" the idea of liking you on Facebook or following you on Twitter. Convincing users to take these actions isn't significantly different from the methods that you'll use to grow your email list (which we'll discuss later in this book). You'll need to present a value proposition that is different from the value that they get by receiving your email. The most common and effective ones will be special offers and deals that are not offered via email or tips from experts that are not offered via email. You may also want to consider reminding people that following or liking you on a social network gives them access to real time and time-sensitive information that they may not have access to via email newsletters or communications.

Where to Put Social Sharing Buttons in an Email Template

As we've previously discussed, real estate within an email template is critically important, particularly the top three inches (roughly 500 or 600 pixels). For that reason, it's important that you balance where you put your social sharing buttons and how important it is that users see them versus the most important content in your email. For example, if you put your social sharing buttons below the fold, it's possible that even if your email content is incredibly compelling and interesting and features an amazing offer, users may not share it on their social networks because they won't view the email outside of their email preview pane and therefore won't ever see your social sharing buttons. The same applies for adding users to your social networks via newsletter promotions. However, if you put the social sharing buttons and features above the fold, you are taking room away from other messages or important information that you want to ensure that users see. You'll need to determine your own business objectives and what role utilizing social sharing in email needs to play in that in order to properly determine where to put your social network buttons. There's no right or wrong way or best practice.

Testing is your friend here! Consider doing an A/B test where you put your social calls-to-action above the fold in one email and below the fold in a second email. Then track all the related metrics, including overall traffic to the web version of your email, sign-ups to your list, new Facebook likes and tracked tweets. You may find that positioning makes a great difference in your social activity. You may also find that it doesn't make any difference at all and therefore it either doesn't matter where you put the buttons. We'll discuss email template testing in general in a separate chapter in this book.

Provide Text Alternatives to Social Share Buttons

It's also important to remember that, while the standard for web design is to use identifiable buttons for social sharing or to join social networks, those images may not be visible or appear in your email

template. Always design your email template so that there is a text link alternative for joining or sharing content via social networks. It may seem unnecessary, but you will absolutely see improved social sharing if you do not rely on images in order to convey the message to your users or subscribers that they can share your content via social networks or join your social circles.

Provide Your Social URLS as Well

In addition to providing your social sharing and social network joining solicitations via a text link, it's also a great best practice to consider including your social network urls or handles in your email template. Users may not want to click a join or share button immediately, but they may be interested in viewing or checking out your social network locations. They also may not want to do that directly from their email, or they may be reading their email at a work location or other location where social networks are blocked. Be sure to include the urls of your Twitter, Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn or other social network locations for them to note or remember for a later time.

Best Practices for Social Sharing in Email Templates

Best practices for social sharing components in emails are changing almost as fast as the social network space itself is changing. However, the following will all help to improve your email's value in the world of social network sharing.

Be Sure to Have an HTML Webpage Version of Your Email: You should be doing this anyway! However, in order for the content of your email to be shared via social networks, you'll need a static html webpage version of the email.

Code Share Links to Directly Share Your Webpage Version: Make sure you're not relying on users to go to your html web page version of your email and then share. Code the sharing buttons or links within your email to post the webpage directly.

Give an Incentive for Joining Social Networks: Email subscribers may be disinclined to join your social networks because they feel as though you already have access to communicating with them. Be sure to give them content or offer incentives to like, follow or add you.

Test Social Button and Link Placements: Test various placements for your social join or share buttons and links in your emails in order to find the right placement and balance for you.

Augment Buttons with Links: Remember that while buttons are the common way to denote a social network share or add on a web page, graphics and images may not appear in your email templates. Make sure there is always a corresponding text link.

Provide Social URLS: Subscribers may read your emails at locations where social networks are blocked (such as at work). Be sure to provide your social urls within the body of the email as well for them to remember later.

Social networks and email marketing work best when they work hand-in-hand. Don't shy away from promoting social sharing or social networks within your email.

Next Up: *Making the most of your call-to-action.*

SECTION 5.13
Optimizing Your Email Call to Action

In This Section: At the end of the day, it doesn't matter if none of your emails go to the junk folder, if your content is amazing, if your open rate is sky high, and if your email template displays perfectly. What matters is if your users ultimately did what you were encouraging them to do in your email, whether that is a revenue-generating event or just a click-through. If you can't write a compelling call-to-action, then you're likely due in for an underperforming email campaign. While there are entire marketing books devoted to the art of the call-to-action, here are some important tips that can improve your call-to-action, and therefore improve your email performance.

Rule Number One: Don't Trap Your Call-to-Action in an Image

If it feels like we're repeating this point frequently, it's because it's very, very important. Image buttons and graphics certainly work better on a webpage to entice actions such as purchases or sign-ups. However, in an email template, those images may be hidden or not displayed at all. Even if you've applied a text call-to-action in the alt or title text behind the image, that small, perfunctory text may not be enough to get a user to click. We recommend that you avoid image-based calls-to-action entirely and use only text links. However, if for brand or design reasons you're obligated to include a graphic button as your call to action, make sure that it has an equally prominent text link call-to-action right next to it.

Rule Number Two: Minimize the Number of Calls-to-Action

The more decisions that you ask users to make, the more they may not make any decision at all! Keep the number of things that you ask your users to click-through to or actions that you ask them to take to a minimum in your email. After all, one click is better than no clicks. If you ask a user to choose between many different options, you may find that they choose none.

Rule Number Three: Keep Your Call-to-Action Simple

We certainly aren't implying that you "dumb down" your call-to-action, but if you overcomplicate it with too many words or "high concepts," you'll lose appeal and results. You don't want to make users or readers think too hard about what it is that you're asking them to do. You want them to understand, immediately, that they are supposed to click or buy or join. A call-to-action is not the place to get out your thesaurus and look for interesting ways to say things. It's a place for you to use the most powerful, relatable and easily understood words and concepts to guide your readers or users to an action. Don't ask users, for example, to "Embrace our company on the world's largest social network!" Keep it simple and tell users to "Like us on Facebook." Fewer words that mean more and that users quickly understand are they best way to write a call-to-action.

Rule Number Four: Make Your Call-to-Action Stand Out

From a design perspective, you want to ensure that your call-to-action stands out. Don't hide it within a block of text. Separate the call-to-action out and ensure that there's white space surrounding it so that it stands out. Use a bolded font and even a font that is a larger size than the rest of your email content. While it's not an ideal "classy" design look, you may want to consider using "carrots" to draw attention to your call to action. For example, your call-to-action may look like this. >>This is a Call-to-Action<<. It's not the most sophisticated call-to-action design ever. However, chances are that if you tested it against a similar design without the carrots, the call-to-action with the carrots would perform better. Keep in mind, always, that your end goal is to drive click-through performance and revenue-generating actions.

Rule Number Five: Make Your Call-to-Action an Obvious Link

This is true of any link in your email, but it's particularly true when it comes to your call-to-action. We always recommend blue links with an underlined decoration style. Your online brand design may not match this, but making your call to action look clearly like a link will improve click-through and will thus improve overall email campaign performance. If you absolutely cannot make your link a blue font, at least be sure to make it an underlined font. Do not use a "mouse-over" effect to make the underline appear. That effect will not work in all email clients, and it won't make the link obvious to users who are quickly scanning your email.

Rule Number Six: Segment and Tailor Your Call-to-Action

If your email list is large enough that you're segmenting sub-lists, then you can also segment the writing of your call-to-action text. Any time that you can make a call-to-action more specific to the demographic who is reading the email, you can improve the performance of that call-to-action. For example, if you are segmenting users by state, you may have one call to action that reads "Sign Up for Texas' Favorite Summer Activity List" and another that says "Sign Up for Florida's Favorite Summer Activity List," even if both lists provide complete national information rather than state-specific information. You can also tailor calls-to-action by gender, customer loyalty, and just about any other criteria that you could come up with to segment your customer list. The more tailored the call-to-action is, the better it will perform.

Rule Number Seven: Personalize Your Call-to-Action

Much like making your call-to-action more specific through list segmentation can improve performance, using variables to personalize a call-to-action can also improve performance. For example, if your email marketing platform allows you to replace variables with fields from the database, such as Comm100 Email Marketing does, then you can easily have an entirely personalized call to action for every single user. For example, instead of saying "See custom sales items selected for you," you can create a much more customized and conversational call to action that says, "Suzie, see the sale items we picked out just for you." While you'll want to be careful that your personalization doesn't sound too much like customer spying, a personalized email and a personalized call-to-action will almost always improve performance.

Rule Number Eight: What, Why, How

If you're struggling to write good calls to action, following the "What. Why. How." rule can help to improve your performance. In short, have your call-to-action tell users what they should do, why they should do it and how to do it. Here are three examples:

Save 50% to Get the Most for Your Money by Clicking Here
Join Our Newsletter to Get Exclusive Discounts by Entering Your Email
Read the Article to Learn More by Clicking This Link

The key, of course, is to keep your call-to-action short and understandable while hitting all three major points: What? Why? How? Your subscribers' or users' brains will understand the thought process and know exactly what they need to do to benefit from your offer or promotion.

If you want to shorten the call-to-action, skipping the "Why" is often a way to accomplish that goal while still clearly conveying to users what they should do and how. Here's how the three calls-to-action above would read if you made that change.

Save 50% by Clicking Here
Join Our Newsletter by Entering Your Email
Click Here to Read the Article

You'll need to test and determine for yourself which method works best for you. You may also be limited by design space as to which method can work best in your email marketing or newsletter template.

Rule Number Nine: Above-the-Fold Call-to-Action

Another best practice that it may sound like we're repeating, but we're repeating it with good cause! Always remember that you want to get at least one call-to-action in above the fold of your email (within the first three inches or 500 pixels). In case users do not continue to scroll and read below their email preview pane, you want to be sure that they have an opportunity to click through on your call-to-action in the portion of the email that they see.

Rule Number Ten: Most of All, Make Your Call-to-Action Persuasive with Action Words and Commands

This, of course, is easier said than done! Determining which words, commands and concepts will resonate with your audience and cause the best response can take time and creativity. However, it's well worth the effort. Of course, you'll need to then implement…

The Most Important Rule: Test! Test! Test!

The call-to-action is the most important part of your email, and it's worth the time to test every element of it. Test different locations, different words, different font colors and sizes, images versus text. In short, test everything that you can think of. Of course, don't test them all at once because you won't' get usable data. Don't worry. The final chapter of this book is devoted entirely to email testing.

Your call-to-action is important, and it's important that you put time and thought into writing it, placing it within your email, and designing its look. The ten rules above, plus a rigorous round of testing, can mean that your call to action is perfectly optimized for every segment of your list and every email that you send.

Next Up: Finishing your email with a great "From" address and subject line!

SECTION 5.14
The Final Step: The Subject Line and From Address

In This Section: It may seem as though getting users to open your email would be the first step in designing a successful email campaign. In fact, setting the "from" address and determining the subject line is typically the last step. Unfortunately, for many companies, "last step" often translates to "quickly done and not thought out." Having a compelling "from" address and subject line should be a task that you spend an ample amount of time thinking about. It all begins with users choosing to open and view your email, and in many email clients that don't automatically load a portion of your email into a preview pane, that begins with the "from" address and subject line.

The From-Address: Personal or Professional?

It would be easy (and quick) to default your from-address to something simple like info@yourcompanyname.com or email@yourcompanyname.com. However, the from-address that you choose at the beginning of your campaign should never change (you'll be asking people to add it to their contact and address books to avoid having your email go to the spam or junk folder), so it's worth considering whether you want that email address to be personal or impersonal, as well as what email address may help incentivize open rates. You essentially have three options:

Impersonal: This is the most common format for a "from" address and looks similar to those described above. info@yourcompanyname.com and email@yourcompanyname.com are two of the most common. However, you can really select any word that is non-personal and non-incentivized and use it. Remember, though, that it's an email address that people will not be able to reply to or will be using as an automated tool for unsubscribing from your email list. For that reason, don't use an email address that you use for other purposes at your company. The benefit of using an impersonal email address as the "from" address is that it will be unlikely to experience any problems with spam filters. The downside is it may not "help" your open rate in the same way that personalized or incentivized from-addresses may.

Incentivized: An incentivized from-address will utilize the "from" address field to include a word that may help to get users excited about opening your email. Examples include deals@yourcompanyname.com or specials@yourcompanyname.com. What's the benefit? Every opportunity to excite a subscriber about opening your email should be leveraged, and the subtle reminder that they may be about to get a deal or discount can be effective. What's the downside? You may experience problems getting through spam filters in certain instances depending on your sender reputation and the content of your email.

Personal: The third type of email address for your mass email campaign is personalized. Examples include sally@yourcompanyname.com or joe@yourcompanyname.com. This type of from-address can

be particularly effective if your company has a recognizable spokesperson or executive. However, it can also be effective if your business segment is one where one-to-one relationships can be helpful, such as the non-profit sector or even some retail emails. The upside is that it makes the email experience feel more individualized to the reader. The downside is that it can also negatively impact open rates just as easily as it can increase them by making your email look less professional.

What's best for you? Because you don't want to change your "from" address very frequently, you'll want to limit your testing with this one. Certainly, however, one test using only different "from" lines can't hurt. Another option is to take an informal poll of your best customers. Either way, make sure that your "from" address is at least thought through and be aware of the other options if you're finding your open rates to be unsatisfactory.

Remember that it's a CAN-SPAM requirement that the "from" address accurately reflect whom the email is from. No playing around with fake company names or clever url domains!

The Subject Line: Research, Research, Research

There is nothing that we would like more than to tell you exactly what subject lines will work the best for your email! However, subject line and what will work can vary dramatically by industry and email list segment. While we can't tell you for absolute certain what will work for you, we can give you a list of common best practices for email subject lines.

Personalize: Using a personalization feature such as the one offered by Comm100 to insert a first name or user name into the subject line can almost always improve your open rate. It's important, however, to use only a first name or user name and not a first and last name. Most subscribers will consider the inclusion of their last name in a subject line to be a privacy concern given how easy it is to hack into an email. Also, as noted when we discussed personalization earlier in this chapter, keep in mind whether your industry segment lends itself to using personalization or whether your customers would rather not have their name publically displayed on an email from you.

Create Urgency: You want subscribers to open your email as soon as they see it. The longer a recipient waits to open your email, the more likely it is that he or she will simply end up deleting it. How do you increase the chances that your email will get opened promptly? Creating a sense of urgency in the subject line is effective in increasing this metric. "Limited Availability Sale Items" and "Clearance Sale for a Limited Time Only" are examples. Write subject lines that make readers or subscribers feel as though they may miss out if they don't open the email and get the contents immediately.

Create Urgency Without a Date! However, while you certainly want to create urgency, you don't' want to write a subject line that makes your email outdated in the near future. Though email still offers the highest return on investment of any marketing channel, with the rise of social networks users often check their inbox less frequently. If you send an email that clearly says that an offer is out of date by Friday, you

may miss out on potential lagging opens that only happen on the weekend. You'll want to walk a fine line between creating urgency and also not making your email appear out-of-date too soon.

Keep it Short and Put the Important Parts First: Log into a Hotmail, Yahoo! or Gmail account and look at how your subject lines display. You'll notice that you don't see that many characters of your subject line. Generally speaking, you have about thirty-five to fifty characters of text to display in a subject line that a user will actually see. Keep your subject lines short and make sure the most important content, such as the offer you're making, is at the front of the subject line. Also, remember that the longer you make your subject line, the more likely you are to end up in a spam or junk folder. Even if it takes you a while to craft your subject line masterpiece into just thirty-five to fifty characters, it will be worth the time and effort in improved deliverability and open rates.

Repeat Your Company or Newsletter Name: Users will open their email from you based on two things after a scan of their inbox. The first will be the content of the subject line, but the second will be their relationship with you. Not everybody will scan the "from" address or even see it, so it's often beneficial to put your company or newsletter name in the subject line as well. Of course, you'll need to balance between subject line length and reminding subscribers that the email is from you. Most likely, you'll need to do some testing to determine the best course of action for you.

Be Careful of Spam Words: Finally, there's nowhere that the use of spam words can come back to haunt you more quickly than in the subject line of your email. Subject line content is given huge priority by most email service provider spam filters. While it's a fine line, be careful of words like "free" and "cash." Yes, you want to use words in the subject line that will encourage users to open your email, but doing that at the expense of getting into the inbox isn't worth it. As always, be sure to test your email to a list of seed addresses before you send it to your main list. If you end up going into the junk or spam folder, one of the first "fixes" that you should try is removing any questionable spam words from your subject line and making it shorter.

And, of course, again remember that it's a CAN-SPAM requirement that your subject line accurately reflect the content of the email. Don't be misleading.

The Most Important Best Practice for Email Subject Lines: Test! Test! Test!

There's nothing easier to test (or more important to test) than email subject lines. It's incredibly easy to break your email list into two parts and simply send a separate subject line to each and see which one gets a high open rate. Of course, make sure that all other variables such as the time of the send, the size of the list, and the breakdown of email service providers on the list are basically the same. Because subject line performance can vary so much based on industry segment, it's important that you test a variety of keywords, calls-to-action, lengths, personalization, and other factors and then make your own list of what is most effective at generating opens of your emails. Starting with the above best-practices can help ensure that you don't have a subject line that is designed to fail. Ultimately what's best for your email campaign program will need to be determined over time.

Of course, the most important thing to remember is to take your time and think through the "from" address and subject line. A little thought can go a long way to improving open rates.

Next Up: *A summary of best practices for sales conversion emails.*

SECTION 5.15
Best Practices for Sales Conversion Emails

In This Section: Earlier in this book, we gave you some brief lists of best practices to use when sending various types of emails. To make email sending a little bit easier for you, the next several sections will sum up best practices in easy-to-use checklist form for any type of email that you may be sending. Feel free to print out these pages and use them whenever you're putting together an email send for a specific type of email. In this section, we'll cover a best practices check-list for sales conversion emails.

Subject Line Best Practices for Sales Conversion Emails
A sales conversion email should practice all best practices for subject lines in general including:

Urgency: Create a sense of urgency so that users will open your email as quickly as possible, but do this without creating a sense of your email being outdated if a short period of time passes before users see it.

Content: Use words that are proven within your industry or email list segment to create actions and responses. Don't use words that may get you into trouble with spam filters. If appropriate, repeat your company or newsletter name in the subject line of the email.

Length: Do not write a subject line that is longer than thirty-five to fifty characters.

Personalization: If it's appropriate for your industry or email list segment, include a personalization field to use the subscriber's first name or site user name in the subject line of the email.

HTML Design Best Practices for Sales Conversion Emails
As a general rule, the following are design best practices for sending sales conversion emails:

Minimize Images: Even though you are most likely selling or promoting a product, limit your use of images to no more than thirty percent of your email template. Remember, images won't load in the large majority of email service providers.

Use Alt and Title Text: Because your images may not load, be sure to apply both alt and title text behind the images so that text displays when the images don't load. Make the text a compelling call-to-action and make the image a link to your landing page.

Optimize the Top Three Inches: Most email service providers will display the top three inches (about 500 pixels) in their email preview pane. Make sure to optimize this space by not including images, placing a call-to-action in the

area, and making sure that the main sales pitch of your offer appears there.

Maximum Email Width of 600 Pixels: Make sure that your email template does not exceed 600 pixels in width. It may not display in the email preview pane if it does.

One Column May be Appropriate: For sales conversion emails, it may be more appropriate to use a single-column email template rather than two columns. You only want readers to focus on the deal, offer, or revenue-generating event. You do not want to distract them with a great deal of extra information and links that may deter them from following through on your desired action.

Don't' Trap Calls to Action in an Image: As tempting as it is to use graphic buttons or links in your html email, be sure to not trap the call-to-action or any important information in an image. Again, your users may not see the image, and if they don't they may not know where to click. Make sure that links and calls-to-action are all text-based.

Easy-to-Find Unsubscribe Rules: Make sure that it's easy and clear to users where to unsubscribe from your email list. If you don't, they may mark you as spam, which could impact your ability to get delivered to the inbox in the future.

Follow CAN-SPAM Rules: Make sure that you have followed all CAN-SPAM rules including a physical mailing address, an unsubscribe link or address, and an indication that your email is an advertisement.

No CSS! Stay away from coding your html email template using CSS. Many email service providers will strip it out. Use traditional <font> and <table> tags instead.

Format Text: Format your text so that it is interesting to look at by using a variety of bold fonts and font colors. Avoid italics if possible.

Format Links: Format links to look like links so that users recognize them. The best option is a blue font with an underline. However, if you can't make your font blue, at least make links underlined. It's also advisable to make them bold.

No Dark Background Colors with Light Font Colors: Because many email service providers will strip out your background image or misread your font colors, a dark background with white or light fonts can end up looking like a white background with white fonts or a dark background with black fonts. Stick to light background colors and dark fonts.

Include Social Sharing: Include social sharing elements, but don't rely on buttons or images.

Content Best Practices for Sales Conversion Emails

Content is the area of an email where you will experience the largest variation in best practices. Here are the most important best practices for sales and conversion emails.

Single-Call-to-Action: If the goal of your email is to drive a single or targeted revenue generating act, then only give users or readers the choice of one action to complete. Don't suggest that they buy a

product and then also suggest that they read an article. Keep your call-to-action to only one motivation, and that motivation should be to purchase, sign-up, or click through.

Keep It Reasonably Short: The more copy you put in an email, the less likely a user is to complete your call-to-action. You also increase your risk of ending up in the spam or junk folder. Keep your copy to a minimum and include only the highlights that will inspire your reader to click-through.

Don't Use Too Many Navigational Links: While navigational links are great in content or retention emails, in a revenue generating email they can take users away from finishing a revenue-generating activity and onto a content or website page that doesn't promote the offer. Strip navigational links out of your revenue generating or conversion emails and focus on the single call-to-action.

Include Contact Information: Though you don't want to distract users from your call-to-action, you do want to make it easy for them to contact you if they have questions or problems. Including contact information also builds trust with your users or readers. In a revenue-generating or sales email, be sure to include contact information prominently.

Be Careful with Spam Words: Sales, revenue-generating, and conversion emails are often the most likely to end up in the junk folder because they overused spam trigger words like "sale" or "cash." Write compelling email copy without emphasizing potential spam words too heavily.

Personalize: In most cases, your email will perform better if you use a personalization field in the body of the email or the call-to-action. As always, consider if personalization is appropriate for your industry segment.

Segment Your List and Your Content: The more targeted you can make your offers and content; the more likely your offers are to convert. In the case of revenue-generating emails, try to segment your database by purchase history or average spend in order to put the most compelling offer or revenue generating event in front of the most likely candidate to take advantage of it.

Provide Terms and Conditions: Whenever you're sending an offer in an email that has terms and conditions applied to it, be sure to include either the full terms and conditions or a disclaimer that terms and conditions apply and can be found at a specific url within the email.

Follow the list above, and you'll be able to craft successful sales and conversion emails!

Next Up: *A best practices check list for driving clicks and page impressions from emails.*

SECTION 5.16
Best Practices for Driving Clicks to Page Impressions from Emails

In This Section: Clicks count! At the end of the day, your readers can't make you any revenue directly from your email. They'll need to either click through to a landing page where they can make a revenue-generating transaction or to a website where you are monetizing their visit through an impression-based web advertisement. Either way, you'll need to follow basic best practices for driving clicks from your email to your landing page or website. Here are the key points that you'll need to keep in mind in order to successfully accomplish that goal.

Link Appearance

How your links appear in your email can determine how effective you are at driving click-through activity to your website or landing page. In general, the following are best practices for link appearance in html email templates.

- Make links appear in a blue font
- Make sure that links are underlined to denote that they are links
- Use a bold font for your links
- Do not include your links in a block of text but instead separate them out and pad a minor degree of white space around them.

You may decide not to make your links a blue font for brand or design reasons. While a blue font has been shown to drive more clicks, as long as you underline your links most users will recognize them as links.

You may also consider using a larger font size to make links stand out more from the rest of your text.

Link Placement

Make sure that you get at least one, if not multiple, links above-the-fold in your email. That means in the top three inches, or roughly 500 pixels, of your email. This will ensure that users don't need to scroll outside of their email preview pane in order to click through to your website or landing page.

Image Links

If you want to maximize your click-through ratio from your email to your website or landing page, it's important that you don't "trap" links or calls-to-action within images. While image buttons work exceptionally well on a webpage to drive clicks, because images often don't load in emails your entire call-to-action to click may be lost if you use an image to convey a link. Make links and calls-to-action text based.

If your brand department insists that you include graphic buttons for links or calls-to-action even though it is not an email best practice, make sure that there is a text-based link and call-to-action directly below or above the image and that the image includes alt and title text that repeats the call-to-action.

Link Density

As a general rule, the more opportunities that you give a user to click from your email to your landing page or website, the better your results will be. However, keep the following in mind.

- Too many links can send you to the spam or junk folder. If your test send of your email ends up in the spam or junk folder, try removing some of the links.
- If your email is a revenue-generating or conversion email, you may want to include multiple links, but they should all be for the same call-to-action. Don't distract users with other actions or options that don't contribute to your end goal.
- If your email is a content email or retention email, navigational links to your website and multiple links to various contact and content pages can add to your overall link density and opportunities for click-through actions.

URLs in Text-Only Emails

Though you cannot generate tracked click-through actions from the text-only version of your email, you can increase the number of users who navigate from your text-only email to your website or landing page. Include urls for your offer or promoted content at both the bottom and the top of the email. Separate urls from content by a full paragraph break. Most importantly, keep urls in text-only email versions short and memorable.

Call-to-Action Text

Writing your call-to-action text can have the greatest impact on your click-through actions. Though we've covered calls-to-action in great detail earlier in this book, we've provided the best practices again in this summary for you.

Keep Your Call-to-Action Simple: Don't make the wording in your call-to-action too long or too complicated! Keep it simple, clear, and easy-to-understand.

Segment and Tailor Your Call-to-Action: You can also tailor subject lines by gender, customer loyalty, and just about any other criteria that you could come up with to segment your list with. The more tailored the call-to-action is, the better it will perform.

Personalize Your Call-to-Action: While you'll want to be careful that your personalization doesn't sound too much like customer spying, a personalized email and a personalized call-to-action will almost always improve performance.

What, Why, How: If you're struggling to write good calls to action, following the basic "What. Why. How." rule can help to improve your performance. In short, have your call-to-action tell users what they should do, why they should do it, and how to do it.

Make Your Call-to-Action Persuasive with Action Words and Commands: This, of course, is easier said than done! Determining which words, commands and concepts will resonate with your audience and cause the best response can take time and creativity. However, it's well worth the effort.

Next Up: A best practices check list for customer win-back and retention emails.

SECTION 5.17
Best Practices for Customer Win-Back & Retention Emails

In This Section: Customer retention and win-back emails will have a number of similar best practices to other emails. However, you'll want to take particular note of changes in content, offers, and even subject line practices. While you want your customer win-back and retention emails to result in revenue-generating activities over the long-term, you don't want to sacrifice customer affinity and relationship building.

Subject Line Best Practices for Retention and Win-Back Emails
A customer retention or win-back email should practice all best practices for subject lines in general including:

Reduce Stress on Urgency: This element become somewhat trickier with a win-back or retention email. While you still want create a sense of urgency to open the email, because win-back and retention emails don't require a time-sensitive offer (in most cases) you want to also give the email long-term value so that it will be forwarded around based on its content. If your email is a limited time offer to win-back resistant clients or customers, then certainly be sure to include urgency in the subject line. If it's not, focus more on the import and value of the content to give your email a longer time frame in which people may share or open it.

Content: Use words that are proven within your industry or email list segment to create actions and responses. Don't use words that may get you into trouble with spam filters. If appropriate, repeat your company or newsletter name in the subject line of the email.

Length: Do not write a subject line that is longer than thirty-five to fifty characters.

Personalization: If it's appropriate for your industry or email list segment, include a personalization field to use the subscriber's first name or site user name in the subject line of the email. However, remember that with a customer retention or win-back email, you may be hoping for a greater number of forwards or shares. You may want to experiment and test with personalization versus non-personalized content several times.

HTML Design Best Practices for Win-Back and Retention Emails
As a general rule, the following are design best practices for sending win-back and retention emails:

Minimize Images: Even though images will engage your readers or subscribers visually, limit your use of images to no more than thirty percent of your email template. Remember, images won't load in the large majority of email service providers.

Use Alt and Title Text: Because your images may not load, be sure to apply both alt and title text behind the images so that text displays when the images don't load. Make the text a compelling call-to-action and make the image a link to your landing page or website.

Optimize the Top Three Inches: Most email service providers will display the top three inches (about 500 pixels) in their email preview pane. Make sure to optimize this space by not including images, placing a call-to-action in it, and making sure that the main value proposition of your email appears there.

Maximum Email Width of 600 Pixels: Make sure that your email template does not exceed 600 pixels in width. It may not display in the email preview pane if it does.

Two Columns Will Likely be the Better Design Choice: Unlike sales conversion emails, where a single column and a more simplified display will likely be your better choice regarding design format, a win-back and retention email will likely perform better if you use a two-column email template format. Two columns will allow you to get a greater amount of information inserted above the fold. Because win-back and retention emails are generally not as laser-focused as sales conversion emails and include more information and more varied information, getting more preview copy into the top three inches via a two-column format is more important. Remember, the most important information should go in the top left corner!

Don't' Trap Calls to Action in an Image: As tempting as it is to use graphic buttons or links in your html email, be sure to not trap the call-to-

action or any important information in an image. Again, your users may not see the image, and if they don't they may not know where to click. Make sure that links and calls-to-action are all text-based.

Easy-to-Find Unsubscribe Rules: Make sure that it's easy and clear to users where to unsubscribe from your email list. If you don't, they may mark you as spam which could impact your ability to get delivered to the inbox in the future.

Follow CAN-SPAM Rules: Make sure that you have followed all CAN-SPAM rules including a physical mailing address, an unsubscribe link or address, and an indication that your email is an advertisement.

No CSS! Stay away from coding your html email template using CSS as many email service providers will strip it out. Use traditional <font> and <table> tags instead.

Format Text: Format your text so that it is interesting to look at by using a variety of bold fonts and font colors. Avoid italics if possible.

Format Links: Format links to look like links so that users recognize them. The best option is a blue font with an underline. However, if you can't make your font blue, at least make links underlined. It's also advisable to make them bold.

No Dark Background Colors with Light Font Colors: Because many email service providers will strip out your background image or misread your font colors, a dark background with white or light fonts can end up looking like a white background with white fonts or a dark

background with black fonts. Stick to light background colors and dark fonts.

Include Social Sharing: Include social sharing elements, but don't rely on buttons or images.

Content Best Practices for Win-Back and Retention Emails

Content is the area of an email where you will experience the largest variation in best practices. Here are the most important best practices for win-back and retention emails.

Short Blocks of Copy: The more copy you put in an email, the less likely a user is to complete your call-to-action or to read the full email copy. You also increase your risk of ending up in the spam or junk folder. Keep your copy to a minimum and include only the highlights that will inspire your reader to click-through. Consider text blocks that then have a strong call-to-action to click through to the website or landing page to read the full content.

Load Up on Navigational Links: The point of a win-back or retention email is to drive users back to your website for useful content, information, or offers. You can increase this click-through impact by increasing link count, and a great way to do that is to include navigational links to the departments, areas, or sub-sections of your site. A user may not be interested in your choice of content in your email, but he or she may see a navigational link to the clearance section of your website and take advantage of it.

Do Include Contact Information: Though you don't want to distract users from your call-to-action, you do want to make it easy for them to contact you if they have questions or problems. Including contact information also builds trust with your users or readers. Be sure to include contact information prominently.

Be Careful with Spam Words: Don't overuse spam trigger words like "sale" or "cash." Write compelling email copy without emphasizing potential spam words too heavily.

Personalize: In most cases, your email will perform better if you use a personalization field in the body of the email or the call-to-action. As always, consider if personalization is appropriate for your industry segment.

Segment Your List and Your Content: The more targeted you can make your offers and content; the more likely your offers are to convert. Try to segment your database by purchase history or average spend in order to put the most compelling offer or revenue generating event in front of the most likely candidate to take advantage of it.

Segment Further Based on Customer State: If you are sending an email to win-back lapsed or abandoned customers, your email will perform better if you segment your list based on "customer state." For example, customers who have not purchased within a year may need an offer of a 70% discount in order to purchase again. However, customers who have not purchased within the last three months may

only need 10%. Take the time to segment your win-back list based on status and you'll be able to spend less promotional money in the form of discounts while also seeing a higher return on effort.

Provide Terms and Conditions Notes: Whenever you're sending an offer in an email that has terms and conditions applied to it, be sure to include either the full terms and conditions or a disclaimer that terms and conditions apply and can be found at a specific url within the email.

Next Up: A best practices check list for creating content for your emails.

SECTION 5.18
Best Practices for Creating Content for Your Emails

In This Section: At the heart of it all, the email that you send is content that you want your readers to care about. Whether that content is information-based or an offer or promotion, how and what the content for your email is can make a huge difference in performance. Here are some best practices for creating content for your emails.

Choosing and Selecting Content

The first question that you are undoubtedly asking yourself is "What content should I put in my email?" There's not a proven algorithm for knowing what will resonate with your users or readers. In fact, the best option is to always test a variety of content over a period of time and then track the results. You can then use those results to create a best-practices list and internal knowledge of what will work for your users. However, if you're just getting started, here are some tips to follow.

It's NOT What You Would Want: One of the most common content generation mistakes that often happens in crafting email content is that the person in charge of creating the email centers the content around what he or she would want to read or see in an offer rather than using data to determine what actual readers and subscribers would enjoy. Even if you've never sent an email before, your company will have some data on what type of content resonates the best with your users. This may be sales data on the types of items or discounts that work the best, or it may be web analytics that show which pages or content types do the best on your site. Regardless of what sources you use, remember that you want to put content in your email products that will make users want to read and open it. That may mean that the content or offers don't personally align with your instincts or what you like!

Ask Around! No matter how small or large your company is, there are easy and quick web tools out there to survey or poll your existing traffic or members about the type of content or offers that they'll like. If you have an existing social network program, you can use Facebook Questions or a tweet-back campaign to accomplish the same goal. In reality, it will only take you a week to ask users what they want to read or see. The one caution, however, is to remember that the types of users who will respond to polls or questions will be your most active and engaged users. You may want to do the work to find out what the less active and engaged users desire, and that may require looking closely at your sales and web analytics.

Competitor Research: If you have a competitor who has a successful email marketing or newsletter program, or even a more robust web content section than you do, you can feel fairly safe in emulating the types of content or offers that you have seen them promoting. Particularly if they have been running an email program for quite some time, they have likely tested and perfected the types of content and

offers that work best. Again, however, the one caution would be that you may be receiving a specific email based on a list segment that you are falling into. For example, if you have a dummy account at a competitor from which you've made one test purchase, or no purchases, you may be getting different email content than their best customers do. However, it's a great research jumping off point!

Seasonal Content: Seasonal content is always a great way to improve open rates. Remember though that December is the most active email marketing time, so even with great content you may see reduced results because there's simply so much email in most people's inboxes. However, making your content targeted to holidays, seasonal fashion trends, trends in your industry, or other time-related or seasonal elements is always a great way to make the content more relevant to your readers and users.

Test! Test! Test! Of course, at the end of the day, it's all about testing. You'll only develop knowledge of what content your readers and subscribers love and what content they hate over time and by keeping great records and reporting on email activity. Never assume that you already know what your subscribers will want to read. Pay attention to what they're actually telling you with their behaviors.

Correct Grammar Counts!

It may be a world of SMS abbreviations, but test after test has shown that proper grammar in your email counts for improved conversion rates. Take the time to have the English major in your office (or a professional copy writer) review and edit your email. It only takes one user who notices a grammar or spelling mistake in your email to then begin a social media campaign that makes you look less professional than you are!

Determining the Length of Content

How long you make your content in an email is also important. You want to put enough content in to get your message across, but at the same time you run risks if your content is too long. Those risks include:

- Ending up in the spam or junk folder
- Having users be overwhelmed by the amount of content in your email and not reading it
- Having formatting issues as the content gets so long that it creates display problems in various email clients.

The best emails will be under 750 words total, and that's a great deal of text. However, as you determining the length of your text, here are ways to make it more visually appealing and less likely to end up causing problems.

Use Short Text Blocks: Your email will almost never be the best place to put the content of a full article or robust product description. Use shorter text blocks of 100 to 200 words that have a strong call-to-action to click-through to your landing page or website for more information. You'll get the double benefit of a more text-friendly email as well as increased web traffic.

Format the Text: We'll cover best-practices for formatting content below, but make your content visually interesting by using font colors, sizes, and bold tags. If text is more visually compelling, it's also more likely to be scanned or even fully read.

Break Text Up with Headlines or Images: Break up your larger blocks of text with headlines or images (though obviously limit the use of images as previously discussed). Again, if there's too much text in a large block, users will be overwhelmed by it and it's unlikely that they will read it. Keep your email visually interesting with other elements placed in between text areas.

Words to Avoid in Your Email Content

There are about 200 words that can get you into spam trouble with your email content. That's not to say that you can't ever use these words, but it is to say that you should minimize them and certainly don't use them in the subject line. We've provided a complete list of spam-trigger words (the most recent version available) in section six of this book. However, the following short list constitutes what are often referred to as "email disaster words." If you're having a problem staying out of the spam or junk folder, these are the words that are most likely to be putting you there.

- Free
- Visit our website
- Opportunity
- 50% Off
- Click here
- Call now
- Subscribe
- Bonus
- Discount
- Save up to

- Winnter
- Prizes
- Information you requested
- Important information regarding
- Guarantee, Guaranteed
- Special Promotion
- Great Offer/Deal
- All New
- One Time
- Order Now

Again, you certainly can use these words in your email, and you've most likely seen emails from companies that use these words. Ending up in the spam or junk folder involves a complex matrix and algorithm that's different for each email service provider. The more that you use the above words (as well as the list of words provided in section six of this book), the more likely you are to experience deliverability problems. Be aware of these "disaster" words and know that if you over-use them or begin to experience deliverability problems they are your likely culprits.

Formatting Content

Finally, how you format the content in your email is almost as important as what the content itself is. Here are some best practices for content formatting in email newsletters or promotions.

Don't Copy and Paste from Word! If there's one rule of "doing things on the web" that you should always remember, it's "Don't copy and paste content from Microsoft Word." While many email marketing

platforms, including Comm100, will overwrite any "special characters" that translate from Word as "garble", you may later find that in some cases they displayed inappropriately. Word content is not web-ready content. Always copy your content into Notepad before inserting it into your email template. Then use your email platforms html or Wiziwig tools to format headlines, fonts, etc.

Use Bold Tags, Font Colors and Font Sizes: As we noted above, making your content visually interesting is also highly important. Within your individual text blocks, use bold tags, font colors, or even various font sizes to highlight keywords and trigger words. Remember, however, that it's important to do this using inline <font> tags rather than a CSS call.

Underline Links: In a previous section, we provided great detail on the best practices for improving click-through. For a full summary, you should read that section if you skipped over it. However, at a minimum, remember that when formatting content you should always format links with an underlined font in order to improve click-through activity.

Use Headlines: Be sure to break-up your content by using larger, bolder headlines to convey to users what exactly each section is about. It will help readers scan your content for the pieces that are most interesting or important to them.

Small Text Blocks: We've said it frequently because it's important! Use small blocks of text that then use strong calls-to-action to have users click to your landing page or website for the full content or information. It will keep your email more text-friendly and increase web traffic.

Readable Font: Finally, make sure to use a readable font! Arial and other non-serif fonts in a ten or eleven point font size are often considered the best fonts for email templates. Stay away from heavy serif fonts, script fonts, or novelty fonts.

Content is king of the internet, and that includes email. Take the time to follow these best practices for both choosing and selecting and then creating content and you'll see email improvement.

Next Up: Your email will need a landing page! Best practices for email landing pages!

SECTION 5.19
Best Practices for Email Landing Pages

In This Section: In some cases, the links from your email will lead directly to product or content pages on your website. However, in a great number of cases, the links from your email will lead directly to landing pages that you have developed specifically for the product, promotion, or special that you are offering in your email. A good (or great) landing page can make the difference between a successful email campaign and a sub-par email campaign. How do you optimize landing pages? Here are some basic best practices to keep in mind.

The Three Second Scan

The first important best practice for a landing page is to make sure that it passes what is known as the "three second scan." Most internet users will decide whether to stay on a page or abandon it in less than five seconds, so it's safe to say that you have three seconds to convince a user to stay on the page. What does that mean? It means all of the following:

- Your page needs to load quickly!
- Users need to be able to know what the offer is and what message you are conveying within seconds of landing on the page. How do you do this? By keeping it simple as we'll discuss in the following actions.
- Users need to be visually compelled. No matter how great your offer or copy is, if a user isn't visually compelled immediately, he or she will lose interest in the page before you have a chance to sell him or her.

The internet moves quickly, and so do its users. Even a loyal customer coming from a specific email promotion may not give your landing page much time or attention if it doesn't impact him or her within the first three seconds.

Only One Action

Not unlike your sales and conversion emails, you only want users to be able to do one thing when they get to your landing page. That may be purchasing a product, signing up via a form, or even clicking through to another destination. No matter what the action that you want them to take is, it's important that you not distract them with other possible actions. Only present one promotion per landing page. It's actually recommended that you don't include your standard site navigation on landing pages either. After all, if users start drilling down into your website, they may never return to complete the desired action on your landing page. Remember the customer funnel that we discussed earlier? When you get a person to click through from your email to your landing page, you've convinced them to move one step further in

your funnel. However, the ultimate goal is to move them all the way through the funnel. Don't distract them from that desired path with other options or choices.

In short, your landing page should only promote and encourage users to do one specific thing. It may seem counterintuitive, but years of marketing studies have proven that the most effective landing pages simply tell people what to do and do not present them with other options.

Use Short Forms

In some cases, the action that you'll want users to complete on your landing page will involve having them fill out a form. You may want them to join an email list, fill out a survey, or sign-up to receive a postal mailing. When you are asking users to fill out a form on a landing page, the best practice to remember is to keep the form as short as possible. The more information that you ask users to provide, the less likely they will be to actually complete and submit your form. Only ask for the information that you absolutely, one hundred percent need in order to make the sign-up or form submission valuable to you. Every extra question that you ask or field of information that you require will actively reduce your conversion rate.

In short, if you have a form, keep the form short! Identify exactly what you need and only ask for that. The more information that you ask for, the lower your conversion rate will be.

Compelling Call-to-Action

It might go without saying, but your call-to-action must be strong. You have more freedom to use stronger and more compelling words on your landing page than you would in an email because your landing page doesn't need to make it past the spam filters of email service providers. Keep your calls-to-action short and tell users exactly what you want them to do. "Buy now," "Sign-up," "Join Free" – each of these is a high converting call-to-action. Make them easy-to-read and find and don't leave any question in the user's mind as to what you want them to do. We covered some best practices for calls-to-action in emails earlier in this book, and many of them apply here as well.

It should be noted that there are some marketers who believe that using a softer call to action on a landing page can be more effective. Calls to action like "Buy Now" may be more commitment than a user on a landing page is ready to make. "Learn More", for example, may work better. They only way you'll know what works best on your landing page is to test!

Visually Engage

You want to visually engage your users. You are not limited in the use of images, videos, or Flash technology on a webpage the way that you are in an email. With that said, you want to use images to further move your user though the experience of the landing page, not to distract them. Again, you'll want to do some a/b testing, but here are some basic considerations.

- If your Flash component causes the page to load slowly or browsers to crash, it's not worth having on your landing page
- Don't use so many images that the user is too distracted from the ultimate goal of the page.
- While the data is mixed, a video that begins to play as soon as the page loads can cause abandonment from the page as much as they may cause conversions. Many people browse the internet from work where an auto-loading video with sound may cause them to immediately click away from the page.
- You'll have options with images that you'll want to think through. What will work best with your target audience? Lifestyle images? Product images? Abstract images? There's no right or wrong answer, and a/b testing of your landing page is the best way to determine the answer.

What do you need to know? Your page needs to look professional and be visually compelling. As we noted, you won't have very much time to convince users to stay on your page or abandon it.

Use Lots of Whitespace

Or dark space! The best landing pages won't be crowded or busy. You want a great deal of open space around the margins of the page so that users are immediately drawn to your value proposition, sales graphics, and call-to-action. The less you distract them and the more you make the design elements related to your desired user action the focal point of the site, the better your landing page will convert. A great deal of blank white (or background colored) space on the page will focus your users' attention and draw them immediately into the action that you want them to complete.

Design Above the Fold!

In designing an email template, "above the fold" means designing the email so that the most important things for your user to see and do are in the top three inches of the email. When you're designing a landing page, the meaning is somewhat different. "Above the fold" in web-speak means everything that is visible on a standard web browser. In other words, you don't want users to have to scroll down the page to find your call-to-action or your value proposition or, certainly, the most compelling images. In general, you'll have 600 pixels worth of height to be above-the-fold in most web browser resolutions.

Above-the-fold design has become out-of-vogue with many web designers currently. The argument, of course, is that users have become more used to scrolling. However, if you want to be sure that your web pages convert at the highest possible standard, designing to have your message and call-to-action appear above the fold is still your best option.

Use Bold Buttons

Unlike in an email template, you'll have the option of using buttons and graphics to denote important calls-to-action. You won't be limited to experiencing the highest conversion rates through text links. In fact, your conversion rates will be higher if you use large and prominent buttons for your links and calls-to-action. Make your buttons easy-to-read, large, and easy-to-spot. Most importantly, make sure that

they look "clickable." Scan the internet for examples of buttons that you like. Chances are that if you design something similar, you will get outstanding results.

Build Trust

You never know who will come to your landing page. It may be a dedicated customer who already trusts and advocates for your brand. However, it may also be a completely new user who found your landing page through a social media forward or an email forward. Be sure to build trust with your users on your landing page. If you are collecting any information or requesting an email address, make users aware of your privacy policy and any online trust and privacy organizations that you belong to. You may also want to consider a few customer testimonials, but remember that you want to keep the page simple. In short, give your users the tools that they will need to trust you, but don't overdo it and clutter your landing page.

Don't Overwhelm with Terms and Conditions

The chances are good that your offer or information request on your landing page has some terms and conditions applied to it. You certainly want to make users aware of those terms and conditions *on* the landing page. If you do not, you risk a customer service nightmare at best and a press and social media nightmare at worst. How do you accomplish this? You have several options. The first is to make the terms and conditions small and near the bottom of the page. The second, and the more common, is to simply note that "Terms and Conditions apply" and then have users click to generate a pop-up window or text drop-down that reveals the full terms and conditions.

You want to be absolutely sure that any terms and conditions that apply to your offers are on your landing page. However, you do not want to make them visible enough that they will actively discourage customers.

Test!

Finally, the most important best practice for landing pages is to test them, test them, and test them. Google Website Optimizer is a great free tool to set up basic a/b tests of landing pages so that you can see which graphics, calls-to-action, background colors and headlines work the best for converting users. As you compile data, you'll be able to build your own in-house best practices list for landing pages specific to your company!

While there were many best practices presented in this section, if you only remember one of them, remember that the best landing pages keep their design and their user requirements incredibly simple!

Next Up: *The best practices for auto responder emails!*

SECTION 5.20
Best Practices for Auto Responders

> **In This Section:** Auto responders, which we've been discussing throughout this book, are one of the most popular and (if done correctly) effective email marketing techniques available currently. But how do you "do" auto responders in a way that will optimize their return on investment? The following best practices should assist you in crafting a successful and robust auto responder email program.

Use Basic Email Design Best Practices!

The first thing you'll want to do is to design a great email template with great content that leads to a great landing page! This entire section of this book was designed in order to give you the tools to do exactly that. Auto responders are no different from any other type of email marketing when it comes to the application of best practices for content, design, landing pages, formatting, subject lines, and spam protection. If you've read and absorbed the parts of this book in this chapter prior to reading this list of best practices for auto responders, then you have all of the information that you need in order to design great email templates, develop great content, and optimize your deliverability, open rate, click-through, and landing page conversion rates.

Be Sure That Your Content is Timeless

You'll never be able to tell when and where a user may get your auto responder. For that reason, it's absolutely critical that you ensure that the content contained in your auto responder isn't time or date specific. Even if you haven't changed your auto responder text for two years, users should still feel as though your content may have been written that very day. Avoid references to trends, slang, current events, or pop culture references. Use events, references, language, and images in your auto responders that won't date the email content. Avoid images that include fashionable clothing that may trend out of style. Don't reference seasons or holidays. The basic rule of thumb is to create content that can be read on any time or date and will be relevant and important to the user.

Timeless Means No Offers with Expiration Dates!

Remember when you're developing your auto responders that you can't use offers and promotions that have expiration dates or that feature products that you have a limited amount of stock of or will not be carrying for the long term. It's easy to believe that you will regularly update your auto responder content, but the reality is that most email marketers turn their auto responders on and then forget about them (we'll give you a best practice on how to avoid that further down in this list). Any time an offer goes out that isn't actually available to users, you risk alienating customers as well as damaging your brand through press, viral, word-of-mouth, and social media. Only include offers, promotions, and products in your auto responders that will be available no matter when a user reads the email.

Don't Number Your Auto Responders by Issue Number

While you may see auto responder campaigns that list an issue number in the subject line or body of the email, this is actually considered to be a poor idea. It's always possible that somebody may not begin receiving your auto responders until partway into the series depending on their email list sign-up status or the potential that their auto responders may land in the spam folder initially. Many email marketing studies show that as issue numbers rise, subscribers start to realize for exactly how long they've been receiving an email and may be more prone to unsubscribe. Keep your content and subject lines timeless as discussed above. That certainly includes not using issue numbers.

Use Proven Content: FAQs and Popular User Articles

Your auto responder list will be users who are newly subscribed to your product or information list. However, you most likely have a great deal of data about what is useful to new users based on your existing website or email activity. A good place to start is to take content from frequently asked questions that your existing customers submit (or that exist in your website's knowledge base) as well as the most popular articles or products from your website. Even if your website is fairly new, you most likely have a good idea of what the best and most important things that a new user would want to know about are. Utilize that knowledge to ensure that your auto responders are highly relevant to your recipients.

Space Emails Out with a Tail

You'll also want to think about how you'll space your emails out. You'll want to consider putting emails closer together at the beginning of your auto responder cycle when your users are most engaged and most excited about receiving your information. A spacing of two to three days between emails is often considered ideal. However, as you go deeper into your auto responder list, you'll want to space emails out further so that you do not risk annoying subscribers with too much email, ultimately having them mark you as spam or unsubscribing from your email list entirely. As you reach the end of your auto responder list, five days to a week in between emails is enough to remain relevant in your subscribers' minds without actively creating a problem with unsubscribe requests or spam complaints.

How Many Auto Responders Should You Send?

There are many different thought processes on the appropriate number of auto responders. Some email marketing platforms will only allow you to have ten or less active at any one time in order to guard against potential spam complaints and deliverability issues. Some companies believe that up to twenty auto responders is the appropriate number. Most studies, however, come down in the middle that between twelve and fifteen auto responders are the ideal number to send. Ten may not be quite enough to build a significant brand relationship with your new users, but more than fifteen can exceed the limit of a user or subscriber's tolerance. In the end, you'll have to rely on that old marketing tool **testing** to figure out what's ideal for you. Your information may truly be so compelling that users want to receive twenty auto responders and react to them well. On the other hand, you may find that if users haven't acted on your offer or developed a relationship with you by as early as the third email, it isn't worth your time to continue to send to them and the decrease in positive email metrics isn't worth the low return on

investment for follow-up emails. You'll have to do some testing to truly find your best solution. Starting with an even dozen auto responders is a great launch point.

Avoid Increasing Offer Quality

While it's tempting to believe that you should increase the incentive of offers with each auto responder, you may actually end up alienating customers by doing that. It's true that if customers have not acted upon your offer or completed your revenue generating event by the time the first several emails have been sent, the offer presented may not be sufficient for them. On the other hand, remember that the same subscribers who read your first email will also read your tenth email. If you offered 10% to new customers in the first email and 50% off to new customers in the tenth email, you may ultimately end up alienating the customers from the first email and they will not become loyal, repeat customers. You'll have to balance your business needs when making these decisions. However, building customer loyalty should always be a priority!

Pay Attention to Tracking Reports

There are few email programs where a tracking report can give you more valuable information than with auto responders. Why is that? Because you can make changes that have immediately tracked results since your auto responders are always being sent. Is there an auto responder where the open rate is particularly low? Chances are that the content of that auto responder isn't that important to your subscribers and you should change the content. Is there an auto responder where you unsubscribe request rate is incredibly high? If so, that content needs to be changed immediately. Are there auto responders where the click-through rate is very high? If so, that type of content or promotion should be emulated or repeated in other auto responders. Auto responders are a great opportunity to take real time email data and use it to immediately improve your email marketing program.

Schedule Content Reviews

The final best practice for auto responders is to not forget to audit and update your content occasionally. Because your auto responder program is always running in the background and isn't usually topical and, in fact, is such a popular marketing tool because it's low maintenance, you may forget to check in and "freshen up" content or images. What's the best way to avoid this? Take the time to actually schedule a day every six months or even once a quarter to review your current auto responder copy. Whether you use Outlook calendar reminders, project management software, or a smart phone app to send you task reminders, make sure something tells you that it's time to check in on your auto responder content and make sure that it's all still accurate and compelling.

The great thing about auto responders is that, after you initially set them up, they require very little work while still offering a great return on investment. However, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't apply some basic thought and best practices to developing them. If you do, you'll have a completely optimized email marketing auto responder program that can deliver results even when you're not working!

Next Up: *The ten most important email design best practices*

SECTION 5.21
10 Best Practices for Designing Your Email

In This Section: This has been a long section of this book with many important points contained within it. You've now completed the entire section and should be proud of all of the information that you've learned and can now apply to creating and designing your email template, the email content, and even its landing pages. You may be looking for a short list, however. If you want a quick summary of the ten most important best practices to consider when designing and email template, then here you go!

1. Design for the Top 600 Pixels by Three Inches
Your email will most likely need to sell itself within an email preview pane no matter what email service provider it's sent to. You'll have about 600 pixels of length across and about three inches of depth. You need to make sure that your value proposition, your call-to-action, and any key information that will compel users to keep reading is in that space. Avoid heavy use of graphics that may not load when designing the email preview pane section of an email template.

2. Make Links Look Like Links
If you want the best click-through possible, you'll want to make your links not only look like links but also stand out. At a minimum, links in your email should *always* be underlined. Ideally, links will be formatted in a blue font and will also be bolded. If your style guidelines prohibit links from being bold or blue, make sure that they are underlined. Do not ever use images or buttons to denote a link or, if you do, make sure that there is a corresponding text link nearby.

3. Minimize the Use of Images
While images do have unquestionable visually compelling results, always remember that in the vast majority of your subscribers email service providers inboxes images will not load. The more you use images, the more that the vast majority of your email subscribers will see blank white space. While you certainly want to include some images for those who can see them, don't rely on images alone to sell your product or convey your message. Be sure that any information that it is critical that your subscriber knows is not trapped in an image. Always use alt and title text behind images to ensure that there is still copy appearing even when your images do not load.

4. Minimize Copy and Text
Obviously, your email must contain copy and text. That's the core of any email. However, you never want to include so much text that you may risk going into a spam folder or junk folder, and you don't want to overwhelm users with more text than they can read. User shorter text blocks that link back to full articles or product pages on your website or to landing pages.

5. Be CAN-SPAM Complaint

While this is a best practice, it's also the law. You'll need to ensure that your physical mailing address is in the email, that users can unsubscribe from your email with either a single click or by replying to the email, and that the email in some way conveys that it is an advertisement. If you're confused about CAN-SPAM, you may want to revisit the section in this book dedicated to it.

6. Make it Easy to Unsubscribe

While this may seem counterintuitive, the risk of making it difficult for users to find a way to unsubscribe from your email is that they will instead mark your email as spam. This will impact your sender reputation and deliverability in the future. Make it easy and simple for users to find a way to unsubscribe from your email so that they don't hit the always easy-to-find "spam" button!

7. Personalize Subject Lines and Email Content

With very few exceptions, emails will perform better when you use a personalization field such as first name or user name in the subject line and body of the email. The one exception is if your industry deals in private or personal information where your users may feel uncomfortable seeing their name or user name in the subject line or body of the email. Be sure to find an email marketing platform such as Comm100 that supports personalization features. Then use them to increase both your open rate and your click-through rate.

8. Avoid Using CSS

As "old school" as it sounds, your email template design is unlikely to translate across multiple email service providers if you code it using CSS. Many email service providers, and Gmail in particular, strip CSS from the <body> and <head> sections of your email template. If you must use CSS to code, make it inline CSS. However, using <font> and <p> tags within your email template will produce a far more consistent design and display.

9. Minimize the Use of Spam Words

As you will see in the next section of this book, it will most likely be impossible for you to completely avoid using any word that has been identified as a potential spam trigger word. However, be aware when creating copy that spam filters look for particular words and will assign your email a spam score based on them. The best thing that you can do is to use those words in moderation and write copy that avoids using them at all when possible.

10. Always Test!

While we think that it's important for you to test various email designs against each other, what we're referring to here is that you test send your emails to a smaller seed list of recipients prior to sending them to your entire list. This will ensure that you get a chance not only to make sure that your design displays appropriately across multiple email service providers but also to make sure that you're going into the inbox instead of the spam or junk folder. You can then make adjustments so that when you do you send

to your main list, your email is optimized for the best results possible. Ten minutes of testing can save hours of crisis management!

Section Summary

In this section, you learned all of the key information that you'll need in order to design effective email templates and content, including:

- You got advice on how to determine what the goal of your email template is and therefore how to decide what makes an email template successful
- You explored sending and HTML email versus a text-only email and what you should consider before making that decision
- You learned the legal requirements that must be adhered to in an email template
- You learned the benefits of using (and sometimes not using) personalization fields in an email
- You learned about using images in email templates and why it's often best to minimize use
- You learned how much text to use, how to format it, and how to avoid words that will send you into the spam or junk folder.
- You learned the basics of email template format, including the ideal height and width

as well as the options between using a one-column or two-column format.
- You got detailed information on the best way to phrase and code links for an optimized click-through response.
- You got important information on how to code an email template in order to ensure that it displays properly across all of the popular email service providers.
- You learned how to best integrate social media, email forward and unsubscribe information into your email templates.
- You learned how to optimize a call-to-action.
- You learned the tips and tricks of writing effective subject lines and from-addresses.
- You also got a comprehensive list of best practices, including: sales and conversion emails, win-back and retention emails, driving click-through rate, creating content, landing pages, auto responders and an overall top ten best email template practices.

In the Next Section…
In the next section, we'll cover one of the often trickiest parts of email marketing: understanding spam and how to make sure that your emails stay out of the spam or junk folder and go into the inbox.

SECTION 6: How to Get Into the Inbox Every Time

In This Section: One of the greatest challenges of email marketing or sending email newsletters is getting into your recipient's email inbox. It may seem as though once you send an email, it should clearly go into the inbox. However, anybody who has ever sent, received, or even glanced in passing at an email account knows that spammers aggressively send unwanted email in even greater quantities than they do junk mail to your postal inbox. In this section, we'll learn about what spam is, how email service providers determine if your email is spam or not, and what you can do to ensure that your marketing email lands in the inbox every single time.

Section 6.1
What is Spam?
Section 6.2
What To Do to Avoid Being Flagged as Spam
Section 6.3
A List of Common Spam Words
Section 6.4
Special Spam Concerns for Auto Responders
Section 6.5 What To Do If You're Flagged by an Email Service Provider as Spam
Section Summary

SECTION 6.1
What is Spam?

> **In This Section:** Spam can be not only annoying but also dangerous to consumers. What that means for you as an email marketer is that the safety precautions that email service providers have put in place to control the amount of spam that makes it into a user's inbox may actually work against your perfectly legitimate and requested email to your subscribers. As you expand your email marketing program, you'll consistently be frustrated by having to fight your way past spam filters. In this section, we'll take a closer look at what spam is so that you understand why those filters are so very important.

Take a moment right now to go to your email inbox. Now, go to your spam or junk folder. Depending on how effective your spam filters are, when the last time you emptied your spam folder was, and who your email service provider is, you may literally have hundreds of unsolicited email messages in your spam box. Of course, chances are that not only your email service provider's spam filters but also you personally will know that these email messages are junk.

Email Spam Defined

By definition, email spam is any email that meets the following three criteria:

- **Anonymity**: The address and identity of the sender are concealed
- **Mass Mailing**: The email is sent to large groups of people
- **Unsolicited**: The email is not requested by the recipients

There are a number of other less formal characteristics that you will typically find present in spam emails. There is usually no way for a recipient to opt-out of future email sends. The email is typically sent from an international IP address to avoid both tracking and subjectivity to US laws. And, of course, the email almost exclusively promotes "scam" activities that would require the user to turn over sensitive financial or personal information to the sender of the email.

In short, spam email is any email that was not requested by a user but was sent to that user and many others, typically (but not always) with malicious intent. The source and identity of the sender is anonymous and there is no option to cease receiving future emails.

Why Does Anybody Actually Send Spam?

Chances are that most of us reading this email can easily identify a spam message in our inbox and ignore it. However, not everybody is as experienced in the methods of marketing and the risks associated with spam. There are individuals in the world who will respond to spam messages, giving the

malicious spammers who sent them exactly the risky financial or personal information that those spammers want. The result can be profit for the spammers and even financial loss for the recipients.

You may say, "But so few people will actually respond to a spam message. Is it really worth sending so many in order to just find a handful of recipients?' The truth of the matter is that spam email is a giant numbers game. The more email a spammer sends, the more likely he or she is to get recipients to respond to the email. If a spam email sender has a list of five million email addresses, only a small fraction of those need to reply to the spam message in order for it to result in significant financial turnover for the spammer.

Also, keep in mind that one of the great benefits of email marketing is that the cost in money and time to send emails is quite low. Whether the spam email sender is using his or her own email server or renting a low-cost, offshore proxy server, the cost of sending huge numbers of spam emails is almost always going to be lower than the return. In most cases, it will only take one individual responding to a spam email send to make the entire send worth it to the malicious spammer.

Spam email isn't an illogical business practice. It's simply an unethical one. Fortunately, both the US Federal Government and most email service providers have put steps in place to reduce and eliminate spam email.

Why Does the Government Care About Spam?

The US Federal Government, in specific the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), cares deeply about email spam and enacted the CAN-SPAM federal legislation act in 2003. CAN-SPAM has been covered in great detail earlier in this book, and if you need to get up-to-speed on CAN-SPAM, we invite you to revisit those chapters. Why does the government care about spam email? The job of the FTC is to protect consumer rights. Spam email can put consumers at risk in two different ways:

Financial and Privacy Risks: Because most spam email is designed to solicit financial data such as credit card numbers or personal data such as a Social Security Number from users, that data can then be used for identity theft, credit card fraud, and a host of other crimes. While CAN-SPAM certainly can't stop those types of emails from finding their way into your email account, it can set up strict fines and prohibitive penalties for any spammers who get caught.

Protecting Children: CAN-SPAM was developed in order to eliminate the amount of unsolicited email that advertised inappropriate adult services to children. There's no way for an email spammer to know the age of a user that he or she is emailing. Therefore, even if the email includes entirely inappropriate (and potentially illegal) images for a minor to see, it may end up being sent to a child's email box.

While most people consider the CAN-SPAM legislation to be fairly ineffective at stopping spam, that doesn't mean that you don't need to follow it to the letter. CAN-SPAM is still active legislation, and if you are caught violating it you are subject to massive fines as detailed earlier in this book. Fortunately,

though CAN-SPAM did not do a significant job of stemming the flow of spam to your email account, most email service providers have done an outstanding (perhaps too outstanding) job of keeping spam mail out of the inbox and into a designated spam or junk folder.

Why Do Email Service Providers Care About Spam?

Without a doubt, your company email marketing program or newsletter will at some point encounter a battle with email service providers' spam filters. In that moment of frustration, you will wonder why an email service provider cares at all about whether a spam message goes to the inbox or the junk folder and why the spam filters are so prohibitive. The truth is that, for email service providers, having good spam filters is just good business. The "customer" of an email service provider is the person with an email account. Most email service providers make their revenue based on the amount of time that a user spends in their inbox. For example, most online email service providers serve web-based ads within the online version of an email inbox. The longer users stay in their email inbox, the more likely they are to click an ad or the more ad impressions are served.

If users become frustrated with the experience of receiving high amounts of spam in their inbox, they will respond by either spending less time in their inbox or by switching to an email service provider that gives them a better experience and better filters out spam. Therefore, it's a critically important business practice for email service providers to give their customers powerful and effective email spam filters.

But Your Email Isn't Spam!

If you're reading this book, then you are working to put together a legitimate, non-spam email program. You know that, and we know that. However, to an email service provider you are largely an anonymous source (unless you get on the white list, which we'll discuss in the next section). Email service providers will use a series of filters and data associations to determine if your message is spam or not. In some cases, this won't be a problem for you. But sometimes even the most innocent emails will appear as spam to an email service provider's spam filters. In the next section, we'll tell you all of the best ways to avoid that.

Next Up: *How to avoid going to the spam folder!*

SECTION 6.2
How to Avoid Being Flagged as Spam

In This Section: Ensuring that your email is delivered to the inbox instead of the spam folder can be a significant challenge. As email spammers get smarter and find new ways to slip through spam filters, email service providers have responded by improving their spam filters. What's the good news? If you follow the rules and build a good, quality email program you will most likely not have a problem getting delivered to the inbox. What's the bad news? You'll need to consistently work to ensure that your email is inbox-ready. In this section, we'll tell you how to get your email into the inbox as consistently as possible.

Understand What Email Service Providers are Checking

To begin, you'll need to fully understand the list of factors that go into an email service provider's algorithm when it decides if your email is spam or not. Much like the Google search algorithm, the factors of an email service provider's spam filter algorithm are a secret. Why is that? If you knew what they were, you would simply follow the rules! That, of course, is the problem. You would follow the rules, and so would thousands of malicious spammers. By identifying factors that indicate that a message is spam and then keeping those a secret when checking inbound email against them, email service providers keep a "leg up" over malicious spammers. Why are we telling you this? The information contained in this section is the most reliable and up-to-date information available. However, email service providers constantly tweak and update their spam filters. You'll need to regularly test and stay aware of trends to make sure you're inbox-ready. As a general rule, email service provider spam filters will look at all of the following:

Are you on a Blacklist? Not only do email service providers keep an internal blacklist of domains and companies that they will automatically filter out of the inbox, but there are also several international email blacklists that email service providers also refer to for determining spam email. If you are on a blacklist, it is game over for you and it's time to begin your email marketing program from scratch. You don't end up on a blacklist unless you are a serious spam offender.

Are you on a White List? Unlike the blacklist, a white list is a good thing to be on! White lists are maintained on the individual email service provider level and are lists of domains or senders that are automatically approved for inbox deliverability without being subjected to spam filter review. If you can get on a white list, your email deliverability will improve dramatically.

Sender Reputation: Your sender reputation is a number or score assigned to your sending IP or source. It's believed that it's also combined with domain name and several of the factors listed below, but the actual algorithm remains a secret. If you are using a third party email marketing platform such as Comm100, it's important that you select a service that has a high sender reputation and that protects its sender reputation by ensuring that its clients don't send spam emails.

Domain Reputation: In recent years, email service providers have started tracking domain reputation as well. This created a bit of a struggle for many companies who had avoided the spam or junk folder delivery by consistently switching servers and IP addresses when sending email. Most email service providers at this point have developed software that also identifies the domain associated with the email and assigns a spam score or penalty based on that domain's email history.

Previous Spam Complaints: One of the greatest marks against you if you're having trouble getting into the inbox will be if your subscribers have previously marked your content as spam. While a certain number of spam complaints will be unavoidable, if the number begins to escalate you can find yourself removed from a white list and watching your email land in the spam or junk folder without any hope of remedying the problem in the short term. That's why so many best practices offered up in this book have been about reducing spam complaints.

Activity of Your Email List Subscribers: Another more recent development in spam filters is to apply a score based on the activity of your email list. If your emails regularly get incredibly small open rates or are deleted without being opened, then that indicates to email service providers that you are sending low quality email that is potentially unsolicited. While it won't automatically get you blocked from the inbox, it will combine with other scores that may reflect unfavorably on you.

Content of Your Email: The content of your email is a significant factor in making it through spam filters. Image use, text content, and subject line can all create spam problems for you. Writing and designing email has to be as much about deliverability as it is about email performance.

The above points are the primary items that email spam filters will check for. Now, the question is, what can you do to make it past those filters and into the inbox?

Start By Building a Great Email List

The very first and most important thing that you can do to ensure great email deliverability is to build a great email list. This means that you are not purchasing or renting lists that you can't trust the source of and it means that you are not sending your customers or subscribers unwanted email. Make sure that the email leads that you have generated for your database came from email sign-up boxes where the users clearly opted-in to your email program. For ideal security, use a double opt-in process where users must then click a confirmation link on an email they receive after they sign up in order to activate your email sends.

It may seem as though making it more difficult for your subscribers to sign up will actually cause you to create a smaller email list. That may be true. However, if you begin sending email to users who do not want your email and, as a result, get a high number of spam complaints, you'll risk not being able to email to your most valuable clients.

While it may seem as though users who do not want your email will simply unsubscribe from your email list, the reality is that they are far more likely to hit a "Report Spam" button. Most email service providers make the spam report functionality quick and easy to use, and therefore subscribers will often hit the spam button even if they simply want to stop receiving your email but know that they signed up for it. Every step that you can take to reduce the number of spam complaints that you get will help you out in getting into the inbox regularly. That may mean a more "slow and steady" approach to building your email list rather than a quick approach!

Apply for White List Acceptance

If you are using an outsourced email marketing platform such as Comm100, the good news is that your marketing email will be kept separate from your corporate email and your marketing platform is taking care of managing its sender reputation as a significant part of its business. However, if you are building an in-house system, you'll want to ensure that you're recognized by as many email service providers as possible as a reputable, white list email sender. Yahoo!, AOL and several other major email service providers have white list applications processes that you can find online. Unfortunately, many other email service providers create their white list internally and do not allow actual submissions for it. There are also a number of outsourced marketing companies that will manage your white list submissions for you. While ideal solution is to use a third party email marketing solution, if you are creating your own in-house sending solution, be sure to actively get on as many email white lists as possible.

Get Users to White List You

Regardless of whether you are using a third party email marketing platform or an in-house solution, your derivability to the inbox is assured for every subscriber who actively adds you to their address book or contact list. It's up to you to encourage users to take that action. The most effective way to accomplish this will be to ask them to add you to their contact or address book in the welcome email that they receive when they sign up for your newsletter or email list. It also doesn't hurt to remind them to do that in the body of every email that you send. After all, it may take several emails before you've proven yourself to be "inbox-worthy" content that your new subscribers really want to receive.

There's only so much that you can do to encourage subscribers to add you to an address or contact book, but every subscriber whom you can convince to do so is one more email that you are assured will get directly to the inbox.

You've most likely seen the type of copy that is used to encourage users to add an email to an address book or contact list. In case you haven't, here's a good example of how it's typically phrased.

"Take a quick moment to add the email address (insert the email address that you send your mass mail from) to your address book or contact list. That way, you'll always be sure that you aren't missing important information or offers from us!"

Every effort that you can make to have users individually white list you will pay off in improved sender reputation.

Make the Unsubscribe Link Prominent

We've discussed several times that it may seem counterintuitive to you to make your unsubscribe link prominent and to place it at the top of your email. In the end, though, it's always better to give users an easier way to unsubscribe from an email than it is to have them mark your email as spam. The reality of the situation is that if people no longer want to receive your email, they are going to remove themselves from your email list one way or the other. When that happens, you want for the method that they choose to be to unsubscribe rather than to tell an email service provider that you are spam.

Most email service providers, as well as email marketing platforms, have a fairly low tolerance for the number of spam complaints that they'll allow before you start to be penalized. It's typically based on a percentage of your list, and may be as low as one percent. That means that if you send a hundred emails, you can only afford for one person to mark you as spam! One of the single most important steps to staying out of the junk or spam folder is to reduce the number of active spam complaints from users. By providing an easy-to-use and easy-to-spot unsubscribe link, you can reduce spam complaints significantly.

Manage Your Subject Line

Subject line will be a huge determinant to your email's ability to get into the inbox. We've previously discussed that it's the first thirty-five to fifty characters of an email subject line that users see. The reality is that you should not write an email subject line that is significantly longer than that because the longer your subject line is, the more likely a trip to the spam or junk folder is.

Earlier in this book, we devoted an entire section to writing subject lines. For the purposes of spam control, you'll just want to remember three primary rules:

- Shorter is better! (But not less than five or six words)
- Don't rely on words that are included in the "spam word" list in the next section of this book.
- Avoid using all caps or special characters in your email. They may end up resulting in having you flagged as spam.

You can get away with using "spam words" in your subject line if you have a great sender reputation and use them with moderation. However, if your test email goes to the spam or junk folder and you have a spam word in your subject line; your first test fix should be to remove it.

Control the Use of Your Domain

Because email service providers have tightened up algorithms in the recent past to track not only sender IP but also the domain name, it's important that you protect your domain name from getting a bad sender reputation. You may be running a perfectly legitimate email program, but if you have affiliate partners,

advertising partners, or even malicious competitors that send mass spam messages using your domain, you could find yourself on the blacklist. How do you protect against this?

To a certain degree, you can't. After all, you can only act upon what you know, and it's possible that many anonymous people are sending email referencing your domain name as the sender. What you can do is protect against this so that you're able to stop it when it does occur and discourage it when possible?

- Be sure that your domain and company name are protected and trademarked as needed
- Be sure to include terms in any affiliate deals or advertising deals regarding the use of your brand or domain in email marketing campaigns

As a business best practice, you should want to maintain control and ownership of the use of your domain. However, this becomes even more important if you are relying in any way on email marketing as a significant part of your marketing strategy.

Write Content that Isn't Full of Spam Words

This rule, as well, may seem fairly obvious. However, you'd be surprised how many emails are sent daily and then end up in the spam or junk folder because they were loaded down with words like "free" or "credit." Writing content for email marketing can be a very specific process that's not different from writing for a Search Engine Optimization page in the fact that you need to write to a certain algorithm. There are many free online tools that will scan your email content and give you a score or a color-coded rating regarding the likelihood that you will be flagged as spam. While these tools are imperfect, they can give you a red flag if you are clearly in the danger zone.

The basic rule of thumb is to understand the words and types of language that most email service provider spam filters will consider likely junk mail. Then simply write in a manner that doesn't incorporate those words or style. It may mean that you need to think a little harder while writing your copy, but that effort will be worth it when you hit the inbox. After all, it doesn't matter how persuasive the word "free" would be with your subscribers if they never actually see the email.

Avoid Emails that Are One Large Image: Minimize Images Overall

Emails that are one large image have a high chance of being flagged as spam if you don't already have a good sender reputation. Using a large image to encompass the entire email is a frequent trick of email spammers. If the entire content of your email is in an image file, then the email spam filters have nothing to spider in terms of content and can't figure out if your message is junk or not. We've all seen emails get delivered to our inbox that are one large image. However, your deliverability chances decrease if your email is one big image. As we noted earlier, even if you hit the inbox, your conversion percentage will be decreased as well.

While images are an important part of any email template, the more images you use the more you may experience spam filter issues. If you are having a difficult time making it into the inbox, then one of the first steps you'll want to explore is to reduce the number of images in your email template.

Minimize the Use of Red Fonts and Huge Headline Size Fonts

Red fonts and huge headline size fonts have also been shown to cause spam filter issues, though not as frequently as many of the other issues noted here. As a general rule, it's just a better idea to avoid using red fonts (pick an off-red color), huge headline fonts of more than sixteen pixels or a combination of both. There are plenty of design options that still give you great flexibility without using those font sizes and colors.

Summary: It's Not that Hard to Get Into the Inbox

While getting into the inbox instead of the spam or junk folder often seems to be one of the biggest challenges of email marketing, the truth is that it's just not that hard. The single best solution will be to use an outsourced email marketing provider such as Comm100 so that you don't have to devote a team of experts to managing your sender reputation. Regardless, the simple solution is to use a good quality list of authorized contacts, create quality email that doesn't read or look like spam and then provider users with content and offers that they will actually care about so that they don't mark you as spam, unsubscribe from your email, or just stop opening your emails.

Next Up: A list of spam words that you'll want to avoid.

Comm100

SECTION 6.3
A List of Common Spam Words

In This Section: One of the fastest ways to end up in a subscriber's spam folder or junk folder is to load your email up with words that most email service providers have identified as common words in spam email. But what are those words? It should be noted that email service provider spam filters are a continual work in progress and that the below list is added to and tweaked constantly in order to provide the most effective spam filtering possible for the real clients of email service providers, the users of email. However, in this section we'll provide you with a list of common words that can flag spam triggers.

The Most Common Spam Trigger Words

The following are two hundred common words and phrases that can set of email service provider spam filters. Remember that it doesn't necessarily mean that you can't use these words in moderation. However, too many of them or too much repetition of one of them can land in you the spam or junk folder. If you do find yourself having an inbox deliverability problem, removing any instances of these words from your subject line or email content can help to get you back into the inbox.

4U	Buy direct	Claims to be legal
Accept credit cards	Buying judgments	Claims you are a winner
Act now! Don't hesitate!	Cable converter	Claims you registered with
Additional income	Call free	Some Kind of Partner
Addresses on CD	Call now	Click below
All natural	Calling creditors	Click here link
Amazing	Can't live without	Click to remove
Apply Online	Cancel at any time	Click to remove mailto
As seen on	Cannot be combined with any	Compare rates
Auto email removal	other offer	Compete for your business
Avoid bankruptcy	Cash bonus	Confidentially on all orders
Be amazed	Cashcashcash	Congratulations
Be your own boss	Casino	Consolidate debt and credit
Being a member	Cell phone cancer scam	Copy accurately
Big bucks	Cents on the dollar	Copy DVDs
Bill 1618	Check or money order	Credit bureaus
Billing address	Claims not to be selling	Credit card offers
Billion dollars	anything	Cures baldness
Brand new pager	Claims to be in accordance	Dear email
Bulk email	with some spam law	Dear friend

Dear somebody
Different reply to
Dig up dirt on friends
Direct email
Direct marketing
Discusses search engine
listings
Do it today
Don't delete
Drastically reduced
Earn per week
Easy terms
Eliminate bad credit
Email harvest
Email marketing
Expect to earn
Fantastic deal
Fast Viagra delivery
Financial freedom
Find out anything
For free
For instant access
For just $ (some amt)
Free access
Free cell phone
Free consultation
Free DVD
Free grant money
Free hosting
Free installation
Free investment
Free leads
Free membership
Free money
Free offer
Free preview
Free priority mail
Free quote
Free sample
Free trial
Free website

Full refund
Get It Now
Get paid
Get started now
Gift certificate
Great offer
Guarantee
Have you been turned down?
Hidden assets
Home employment
Human growth hormone
If only it were that easy
In accordance with laws
Increase sales
Increase traffic
Insurance
Investment decision
It's effective
Join millions of Americans
Laser printer
Limited time only
Long distance phone offer
Lose weight spam
Lower interest rates
Lower monthly payment
Lowest price
Luxury car
Mail in order form
Marketing solutions
Mass email
Meet singles
Member stuff
Message contains disclaimer
MLM
Money back
Money making
Month trial offer
More Internet traffic
Mortgage rates
Multi level marketing
Name brand

New customers only
New domain extensions
Nigerian
No age restrictions
No catch
No claim forms
No cost
No credit check
No disappointment
No experience
No fees
No gimmick
No inventory
No investment
No medical exams
No middleman
No obligation
No purchase necessary
No questions asked
No selling
No strings attached
Not intended
Off shore
Offer expires
Offers coupon
Offers extra cash
Offers free (often stolen)
passwords
Once in lifetime
One hundred percent free
One hundred percent
guaranteed
One time mailing
Online biz opportunity
Online pharmacy
Only $
Opportunity
Opt in
Order now
Order status

Orders shipped by priority mail
Outstanding values
Pennies a day
People just leave money laying around
Please read
Potential earnings
Print form signature
Print out and fax
Produced and sent out
Profits
Promise you …!
Pure profit
Real thing
Refinance home
Removal instructions
Remove in quotes
Remove subject
Removes wrinkles
Reply remove subject
Requires initial investment
Reserves the right
Reverses aging
Risk free
Round the world
S 1618
Safeguard notice
Satisfaction guaranteed

Save $
Save big money
Save up to
Score with babes
Section 301
See for yourself
Sent in compliance
Serious cash
Serious only
Shopping spree
Sign up free today
Social security number
Special promotion
Stainless steel
Stock alert
Stock disclaimer statement
Stock pick
Stop snoring
Strong buy
Stuff on sale
Subject to credit
Supplies are limited
Take action now
Talks about hidden charges
Talks about prizes
Tells you it's an ad
Terms and conditions
The best rates
The following form

They keep your money — no refund!
They're just giving it away
This isn't junk
This isn't spam
University diplomas
Unlimited
Unsecured credit/debt
Urgent
US dollars
Vacation offers
Viagra and other drugs
Wants credit card
We hate spam
We honor all
Weekend getaway
What are you waiting for?
While supplies last
While you sleep
Who really wins?
Why pay more?
Will not believe your eyes
Winner
Winning
Work at home
You have been selected
Your income

Next Up: *Special tips for keeping auto responders out of the spam folder.*

SECTION 6.4
Special Spam Concerns for Auto Responders

In This Section: If a portion or the entirety of your email marketing strategy is an auto responder campaign, there are some specific concerns and tactics that you may want to keep in mind regarding ensuring that your auto responders consistently make it into the inbox of your recipients. While, at base, auto responders are no different than any other email marketing program, the frequency and volume that you are sending can lead to spam folder or junk folder delivery if you are not careful and monitor performance regularly

Use Anti Spam Best Practices, Of Course!

The first step to getting auto responders into the inbox is to follow all of the steps outlined in the previous portions of this section in order to ensure that you have built the most inbox-friendly email that you can. Avoid fonts, words, and coding practices that set off spam triggers. Don't send emails that are simply one big image. Try to get white listed or get your users to white list you. Make sure that your email contact list is a quality list. Make sure that your sender reputation and domain reputation are closely protected and managed. Because auto responders are just like any other email, you'll want to be sure that you follow all of the best practices described above.

Why Are Auto Responders More Likely to Send You to Spam?

If auto responders are just like any other type of email marketing, why are they more likely to send you to the spam or junk folder? The answer is simple: volume. With a more traditional email marketing or newsletter program, you're sending out an email possibly weekly. Even if you are sending much more frequently than that, you are monitoring your content and user response closely. With an auto responder, you are sending emails daily. You're also often sending them to large numbers of recipients. Because the numbers are higher, the chances for an increase in spam complaints or the other user-generated triggers can also increase no matter how well you've built your email list and your email templates. It simply becomes a numbers game and a higher volume of email can translate into a higher number of unsubscribe requests or spam complaints, both of which impact your sender reputation score. But what can you do to minimize this? There are a few tricks.

Monitor Auto Responder Data and Change Underperforming Individual Emails

The first and most effective change that can improve the inbox deliverability of your auto responder emails is to proactively identify any emails in the sequence that are triggering a high number of spam complaints or unsubscribe requests. If your auto responder program is new, then it may take a number of weeks or even months to have enough data to be able to see which specific sends trigger a high number of unsubscribe requests or spam complaints. Once you have identified individual emails via your reporting interface that have high unsubscribe or spam issues, you can then replace those with emails

and content that are more appealing to your user base. It's true that it will be likely that your spam or unsubscribe email problem spots will most likely be the emails that are the most targeted to attempt to convert a sale or revenue-generating event. You'll need to also take a look at how effective those emails are at generating revenue and make an informed business decision about the value of the sales generated versus the long-term viability of emailing your subscribers reliably. If the email in question that's causing the high spam or unsubscribe complaints generates a significant amount of revenue, it may be worth it to take the gamble on the poor user response from an email list management standpoint. If, however, the email in question is not generating revenue, protecting the long term value of your email list, which is a company asset, should take priority.

In general, it's always a good idea to review your overall auto responder performance and make adjustments to individual emails in the sequence that do not perform as well as other emails in the sequence.

Don't Bunch or Group Your Auto Responders Too Closely Together
For many who are new to sending auto responders, the temptation is always to send them on consecutive days, one right after another. The logic is that you want to maximize exposure shortly after a person has signed up for your email list and is motivated about receiving your emails and offers. However, the flip side of this is that, many times, too much email at the beginning of an auto responder campaign can annoy subscribers and cause them to disengage with your email program, often by clicking the "spam" button in the email inbox. Fortunately, you can most likely accomplish both the goal of providing enough enticing email to your users while also protecting against spam complaints. Simply spacing your emails out two-to-three days apart will ensure that enough email lands in your new subscriber's inbox while he or she is most engaged but will also mean that you are avoiding the early flood of emails that can often lead to spikes in spam complaints.

Prioritize Your Best Content First
It's a basic auto responder best practice to send your most compelling emails first. The first emails that you send will get the highest open rate and will determine whether your users or subscribers stay engaged with you for subsequent email sends. When it comes to making sure that your auto responders find their way to the inbox, it becomes even more important. Users will decide within the first three emails, and often with the very first email, whether you are a legitimate email sender or whether they have made a mistake in subscribing to your email program. Much like on a first date, you need to make sure that you're putting your absolute best foot forward in terms of valuable content and compelling offers in the first three emails. Your email also needs to be professional looking and professionally written (good grammar, no SMS abbreviations!). Finally, make sure that what your users are receiving in their emails is what they signed up for. This is always true in any email send. However, if what your subscribers signed up for is a ten email series on how to apply different makeup looks and the first email that they receive has no tips and only a discount offer on makeup products, you can expect a spam complaint problem to ensue. Deliver what you said that you would deliver, and deliver it with high quality. This is especially true in the first several emails.

Auto responders can achieve high inbox deliverability standards by combing general email deliverability best practices and carefully monitored auto responder data to ensure that you remove or alter any individual emails in the sequence that cause spam or unsubscribe request peaks.

Next Up: *What to do if you begin to be sent to the spam or junk folder.*

SECTION 6.5
What To Do If You're Flagged by an Email Service Provider as Spam

In This Section: Perhaps you feel as though you've done everything correctly and your email is still hitting the spam folder instead of the inbox. Alternatively, perhaps you already had a deliverability problem with your marketing emails and were reading this book in order to learn how to fix your problem. Possibly, you've never had a problem before and suddenly a specific send hits the spam folder. What should you do? There's actually a great tried-and-true process for attempting to determine what sent you to spam and how to fix it. In this section, we'll walk you through it.

Step One: Test Addresses and Spam Deliverability

Hopefully, you took the prior advice in this book and tested your email send to a group of seed addresses or test addresses before you sent the entire email. That means that you were able to identity that your email had a spam problem long before you sent it to your entire list. If you didn't do that, then solving your spam problem may be more difficult than the process that we are about to describe. Also, identifying and fixing your spam problem after it's been identified in your pre-send tests means that you haven't wasted an email send and you can, hopefully, correct the spam problem and still deliver your email to the inbox of your subscribers. If you only realized the spam problem retroactively, then you've most likely wasted an email send that landed in the spam folder of most of your email list.

In addition to knowing if you have a spam problem before you send to your main list, sending to your seed or test email addresses prior to sending the email as a whole can tell you if you will have a spam problem in just one email service provider or in multiple email service providers. This can help you make better decisions. If you're ending up in the junk folder in Hotmail, for example, you certainly need to remedy your spam issue because Hotmail accounts for huge portions of most email lists. However, if you are ending up in the spam folder in a less important email service provider, it may be worth your time to simply send anyway and fix the spam issues retroactively.

Seeing if you have a deliverability problem in all email service providers or just one can also make your "fix process" different. You may be experiencing a black list issue with just one email service provider. Or, you may have one email service provider whose spam filters are more sensitive than others. If you are lucky, you are caught in spam in an email service provider who has a streamlined contact for email marketers to request clarification, such as Hotmail. You can also make decisions, such as segmenting your list by email service provider and sending your multi-part html message to anywhere that did not flag you as spam and a text-only version to places that did flag you as spam. Regardless of how you proceed, the first step is to identify where you landed in the spam folder and then focus your testing efforts on perfecting that email template for that particular email service provider.

If you ended up in the junk folder in multiple email service providers, you may want to go back and start from scratch with your template. Alternatively, you may be in a scenario where you have recently had a high number of spam complaints or email list quality issues. While it's important to go through the entire spam testing process described below, it's equally important to take a moment to take a three-hundred-and-sixty degree look at your email marketing program and explore if you've violated enough spam best practices over the recent past that you may simply need to "wait it out" until you can return to the inbox.

Step Two: The Subject Line

The subject line is often the biggest culprit in sending an email to the spam filter, and spam filters prioritize subject line content highly. Begin by making sure that your subject line follows basic spam best practices:

- Is it too long? Try to make sure it's thirty-five to fifty words
- Have you used ALL CAPS? If so, remove them.
- Have you used excessive punctuation?!!? If so, remove it.
- Have you used any of the spam-filter trigger words detailed in this section?

After you've checked your subject line for any of the potential spam triggers above, try resending the email with a completely safe subject line. It's probably a good idea to send one test with the subject line that you used simply modified to remove any of the potential spam triggers above and a second test with an entirely different subject line. If you now get into the inbox, that's great and you've fixed your problem. If not, continue to use the "safer" subject line and proceed to step three of this test.

Step Three: The Content

The next most likely portion of your email that is sending you to spam is the actual content of your email. This can be time consuming to test, but we have a recommended method that can speed it up.

Take a look at the body of your email. Break it up into four or five "sections" of content. Begin by removing the first section of content. Send the email. Does it still go to spam? Then the offending content is in a different section. Remove the next section, and then send the email. Are you still in the spam folder? Then that section was not the problem either. Continue removing sections and sending the email until you finally hit the inbox. When that happens, you'll know what section of the email included the words, links, or html code that set off the spam filters. You can go back and begin to rework that content and then reinsert it into the email until you find a version of it that no longer sends you to spam.

It's important that when you begin to replace the content that you stripped out of the email, you replace it one piece at a time, just like you took it out, and resend the email each time. You may have more than one problem area, but it was how the areas worked in combination that sent the email to spam to begin with.

If the portion of your email that is causing you to go to spam is in the content, you'll identify it using this process. If you do identify it, then you can fix it and send your email. If you don't, then move on to step four of this testing process.

Step Four: Images

In step four, you'll want to remove all (or as many as possible) of the images from your email and then resend the email. Images, particularly when heavily used, can increase your score in a spam filter since so many spammers use images to high viruses, spyware, and even inappropriate messages that they don't want spam filters to be able to read in the text of their email. Start by removing all images from your email template and seeing if you then make it into the inbox. If you do make it into the inbox, you can begin adding images back into your email one-by-one until you've reached a "tipping point" and land back in the spam or junk folder. If you want to be entirely safe, it is probably better to send your email without any images at all if images turned out to be what was causing you to go to the spam or junk folder.

If stripping out or removing images solves your deliverability problem, you can now send your email. If not, continue on to step five of this process.

Step Five: Text Only

Before you try the unlikely source of your "from address" or have to start looking at more drastic and complicated reasons why your email may be hitting the spam folder, attempt to send the text-only version of your email. Why would you want to do this? If the text only version of your email makes it into the inbox, then you have ruled out the health of your email list or a blacklist or sender reputation problem with your IP or domain name. List health and sender reputation issues are difficult and time consuming to remedy. If the text-only version of your email makes it into the inbox, then you know that if you simply strip down and sanitize your html version, you can get into the inbox. Of course, make sure that your text-only version also uses a clean subject line and content free of spam-trigger words. If the text-only version also goes to spam, you'll need to proceed to step six of this process.

Step Six: The From Address

Step six is the fastest test, and it's also the least likely to be the cause of your deliverability problem. However, it's certainly worth testing just in case. Change the "from" address of your email and try sending again. It's likely that if you're experiencing a deliverability problem due to something bigger than your subject line or your content, simply changing the "from" address on your email won't get you into the inbox. However, at this point in the process it's certainly worth testing. The reasons that you're experiencing deliverability problems if you aren't able to solve your junk or spam folder issue with a change to content, images, or subject line can be much larger and much more difficult to fix. It's certainly worth the ten minutes to see if changing the "from" address will solve your problem! If it does solve the problem, then you can continue with your email send. If not, continue on to step seven of this process.

Step Seven: Email List Health

If you are using a third party email marketing platform provider such as Comm100, then your email marketing list is most likely in great shape given that most thirty party email marketing providers automatically prune and clean your list and ensure that unsubscribe requests are handled properly. However, it may be surprising to you how many times in-house email management systems fail to do this. If you have built an in-house system, then any small piece of change to your website code or server configurations, among other technical elements, can result in bounces not being pruned from your email lists, unsubscribe requests not being properly removed, and even bad addresses being mailed to repeatedly. If an error such as this has happened, then email service providers will begin to black list you. Spammers commonly don't take the time to clean or manage their lists, so if for some reason your list management techniques have failed, you will appear as though you are a spammer.

List management and keeping a clean email list is one of the greatest arguments for using an outsourced email marketing provider. Managing the process in-house leaves a great deal of room for error and can be downright challenging.

If you discover through the course of investigation that you have made an error in list management, you'll want to take the following steps:

- Immediately correct the error
- For any email service provider that allows an inbound channel for questions from companies that send email, send a communication admitting your error and asking to be reinstated to inbox status
- Be prepared to wait things out. If you've made a critical list management error, you may just need to be prepared to "wait out" your penalty phase.

If you discover that you've made a significant list management error, then you may not be able to remedy it in time for your next email send – or even your next several emails. However, you now know what the issue is and you can move on with correcting it. If, however, your list appears to be clean and healthy, you'll unfortunately need to consider step eight of this process.

Step Eight: Your IP or Domain

Unfortunately, if you've now tried all of the other steps on this email check list and have still not identified why you're going to the spam or junk folder, it's likely that you've taken a hit to your sender reputation score and that "black mark" is now associated with your IP or domain. While it's possible to test this by attempting to send from alternate IPs or domains, most email spam filters are fairly smart and will still be able to recognize it as you. If you have alternative IPs or domains available to you, you can try sending from them. If they do end up in the inbox, you know that you have a sender reputation problem. You can make a business decision at that point as to whether it's worth it to you to attempt to send your marketing email via your alternate domain or IP. However, whether you do that or not, you'll want to consider steps nine and ten as well as the last resort in this process. Repairing your sender reputation can be

challenging, can take time, and won't always be successful. That's why it's so important to follow all email marketing best practices from the very beginning of your email marketing program.

Step Nine: Contact the Email Service Provider if Possible

If you believe that you have a sender reputation problem or have been blacklisted and our content is valid, your list is opt-in or double opt-in, and you haven't made list management errors or experienced high user unsubscribe or spam complaints, then you can proceed to contact email service providers where possible. Hotmail offers a contact form, as do several other email service providers. However, be aware that the response time may take quite a while and the burden of proof will be on you to prove that your email is both high quality and desired by your subscribers. If you have developed a sender reputation problem, there is likely a reason for that and you will have a difficult time convincing an email service provider otherwise.

Step Ten: Reduce the Size of Your Send

You can also try reducing the size of your email send to only the most engaged users. Remove anybody who doesn't regularly open and respond to emails from your email list. Then send to only your highest value, highest activity subscribers. This will improve your email metrics with email service providers because it will demonstrate high open rates and low unsubscribe or spam requests. A smaller list also means a higher chance of making it into the inbox. It's not an ideal fix, but because you're most likely in a situation where you'll need to use the last resort described below, it at least allows you to continue emailing on a regular basis with limited results.

Last Resort: Attempt to Wait it Out

Your last resort is simply to wait it out. If you've gotten a damaged sender reputation, the only thing that can ultimately heal it is time. Continue to send email, but make sure that it's email with very few images and absolutely no questionable content. As described above, send it to a smaller segment of your list. Your email marketing results will be minimized, but it's a necessary step in order to repair the damage that you've done to your sender reputation. Depending on the reasons for your sender reputation issues and the severity of them, you may return to inbox deliverability in a month or in six. If it is longer than six months, your infractions must have been quite severe and you most likely need to explore alternatives to email marketing for the near future.

The best defense against significant spam and junk folder problems is to use all email best practices in this book, and of course particularly the spam best practices described in this section, from the beginning of your campaign and in all sends. If your users respond well to your email and email service providers subsequently identify you as a trustworthy email sender, your campaigns and email marketing program will be successful.

Section Summary

In this section, you learned all of the key information that you'll need in order to stay out of the spam and junk folders and get your email delivered to your subscribers' inboxes with regularity.

- Spam is any email that is sent in mass to an unsolicited group of users from an anonymous source.
- Though your email may not be spam, email service provider filters to identify spam may flag it as potential spam and send you to the junk folder instead of the inbox.
- While all email service provider spam filters are different and constantly evolving, most of them check the following criteria: white list status, black list status, sender reputation, domain reputation, spam complaints, email content, and user activity over time.
- Common tactics to stay out of the spam folder include getting your individual subscribers to add you to their address book or contact list, using a prominent unsubscribe link, avoiding subject lines or content that are full of spam words, using too many images or one big image, not using red fonts, not using ALL CAPS, not using excessive punctuation, and reducing the amount of content in an email.
- If you are sending a auto responder campaign, you should monitor campaign statistics to remove or alter any individual emails that have high spam or unsubscribe requests. You should also be sure to prioritize your most important email content first.
- If you do end up in the spam folder, follow a systematic test process to determine the reason and then remedy it.
- The best way to ensure that you end up in the inbox is to follow all email marketing best practices from the time that you begin your email marketing program and to be rigorous about practicing them in all email sends.

In the Next Section…

In the next section, we'll discuss how to build a high-response, low-complaint email contact list in order to get the most out of your email marketing programs.

SECTION 7: Building Your Email List

In This Section: So far in this book, we've explained to you all of the ins-and-outs of actually sending email. However, all of that information won't get you very far if you don't have a list of email addresses to send to! In this section, we'll explore how to build a healthy, responsive email list. We'll discuss various sources for email address acquisition, how to find the highest quality leads, and what the best practices are for capturing emails during your visitors' time on your website. By the end of this section, you'll understand not only the difference between a quality list and a quantity list, but also how to build an email list that combines quality leads with large volume.

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Section Summary

SECTION 7.1
Where Do You Find Email Subscribers?

> **In This Section:** You have a website. Perhaps it's a brand new website, or perhaps it's a website that's existed for a while but you haven't focused on collecting email addresses. Your website has content, products, or services that you want to communicate with individuals about. To do that, you want to combine a social media strategy with an email communications list. However, you're a little stumped as to where to find email addresses and subscribers. In this section, we'll walk you through all of the locations that you should utilize to maximize finding email subscribers.

Why Build Your Email List?
The most obvious reason to build your email list is to maximize the value of your customers and your company revenue. However, it's also important to remember that your email list is a company asset. In the event that you want to sell your company, a high-quality email list can increase your company's overall valuation. Additionally, a high-performing email list can give your company additional revenue opportunities by giving you the chance to sell advertising space in your email products or send sponsored emails on behalf of partners or advertisers. You're not just building your marketing channel when you build your email list. You're also building your company's total value. That's why it's worth your time to build a quality email list over time.

Quantity versus Quality
One of the first dilemmas that you'll need to deal with when you begin to build your email list is the quality versus quantity debate. Obviously, the larger your email list is, the more potential you have to generate revenue from it. However, as with most marketing activities, the quality of your leads is equally important. If you create a large email list by porting over old contacts or by buying or renting a large list, you may have a great number of email addresses. However, you may have very few email addresses that are actually leads who are interested in interacting with your product, company, or brand. That's why it's often a better idea to start slowly and build your email list over time. Focus on getting the best quality leads on your email list and then let the numbers grow as your business grows. While you ultimately do need to grow the largest email marketing list possible, you also need to grow a quality list that will respond to your offers and increase your company revenue.

Visitors to Your Site
The most obvious and logical place to find interested email subscribers is on your website itself. If users are visiting your website (regardless of whether they purchase or make a transaction), they have an interest in the information or content that you're providing. Every page of your website should include an email sign-up box that allows users to join your mailing list. We'll discuss the best practices for creating

that email sign-up box later in this section. However, every visitor to your website is a potential email subscriber.

Customers Who Purchase Goods or Services

Customers who visit your website but don't make purchases or transactions are important email marketing leads. However, customers who do make a purchase or transaction are even more valuable email marketing leads because they've shown a willingness to purchase from you or entrust you with personal or financial information. Ensuring that you make it easy and inviting for users to opt-in to your email program when they purchase or transact with you will help you build not only a large email list but also an email list of valuable users with proven purchasing history.

Your Social Media Outlets

Social media is becoming an increasingly prominent form of customer retention and brand awareness. With the right motivation and a properly designed email sign-up box, social media leads can often be solicited to become higher converting email marketing leads. When we discuss the best practices for designing an email capture box, we'll discuss specific best practices to use when encouraging users to sign-up for your email marketing program via social media outlets.

Websites That Have Similar User Demographics

Growing your email list can be quite similar to advertising your business as a whole. Websites that have similar content or user demographics to your website can be great places to prospect for potential email list leads. You can do this in a number of ways. Ideally, you can cut a deal with the website on which you want to collect emails to promise them advertising space in any email that you send. This will save you from having to pay to advertise for your email list. You can also pay to advertise for sign-ups to your email list on other websites. You can do this buy purchasing an impression-based or click-based advertising campaign, or you can offer to pay per valid email sign-up. Both are acceptable industry standard ways to pay for email advertising. However, if you are going to pay to advertise your email list and recruit email sign-ups on another website, you'll need to ensure that you have a firm understanding of what you can afford to spend per email sign-up is. To do this, you'll have to assign a value to an email name. The best way to do this is to keep it simple. Take a look at your last email send. If you had an email list of one hundred people and your email generated $100 in revenue, then you can spend $1 per email sign-up.

Advertising your email list on websites other than your own site can be a great way to grow your email list. In fact, it can often be more profitable than simply advertising your website. If you can give users a compelling reason to sign up for your email (such as free offers or discount codes), it is a much lower barrier to entry for most people to sign up for an email list than to make an initial purchase. Just be sure that you understand how much you can afford to spend per email address and that you have a plan in place to identify which emails came from which advertising sources.

Search Engines (Organic and Paid Search)

Similar to the process of advertising to build your email list on other websites, using search marketing to build your email list can be equally effective. Building landing pages specific to your email list (you may want to refer to our best practices for landing pages list earlier in this book) and then optimizing for organic search engine placement or paid, click-based search engine advertising. Again, however, if you do this, be sure that you have a handle on how much you can afford to pay per email sign-up as well as a way to track where email sign-ups came from. If you're not well versed in the marketing areas of search engine optimization or search engine marketing, you may want to consider hiring a professional to help you since both of those areas can be complicated to learn. However, many successful email lists have been built using search engines as the primary method for recruiting subscribers.

Offline Locations

Just because your email list is an online marketing tool, it doesn't mean that you only have to solicit emails online! If you have a retail location, you can collect emails when customers purchase or visit the store or other location. If you market by attending festivals or concerts, you can collect emails at those locations. Offering to raffle off a prize but requiring an email on the raffle ticket can also be an effective way to grow your email list. Of course, you'll have to dedicate the time to retyping all of the emails that you collect into your system, but it's often worth it. Don't overlook offline opportunities to grow your email list.

Purchasable or Rented Lists

If you need to grow your email list quickly, there are a number of services that will allow you to rent or purchase email names. However, doing so comes with several risks. Most list purchases or rentals are somewhat expensive, and you may not make your money back as quickly or as regularly. Additionally, a rented or purchased list means that you are buying email addresses of individuals who have not been exposed to or shown and interest in your brand or product. This may mean that they are less likely to respond to your email, and may even mark your email as spam. This could create domain reputation problems for you with future email sends. Finally, if you do choose to rent or purchase a list, be sure to use a credible agency. If you rent or purchase a list that includes a high number of bad email addresses that will bounce or be undeliverable, you will incur sender reputation penalties that will impact your ability to email market moving forward. While buying or renting an email list can help to quickly grow your email list and show returns, proceed with caution when soliciting and buying lists.

Black Hat Techniques

There are also a number of black hat techniques for gaining emails, including spidering websites for registration forms. We cannot emphasize enough how much of a poor idea it is to participate in any black hat email techniques. Not only do you risk breaking privacy laws, you also risk your sender reputation and email future.

Growing your email list can take time and patience. However, a good quality email list not only gives you an opportunity to grow revenue for you company, it also increases your company's value as a whole. Take your time and build a solid email lead recruitment process. It will pay off in the long term.

Next Up: Should you require users to double opt-in to your email list, or is a single-opt in enough?

SECTION 7.2
Single Opt-In Versus Double Opt-In

In This Section: Before you begin to build your email marketing list, you'll need to decide if you want customers to use a single opt-in or a double opt-in to your email list. Of course, in order to do that, you'll also need to understand what a single opt-in and a double opt-in are and how to implement them. In this section, we'll explain both techniques and the pros and cons of each.

What is a Single Opt-In Sign-Up?

When you hear somebody say "single opt-in" in reference to email marketing, it means a sign-up process in which a user does not need to confirm that he or she signed up. In short, once the user enters his or her email into the sign-up or join box, the email address is instantly added to your email list and the new subscriber instantly starts receiving emails from you.

What is a Double Opt-In Sign-Up?

Unlike a single opt-in sign-up, a double opt-in sign-up requires that a user confirm that he or she has actively joined your email list. This is typically done by generating an email to the user after he or she signs up. That email then requires the user to click a link in the email in order to confirm that he or she is the owner of the email address and does want to receive emails from you. This process eliminates many of the "bad" email addresses that get entered into a system (typos or incorrect email addresses) and also protects against instances where somebody may be taking "revenge" on another person by using their email address to sign up for numerous email marketing lists. It essentially insists that the new subscriber confirm that they do own the email address that they signed up with and do want to receive emails from you. If you are using a third-party email marketing platform such as Comm100, you will most likely have the option of simply turning a double opt-in feature on if you wish. If you are building your own in-house system, you'll need to create this process with your own development team.

What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of a Single Opt-In?

Single opt-in and double opt-in solutions both have advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of using a single opt-in system include:

Easiest on the User: Single opt-in is easiest on the subscriber. He or she won't need to look for an extra email in his or her inbox or remember to click a confirmation link. The subscriber gets the instant satisfaction of beginning to receive email immediately.

Fastest Way to Build a List: As we'll discuss below, one of the disadvantages of a double-opt in is that, often, people simply never confirm their subscription and you ultimately benefit from fewer sign-ups. This

is particularly important if you're paying to acquire email addresses. A single opt-in will allow your list to grow more quickly. That speed may come at a cost, however.

Less Lost Email Addresses: With a double opt-in, some subscribers will simply never remember to confirm their sign-up (or the confirmation email goes to spam). In that case, even though you did the hard work of convincing somebody to sign-up for your email list, you won't be able to contact them and you will have essentially "lost" the email address.

Less Tech Resources Used: If you are using a third-party email marketing platform such as Comm100, you won't need to allocate any additional tech resources to building out a double opt-in system if you want one. However, if you are building your own proprietary email marketing platform, a double opt-in will require more tech resources to build and a single-opt in may be a more effective solution to get your email marketing program up and running.

The disadvantages of a single opt-in email sign-up system include:

Less Respectful of Users' Privacy: These days, individuals have a great concern about their online privacy. A single opt-in sign-up procedure is less concerned with privacy and information control, and some users will notice that and be concerned. Some online privacy certifications require that you use a double opt-in system.

Greater Risk to Your Sender Reputation: When you don't use a double opt-in system, a number of bad addresses can enter into your email list. This includes mistyped email addresses, which can impact your sender reputation by adding to the statistics of undeliverable addresses that you're attempting to mail to. You also risk having somebody who is not the owner of an email address enter the address into your newsletter box as a joke. Then, when the actual owner of that email address receives your email, he or she may mark you as spam and negatively impact your sender reputation.

What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of a Double Opt-In?
A double opt-in solution also comes with a number of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of a double opt-in sign-up process include:

Better Quality List Protection: As we previously discussed, at the end of the day it doesn't matter how large your email marketing list is if the list is not predominantly high-quality addresses. Without a double opt-in, you risk keeping bad email addresses on your list. In addition to the examples noted above, malicious competitors may flood your single opt-in form with bad addresses simply to degrade your sender reputation. A double opt-in sign-up protects your list, your company, and your subscribers.

Opportunity to Communicate with Subscribers Immediately: A double opt-in sign-up process also gives you the ability to communicate with your subscribers immediately in the confirmation email. You can tell them more about your brand, ask them to add your email to their personal white list, or even

provide a special offer. This allows you to put a communication in front of them while they are still thinking about you after having signed up.

The disadvantages include:

Slower List Growth: A double opt-in process will mean that your list grows more slowly. It requires more work of the user and often results in "lost addresses" as described below.

Lost Addresses: Whether it's because they simply lose interest or because your confirmation email goes to the spam or junk folder, many email subscribers will simply not follow through with confirming their subscription, and you will have lost a potential marketing lead.

More Tech Resources Required: If you are building your own proprietary email marketing solution, a double opt-in system will require more tech resources. If you are using a third party email provider such as Comm100, you won't need to worry about these additional tech resources!

Can You Test Each?

All good marketing involves testing! If you're unsure which sign-up solution is best for your business goals, try using a single opt-in for a month and then a double opt-in for a month. Track sign-up volume, spam complaints, bad email addresses, and overall email list activity. Then compare each against your goals and determine which the best solution is for your company.

What is Recommended, Single or Double Opt-In?

There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to single opt-in versus double opt-in. In the long run, making the decision that protects the quality of your email list and your sender reputation is always going to be more important. However, you may find that with a single-opt in you don't experience a high volume of bad or malicious addresses and you can grow your email list at a quicker pace. Ultimately, you'll need to weigh your business goals about list growth, customer ease, and protecting your list quality and sender reputation against each other. If you're unsure, it's always better to err on the side of caution with a double opt-in. However, only you can determine what's best for your company.

Determining what type of opt-in you want to use with your sign-up process is the first step that you'll need to take before you begin to build your list. However, it's not a permanent decision and you can always change your mind later!

Next Up: Best practices for encouraging your existing customers to join your email list.

SECTION 7.3
Encouraging Existing Customers to Join Your Email List: Best Practices

> **In This Section:** The most valuable customers to have on your email marketing list are existing or previous customers. What are the best ways and techniques to encourage previous or existing customers to join your email marketing list? In building your email database, previous and existing customers often present the lowest hanging fruit and the easiest opportunity. In this section, we'll cover the best practices for recruiting existing and previous customers to your email

Best Practice: Use an Opt In Form When Users Check Out or Register

The easiest and most streamlined place to capture your existing and previous users' email addresses and consent to opt-in to your email list is when those users purchase on your site or when they register as a site member. In both instances, users or customers will need to provide email addresses in order to receive login information, purchase receipts, or other necessary customer communications. Since they're already providing you with information and interacting with your site, it's a perfect opportunity to request that they allow you to email them with additional information and offers. This is typically done by putting a consent check box below the spot where users enter their email address. Depending on your email system, that consent check box can either automatically update your in-house database and include those users on email lists, or you can query your user database periodically and upload all contacts with a positively checked consent box to your email marketing platform. If you are doing the latter process, be sure that you don't overwrite anybody who has unsubscribed from your email list. Also, if you are manually uploading opt-in emails, be sure to do it fairly regularly. The longer that you wait, the more likely it is that a subscriber will forget about you and subsequently mark you as spam when you do eventually email them.

Best Practice: Use a Negative Consent Opt-In Form

There are two types of ways to construct an opt-in check box where your customers enter their email addresses. The first is called a "positive consent form." This means that users must actively check the box in order to be on your email list, and your text next to the box should say something similar to, "Check this box in order to receive special offers and deals from us." A "negative consent form" means that the box is already checked and users must proactively uncheck it if they do *not* want to receive email from you. In this case, your text next to the email consent box should read, "Please uncheck this box if you do not wish to receive future emails from us." While a negative consent form does mean that you may experience some heightened spam complaints, almost every case study ever done has shown improved results with a negative consent form. While users are unlikely to actively check a consent box, they are equally unlikely to remember to uncheck it. To optimize your email collection of existing customers, choose to use a negative consent form.

Best Practice: Offer a Clear Value Proposition

In the case your existing or current customers, giving them a compelling reason to join your email list is no different than the same need with raw leads. Even though existing customers may already have a relationship with your company, brand, or product, that doesn't mean that they necessarily want to allow you to email them. After all, our inboxes are all very crowded these days and many people simply don't want extra "junk email." Be sure to give your customers a clear value proposition for why they should allow you to include them on your email list. This may be exclusive offers and discounts, useful information, early access to new products, monthly contests, or a host of other features that can encourage users to join an email list. The best value proposition for you may require some research and some testing. However, once you determine what it is, you'll see an increase in customers opting into your email list.

Best Practice: Assure Privacy

This best practice applies virtually any time you solicit uses to join your email list, regardless of their previous relationship with you. Be sure to ensure users of your commitment to your privacy policy and that you will not share, sell, or rent their email. If possible, become accredited by an online trust and privacy monitoring organization such as Truste (Comm100 is Truste accredited). Information has become the currency of the internet, and users are increasingly aware that they want their private contact information to remain private. Be sure to give them that assurance whenever you are asking for an email address of any kind.

Best Practice: Solicit Customers in Operational Email Communications

When a customer registers at your site or makes a purchase, you have a golden opportunity to request that they allow you to add them to your marketing email list even if they don't opt-in to your email list at the time of registration or purchase. Almost all registrations or purchases require follow-up confirmation or receipt emails. Those emails often experience a high open rate as they are highly relevant to customers. Utilize this communications opportunity to request again that customers allow you to add them to your email marketing list and provide them with a link to a confirmation page to add them to the list. You can also include this invitation in any and all of your customer service email templates.

Best Practice: Solicit Customers via Social Media

Many of your existing customers will have a relationship with you via one of your social media channels. Be sure to periodically solicit customers via these channels to join your email list. You'll need to emphasize the benefits and exclusive offers or content available via email when you do this since many of your social email followers may already feel as though they've given you a valid communications channel by following you on a social media network. However, it's important to you to encourage them to transition to an email list for long-term revenue and valuation goals.

Best Practice: Solicit Customers in Print Mailers

If you communicate with your customers via print mailings, it's a perfect time to encourage them to join your email list. Remind them that by allowing you to communicate with you via email, they save a tree and resources when you no longer need to send them print mailings!

Existing customers are not only the most likely to join your email list, they are also the most likely to respond to offers and information in your email products. By following the best practices above, you can optimize the number of existing customers who allow you to contact them via an email marketing or newsletter channel.

Next Up: *Best practices for designing an email sign-up box are explained.*

SECTION 7.4
Designing an Email Sign-Up Box: Best Practices

In This Section: For soliciting your existing customers to join your email list, most of the work can be done when they purchase or register. However, if you're advertising your email list on a search engine or other website or if you are soliciting visitors on your website or social media channel, you'll need a well-designed email sign-up box. The difference between a well done email sign-up box and a poorly designed email sign-up box can be the difference between healthy email list growth and slow and tedious email list growth. In this section, we'll cover the best practices of designing an email sign-up box.

Best Practice: Use a White Box for Text Entry

It's possible that, as you are surfing the internet looking for examples of email sign-up boxes, you'll see a number of "trendy" email sign-up boxes where the field in which a user enters his or her email is shaded grey or another color that "snaps." While that color usage may draw attention to the area of the page where the email sign-up box is located, most case studies reveal that users are more comfortable with entering text into a white box and also recognize a white text box as an area where they are supposed to enter information. If you want to use color or design to draw attention to the area of a page or landing page where users enter their email address, use best practice webpage and graphic design elements to draw a user's eye to the correct area of the page. Do not, however, use a color other than white for the actual field in which a user enters his or her email address.

Best Practice: Show a Sample Email Format

It may seem as though all users understand what format they need to enter their email address in. However, this isn't actually true! Provide users with an example of what their entered email address should look like either within the text box itself or below the text field. For example:
Enter your email address above (ie: yourname@email.com)

Best Practice: Make the Submit Button Large, Clear, and Near the Text Field

The most important part of your email sign-up box or form is the submit button. Not only does it need to be clear and easy-to-spot, it also needs to actively encourage users to click it. Consider the use of graphic arrows and even animation surrounding your submit button. Color is one of the most important elements of any action button on a website, and your email sign-up box is no exception. If you have a standard website color palette in which a certain color is consistently used to indicate that a user should take an action by clicking a button, use that color. Otherwise, select bright, attractive, action-oriented colors. In some case studies, red has been shown to be particularly effective in a submission button. Finally, make sure that your submit button is big, easy to spot, and near enough to the text field where users enter their email address that there is a clear mental relationship between the button and the text

field. While experimenting and testing various elements of your email sign-up box is important as a whole, you may want to take extra time and resources to test the color, text, positioning, and placement of your submit button early on in your email collection process.

Best Practice: What Should Your Submit Button Say

Keep the text on your email submission button short, clear, and friendly while also telling users exactly what you want them to do. Popular and effective phrases include:

- Join Now
- Join Free
- Begin Receiving Offers Now
- Submit Your Email
- Register

Best Practice: Keep Everything Above the Fold

Not unlike any web design best practice, if you want to experience the best optimization from your email sign-up box, make sure that all elements of it are above the fold. This is true if your email sign-up is a module on your website or if you have made an entire landing page dedicated to capturing emails. The value proposition, email entry field, privacy assurance, and, most importantly, the submit button, should all be placed well above the fold in a standard web browser layout. The most effective online marketing solicitations always happen above the fold!

Best Practice: Assure Privacy

This best practice applies any time you solicit uses to join your email list, regardless of their previous relationship with you. Be sure to ensure users of your commitment to your privacy policy and that you will not share, sell or rent their email. If possible, become accredited by an online trust and privacy monitoring organization such as Truste (Comm100 is Truste accredited). Information has become the currency of the internet, and users are increasingly aware that they want their private contact information to remain private. Be sure to give them that assurance whenever you are asking for an email address of any kind.

Best Practice: Offer a Clear Value Proposition

Users who do not have a previous relationship with your company will need a strong incentive to actively join your email list. After all, our inboxes are all very crowded these days and many people simply don't want extra "junk email." Be sure to give potential subscribers a clear value proposition for why they should allow you to include them on your email list. This may be exclusive offers and discounts, useful information, early access to new products, monthly contests, or a host of other features that can encourage users to join an email list. The best value proposition for you may require some research and some testing. However, once you determine what it is, you'll see an increase in individuals joining your email list.

Best Practice: Don't Ask for Too Much Information

We've mentioned several times that the more information that you have on your email subscribers, the more you can segment your email list and the more effective it will be in returning results. However, the moment when a user joins your email list is not the right time to ask them for a great deal of information. You want to make joining your email list as painless as possible. The more information that you ask subscribers for, the more likely they are to abandon the process of subscribing to your email product. Keep the information required to join at a minimum. If it's possible, only ask for their email address. It's often also fine to ask only for an email address and a first name. If you want to collect additional information, you can do so in a follow-up or on a second screen after you have captured their email information. Adding a name to the database without detailed information is better than not adding a name to the database at all because your potential subscriber became overwhelmed with the length or size of your email sign-up form. Keep the information requests to a minimum when initially capturing an email address for your database.

Best Practice: Check for Email Format or Duplicate Emails

If it is possible for you to do so technologically, check for proper email format or duplicate copies of the email in your database at the time of email submission. Checking for email format will ensure that, if you require a double opt-in, your new subscriber actually receives your confirmation email. If you do not require a double opt-in, it ensures that your potential subscriber double checks his or her email and then enters the correct one. This not only means that you are more likely to actually contact your subscriber via email, it also means that you will be sending out fewer bad or "bounced" email addresses. Every time you send to a bad email address, you risk your email sender reputation.

Checking for duplicate emails in the system helps to control instances where a user may previously have marked you as spam and inadvertently joins again, only to mark you as spam again.

The more that you can check and confirm email address quality at the time of sign-up, the healthier and better your email list will be.

Best Practice: Display a Confirmation Page

Regardless of whether you are using a single opt-in or double opt-in email sign-up form, after your new subscriber has entered his or her email address, be sure to display a confirmation screen confirming that you have received the subscription request. Otherwise, your new subscriber may continue to click the "submit" button, generating site errors for you. If you are using a double opt-in sign-up system, use the confirmation screen to remind your new subscriber that he or she needs to check his or her inbox (including the spam folder!) for the confirmation email and should add your email address to his or her contact or address list. A confirmation screen is also an ideal opportunity to present users with other actions to take, such as purchasing opportunities or social media links. Don't waste any opportunity to interact with your new subscriber, and that includes the confirmation page!

Best Practice: Use Landing Page Best Practices

Finally, whether you are developing a landing page that is entirely devoted to email capture or whether you are incorporating an email capture box onto a webpage that includes other content, be sure to use all best practices of web design and landing page design (covered extensively earlier in this book). No matter how compelling your email offers are, if you use poor landing page or web design, you won't be able to convince users to sign-up for it.

Creating a compelling email sign-up box may seem overwhelming, but if you simply follow the above listed best practices, you'll be able to create a high converting email sign-up box. Of course, always remember that all marketing modules, including email sign-up modules, should be tested with various looks, designs, copy and positioning in order to find the best performing solution.

Next Up: *How do you control opt-outs and unsubscribe requests from your email list?*

SECTION 7.5
Controlling Opt-Out and Unsubscribe Requests from Your Email List

In This Section: Now that you've done the hard work of developing a great email sign-up box, finding the right locations to solicit both existing customers and new leads to sign-up for your email marketing or newsletter list, and streamlining the process, how do you keep your subscribers active and engaged and control opt-outs and unsubscribe requests? Managing your email list also means managing subscribers once they've joined. In this section, we'll talk about what to do to handle, and minimize, unsubscribe requests and opt-out notifications.

Step 1: Offer Great Content and a Valuable Email Product

The first thing that you want to do, of course, is to minimize how many subscribers actually choose to unsubscribe from your email list. What's the best way to do that? Provide them with an email product that they'll be excited to receive and will look forward to reading. You'll still sometimes have users who simply want to minimize how much email they're receiving, but if you take the time to carefully develop and craft your email marketing or newsletter program, if you think about what consumers really want, and if you test and optimize different ideas, you can dramatically reduce the number of unsubscribe requests that you receive. If, on the other hand, you email non-valuable content frequently to your subscriber base, you'll experience high volumes of both unsubscribe requests and spam complaints. Both of these will negatively impact your sender reputation score and future email marketing programs.

Step 2: Be Sure to Process Opt-Outs or Unsubscribe Requests in a Timely Manner

Once somebody does unsubscribe from your email marketing list, you need to process the unsubscribe request as quickly as possible. Legally, CAN-SPAM only requires that you process unsubscribe or opt-out requests within ten business days. However, if a person unsubscribes from your email and then receives another email from you two days later, not only will you likely get a customer service complaint, you will most likely also get a spam complaint filed with the email service provider. If you are using a third-party email marketing platform such as Comm100, then it's likely that your unsubscribe or opt-out requests are being handled instantly. However, if you are building a proprietary in-house email system or manually removing opt-out or unsubscribe requests, it's recommended that you have a process that ensures that all opt-out or unsubscribe requests are handled within ten business days or prior to the next time that you send email, whichever is shorter.

Step 3: Allow Users to Unsubscribe from Individual Lists or to Universally Unsubscribe

If you manage multiple email list segments, it's advisable to allow users to choose between simply opting-out of a single email list or opting-out of all future emails from you. CAN-SPAM requires that you offer the ability to unsubscribe from all future emails from any main list or sub-list (referred to as a "universal unsubscribe"). However, if you have multiple special interest lists, you can often preserve your

relationship with a subscriber by allowing them to simply opt-out of one type of list. For example, you may have one email list that you send special offers to, one that you send newsletter content to, and a third that you send only information related to new products to. You can allow your users to choose to not receive any email, or to individually choose which lists to no longer receive email from. In the second case, a user may only want to stop receiving information on new products. If you only offer a universal unsubscribe option, then that user will unsubscribe from all emails and you will never be able to contact them again. If you offer the user the ability to manage which email lists he or she is active on, you may only experience a reduction in the number of emails that you can send to the user. Many third-party email marketing platforms, including Comm100, offer an easy module to allow users to login to a management page and choose which of your email sub-lists they wish to remain on or unsubscribe from. However, always remember that you are legally required to offer users the ability to easily unsubscribe from all future emails from you.

Step 4: Offer Multiple Channels to Unsubscribe

You want to make it easy for your users to unsubscribe. This is both a CAN-SPAM requirement and a choice that is in your best interest. CAN-SPAM requires that users need only reply to your email or make one, single click from your email in order to unsubscribe. You want to not only ensure that that is the process that you use, but you also want to make sure that users can easily find the unsubscribe information in your email so that they do not become frustrated and mark you as spam.

Step 5: The Unsubscribe Confirmation Email

The debate over whether you should send a confirmation email after a user opts-out or unsubscribes from your email list is a debate that has never reached a conclusive answer. On the one hand, your former subscriber has made it clear that he or she does not want to receive any future emails from you. On the other hand, it's one last chance to communicate with your subscriber within the ten business day window before they must be entirely removed from your email list. We think that it's absolutely fine to send one final email confirming that you have received the user's request to unsubscribe and are removing them from the email list promptly. You can also use that email to solicit information from them (either by linking to a survey or by asking them to contact customer service) about why they opted-out of your email list. You may be able to gain valuable information about how to improve your email marketing program and avoid future unsubscribe requests.

Losing members of your email list is unavoidable no matter how well-developed your email marketing or newsletter plan is. However, managing unsubscribe requests effectively and in a way that helps you maintain the health of your list and gather useful information can turn a negative into a positive.

Next Up: *Special tips for managing subscriptions on an auto responder list.*

SECTION 7.6
Managing and Optimizing Users on an Auto Responder List

> **In This Section:** While managing and optimizing users on an auto responder email list is similar and, to a degree, the same, as managing users and growing your list for a standard email marketing or newsletter program, there are some auto responder best practices to keep in mind. In this section, we'll cover the key points that you need to know in order to have a healthy auto responder email list that won't develop unsubscribe or opt-out problems.

Acquiring Users for an Auto Responder Program

In nine out of ten ways, acquiring users for an auto responder email program is no different than acquiring users for a traditional email marketing program. You'll want to include all of the basic email acquisition practices, including:

- Designing a great email submission form that includes a large, clear submit button, an assurance of privacy, and a clear value proposition
- Using all possible sources for identifying and recruiting subscriptions to your email program both from existing customers and new leads
- Establishing the value of an email address to you so that you know what to pay if you actively advertise in order to grow your email list.

However, because auto responder email programs can often be frustrating to subscribers when they sign-up and suddenly start receiving daily email, you'll want to be sure to provide potential subscribers with information to set their expectations from the beginning. When recruiting submissions to your email auto responder program, be sure to alert users:

- How many emails they can expect to receive
- How often they will receive emails

Most auto responder email campaigns include a high volume of emails, often sent as frequently as only one day apart. This can create spam complaints or opt-out/unsubscribe requests if you don't alert individuals to the frequency and volume when they join your email list. It is better to have a smaller auto responder email marketing list that does not unsubscribe or mark you as spam than it is to have a larger auto responder email marketing list that opts-out or marks you as spam and negatively impacts your sender reputation.

Removing Unsubscribe Requests from Your Auto Responder List

While, with a traditional email marketing list, you can often send an unsubscribe confirmation email and wait several days to remove an opt-out from your email marketing list, the same is not true of an auto responder list. Because most auto responder email campaigns send email every other day (in some cases daily), if you do not immediately remove an unsubscribe or opt-out request from your email database, the user is likely to receive more, unwanted, email from you. When this happens, you'll not only be marked as spam and your sender reputation will be impacted, you'll also experiences customer service complaints.

Additionally, it's not recommended that you send any type of opt-out confirmation to an unsubscribed member of an auto responder list. Auto responder email lists can be more difficult to manage and keep healthy than traditional marketing email lists because users often become frustrated with the volume of email and unsubscribe or mark emails as spam. An auto responder email list often has a much more difficult time maintaining its sender reputation than a similar traditional marketing list would. With an auto responder email list, you don't want to risk that a subscription cancellation email after a user has opted-out further annoys the user and results in a spam complaint.

Auto responder email lists require more sensitivity to handling subscriptions as well as opt-outs due to the often more volatile and fickle nature of the list itself. While you should follow all of the strategies, techniques and best practices laid out in this section to acquire and manage users on your auto responder email list, you'll want to be extra careful with providing full information disclosure when users sign up and with quickly and efficiently managing unsubscribe requests when they do happen.

Next Up: *Advice for keeping your email list healthy and your sender reputation in tact once you've built an email list!*

SECTION 7.7
Managing Your List: How to Keep an Email List Healthy

In This Section: Once you've acquired email addresses and perfected your unsubscribe and opt-out process, there are a number of other activities that you'll want to ensure are happening in order to maintain a clean, healthy, and effective email marketing or newsletter list. In this section, we'll cover the final steps that you'll need to either manage or be aware of in order to keep your email list in its best shape possible.

Cleaning and Pruning: Managing Bounces and Bad Email Addresses

No matter how much you monitor emails as you collect them and attempt to ensure that no bad addresses make it into your email list, addresses will eventually go bad or "atrophy" over time. Users may shut down their email accounts, move on from corporate jobs where their email was hosted, or just abandon an email account until the inbox becomes full and can no longer accept messages. When you attempt to deliver an email to an email address that, for whatever reason, is a bad or invalid email address, the send is registered as a "bounce" (as in the email that you tried to send bounced back and was undeliverable).

The more bounces you receive when you send an email, the more your sender reputation will be impacted. This is because most email service providers assume that responsible email senders remove bad addresses from their lists regularly, known as "pruning" the list (similar to "pruning" your hedges). Spammers, because they do not want to allocate resources or time, will often have high bounce rates. That's why it's important to ensure that all of your bounced or bad addresses are regularly removed from your email database.

In most cases, email senders will set a threshold that says how many times an email address can bounce before it is removed from the list. Why not just remove addresses as soon as they bounce once? In many cases, a single bounce or even a handful of bounces can be accounted for by user behavior. For example, a user with a high volume email account goes on vacation. That user's email inbox then fills up and, when you try to send your email, it bounces. If you were to remove that user after one bounce, you would never be able to contact them again even if they actually enjoyed and engaged with your emails and newsletters and simply made an error by letting their inbox become too full.

Another example might be if, on the day you sent your email, the email service provider that your subscriber was using was having technical problems and many inbound emails were undeliverable while they corrected those problems. In that case, if you removed the email from your database after just one bounce, you'd be giving up your right to communicate with the subscriber based on a temporary technical failure.

Most email senders suggest a threshold of three to five bounces before you remove an email from your email marketing database. If you are using a third party email marketing platform, such as Comm100, periodic list pruning and cleaning is most likely built into your system. However, if you are manually managing email contacts or building your own proprietary email system, then you'll want to make sure that tracking undeliverable addresses and making sure that they are removed from your email list is happening with regularity.

Removing Inactive or Non-Engaged Users

Because there's no additional cost associated with sending an email to a user whether he or she opens an email or not, many email senders simply continue to send to their entire email list with every send even if there are many users who have not opened an email in many months. While there's no financial loss associated with doing this, increasingly email service providers are using overall email metrics to impact your sender reputation score. In some cases, this can land you in the spam box for a certain segment of low-activity users and in the inbox for other users. What's the best way to prevent against this? Limit how many times you email a low-activity user.

The first step is to determine what you consider to be "low activity." If you send one email a week, then you may think that somebody is an active user if they only open one email a month. If you only send one email a month, then you may consider somebody to be an active user if they only open one email every three months. The rule will need to be determined by your best call judgment since there's really no metric that's been released that says what email service providers consider low-activity.

The next thing that you'll want to do is query all of the email addresses that meet your criteria out of your email database and put them on a separate list. It's not that you don't want to ever email these individuals again. You simply want to limit how much you email them.

The third step is to try to identify individuals who may be looking at your email but not registering as an opened email because they don't load images or use only the preview pane. Generate a group email to everybody on your low-usage list letting them know that you're doing periodic email maintenance. You've noticed that while they still receive your emails, they haven't opened one in quite some time. You may be going to their spam box or folder, or they may no longer be interested in receiving your regular emails. If they are interested, provide them with an email address or a simple confirmation box or link to check and return them to the main list. If they do not respond, then keep them on your secondary list and only email them during important revenue or traffic times.

You may also want to take the opportunity to remind them that if they do wish to receive your emails, it's important that they add you to their contact list or address book in order to ensure that your emails are delivered to their inbox.

It may seem like a lot of work, but differentiating your email list to obtain the best possible email metrics can vastly improve your email marketing performance. Sometimes, quality does pay off better than quantity.

Section Summary

In this section, you learned all of the information that you'll need in order to acquire, grow, and manage your email list to ensure optimal delivery and minimal spam complaints and unsubscribe or opt-out requests.

- Your email list is not only a way to communicate with customers and grow company revenue; it's also a company asset in both the short and long term.
- Existing and previous customers are ideal email list conversions. The best place to capture email sign-ups from existing customers is during the site registration or purchase process.
- To recruit new leads to your email list, utilize social media, websites with similar demographics, search engines and offline email collection venues.
- A single opt-in is a way to join an email list that does not require the user to click a confirmation link in a separate email. It builds your email list faster, but risks bad email addresses.
- A double opt-in is a type of email list sign-up that requires a user to click a confirmation link in a second email. It reduces the growth of your list size but provides better quality email leads.
- When designing an email sign-up box, be sure to utilize all best practices including: using a white field for email address entry, providing a sample email address format, using a large and easy to find submission button, providing a clear value proposition, and assuring users of your privacy policy.
- When managing unsubscribe or opt-out requests, be sure to remove names quickly. You may want to send a subscription cancellation email as well.
- Be sure to prune bounced or bad addresses from your email list regularly.
- Periodically sort and remove low-activity users from your email list in order to optimize your email metrics and sender reputation.

In the Next Section …
In the next section of this book, we'll discuss what the important marketing metrics for an email campaign are and how to determine if your email marketing or newsletter program is a success.

SECTION 8: Determining the Success of Your Email Marketing Campaign

*In This Section***:** You've built an email marketing or lead list. You've designed an amazing email template. You've come up with great content and a compelling offer to use in your email marketing or newsletter plan. But now how do you tell if your email marketing efforts are a success? In many cases, if you increase your revenue, that makes your email marketing program successful. But if you're not immediately making revenue, or if revenue isn't your only or your primary goal, how can you tell if your email marketing program is successful? More importantly, if you're not seeing the revenue increases that you'd hoped to see, how can you identify which parts of your email marketing or newsletter program will need to be fine-tuned or improved? In this section, we'll walk you through common email marketing metrics, what they mean, and how to determine if you're email campaign is successful.

Section 8.1
What Are the Key Metrics That Determine Email Success?
Section 8.2
Email Deliverability: Inbox Deliverability Rate Numbers and Their Meaning
Section 8.3
Open Rate: What are Good Open Rate Numbers and Their Meaning
Section 8.4
Click Through Rate: Click Through Rate Numbers and Their Meaning
Section 8.5
Customer Sales, Site Activity or KPI Conversions from Email
Section 8.6
Managing Metrics on an Auto Responder List
Section 8.7
Sample Email Tracking Reports
Section Summary

SECTION 8.1
What Are the Key Metrics That Determine Email Success?

In This Section: If you have a basic understanding of marketing metrics, then many of the metrics associated with email marketing won't be foreign to you. They may, however, be variations of the types of metrics that you're used to looking at for ad campaigns or on-site performance metrics. If you're not familiar with common marketing metrics, don't worry! In this section, we'll walk you through what the most important metrics that you need to understand to optimize your email marketing or newsletter program are and explain them to you.

List Size

The first metric that you'll need to understand in order to fully be able to understand your marketing email or newsletter campaign is the starting point – your list size. If you're sending to five hundred names or five thousand names, you can expect some changes and alterations in your key performance indicators. For example, when your email list is smaller, it's likely that all of the names on your email list are people who are passionate about or committed to your brand. Therefore, you should expect higher open rates and user engagement. As your list grows, you'll move further away from your committed brand advocates and to a more generalized, less passionate audience. When that happens, you are likely to see open rates, click-through rates, and even conversion rates drop to lower levels. It's impossible to tell what, for your company or business, constitutes a small email list or a large email list. However, before you can determine the success or failure of any email marketing campaign, you'll need to take a look at your list size and think about what type of users are likely to be on your list.

Deliverability – Delivered Rate

The first metric that you'll need to understand is called "deliverability" or "delivered rate." This is the number of emails that you sent that were actually delivered to recipients. It's not the number that arrived in the inbox – deliverability rate may include emails that ended up in spam or junk folders. However, what it does tell you is how many "bad addresses" or "bounced" addresses you had on your email list. A healthy email list, and one that will not incur sender reputation penalties, will have a limited number of bad or bounced addresses. If the email list that you are sending is your internally-collected house-list and you have a low deliverability rate, this may mean that you are not properly error checking email addresses at the time that people submit their email addresses, that your are not properly pruning and maintaining your email list, or that a malicious competitor has recently spammed your list by signing up a high volume of bad email addresses. In any case, if your deliverability rate is low (or the number of undelivered email addresses is high), your list requires immediate attention to restore it to full health. If your email list is a rented or purchased list and your deliverability rate is not acceptable, you should request a refund on a per-email address basis for the number of undeliverable addresses and should

consider that factor when considering renting or purchasing email addresses from the same source in the future.

Open Rate

Open rate is one of the single most important metrics that you will need to monitor to optimize your email campaign. Simply put, open rate is the number (typically presented as a percentage) of people who received your email and then opened it. We'll discuss open rate in great detail in the next section of this book. However, since the first step of any successful email campaign is getting people to actually open your email, open rate is a critical metric to both monitor and constantly improve upon.

Click-Through Rate

Click-through rate will also be discussed in much more detail in the following sections of this book. However, because you typically cannot monetize directly from an email view (unless you are serving impression-based ads within your email), all of your monetization depends on how many people click-through your email to a website page or landing page on which you can make money either through a revenue-generating transaction or a page impression for an advertising contract. Click-through rate may be presented as the total number of clicks from your email to pages on your website. It may also be presented as the total number of individuals who clicked through your email to a landing page. We'll explain the pros and cons of these tracking options in the following section. For now, just be aware that there are multiple metrics to consider and that click-through rate is important.

Conversion Rate

Conversion rate, of course, is the metric that often matters the most. This is the metric that determines how many of the individuals that you emailed made a revenue-generating transaction or signed-up at your website. While almost all email marketing platforms, including Comm100, will handle tracking your deliverability, open rate, and click-through rate for you, you'll have to accommodate your conversion tracking with an internal system. Google Analytic's goal tool and referring sites tools are an acceptable out-of-the-box solution for this challenge. However, you may want to develop more robust internal tracking tools and reporting tools to manage tying sales or sign-ups back to sources such as email marketing.

Unsubscribe and Spam Complaints

The final primary metric that you'll want to look is the number of unsubscribe requests or spam complaints that your emails are generating. Not only do a high number of unsubscribe or spam complaints mean that you are jeopardizing the health of your email marketing list and your sender reputation, it may also mean that your content or offers aren't compelling. The goal is always to grow your email list, not to reduce its size. If you are seeing high numbers of unsubscribe requests or spam complaints, it's time to take a close look at the quality of the email marketing that you're sending or the frequency with which you're sending it.

Typically, you'll want to see a combined unsubscribe and spam complaint rate of one percent of your total list or more. In the event that your unsubscribe requests or spam complaints exceed two percent, it's time to do some serious investigation into the timing, content, and frequency of your email sends.

Historical Comparisons

The five metrics described above are the primary metrics that you'll want to consider when evaluating your email marketing efforts: Did users actually receive your email? Did they open it? Did the click-through to the content or offers promoted? Did they take advantage of that content or those offers? Did they remain on your email list?

However, you'll want to not only track these metrics individually but using a method that compares them to previous email sends. Be sure to optimize both year-over-year, month-over-month and send-to-send metrics to track email engagement activity. You may learn simple best practices that can make your email program more effective. Whether you've just begun developing an email marketing campaign or whether you've been emailing users for years, comparing past and current email engagement using the metrics describe above can help you monitor where your email campaigns are succeeding and where they could use some extra attention and development.

Next Up: *Monitoring and maximizing your deliverability rate data.*

SECTION 8.2
Email Deliverability: Inbox Deliverability Rate Numbers and Their Meaning

In This Section: So what does an inbox deliverability rate mean? More importantly, what can you do if yours is not acceptable in order to improve your overall email campaign performance? In this section, we'll discuss what an acceptable email deliverability percentage is, what it may imply about your email marketing efforts, and what actions you can immediately take to attempt to improve this metric.

Deliverability Numbers Defined
As we previously mentioned, your deliverability rate is the number of emails that you sent that were successfully delivered to recipients. It is not a reflection of whether your email went into the spam or junk folder of your recipient. As long as your email is delivered, it is counted as a positive delivery no matter what folder it is placed in by the email service provider.

Emails that are not delivered may be email addresses that do not exist and were entered into your system improperly, email addresses that have been cancelled or deactivated since your last send, email addresses where the email service provider is experiencing technical difficulties at the time of your email send, or email addresses where the recipient's email account was full and could not receive further messages. Essentially, any email for which a viable destination account was not found is listed as an undeliverable email.

Desirable Deliverability Numbers
Of course, you want your email deliverability bounces to be as low as possible and as close to zero as possible! In reality, no matter how diligent you are about maintaining a clean email list; bad addresses may slip through or be added to your email marketing list.

If your email deliverability bounces exceed three percent, then you have entered a red flag zone. You are within normal parameters if the undeliverable count is between one and two percent,

What Your Deliverability Numbers Say About Your Email List
If your email deliverability bounces are too high, this may mean one of several things about your email list.

You are Not Properly Vetting Emails at the Time of Sign Up: You might be surprised how many people will mistype an email address when they enter it into a submission form. While some of this activity is unable to be controlled by you, there are some basic email checks that you can make sure are

implemented at the time of sign-up. Making sure that all emails meet the basic format of using a "@" sign and ending in a ".extension" format can reduce the number of bad addresses entered into your email system.

You are Not Regularly Pruning Your Email List: Earlier in this book we discussed the process of pruning and cleaning your email list, which is the process of making sure that bad email addresses are regularly removed from your email list after they have bounced several times. If your deliverability percentage is too low (or your undeliverable percentage too high), you should check to ensure that your list is being regularly and actively pruned.

You Have Malicious Competitors: It can be a mean world out there. It's not entirely impossible that if you see a high and unexpected amount of undeliverable emails that your competitors have taken to a black-hat technique of spamming your email sign-up list with poor quality addresses in order to decrease your sender reputation.

You Have Rented or Purchased a Bad List: If the list of emails that you have sent to is a rented, purchased or traded list, then you can be assured that the list was not properly scrubbed before you obtained it. One of the risks of purchased or rented list is that you may ultimately get a high number of bad our bounce addresses.

You Ported Emails Over From Another Source Without Controlling for Old Addresses: If you created your email list by porting email addresses over from another email source location, such as your retail database, but didn't have the list scrubbed or cleaned before you sent an email, you will experience a high undeliverable count. Because databases that do not send email frequently do not have to be concerned with pruning or cleaning, you may have a high number of bad addresses.

If you are seeing a high number of undeliverable emails, it most likely means that you are experiencing one of the above situations. It's imperative that you remedy the situation, as a high undeliverable count can significantly damage your sender reputation.

What Can You Do To Improve Your Deliverability Numbers?
Fortunately, most of the issues and problems indicated by a high number of undeliverable email addresses can be remedied over time.

Add Error Checking: If you are not checking for email format when a user submits his or her email to your list or database, add error checking for basic email format including "@" and ".extension."

Switch to Double Opt-In: If you are using a single opt-in method for email sign-ups, switch to a double opt-in. If a user has entered a bad address, non-existent address or mistyped address (or even an intentionally bad address for malicious reasons), he or she will not receive their confirmation email.

Without that confirmation email, the individual cannot activate their email send and you will not be penalized for the bad or undeliverable address in your database.

Double Check Pruning Procedures and Settings: If you are using a third-party email sending platform such as Comm100, check to ensure that your pruning settings are set correctly, typically to remove addresses after three to five bounces. If you are using an in-house proprietary email system, run a number of tests to ensure that your list pruning is and has been happening effectively and on-time.

Be Wary When You Buy or Rent a List: If you are purchasing or renting an email list, be sure to negotiate an appropriate or acceptable number of bounced addresses from the list and ensure that you will get financial compensation for any bounced addresses over the agreed upon limit. No email list is perfect, so do not expect a zero percent bounce rate. Aim for an acceptable one to two percent bounce rate, though you may need to stretch to three percent in some instances. Always be responsible about doing consumer research about any organization that you rent or purchase an email list from.

Be Wary of Porting Contacts Over: If, in any instance, you are transferring email addresses from one portion of your database into your email marketing list, take appropriate precautions. Write a script to do a basic remove of any addresses that are not in proper email format. You may also want to separate emails by the age of the entry in your database and send in segments with newer addresses first. Older addresses are likely to have a higher percentage of bad addresses, and by sending them separately you may be able to target and remove them more quickly.

Keeping a clean email list that can get high deliverability is important to not only preserving your sender reputation but also to providing you with realistic email marketing metrics based on a viable list rather than an inflated one. Pay attention to your deliverability metrics and you'll be rewarded with improved overall email list activity.

Next Up: *What should you aim for in an open rate and how can you improve your open rate?*

SECTION 8.3
Open Rate: Open Rate Numbers and Their Meaning

In This Section: Once you manage to get your email delivered to your recipients successfully, the next most important email marketing or newsletter metric is open rate. After all, does it matter at all if you delivered an email if nobody actually opened it and read it? In this section we'll talk about open rate metrics, how to evaluate them, and how to optimize them.

Open Rate Defined

The open rate of your email is a percentage representation of the number of recipients who opened and read your email. For example, if you sent an email to a hundred people and fifty of them opened it, your open rate would be fifty percent. If you sent an email to a hundred people and fifteen of them opened it, your open rate would be fifteen percent.

It's important to note that open rate tracking is not a perfect science. An email's open is registered when a single pixel graphic known as a tracking pixel loads. If you've been paying attention throughout this book, then you know that not all email service providers or all individuals load graphics regularly. This means that you may be experiencing emails that are opened but for which the open is not registered.

Additionally, since open rate is tracked using a pixel graphic, any users who only receive or read the text-only version of your email will not be included in the open rate tracking for your email send.

Desirable Open Rate Numbers

Nailing down a desirable open rate percentage is nearly impossible since so many factors can contribute to open rates. Is your list healthy and new? How frequently do you send email? What time of day did you send email? Is your list an auto responder list?

If you can obtain an open rate of greater than fifty percent, then you should be incredibly pleased with yourself. Open rates that hover in the twenty-five to thirty percent rates are considered a success as well. If your open rate dips below that level, it may mean that there are issues with your subject lines or the quality of your email list. However, lower open rates may be typical and even acceptable for the quality or type of your list.

A better way to look at open rates rather than to simply set an arbitrary goal that may not be supported by your type of list, content, or other factors is to study the historical trends of open rates on your email products and strive to always improve them, setting goals to increase open rate percentages slowly over time and monitoring what behavior impacts your open rates both positively and negatively.

What Your Open Rate Percentages Say About Your Email Campaign

If your open rate is either extraordinarily low, trending downward with regularity, or much lower than you are used to seeing in on email marketing reports, then you may be experiencing one of the following errors with your email campaign strategy.

Poor Subject Lines: The most common culprit of poor open rates is poor subject lines. If the reason for your less-than-desirable open rate is not immediately obvious, the first course of action should be to evaluate your subject lines.

Poor Selection of Date and Time to Send: The day of the week and the time of the day that you send an email can impact your open rates. Generally, sending after 9am Pacific Standard Time on a Tuesday-Thursday will generate the best results. Mondays, Fridays, and weekends are typically not good email activity days. However, based on your demographic and industry segment, these rules may not hold true.

Over-Sending: The more email that you send, the less likely people are to open it with regularity. With very few exceptions (high value content), the greater the volume of email you send to an individual, the fewer times he or she will open. If your open rates are low or trending downwards and you send multiple emails per week, you may want to evaluate if you're simply sending too much email to your subscribers to keep them engaged.

Seasonal Sends: Seasonal factors can also impact open rates for your email. While you may think that, if you are a retail outlet, the time of year when your users will most want to hear from you is between the end of November and the middle of December, you may not be right. In fact, that time period is the highest email volume period of the year, so users are often more selective about what they do and don't open in their crowded inboxes. On the other end of the spectrum, internet activity as a whole is lowest in the summer. You may experience lower open rates in the summer as users spend less time on their computers or mobile devices.

Bad Email List: Finally, you may be getting poor open rates simply because your email list isn't a very high quality. If you rented or purchased your email list and the users are not already familiar with or brand advocates of your product or company, you'll experience lower open rates than with a list that you built from your own website. Also, the younger your demographic is, the less they will be tied to opening emails as younger demographics are more comfortable with social media or text messaging as a form of communication. Your email list may also simply be old. The longer a user has been subscribed to your email list, the less frequent their email opens typically become. It's important to always be infusing your email list with new, fresh, and enthusiastic members.

If your open rate isn't in your desired target zone, the reasons or causes above are the most likely source of your low open rate.

What Can You Do To Improve Your Open Rate?

In most cases, open rate is one of the easiest email metrics to improve upon, though it may take time and effort to do so. Use the following techniques to raise your open rate over time.

Subject Line Tests: We will go into great detail about how to run an appropriate subject line text in the final section of this book. The very first weapon in the battle against low open rates will be to develop best-practices for subject lines that drive high opens. We've given you subject line writing best-practices in general earlier in this book, but you'll need to establish some a/b email tests in order to determine what actually works the best for individual company, demographic, or market sector.

Time and Date Tests: We'll also cover how to run an effective time and date test later in this book as well. If your open rates are low, you may want to experiment with when you send your email. Remember also, that if your email is incredibly time-sensitive you want to ensure at least a three-day tail on it. Individuals do not check their email inboxes as frequently any more. You may also want to immediately move your email to a weekday send if you are sending on the weekend. For a more detailed description of how to run a time and date test, see section nine of this book.

Reduce Your Email Sends: If you send a high volume of email and see a drop off of or a regularly low open rate, try simply sending less email. Often times, less is more. If you are in an inbox daily, you may simply quickly get deleted. However, a weekly email or even bi-weekly may be more likely to get opened and read.

Evaluate Your List: Finally, evaluate the quality of your list. Your open rate may have absolutely nothing to do with subject lines, times, dates, or email volume. It may simply be that you have put together a list of email addresses of individuals who are not that interested in or engaged with your product or brand. If that is the case, then you'll need to determine for yourself what the best course of action is. You can continue to email those individuals despite poor metrics. You can shift the focus of your email campaign to something more relatable to those individuals. You can re-allocate your time and effort to building a higher quality list. Ultimately, the solution is in your hands.

Fixing a low open rate can take time and a great degree of trial and error. However, for successful email marketing, you must have emails that are actually opened and read. Mastering the open rate is an essential part of mastering email marketing.

Next Up: *How do you evaluate click-through numbers and optimize click-through in your emails?*

SECTION 8.4

Click-Through Rate: Click-Through Rate Numbers and Their Meaning

In This Section: You've successfully mastered email marketing metrics ones and two – deliverability and open rate. The next step, of course, is to get users and subscribers to click-through from your email template to your landing page or website. You may be serving impression-based ads within your email, in which case any view of the email with images turned on will result in revenue for you. However, chances are that for you to make revenue you'll need to get users to click through from your email to your transactional or revenue generating webpage. In this section, we'll summarize how to view and improve click-through metrics.

Click-Through Defined

Click-through rate is the percentage representation of the number of clicks that your email generated. However, click-through percentage may be calculated in one of two ways.

Individual Click-Through Percentage: In this form of the click-through percentage, the percentage is displayed as the total number of users who clicked-through your email. So, if you sent an email to one hundred individuals and fifty of them opened it, then your **open rate** was fifty percent. Then, if ten of those fifty individuals clicked through your email, your **click-through rate** was twenty percent (ie: ten is twenty percent of fifty).

Holistic Click-Through Rate: A holistic click-through rate takes into account all of the clicks from an email to a destination page even if those clicks were made by the same individual. For example, if you sent an email to a hundred recipients and fifty of those recipients opened the email, then your **open rate** would be fifty percent. If ten individuals then clicked-through the email but among those ten individuals they each clicked an average of 2.5 links for a total of twenty-five clicks, then your **click-through rate** is fifty percent (ie: twenty-five is fifty percent of fifty).

Neither format is necessarily better or worse. A holistic click-through rate typically means that your email marketing platform can also identify which specific links were clicked, which is a asset in gaining email performance intelligence. However, the information from either format is useful. Just be sure that you know which format your email marketing platform uses. If you are building your own in-house email marketing platform, be sure to think through which format you'd prefer to use.

Desirable Click-Through Numbers

Once again, nailing down what a desirable click-through number for your email product should be can be dependent on a number of factors. Which method of click-through tracking are you using? How many links are you putting into your emails? How engaged is your user list to begin with?

If you are using an individual click-through metric, you'd like to see your click-through numbers generally be larger than ten percent. Again, however, many variables can come into play here.

If you are using a holistic click-through tracking metric, you'd like to see your numbers in the thirty-percent range and certainly no less than twenty percent.

Not unlike open rate, though, your best bet with evaluating your click-through rate metrics is to use them comparatively over time to determine which emails do and don't generate good click-through numbers and then improve your click-through performance over time.

What Your Click-Through Percentages Say About Your Email Campaign

If your click-through percentages aren't as high as you want them to be, that can indicate a number of issues with your campaign, including:

Not Enough Links: The culprit may be as simple as not having provided users with enough links to click! While you don't want to fill your email up with so many links that you end up in the spam or junk folder, you also want to make sure that there are an ample amount of opportunities to move traffic from your email template to your website. It's possible that you have designed an email template that simply does not have enough links in it.

Invisible Links in Images: It's also possible that your users can't see your links because you've used only graphic buttons as links. Remember, many email service providers and individuals do not load images in email templates. If all of your links are "trapped" in an image, your users may simply not know where to click – and they're not going to hunt around looking for it!

Poorly Formatted Links: Similar to having links "trapped" in images, you may have formatted the links in your email in a way that is not apparent to users. While the links may be in line with your web style guide, if they aren't underlined and made to look like links, users may not recognize them as links and click them.

Poor Calls-to-Action: If your call-to-action does not entice or excite users, your click-through rate will suffer. We dedicated an entire chapter in section five of this book to best practices for writing a compelling call-to-action. If you need a refresher course, we suggest re-reading that section!

Non-Compelling Content or Offers: It's possible that the content or offers that you're promoting simply aren't compelling to your users. If you've exhausted improving all of your formatting, text, and content for click-through solicitations, it's time to consider that you may just not be offering your subscribers what they really want.

Poor List Quality: Finally, as with most email metrics, it may simply be a case of list quality. If your list was purchased or rented or is out-of-date internally, your subscribers or recipients simply may not care enough about your content, products, or offers to click-through. If all else has failed, it's time to consider how good (or not) your email lead list is.

A poor click-through rate will generally be one of two issues. Your email template may be formatted in a way that doesn't encourage clicks or your content and offers aren't compelling (or aren't presented as compelling in the call-to-action).

What Can You Do To Improve Your Click-Through Rate?

Poor click-through metrics can be more difficult to pinpoint and improve than open rate or deliverability problems. However, there are some steps that you can take to try to drive your click-through number upward.

Audit Your Email Template for Click-Through Best Practices: In section five of this book, we devoted an entire chapter to the best practices for optimizing click-through activity. Compare the best practices listed in that chapter to your existing email template and make any changes needed to realign your email template with its click-through goals and the best design techniques to accomplish those.

Review Calls-to-Action: Likewise, we also devoted an entire section in section five of this book to best practices for writing effective calls-to-action. Review your existing call-to-action text with the best practices suggested in that section and alter them if necessary.

Test Different Offers and Content: You should always be testing different content and offers, but if you've been experiencing a low click-through rate, then it's even more important to get outside of the box. Come up with content and offers that are extremely different from what you typically promote and then test those. Monitor what creates an improvement in click-through activity and then create more offers and content like that in the future.

Evaluate Your List: Finally, evaluate the quality of your list. Your click-through rate may have absolutely nothing to do with formatting, calls-to-action, or offers. It may simply be that you have put together a list of email addresses of individuals who are not that interested in or engaged with your product or brand. If that is the case, then you'll need to determine for yourself what the best course of action is. You can continue to email those individuals despite poor metrics. You can shift the focus of your email campaign to something more relatable to those individuals. You can re-allocate your time and effort to building a higher quality list. Ultimately, the solution is in your hands.

Click-through rate can be one of the more challenging metrics to accomplish an improvement in, but that doesn't mean that it can't be done. Practice diligence and patience and be willing to think outside of the box and you'll be able to see improvements in your click-through metrics and performance.

Next Up: *How do you monitor and maximize conversions and KPI's from an email campaign?*

SECTION 8.5
Customer Sales, Site Activity or KPI Conversions from Email

> **In This Section:** Of course, at the end of the day, what really makes your email program successful is if it meets the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that you've set for it to accomplish. In most cases, this is going to be a revenue goal. However, it could also be a membership increase, successful conversions to a lead form, or even simply page impressions. In this section, we'll talk about how to track your Key Performance Indicators and how to interpret the data in order to optimize your overall email campaign performance.

Key Performance Indicator Defined

While determining what your Key Performance Indicator for your email will be is entirely up to you and may be something completely unique to your business, there are a number of common success criteria for email campaigns (and marketing campaigns in general) that you may want to work with in order to keep things simple.

Revenue on a VPA Basis: One of the easiest metrics to work with is revenue on a value-per-action or value-per-acquisition basis. In this metric, your email is promoting a single product, purchase, or action that you have set a fixed value on. You may be selling a product that has a profit margin of twenty-five dollars. Therefore, you can assign a twenty-five dollar value to every tracked transaction from the email. You may be collecting names and leads and know that the average lifetime value of a new member is $100; therefore you can assign a value of every new lead as $100. When you use this metric, it becomes very easy to just track transactions and then multiply. It also means that you value each email the same way, so you do not need to complicate matters by trying to sort out high value email names versus low value email names.

Revenue on a Total Revenue Number: The second most common way to track email campaign success is on a total revenue basis. After you sent your email, how many transactions or sales did you make and what was the total value of those email campaigns? You can then cross-compare different campaigns and determine which campaigns ultimately generate the most revenue.

Total Number of Sales/Transactions: In some cases, looking at revenue, while important, can make your numbers unclear. Perhaps you only had one sale, but that individual sale was worth $5000. That may make your email campaign look as though it was highly successful. However, in truth, you only enticed one person to purchase products. It just so happens that that person was a high-volume buyer. That doesn't mean that your email campaign was well designed. It means that you got lucky with a big-dollar buyer. It's often important to look at the total number of transactions that an email generates. If that total number of transactions was low but the revenue was high, you still need to improve your email

program to convert more actions. If the number of transactions was high but the revenue was low, you'll need to work on your merchandising, cross sell, and up-sell techniques to convince users to purchase more or higher value products.

Lead Form Generation/New Members: It's also possible that your email's goal is to recruit new members, email addresses, leads, or to get existing members to fill out more detailed profile information. If that's the case, you'll want to tailor your metrics to simply count the number of sign-ups or forms filled out. If you know the monetary value of a sign-up, new member, or fully filled out lead form, you can assign a VPA to the transaction and count both revenue and sign-ups.

Page Impressions: Finally, if your business model is a page-impression based advertising model, then your KPI will be the number of page impressions that an email generates. Unlike sales, sign-ups, or other types of transactions that can be tracked directly back to an email, you can't generally track a page impression back to an email unless you have sophisticated software. You may need to create this metric by taking the average page impressions for the three days after an email send and then using the increase over those to credit to your email.

Of course, it's always possible that your business needs require a KPI that is entirely different from those listed here. The important thing to remember is that you want to tie something tangible, trackable, and, if possible, with a set monetary value to help you determine your campaign's success.

Desirable KPI Numbers

There's absolutely no way to provide advice in a general way on what desirable KPI numbers for your unique business should be. The size of your business, the average transaction value, the conversions that you experience from different types of marketing efforts, whether your goods are luxury goods or not, and many other factors can determine what your expectations from your email marketing campaign should be. The good news is that, in most cases, there is no cost associated with sending an email campaign so you will make a profit even if your KPI and conversion percentage are very low. One of the most appealing aspects of email marketing is the consistently high ROI. However, you'll need to set your own performance targets and goals based on your unique business needs.

What Your Key Performance Indicators Say About Your Email Campaign

If your Key Performance Indicators aren't registering as high as you want them to be, that can indicate a number of issues with your campaign, including:

Non-Compelling Offer: The most obvious and common scenario is that, if your users didn't respond well to your email, you simply didn't give them a product, incentive, or information that they wanted. No matter how hard you market, if your product choice is bad or your discount isn't significant enough or your offer isn't compelling enough, you won't get a return on your email campaign. At the end of the day, what you put in front of your email marketing list has to be desirable to them.

Non-Compelling Marketing: It's also possible that you put a great product or offer in front or your email list, but you didn't market it well. Bad copy, bad images, grammar errors, bad branding, and a host of other marketing best practices can make even the best offer fail. If you're sure that your product or offer was good, the next thing to check is the marketing collateral that you used to promote it.

Poor Email Design: We've discussed email design at great length in this book. That's because a poor email design can mean that your recipients don't see, read about, understand, or have a clear path to click-through your offer to your website or landing page. Make sure that your email design is optimized using all of the best practices in this book before you send it if you want to ensure the maximum return on investment for your campaign.

Poor Deliverability: If your email send goes primarily to the junk or spam folder, or if it doesn't get delivered to your recipients at all, then your performance metrics will be incredibly low. Not many people regularly check their spam or junk folders, and if they do they often simply delete everything that is in there. If your offer is great, your marketing is great, and you have a great email template, then you might simply not be getting your email read by those who would purchase it.

The Bar is Too Low: If your KPI is based on overall revenue and it keeps falling short, you may not be doing a good enough job of convincing people to purchase higher-end or high-dollar-value products. Review your merchandising and marketing to ensure that you're not simply pushing people to sales, clearance items, or low-dollar amount goods in order to get a transaction that ultimately doesn't make any money for you.

Dead Email List: Your email list may simply be tired of your products or offers. If you're not constantly refreshing the content of what you send as well as constantly building your email contact list, then you may see low conversions simply because all of the email contacts who will purchase from you have already purchased from you.

Bad Email List: If you rented or purchased an email list, you may simply have a list of leads that are ultimately not interested in your product, service, brand, or company.

Unrealistic Goal: Finally, it's always possible that you simply set an unrealistic goal for your email conversion campaign. Review your expectations against the performance of your other marketing channels and determine if perhaps you were just unrealistic.

The failure of an email campaign to perform can be linked to one or several of the causes above. It may also be a factor that is entirely unique to your business or market sector. Finally, it may simply be a factor of timing and economies.

What Can You Do To Improve Your Key Performance Indicator Results?

If your email campaigns aren't returning the results that you'd hoped for, there are a myriad of reasons that fact could be attributed to. However, there are some basic changes that you can make and steps that you can take that should help improve your return from your email campaigns.

Send on the First or 15th of the Month: A little handy trick if your email is promoting a product or service that users will need to spend money on is to send it close to the first or the fifteenth of the month. Those are the days on which most workers receive paychecks and feel more mentally secure about making purchases.

Segment, Segment, Segment: The more that you can put a specific offer or product in front of a specific segment of your email list, the better. Don't just send to your entire list. Segment your list by purchase history, gender, geography or any other factor that you may be storing in your database that help you tailor an offer that's specific to that portion of your list. For example, if you sell skin care products, segment your email list by gender and send an email with skin care for women to the females and one with skin care products branded for men to the male list.

Test, Test, Test: As with any marketing campaign, the best move is to actively test different offers against each other. Try a fifty percent discount to part of your email list and a ten percent discount to another portion of your list. The ten percent discount may end up generating fewer transactions but ultimately making more revenue for you. Test different products, offers, discounts, and terms and conditions until you find the right "magic mix" that leads to high email conversions.

Audit Best Practices: As you may have noticed above, many of the reasons for a poor campaign performance from an email campaign may simply have to do with not following basic best practices for email design and sending. Audit your email program against all best practices covered in this book and make sure that you are following all of them. A bad email template, list, or sending practices can mean that your email campaigns will fail no matter what the content included is.

The most effective way to ensure that your email succeeds is to use best-practices combined with a highly segmented list. Then test various offers against each other. In the end, it often takes time to develop a high-performing email campaign strategy. Take time, practice patience, and learn from your mistakes as you develop the list of best practices that translate into the highest possible returns for your email marketing or newsletter program.

Next Up: Special notes for managing the metrics associated with an auto responder email campaign.

SECTION 8.6
Managing Metrics on an Auto Responder List

In This Section: If your email campaign is based around an auto responder campaign, there are a few special notes that you'll want to keep in mind regarding email metrics and how they will perform for auto responders versus for timed, lower volume email campaigns. In this section, we'll point out some areas to watch for when monitoring metrics to determine the success of your auto responder campaign.

Metrics Will be Lower

The first thing that you'll want to be aware of is that metrics for an auto responder email campaign will usually be lower than they will be for a traditionally structured email campaign. This is because, unlike traditional campaigns, most auto responder email campaigns will need to provide a more generic level of information instead of time-sensitive or list-segment specific offers and information that can improver overall email performance.

Some very specific types of auto responder campaigns, specifically those that are contextualized as an email course and that have a shorter duration, can have higher performance metrics. However, if your open rate for your general email campaign is forty percent, you should not expect to generate the same email open rate from an auto responder campaign.

You can still drive your performance metrics higher with auto responders by following the advice in this book. However, you will still see better results from a customized campaign than you will from a generalized auto responder campaign. Though, of course, you'll need to put more effort into designing those campaigns.

Watch Metrics More Carefully

Performance metrics associated with auto responder campaigns can go unnoticed for long periods of time and ultimately negatively impact your overall sender reputation and ability to successfully deliver email to your subscribers. Because an auto responder campaign is designed to run with limited effort from you, it's not uncommon for it to be a month (or several) between evaluations of the metrics of an auto responder campaign. By that time, you may have experienced high unsubscribe rates, spam request, or low open rates that have given you a low sender reputation score that will stay with in the future.

It's recommended that you check in on your email metrics weekly, even for auto responder campaigns. Even if you're not checking in on the auto responders in a formalized way, at least check in informally and scan the report provided by your email marketing service provider. If you notice a downtrend in user

activity or Key Performance Indicators, you can fix or pause the auto responder campaign temporarily before any real damage is done to your ability to send email.

View Metrics to Individual Emails Instead of the Campaign as a Whole

Finally, when dealing with an auto responder campaign, be sure to look at your performance metrics on an email-by-email basis rather than as a compiled number for the entire campaign. You may find that you only have one or two emails in your auto responder list that have poor metrics and that are, as a result, impacting the overall metrics of your campaign negatively. If that's the case, then you can quickly fix the metric performance of your email campaign by altering, fixing, changing, or entirely removing those emails from your sequence. In the case of email marketing, it only takes one bad or unpopular email that's being repeatedly sent to negatively impact your entire email marketing strategy. Particularly if that email is resulting in a spike in unsubscribe requests, opt-outs, or spam complaints, it's important to identify it as an individual point of failure and fix it. The rest of your campaign may be performing at or above expectations. Don't let the proverbial one bad apple ruin the bunch!

Put the Time and Effort In To Test

Because the purpose of auto responder email campaigns is to reduce the amount of work required to get a positive return on investment from an email marketing program, managers of auto responder campaigns often overlook many of the developmental parts of designing an auto responder campaign. It's frequent that the "First Draft" of an auto responder campaign is still the copy of an auto responder campaign that's being used a year later. Even if your first pass at an auto responder campaign yields good results, that doesn't mean that it can't be better. Take the time to test offers, subject lines, content, send dates and time, and other factors with your auto responder campaign during the first six months. The data that you collect will help you to hone and perfect your auto responder program so that it goes from good to great. Just because a process is designed to reduce the amount of work that you put into it over the long term, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't put time and effort into it at launch and for the time immediately following in order to make sure that it's optimized for the best possible results.

While auto responder campaigns are a form of email marketing, they don't always perform or behave in the same ways that traditional email marketing campaigns do. Make sure that you're aware of the special care you'll want to pay to metrics and metrics improvements during the early phases of your auto responder campaign, and be sure to continue to check in on email metrics with your auto responder campaign regularly in order to avoid any unexpected email sending problems or reduced returns on your effort.

Next Up: *Samples of some basic email tracking reports to get you started!*

SECTION 8.7
Sample Email Tracking Reports

In This Section: If you're used to looking at marketing campaign reports, then you can either skip or just quickly scan this section. However, if you're not sure how to take the information that we've given you in this section and translate it into a format that will guide you in optimizing and perfecting your email marketing campaign, then this section should help you. In this section, we'll show you some sample email tracking reports to help get you started in creating your own.

Where to Find the Data for Your Email Tracking Reports

If you're using a third party email marketing platform such as Comm100, then all of the email performance data that you'll need other than Key Performance Indicators should be provided for you. If you've built your own in-house email marketing platform, then it's important that you've not only built in ways to track the key metrics we've discussed in this section but also that you've created a way to easily query out that data and provide it to your marketing team.

In order to track Key Performance Indicators such as sales or sign-up conversions, you'll need to be using a website metrics toolkit that tracks sources of conversions or sales. This functionality is possible from Google Analytics. However, there are also a number of website metrics packages that can be purchased that offer customized or enhanced abilities or reporting functions. Finally, your own ecommerce backend may provide this information. Be sure to make sure that it's configured properly and test its ability to successfully track a sale from an email source before beginning your email marketing campaign.

Using the Reports Provided by Your Email Marketing Platform Provider

In many cases, you won't need to translate many of your email marketing metrics into their own report format because your email marketing platform provides an easy-to-use report format. However, we recommend translating all email performance data into a single document so that you can view it combined with your conversion or sales metrics in one place. If, instead of using a third-party email marketing platform, you have built an in-house email marketing solution, you may want to consider the extra effort of building a simple report format to tie all of that information together.

Sample Report: Individual Email with Revenue Goal

This is a sample report for an individual email that had a revenue goal. Opt-out request and spam complaints are not included on this report due to space limitations. In this case, twenty percent of all users who received the email opened it, and a quarter of those then clicked. The email generated $10,000 in sales. If you were then going to attempt to develop a goal for future email metrics, you would

want each email sent to be worth $1 in revenue consistently. This would help you determine a value for renting or selling advertising space in your email template.

Email Name	Send Date/Time	Recipients	Delivered	Opened	Clicks	Revenue
Sales Promo	1/1/2011, 12:00pm	10,000	9900	2000 (20.2%)	500 (25%)	$10000

Sample Report: Individual Email with Sign-Up or Transaction Count Goal

This is a similar report designed to show instead the tracking of an email that uses the total number of transactions as the Key Performance Indicator. Opt-out request and spam complaints are not included on this report due to space limitations. In this case, the email send was successfully delivered to 9900 individuals and 100 completed a transaction (a sale or filling out a lead form). That means that approximately 1% of all of the individuals who received the email then completed the goal of the email. This metric can be used in the future to determine what conversion rate should be expected for an email send and to anticipate revenue based on that conversion percentage.

Email Name	Send Date/Time	Recipients	Delivered	Opened	Clicks	Transactions
Sales Promo	1/1/2011, 12:00pm	10,000	9900	2000 (20.2%)	500 (25%)	100 (1%)

Sample Report: Five Email Campaign Send with Transaction and Revenue Goal

This is a sample report of five emails sent over a period of time as part of a larger campaign. The yellow-highlighted areas represent areas that your email marketing team should evaluate and make changes based on.

Email Name	Send Date/Time	Recipients	Delivered	Spam	Opt Out	Open	Click	Trans-actions	Revenue
Sales Promo 1	1/1/2011, 12:00pm	10,000	9900	3	7	2000 (20.2%)	500 (25%)	100 (1%)	$10000
Sales Promo 2	1/3/2011, 1:00pm	10,000	9900	5	5	4500 (45.5%)	1125 (25%)	100 (1%)	$10000
Sales Promo 3	1/5/2011, 2:00pm	10,000	9900	17	25	3000 (30.3%)	750 (25%)	25 (-1%)	$1500
Sales Promo 4	1/7/2011, 3:00pm	10,000	9900	3	1	3000 (30.3%)	1500 (50%)	300 (3%)	$20000
Sales Promo 5	1/9/2011, 4:00pm	10,000	9900	1	1	400 (4.4%)	100 (25%)	25 (-1%)	$10000

Poor Performance on Email Send Three: The third email send in this sample report resulted in unusually high spam complaints and unsubscribe requests. This shows that this email contained content that, once viewed, upset or offended subscribers and should be removed.

High Performance of Subject Line on Email Send Two: The second email received a spike in opens and open rate. This most likely means that the subject line was exceptionally good and should be emulated. However, send time and date should also be evaluated.

Poor Offer in Email Send Four: While email four generated an average open rate, the clicks and transactions generated were below average. This most likely means that the product or offer promoted in that email was not compelling to subscribers.

Poor Subject Line in Email Send Five: Email send five had an extremely low open rate. This is most likely related to subject line, but may also be due to date and time of send or to list fatigue from having received five emails.

Section Summary

In this section, you learned the key factors that you'll need to know and understand to make sense of your email marketing or newsletter metrics and then use that data to optimize and improve your email marketing or newsletter program.

- The key metrics that you'll need to understand to optimize your email marketing performance are deliverability rate, open rate, click-through rate, unsubscribe or spam complaint rate, and business specific Key Performance Indicators.
- Deliverability rate refers to the number of emails that are successfully delivered to valid email addresses on your email marketing list. A poor deliverability rate means that there are problems with your email list that may result in a poor sender reputation.
- Open rate is the number of delivered emails that were then opened by recipients. A good open rate means that you have written a good subject line and have a healthy email list that supports your product, brand, or company. Poor open rates can negatively impact your overall sender reputation.
- Click-Through rate is the number of users who opened your email and then clicked a link. A good click through rate means that your offer and email design was compelling. Poor click-through rates will reduce the overall revenue that you gain from your email campaign.
- Key Performance Indicators are the individual business goals that you associate with your email marketing program. They may be revenue, transactions, or sign-ups.
- Auto responders present some unique metrics needs and attention that should be paid attention to.

In the Next Section: In the next section of this book, we'll cover how to set up and test various factors of your email marketing or newsletter program in order to optimize overall performance.

SECTION 9: Optimizing Your Email Marketing Campaign

In This Section: Congratulations! At this point, you've successfully learned (and possibly implemented) steps to design and develop an email campaign, build a high-performing email list, and understand what the metrics behind your email campaign mean. It would seem as though your journey is complete. However, there's typically one more step to take before you can call your email marketing program fully developed. What's that step? It's the ongoing process of improvement and optimization! In this section, we'll talk through the various tests that it's recommended that you run on your email marketing or newsletter program in order to take it from good to great … and beyond. By the end of this section, you'll be enthused and ready to start testing different elements and techniques with your email marketing program.

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SECTION 9.1
How Do You Optimize Your Email Campaign?

> **In This Section:** The first question you may be asking is, "How can I optimize my email campaign and program?" Even if your email marketing program is performing successfully, chances are that there is room for improvement. After all, user demographics, interests, and even the activity of email service provider filters can change regularly. In this section, we'll take a look at the two primary factors to consider to perfect and optimize your email marketing program or campaign.

Basic Techniques or Email Marketing Optimization

When looking at optimizing your email program, there are three components that you should consider. The first is simply to audit your email marketing program against all of the best practices detailed within this book (we've pulled them together and summarized them in an appendix for a quick reference). You may find that you've inadvertently overlooked a common best practice that could dramatically or even just marginally, improve the performance of your campaign or overall email program. We won't cover auditing your emails for best practices within this section since it's been covered in such depth in other sections of this book.

The second two methods, however, we will cover in detail. The first technique that we'll discuss is the process of segmenting your email marketing list or database, referred to as "list segmentation". The second technique we'll discuss is testing various elements of your email campaign in different presentations, referred to as "A/B testing." We'll cover each technique in detail and even give you sample tests to run. Of course, once you've mastered both list segmentation and A/B testing, you may want to expand and run some A/B tests within a specific list segment. That's when you'll know that you've become a true email marketer!

What is List Segmentation?

List segmentation is breaking down your larger, main email list into smaller segments so that you can present targeted offers and messages to them. Depending on your in-house marketing resources or the size of your marketing email list or database, this can mean simply splitting your list into two separate halves, or it can mean having many smaller lists. You can permanently segment your email marketing list, or you can create different list segments as needed with each email send or time frame. In the next section of this book, we'll discuss list segmentation in great detail, including examples. As a general marketing rule, however, the more you can make a message or email specific to the audience it is intended for, the higher your conversion rate will be.

What is an A/B Test?

An A/B test is any time that you test two different components of an email against each other while no other factors are changed. For example, you may randomly split your email list down the middle and test two different subject lines to see which one gets the larger open rate. Or you may test two different offers against each other. In short, any time you test one element of an email (element A) against a different version of it (element B), you have an A/B test. Continually testing will mean that, eventually, you will have completed enough tests to have a usable best practices list for your own email marketing program.

Adopting a Process and Making a Plan

Before you proceed with using either of the techniques that we're about to explore in order to optimize and perfect your email marketing program or campaign, remember that the most important part of perfecting and improving your email program is use a systematic approach. Make a list of the items that you'd like to test, the portions of your email list that you'd like to segment, and ideas that you have for offers and messages that may work better than your current email content. Then begin to test and segment in a systematic way. Never attempt to run more than one test at a time. Your data will become jumbled and it will be harder to draw conclusions. Also, be sure to track and log all of your data. That doesn't simply include the results of a test or segmentation, but also the time, date, spam complaints, and full range of data associated with the email send. If you simply begin testing at random and trying list segments simply for the sake of testing list segments, you won't be able to draw complete conclusions. An organized effort to improve your email marketing program is the best effort. This is true of most marketing campaigns, but it's particularly true of email. In the world of email marketing, even one small change can have a significant and immediate impact. That impact, however, may be positive or negative. Therefore, it's important to always keep good records of what you changed in your email program, when you changed it, and what the results were.

There's always room for improvement. We hope that the tips and techniques that we're about to detail will help you improve your email marketing or newsletter program.

Next Up: *We'll explain and discuss the best ways to implement list targeting and segmentation.*

SECTION 9.2
List Segmentation

> **In This Section:** List segmentation, as we described above, is the process of taking one larger email list and breaking it down into smaller, more targeted lists (or segments). While it may result in more work in the form of more email templates, text, or images to generate, it will also typically result in a higher conversion percentage.

Why Segment?

The answer to the question, "Why segment?" is simple. You segment your email list because it improves conversion and results. As a standard rule of marketing, the more that a message is directly targeted to a group who sees or receives it, the better it will perform. No matter how small your email marketing list is, there are certainly sub-groups within it. When you separate those sub-groups and deliver a targeted message to them, they are more likely to respond. Why segment? Because a tailored message will always perform better than a generic message!

How Do I Identify Which List Segments to Separate?

In this section, we'll detail the four most common ways to segment an email list. However, you should certainly consider other methods that are unique to your market or industry segment. You may have seasonal customers. You may have groups of users that can from an event, conference, or other source that have similar interests. While the four methods that we will detail in the upcoming pages are the most common methods, any ideas that you have for how to group customers or users together could result in creating a viable email list segment.

Is Segmenting Really Worth the Work?

It is true that segmenting your email list will create more work for your marketing team. After all, for each different email that you send you'll need modified copy. You may need different images or email templates. You'll need separate reporting and analysis. You will, however, experience higher conversions. However, only you can determine the value of the time and effort of your email marketing team to create differentiated sends versus the return on investment of that time and effort. Unfortunately, there is no magic number at which point a list is big enough that, without fail, segmentation will yield greater results than the effort put into it. You'll need to evaluate the pros and cons and your available marketing team members and make a business decision regarding the value and outcome of list segmentation.

Start Small with Basic Segmentation

No matter what you determine in regards to the emphasis on segmentation within your email marketing database, begin by pulling out only one list segment and building from there. If you try to pull out too many lists segments at once, you'll end up confusing yourself.

Avoid Cross Population

Be sure, also, to put parameters in place so that you do not inadvertently have the same customers on multiple list segments that are being sent at the same time. You don't want one subscriber to receive three emails in three days simply because he or she met the criteria for three different list segments.

Now, let's talk about some specific ways to segment your list.

Next Up: *Tips for list segmentation based on email service provider.*

SECTION 9.2a
List Segmentation By Email Service Provider

As you may recall, an email service provider is a service where your users may receive their email. The most common, and most likely the largest percentage of your list, will be Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, and AOL. However, you should certainly check your email marketing database to see if you have any other email service providers who account for a significant portion of your database.

Why Segment by Email Service Provider?
There are two primary reasons to segment by email service provider. The first is to take advantage of (or avoid having your email template broken by) the various display options available in certain email service providers. The second reason is to be able to easily and nimbly recognize and respond to potential spam folder deliveries to certain major email service providers.

Email Service Provider Display: Most email service providers will block images from displaying. However, Yahoo! Mail commonly does not. This means that, if you segment your list out by Yahoo! Mail addresses, you can design a separate, more image-heavy template for those users while using a more text-based and html-based email template for other email service providers. You may find, as times change, that other email service providers change their regulations on images to your benefit or detriment. In either case, being able to develop and send a template specific to the display methods of the email service provider can improve your overall performance.

Controlling Spam and Deliverability: If you do not segment your email list by email service provider and are suddenly flagged as spam or junk mail at one email service provider, it may be several sends before you recognize it. You'll certainly see a decrease in your open rate if a specific email service provider is sending you to the junk folder, but it may take several email sends before you realize it is a deliverability problem and not simply a poorly written subject line. However, if you segment your email list by email service provider, then you will notice if only one segment of the list has a significant open rate drop off in a given send. If that happens, not only can you be fairly sure that you were flagged as spam or junk mail, but you already have the portion of the list segmented to respond to. You can decide to not send to that segment for a period of time or to send only a text-based version of your email to increase the chance that it will not be flagged as spam or junk.

Best Practices for List Segmentation by Email Service Provider
If you are going to segment your email marketing list by email service provider, chances are that you will later find yourself sub-segmenting by one of the other categories that we are about to discuss. Simply be sure to keep a careful eye on which lists are which to avoid duplicate email sends or over-sending to a single individual.

Also, be sure to regularly check in to ensure that a particular email service provider still accounts for enough of your list to warrant having its own email list segment.

Next Up: List segmentation tips for segmenting your email list by customer behavior.

SECTION 9.2b
List Segmentation By Customer Behavior

No two customers are alike, but certain groups of customers may be similar! Particularly if your online business involves ecommerce or the selling of products, customers may group into specific buying patterns. This may be based on what they purchased, the typical dollar amount that they purchased, how often they purchased, or even other data that you've collected from your website such as interests or hobbies that they have or share.

Why Segment by Customer Behavior?

The more that you know, the more you can craft a message or offer that is likely to convert for your users. For example, if you run a website that sells makeup, you may have a large group of users who have identified themselves as users who like to purchase eye makeup in "warm" colors. You may know this through their purchasing history or via information that they provided in their user profile. You may have another group of customers who have identified themselves as users who like to purchase eye makeup in "cool" colors. Rather than sending one email to both groups of users simply recommending eye makeup, sending two separate emails will yield better results. In the email to users who like "warm" colors, feature products in that color palette. In the email to "cool" color users, feature those colors. You'll get better results because you'll show each customer what they want to see based on their customer behaviors.

Another example of how to effectively segment users by customer behavior is to segment users by their typical purchase amount on your website. If you place a hundred dollar offer in front of customers whom you know do not spend more than twenty dollars per transaction, you are unlikely to receive a high response to your offer. However, if you put a twenty dollar offer in front of customers who regularly spend more than a hundred dollars per visit at your website, you are likely not maximizing the profits that you could gain by advertising to that audience. By segmenting your email marketing list by the average amount that users spend, you can put offers in front of them that are not only likely to convert but also likely to maximize the revenue spent.

Best Practices for Segmenting Your Email List by Customer Behavior

As we noted earlier, stay organized! You can most likely come up with dozens of ideas and ways to segment your email marketing list by customer behavior. However, if you bite off more than you can chew, you'll soon find yourself overwhelmed with data and unable to tell which strategies are most effective with your users. Create a systematic plan. Then track what works and what doesn't and repeat the segments that have proven most effective.

Also, keep data up-to-date. A user with a history of one type of purchase may change to a different type of user as lifestyles, age, and other factors change. In order to ensure the best response to your list segmentation, query fresh data each time you segment a list.

Finally, don't be afraid to experiment. Your industry or market segment may have unique customer behaviors that make an "off-the-wall" list segmentation make sense. Anything is worth trying once!

Next Up: *List segmentation tips for segmenting your list by demographics.*

SECTION 9.2c
List Segmentation By Demographics

Age, gender, marital status, geographic location, and an entire host of demographic factors can contribute to a successful list segmentation strategy. In many cases, you will have the vast majority of this data from a registration or shopping cart field filled out by your email recipient. In some cases, you may have to actively solicit it in order to refine and develop your email list segments. No matter what the case, you can improve your email campaign performance with demographic list segmentation.

Why Segment Your List By Demographics?

Men and women do not speak alike. Older generations and younger generations have different ways of speaking and privacy concerns. People in certain regions of the country or the world have local affiliations and loyalties that you can use to build trust and enthusiasm. When you use demographic factors to segment your list, you give yourself yet another opportunity to put the most targeted message in front of the best individual for it.

Gender Demographics: Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars. The title of the book may or may not be true, but you can know that, typically, men and women will respond to different types of marketing copy and images. Depending on the nature of your business, they may also simply be interested in different products. Sometimes, sending men and women different messages can result in the most ideal conversions possible.

Age Demographics: Much like with gender demographics, age demographics can inform how you speak to your audience and which images you use. Younger demographics will respond to pop-culture references and more salacious verbiage and imagery. Older demographics prefer classic references and milder marketing materials. Additionally, as with gender demographics, they may simply have interests in different product sets. Identifying age demographics and catering to them can, if your list dictates it, improve your conversion.

Geographic Demographics: Southerners like to say "Ya'll." Northerners like to talk about snow. West-coasters will be more liberal. While you can't tell everything about a person from their geographic demographic, you can make some educated guesses based on group mentality and tailor your email marketing campaign accordingly.

Best Practices for Segmenting Your List by Demographics

Don't fall prey to stereotypes! There is a fine line between using demographic data effectively and falling prey to stereotypes or, worse, bigotry, racism, or homophobia. While demographic data can inform more effective offers and ways to communicate with your clients, be sure to keep it respectful and remember that, even though you're dealing with a database, individuals are still people.

Don't be pushy about collecting data! Just because you want demographic data in order to segment your database, it doesn't mean that your users are comfortable giving it to you. Be aware that there will always be users who just don't want to share data. Don't force them into it. You'll end up alienating users and doing more harm than the good that the list segmentation will do.

Next Up: *List segmentation tips for segmenting your list by user state.*

SECTION 9.2d
List Segmentation By User State

Earlier in this book, we spent a great deal of time discussing crafting your email program around the various user states of your customers or users. Active users, lapsed users, inactive users, and abandoned users all will respond to different types of emails. While we're not going to make you re-read all of our advice on user state and your email program, we will remind you of a few key points here to help you get a full picture of list segmentation options.

Active Users: Active Users are your current customers and the bulk (we hope!) of your email list. You'll be most effective with them when you're using one of the other mentioned list segmentation methods discussed in this section. Your own business metrics will determine what an active user is. It may range from a person who has interacted with your website within the last week to a user who interacted with you in the last three months. You may also have seasonally active clients that you will want to segment out and only contact when it's seasonally appropriate.

Lapsed Users: Lapsed users are users who have made a purchase or transaction, but not recently. They may be recently lapsed or "long-term lapsed." You will want to, if possible, segment these users out in order to ensure that your email list remains active enough to not be sent to the spam or junk folder. Again, however, be aware of cases where you have a seasonal product or a seasonal customer who should be contacted at the appropriate time.

Abandoned (Inactive) Users: These are users who have not used your site in so long that it is obvious that they have abandoned your brand or company. While email is still the most cost-effective and useful way to communicate with them, you'll want to segment them out and minimize the frequency with which you contact them. They will have low open rates for your email and often have high amounts of spam complaints or unsubscribe requests which, ultimately, can negatively impact your sender reputation.

Within each of these groups, as with all of the potential list segments we've discussed, it's possible to further segment the list into other subgroups in order to improve your overall conversion rate. The value of this versus the effort to break lists in to multiple segments will be dependent on the importance of retaining or winning back customers to your business model.

Always remember that the more frequently you email your lapsed and abandoned or inactive users, the more damage you may potentially be doing to your sender reputation through low opens and high spam or unsubscribe complaints.

User state is one of, if not the, most important ways to segment your email database. It not only allows you to find the most valuable names in the database, it also allows you to protect your sender reputation while simultaneously not sending to poor value email addresses.

Next Up: We will now move on to discussing the various design and content tests that you can use to optimize your email program.

SECTION 9.3
Email Tests

> **In This Section:** If we haven't said it enough in this book, then we'll say it one more time! The best marketers test their campaigns regularly, and email marketing presents a great opportunity to test all facets of your marketing strategy. In this section, we'll discuss all of the various email tests that you may want to run and what you'll be trying to determine from those tests.

Why Test?

The first question that you may be asking yourself is, "Why would I bother to test different types of emails against each other? I know what works!" You may be right. You may know what has worked best for you in the past or even what works best in your industry based on what your competitors do. But there may just be something that you don't know! The marketing landscape changes constantly. It's possible that a promotion that you ran brought in an entire database of customers who will respond to the color blue more favorably than they will respond to the color red. You won't know this, however, unless you regularly structure tests to check different email elements against each other.

In short, testing gives you a competitive advantage. While your competitors and your customers may be assuming that things are all the same in the world, you're learning ways to take your email marketing program from good to great. The change may end up being exponential instead of incremental.

Why is Email a Great Testing Ground?

More than any other marketing channel, email presents you with an almost ideal channel for testing various marketing ideas, offers, concepts and more. Why is that?

You Can Easily Split into Equal Lists: Whereas you can't control the demographic breakdown or frequency of visitors to your website, you can easily create an evenly demographically split version of your email list. Because you collect additional information about your email list, you can ensure that all testing segments include different types of customers. Even if you don't collect additional information about your email list, if you simply split your list down the middle, you'll almost always end up with an evenly demographically split list to test to.

Real Time Results: Email tracking is almost entirely real-time. You can see how many people open, click, and respond to your email almost as quickly as it is sent. You won't need to wait for long-tail reports if the difference in the response to two tested elements is significant. You make changes to your other marketing channels based on the response to your emails quickly and effectively.

Low Effort: Unlike a print campaign or a telemarketing campaign, you can test marketing creative collateral and promotional concepts with a fairly low effort. All you'll need is some graphics updates and some copy updates. You won't need to design and produce print pieces or to take up vast man hours and human resources for a telephone campaign.

Ability to Isolate Components: Finally, the amount of data that is tracked with an email marketing campaign is significant and allows you to isolate components. Did women respond to one type of email offer while men responded to an entirely different type? Did one email service provider give you the best response rates? Because email marketing data is so detailed, you can craft very specific marketing campaigns for the future based on what yields the best results.

How to Run an A/B Test

Before you begin to run your tests, you'll want to make sure that you understand the best way to split your email list for a clean A/B test. Because you want the resulting lists to be as even as possible in terms of valid email addresses and demographic information, consider taking the following steps before splitting your email list into two parts:

Remove Inactive Users: Begin by removing all of the most inactive users from your main list. This may simply be users who have never opened an email, or it may be users who haven't opened an email in a very long time. You'll need to decide for yourself what the criteria will be.

Remove Highly Active Users: Also remove your most active users. This most likely will mean people who open the majority of the emails that you send, but it may also simply mean anybody who has opened an email within the last month or the last two email sends.

Sort Alphabetically: Often, the best way to sort a list and then split it down the middle is to sort the list alphabetically. It will often give you the most randomized data.

Do Not Sort by Join Date: However you choose to sort your list before splitting it, be sure that the list is not sorted by the sign-up or join date of the users. Your most recent sign-ups will be more active and likely to open than your older ones. If you sort by join date, one list is likely to respond to the email better than the other one based simply on the fact that they have engaged with your company more recently.

Split Your Highly Active or Highly Inactive Users Separately: After you have sorted and separated your main list, use the same technique to sort and separate your highly active or highly inactive users. The split the results back into the two new segments of your main list. This will ensure that each of your A/B segments will have a sampling of average, highly active, and highly inactive users.

Check the Percentage of Email Service Provider Addresses: Do a quick check of each of your newly halved email lists. Make sure that you have roughly the same percentage of Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo! and

any other large email service providers on each list. If you do not, you may risk having your results altered if one of your email service providers sends your message to the junk or spam folder.

Email Areas to Test

There are a number of areas of email marketing that you'll want to test. We'll explore all of them in the upcoming sections!

Next Up: *Testing the graphics in your email program.*

SECTION 9.3a
Graphics Test

Unless you are sending exclusively text-only emails, your email template most likely includes some graphic elements. In this section, we'll briefly discuss different graphics tests that you'll want to consider with your email template.

Why Test Graphics?

Even though we've told you that an email that includes too many images will likely have performance problems, graphics are an important element of any marketing campaign. Even though you want to be careful with how many graphics you use in a standard email send, it's also true that nothing converts a user as well as a compelling image.

That's why it's so important that you test your graphics and images to make sure that you're using the most effective technique possible. A small change in which graphic you use, or how you use graphics, can make a huge difference in how well your email (or any marketing channel) performs.

Types of Graphic and Image Tests

Here are basic image and graphic tests that you'll want to consider as you perfect your email marketing program.

Color Tests: It may seem silly, but sometimes something as simple as a change in color can improve your email's performance. Your official brand color may be red, but people may respond to your emails better when those emails are sent using a soothing blue background. Test the color pallete of images and graphics in your email. You may even find that some colors perform better by gender or age.

Graphics Positioning Tests: Is your main email image in the center of your email? It may actually work better if it's positioned in the upper left corner where people see it more quickly. Or it may work better if it's positioned higher up on the page. Consider two versions of your email template that use two different graphics positions to see if there may be a difference in results. You may even find that giving the graphic a lower position helps if people don't load graphics initially.

Lifestyle versus Product Tests: Generally, it's accepted that there are two types of images. Product images show your product or offering. Lifestyle images show people using your product or otherwise living an lifestyle that people may be able to obtain if they use your product. Consider testing two versions of your email template that have no difference except that in one version you use a lifestyle image and in another you use a product image.

Image Density Tests: Finally, it's always worth your time to test how many images are used in your email. If you use many images, try testing a version with fewer images. If you use very few images, try seeing how your email performs if you add a few extra images in.

Best Practices for Image Testing

As with any test, make sure that you're testing a pure A/B split of your list and don't make any other variable changes other than the change in the image. You're looking to see if making a change in how you display and choose images can improve your email performance. You can't do that if you change other factors at the same time.

Also, be sure to use similar alt and title text behind the images. For email clients that don't load images, the alt and title text can impact performance significantly. Don't allow changes in alt or title tags to make the data in your test unclear.

Finally, be sure to plan out your image tests so that you know what you're testing when. Consider starting with placement or density and then moving on to image type or color.

Next Up: *Tips on testing copy and text.*

ECTION 9.3b
Text and Copy Tests

Copy drives the success of your email marketing program. That's the bottom line. If you want to optimize your email marketing program for the absolute best results, then you need to optimize your copy. In this section, we'll talk about different copy and text tests that you'll want to run.

Why Test Copy and Text?

As we noted above, copy and text are what ultimately drive your email marketing program. This not only includes the actual content of your copy, it also includes the formatting and appearance of your text. Depending on your audience or demographic, as well as your market segment, there may be a number of factors that you should consider testing when developing copy and text guidelines for your email program.

Types of Copy and Text Tests

Below are some common and useful copy and text tests that you may want to consider for your email program.

- **Headlines**: The most obvious copy test that you'll want to run in your email is the content, appearance, and placement of your headlines. Headlines are the largest and most visible piece of copy that will either engage or turn off users quickly. Make sure that your headlines are readable. More importantly, make sure that they compel the user to keep reading. Consider testing headlines that give "commands" against more informational headlines or even funny headlines. Good headline display and copy can make a big difference in your email program.

- **Tone**: It goes without saying that the tone that you write in can make a big difference in how users related to and build relationships with your company. If you communicate primarily with professionals, then your tone may be better served by being more formal. However, younger demographics may relate better to a more casual tone. If you're unsure which tone will ultimately work better for you, explore trying several different ones and then making a brand decision later on.

- **Length and Teasers**: Does your email perform better when you provide longer blocks of text, or does it perform better when you provide shorter teasers that link to longer web pages of copy? If you're unsure, be sure to test both approaches.

- **Keywords and Calls-to-Action**: Do you know which words will really drive your users to click through to your website or landing pages? Will "click here" work better than "get more info?" The right keywords or phrases to use in your calls to action can mean more users landing on your actual monetization pages. Be sure to test several variations and learn what will compel your users to click.

- **Font and Appearance**: Most likely, you have brand standards about what fonts, font colors, and font sizes are appropriate to use in your email templates. However, slight variations in size or color (particularly if your brand color is a lighter shade or a grey) can engage users more quickly. Consider testing a font one size up or down and one shade darker in a basic A/B test.

- **Content**: Perhaps the largest test to undertake is what the actual content of your copy should be. We've previously discussed content in depth, but your choices are often endless. Offers of all types, how-to suggestions, questions and answers, informative articles…all of these are content type options. Then, within that spectrum, the actual information that you're conveying can mean boom or bust for an email campaign. You should never stop testing types of content and learning from those tests as well as repeating types of content that have shown high response rates.

- **Seasonality**: Do your users respond to content that seasonal (for holidays, work seasons, sports seasons, and more) or does using seasonal content alienate a large chunk of your list? It's worth testing to find out!

- **Bulleted and Numbered Lists**: In many tests, users respond well to bulleted or numbered lists. These lists are easy-to-read, take the user through a clear visual path, and usually end with a clear call-to-action. If you're not using bulleted or numbered list in your email template design, it's a good idea to test a "list version" of an email against a "full content" version of an email.

- **Personalization**: Finally, we've devoted a large portion of this book to personalization, but it's always worth testing in your own email campaigns. Some demographics will respond better to content that includes their first name, user name, or other information. Some will be concerned about privacy. If you're unsure with method is better for you, it's time to (you guessed it) test it!

Best Practices for Copy and Text Tests

As with all tests, make sure you are doing a pure A/B split of your list and don't try to change more than one factor at a time. If you are testing "command" headlines against funny headlines, then make sure that the headline font, size, and placement is the same for both. Be sure that what you're testing is isolated.

Make sure that the same copy writer creates the copy for both versions of your test. Small differences in the tone or style of a specific writer can account for test variations that may not be true to your initial goal.

Next Up: *Tips for running subject line test.*

SECTION 9.3c
Subject Line Tests

"If they don't open it, why even bother sending it?" So goes the mantra of email marketing. If you optimize your subject line strategy, you'll optimize your open-rate. If you optimize your open-rate, you'll optimize your email program. In this section, we'll discuss testing various subject line techniques against each other.

Why Test the Subject Line?
There are only two things that determine the open-rate of your email. While brand equity and user quality play a role, at the end of the day it's whether your email gets delivered into the inbox and the quality of your subject line that drive email opens. While brand equity and user quality take a significant time to build and inbox deliverability is a science and an art in its own form, you can test and control subject line easily. Mastering the best subject lines for your email marketing program is step one in getting the maximum number of views to your email campaign.

Types of Subject Line Test
Below are some common and useful copy and text tests that you may want to consider for your email program.

Personalization: As we've previously discussed, many case studies reveal that using personalization, such as a recipient's first name or user name, can dramatically improve email open rates. This may or may not be true for your email list – or it may only be true for a segment of your email list. Be sure to test all versions: non-personalized, personalized with a name, or personalized with a user name to see if you see a shift in user response.

Specific or Vague: Sometimes, a subject line that doesn't quite tell you what will be inside the email causes curiosity and therefore users open the email. Sometimes, however, telling users exactly what they'll be getting inside of the email works better. Both variations are worth testing to see what your users will respond to most effectively.

Mention the Offer: In many cases, if you are including an offer or discount in your email campaign, mentioning the specifics of the offer in the email can increase open rates. However, don't fall into the "Groupon" effect. If you're always promising big offers in your subject line, then your users will come to expect those big offers and not open anything that doesn't mention them. Test mentioning offers, but never rely solely on those offers for ongoing open rates.

Different Offers: The subject line is a great place to test different offers against each other. Does a free shipping email subject line get a better response than a fifty percent discount offer? While testing offers against each other is a multi-step process, the subject line is probably the best place to get instant feedback on what offers your users are most interested in.

Short Versus Long: While a longer subject line may be a spam or delivery problem, a shorter one may not give users enough information. Test short form versus longer subject lines to see if they make a difference.

Dated or Time Sensitive: Sometimes, a little urgency can go a long way and telling users that an offer is for a limited time or giving a cut off time for action will increase your open rates. However, sometimes your users are longer-tail users and urgency simply makes them think that the email was already out-of-date by the time they considered opening it. Try both versions and see if your users can be spurred to action by a time frame or if you need to allow them their own leisure time to open.

Best Practices for Subject Line Tests

As always, be sure that your A/B list split is clean. This is particularly true of subject line tests. If you have an uneven balance of user states or email service providers, you're incredibly likely to have invalid open-rate data at the end of the day.

Test subject line concepts over several sends. Even if you are incredibly cautious about the quality of your A/B split, there are still factors that you won't be able to account for such as long-tail opens and possible timing issues. In general, test your subject line concept three to five times before determining what the data means.

Be aware of inbox deliverability! Your subject line can have the greatest impact on your ability to get into the inbox instead of the spam or junk folder. If you're testing multiple subject line concepts, be sure to always check deliverability before you send to your list.

Next Up: Advice on how to test list segments.

SECTION 9.3d
List Segment Tests

Effective email marketing typically means segmenting your list, but how can you do this effectively to test the best way to do it? While we've given you tips throughout this book on proper list segmentation, in this section we'll discuss some basic ways to test list segments.

Why Test List Segments?

Not every piece of clothing fits every size. Not every meal is appealing to every kind of diet. In general, in life, one size does not fit all. That's as true for consumer goods as it is for marketing techniques. You wouldn't have an in-person sales man show a man's hat to a fashion-conscious female shopping for shoes, would you? The same is true in email. In fact, the need to personalize and display the best offer to the best customer is even more important in email marketing because you don't have the advantage of a compelling salesperson and his or her personality. Therefore, finding and identifying the segments of your list that will respond to various offers most effectively becomes the best way to turn a "one-size" generic email into a precisely targeted email.

Types of List Segment Tests

Some common ways to test segmenting your database for targeted sends include:

- **User State**: As we discussed in great detail in the opening sections of this book, user state is a common way to segment your list. The longer a user has been lapsed or the time since they've abandoned the site, the more likely it is that they'll need a big or significant offer in order to re-engage with you. It's certainly worth it to test sending a more compelling offer to lost customers rather than continue to send the same maintenance offers to all users.

- **Gender**: Not only do men and women often have different product or content interest, but it's also true that sometimes different marketing techniques or graphics and images will appeal differently to different genders. Depending on the scope of your product or service line, separating your database by men and women and presenting different displays and messages to them may result in higher conversions or sales.

- **Age**: Again, product and service interests may be different depending on a user's age. However, even more importantly, an older demographic may want more information about privacy and instructions. A younger demographic may respond more to catchy copy and pop culture references. Breaking out database out by age to test if different approaches will work to different segments is a great idea of your website or business appeals to users of all ages. Just because you appeal to all ages, it doesn't mean that a single email campaign can effectively speak to all ages.

- **Geographic Region**: There are so many reasons to segment your list by geographic region that it goes beyond the scope of this summary! Colloquial speak, reference to landmarks and local

events, use of local colors, and even the ability to reference the weather are just a few. However, it's also possible that your products or services are so generic that a geographic split won't do you much good. You'll never know until you test breaking out your most major markets from your database and trying a separate send to them.

- **Purchasing History**: More often than not, the most effective way to split or segment your database will be by common purchasing histories. If you have a critical mass of people who have previously purchased mixing bowls, then those people are ideal to send an email to about baked goods. There are many similar purchasing trends to explore. In most cases, though segmenting by purchasing history may take the most work, it will also yield the greatest results.

Best Practices for List Segment Tests

Segmenting your list may be tricky, and you want to be sure not to over-email people. Take the time to run an extra manual check to ensure that you haven't inadvertently included the same people on multiple email lists that are being sent at the same time. Few things will get you marked as spam by a user faster than delivering multiple emails to their inbox on a given day.

Don't segment too small! You still need a critical mass of users in order to make the time and effort of sending a unique email worth your time. You'll need to determine "how small is too small" for a list based on your own business needs, but don't fall so in love with list segmentation that you create email lists that don't really have any value.

Take the time to think through your business needs and the best way to segment a list for you. You may have a list segmentation that is entirely different from the ones that we've suggested above.

Next Up: *Tips on testing the "From" address.*

SECTION 9.3e
From Address Tests

It may seem like a minor part of an email, but the "from" address can mean everything from inbox deliverability to increased user trust. In this section, we'll cover some basics on testing your "from" address.

Why Test the From Address?

You might be surprised how much the "from" address on your email can impact your open-rate. Not only does the "from" address determine whether you're in the spam folder, but it can also build user trust. When users recognize your "from" address and know that it is from a source that sends valuable content, they are more likely to open your email. But what version of a "from" address will work most effectively for you?

Types of From Address Tests

The three most common types of test for the "from" address are as follows:

- **Personalized vs. Informative**: If your brand is big enough or trusted enough, then using a "from" address like "Information" or "Offers" at "YourBrand.com" may be your best bet. However, in some cases, sending the email from a personalized address of a company figurehead can increase open-rates. A personalized "from" address can separate you from the many generic offer emails in users' inboxes. However, it can also make the user suspicious. There's only one way to tell, and that's to test it.

- **No-Reply**: A no-reply from address is the standard these days, and it can put users at ease and facilitate their opening your email. However, it's entirely impersonal and let's them know that they are part of a mass list. If you're not using a no-reply email address as the "from" address, consider testing it. You may see both better open-rates and better deliverability.

- **Branded vs. Non-Branded**: Finally, consider the value of a branded or non-branded email address. If you have a large and trusted brand that users love, then there's no downside in using a "from" address that references your brand. However, if you have a shaky brand reputation or are just starting out, you may want to consider going for a "hard sell" with your from address and using something with user triggered keywords like "offers" or "special discounts." Just be aware of the spam issues noted below!

Best Practices for From Address Tests

As always, make sure that your A/B split is clean. Because your success metric will be open-rate, it's imperative that your lists be as similar as possible.

Test the "from" address early. Because it can have such an impact, you'll want to settle on your preferred format early and stick with it.

Be aware of spam issues! Your from address greatly impacts your ability to make it into the inbox. Test to make sure you're being delivered before you send to your entire list.

The best "from" address can be situational. One may work better for transactional emails and a different one may be better for marketing emails.

Next Up: *Tips on testing your send time and date.*

SECTION 9.3f
Sending Time and Date Tests

Monday is a bad day to send most emails. Wednesday is a great day to send most emails. Morning emails may get lower open rates than afternoon emails. The best times to send email are at noon or four in the afternoon Eastern Standard Time. These are all basic rules of email sending, but are they the right rules for your email program? In this section, we'll cover figuring out the best day and time to send your email.

Why Test Send Date and Time?
We've talked about how your email doesn't really matter if nobody opens it. That's largely determined by the subject line, but what if you send your email when none of your desired targets are actually online checking email? You risk the chance that they'll simply delete you or potentially leave you unopened for long periods of time (perhaps longer than your offer is good for). There's generally going to be a day and a time for your email to perform at its best. Figuring out when that is can improve your email campaign's performance significantly.

Types of Send Date and Time Tests
It may seem basic, but the date and time tests that you'll want to run are most often the ones below:

- **Day of Week:** There's a general rule that Monday and Friday aren't great days to send email. However, it's possible that your email will do well on a Friday. What if your users are mostly individuals who hang out in the office on Friday's looking for ways to kill time? While Wednesday is considered a great emailing sending day, what if your demographic tends to be traveling for work on Wednesdays? The only way that you'll know what day of the week works best for you is to cycle through and try them all. The main point is that you want to send your email so that your users receive it when they're online and checking email. While internet activity is low on the weekend, your offer or email may be entirely relevant to the weekend and therefore it will work best when sent on a Saturday. Consider what days your users both want and are available to receive your email, then try those days to see what performs best.

- **Time of Day:** Sometimes, it's best to be in a user's inbox first thing in the morning so that they see your email when they first check their email. Sometimes, you want to try to catch users at their inbox during lunch or the end of the work day. Sometimes, it honestly won't matter what time of day you send your email. The results will be the same. Again, take the time to think about when your users will want to receive and be able to receive your email. Then try sending at those times.

- **Surprise versus Set Schedule:** You'll also want to consider sending your email at variable times versus having a set delivery time for email that your subscribers are aware of. Sometimes, letting users know that you send email at three o'clock Eastern Standard Time on a Thursday means that users will be looking for your email. On the other hand, sometimes not having a set schedule

means that your email gets noticed more when it arrives. You'll certainly want to consider, if not explore, both options.

Best Practices for Send Date and Time Tests
As always, make sure that your A/B split is even. Younger people will be online more often, and older people may be tied to a more regular email schedule. Be sure that your list is an even split of all of your database.

Be sure to try your day and time tests several times. Sometimes, there are factors that you cannot control for such as ISP slowdowns, holidays, and unexpected news events that keep users offline. All of those factors may impact the data from your test of a day and time to send. Be sure to try at least several times before being comfortable with your final data.

Think outside of the box! Just because most case studies say to send on Monday or Wednesday at noon or four o'clock Eastern Standard Time, that doesn't mean that that's what will be best for you. Take the time to think about when you might see the best results.

Next Up: *Tips on how to test various offers against each other.*

SECTION 9.3g
Offer Tests

Free shipping or fifty percent off? Free gift with purchase or deferred billing? What offer will get you not only the best user response but also the best return-in-investment and repeat users? In this section, we'll discuss testing offers and promotions in your email marketing campaign.

Why Test Offers and Promotions?

Subject lines and content may drive your email marketing metrics such as open-rate and click-through rate, but your offer or promotion drives the actual financial success of your campaign. If nobody cares about your offer, if it's not competitive enough, if it's not easy enough to understand, or if it's not a product that anybody cares about, then you won't make any money. You can have a one hundred percent open rate, but a zero percent purchase rate if you promote the wrong offer. Additionally, the difference between a "good" offer and a "great" offer can be the difference between a status quo email performance and a real winner. How will you ever know what offers get you the best return on email campaigns if you don't test them?

Types of Send Offer and Promotion Tests

The offers and promotions that you want to test may vary extensively based on your product and market segment. However, some common tests to run are included below.

- **Types of Offers**: The most obvious test that you'll want to run is an offer type. While this may vary, as noted above, based on your market segment, common offer types include: shipping offers, bonus gifts, discounts, free upgrades, and extra loyalty points if you run a loyalty program. You'll want to consider testing all of those as well as any types of offers or promotions that are specific to your line of business.

- **Percent versus Dollar Amount**: If you're going to be offering discounts, you'll want to test whether your users are more motivated by seeing their discount presented as a dollar amount or as a percentage amount. Most case studies imply that a percentage amount will convert better, but that may not be true for your demographic.

- **Discount Amount**: You'll also, obviously, want to test different discount amounts to find out where you get the best return on investment. This may, as noted in the tips below, vary by user segments on your list.

- **Free Shipping versus Shipping Upgrade**: Free shipping has been shown to be one of the most effective ecommerce promotions available on the internet. However, sometimes you can get just as much value from offering a shipping upgrade from standard shipping to and expedited form of shipping. Test free shipping versus shipping upgrades and see if you can improve your profit margin with an upgrade offer instead of an entirely free shipping offer.

- **Minimum Purchase Amount**: For many promotions, you'll require users to make a minimum purchase amount. After you do the math of what you can afford in terms of how low that minimum purchase amount needs to be, test making it higher. You may get the same response to the offer whether you require people to spend twenty dollars or fifty dollars. If that's the case, you should always make the minimum fifty dollars!

- **Seasonal Offers**: You'll obviously want to develop and test seasonal offers as well. Do your respondents buy more when it's promoted near a holiday or vacation time? Test offers that are seasonally themed. Then you can decide in the future if it's worth putting seasonal campaigns together at all.

- **Time Sensitive Offers**: Finally, test whether your users respond better to time sensitive offers that the need to act on immediately or longer-tail offers. There are many arguments that time sensitivity causes users to take quick action, but as people spend less time in their inbox, that may not be as true. Be sure to test it to find out what's right for you.

Best Practices for Offer and Promotion Tests

In addition to testing your offers for bottom line revenue and profit margin promotion, consider the viral and acquisition value of an offer. Did an offer get you a lot of shared attention on the internet or did it get you many new customers? That may be worth it even if it didn't generate as much up front revenue as you were hoping for.

Don't lose money! Particularly in the era of social shopping and huge discounts, it's often considered necessary to offer massive promotions to generate customer interest. However, the math on that often doesn't add up and you end up losing money. A less well-responded to offer that makes a profit may be better than a popular offer that loses money for you.

Remember that there may be segments of your database that respond to one type of offer better than to another type of offer. Offers may not be "one size fits all", and you may want to test different offers to different portions of your database.

Consider that timing plays a role in offer success as well. You may want to run an offer test several times in case you've inadvertently sent an offer at a time when a product was unpopular or people were generally not spending as much money as usual.

Next Up: *Advice on running tests with an auto responder list.*

SECTION9.4
Testing Options for an Auto Responder List

> **In This Section:** If your email marketing program consists primarily of an auto responder program, then breaking out segments or running pure A/B tests isn't going to be a viable option for you. However, there are other ways in which you can test and determine what works best for your auto responder list. In this section, we'll discuss how to narrow down your best practices for auto responder emails with some basic tests

Why is Testing an Auto Responder List Difficult?

As we've discussed throughout this book, there are many advantages to running an auto responder campaign. You can do all of the major work at one point, and then the campaign runs on its own with your only having to check in and optimize it infrequently. However, an auto responder campaign can result in a headache if you're trying to test and perfect your list. Here are some reasons why:

New Users Daily: For most auto responder campaigns, you're adding new users almost daily. That means that your list is never "set" and you can't get a good handle on how a stable list would respond to you. You may have added twenty new users right before you send an email, which will impact the response rate. Also, some users on your list may have received and auto responder email the day before, and some may not have received one for over a week. It's impossible to garner a pure test result with a list that isn't stabilized, and auto responder lists never truly stabilize.

Lack of Information Collection: While there are certainly exceptions, most auto responder campaigns collect very little user information because the priority is to capture a lead. The less information that you collect, the less you can personalize or tailor an email to run a test.

Inability to Segment: Similar to the lack of information collected, auto responder lists are difficult to segment. Because users have joined at many different points and times and have often provided very little information, pulling out database segments based on anything other than interactions with your email program can be incredibly difficult. Even finding a way to randomize a list split can be hard.

Ongoing Emails: As noted above, many of your auto responder subscribers are receiving various ongoing emails. The position that they're in within your auto responder cycle can greatly impact what they will and won't respond to. Because auto responders are often so lengthy in duration, it may be difficult to group people by where they are in the process.

Higher Spam Issues: One of the downsides of auto responder campaigns is that they often have greater issues with spam problems. Every time you run an email campaign test, you run the risk of

negatively impacting your inbox deliverability, and this is even more true with an auto responder campaign.

How Can You Overcome the Issues with Testing Auto Responders

However, even with an auto responder campaign, the flexibility and high data collection values of email make it possible for you to effectively test almost any of the standard email marketing tests we've talked about in this section. You may just have to work a little bit harder and take a little more time. Here are some ways that you can effectively test email marketing concepts within auto responder email campaigns.

Use Long Tail Tests: The best way to overcome the challenges of testing email components with an auto responder list is to use long tail tests of a month or more. If you run your test for a long time, you'll be able to equalize out the data variations for the ongoing new subscriptions, unsubscribe requests, and various user states and timing issues. It may mean that it takes you four months to test one component. For example, you run a test of a lifestyle graphic to your auto responder list for two months. Then you switch it to a test of a product graphic for two months. At the end of the four months, you compare responses. Yes, it took a long time, but the data you collected was as clean as it can be. Of course, if your auto responder program is incredibly seasonal in nature, then this may be an issue for you.

Use Expired Segments: You can also take expired segments of your list (users who have completed the entire cycle of your auto responder list) and test concepts on them by sending them individual marketing emails. It's true that these users won't behave exactly as your main auto responder list will. However, it's also safe to assume that they represent the general trends of your auto responder audience. If you send to your expired auto responder segments in an A/B test of subject lines and a time sensitive subject line outperforms a vague subject line, then it's safe to assume that time sensitive subject lines would work well in your auto responder campaign.

Take More Time Crunching Your Data: You can also overcome obstacles with auto responder campaigns by simply taking more time crunching your data. It will be harder to figure out what's going on with your list, but if you really take the time to look at user state and the timing of a send, you can make some educated guesses.

With anything in life, there are pros and cons. An auto responder campaign can reduce email marketing effort on your end while still providing a robust ROI. However, it may also be harder to optimize because it's harder to test. That doesn't mean, though, that testing it is impossible.

Next Up: Advice on how to use the testing data that you collect.

SECTION 9.5
Using the Testing Data that You Collect

In This Section: Now that you've run all of these email tests, what should you do with the data you've collected? A good email marketing testing strategy is only as good as what you do with what you learn. In this section, we'll talk about how to use the data that you collected to improve your email marketing program.

What's the Goal of Email Testing?

The first thing that you need to ask yourself, of course, is "What was the goal of all of that testing?" Obviously, the main goal was to improve your email marketing program, but was it to improve your open rate? To learn more about your users? To make specific action items? In truth, these are questions that you should have asked yourself before you began testing, but even if you didn't your ongoing email tests will have provided you with enough data to make meaningful and measurable changes in your email marketing program. What do you do now? We recommend the following four steps to taking your email tests and turning them into email marketing and newsletter improvements.

Step One: Compiling Your Data

The first thing that you'll need to do is to compile and pull together all of your data. It's possible (and even likely) that your data from your email tests may live in many different locations. Your database may house all of the demographic and content information. Your email marketing solution provider may have all of the email response rate and engagement activity. Your ecommerce solution may have all of the revenue and ROI information. You may even need to go to your social networks to manually try to figure out information about email sharing and viral impact. It's very unlikely that you can look at a single source and find all of the data that you need to evaluate your email marketing tests. So, naturally, the first step is to allocate a person or team to compile all of the data that you need and put it together for you.

Step Two: Putting Your Data into a Usable Format

Of course, data, no matter how much of it there is, is only as good as your ability to interpret it. You'll need to find a format that helps you to look at the data and make determinations. Excel is the most common way to compile and review email data, but you may prefer more charts and graphs to lines and numbers. Take the time to meet as a team, make sure that you are all on the same page about what information you are trying to determine, and then develop a reporting format that clearly shows you the lines between the email tests that you ran and the response rates that you got. This report format, however, will be entirely driven by your company and your preferred way to share information.

Step Three: Reviewing Your Data

Next, take real time to review the data. Ask yourself questions based on what you can tell for sure from the data as well as assumptions that you can make based on trends and variable. Look at anomalies. Really dig in and consider other elements that may have impacted the data. Make it a group discussion. Two eyes, after all, are better than one. Don't simply quickly scan or look at your data. You've taken the time to run important marketing tests on your email channel. Now take the time to be sure that you know what those tests mean and what they have shown you. If you speed through reviewing your data, you'll speed through what may be the most important part of the process. While email data and sending can be almost instantaneous, thinking about what your email data is informing you of should be a long-tail event.

Step Four: Setting a Strategy

Now use what you've learned to set an email strategy. Email marketing campaigns often perform best when you've planned them out several months in advance. If you feel as though you need more information, make an email plan that incorporates more tests of anything that wasn't clear from your original tests. If your email tests gave you clear answers as to what your subscribers or users prefer, then you can schedule out how to make those implementations. However, you do it, take what the email test showed you and translate it into an actionable plan for your email marketing channel.

Then, of course, continue to watch your data to ensure that what you think that you learned from your email tests was actually correct!

Continue to Test!

No matter how extensive your email marketing tests were, there's always more to learn. Testing should be a continual part of your email marketing program. Not only does the business landscape change, but your consumers change as well. Never stop coming up with ideas on what and how to test different concepts in your email, even if those concepts seem "crazy" at the time. Because of the low cost of sending marketing emails, you can send a "crazy" test and the worst thing that will happen is that you'll have one underperforming email campaign. The risk with email can be incredibly low, but the rewards for discovering a great new conversion or revenue technique can be incredibly high.

Continue to test both basic email marketing elements and new, innovative ideas at all times. Email is the ideal marketing channel for testing, and you should always be utilizing this advantage.

Next Up: *A summary of email testing best practices.*

SECTION9.6
Email Testing Best Practices

> **In This Section:** We've touched base on a number of best practices for testing in this chapter. In this section, we'll summarize those best practices for handy reference.

Best Practices for List Segmentation by Email Service Provider

If you are going to segment your email marketing list by email service provider, chances are that you will later find yourself sub-segmenting by one of the other categories that we are about to discuss. Simply be sure to keep a careful eye on which lists are which to avoid duplicate email sends or over-sending to a single individual.

Also, be sure to regularly check in to ensure that a particular email service provider still accounts for enough of your list to warrant having its own email list segment.

Best Practices for Segmenting Your Email List by Customer Behavior

As we noted earlier, stay organized! You can most likely come up with dozens of ideas and ways to segment your email marketing list by customer behavior. However, if you bit off more than you can chew, you'll soon find yourself overwhelmed with data and unable to tell which strategies are most effective with your users. Create a systematic plan. Then track what works and what doesn't and repeat the segments that have proven most effective.

Also, keep data up-to-date. A user with a history of one type of purchase may change to a different type of user as lifestyles, age, and other factors change. In order to ensure the best response to your list segmentation, query fresh data each time you segment a list.

Finally, don't be afraid to experiment. Your industry or market segment may have unique customer behaviors that make an "off-the-wall" list segmentation make sense. Anything is worth trying once!

Best Practices for Segmenting Your List by Demographics

Don't fall prey to stereotypes! There is a fine line between using demographic data effectively and falling prey to stereotypes or, worse, bigotry, racism, or homophobia. While demographic data can inform more effective offers and ways to communicate with your clients, be sure to keep it respectful and remember that, even though you're dealing with a database, individuals are still people.

Don't be pushy about collecting data! Just because you want demographic data in order to segment your database, it doesn't mean that your users are comfortable giving it to you. Be aware that there will

always be users who just don't want to share data. Don't force them into it. You'll end up alienating users and doing more harm than the good that the list segmentation will do.

How to Run an A/B Test

Before you begin to run your tests, you'll want to make sure that you understand the best way to split your email list for a clean A/B test. Because you want the resulting lists to be as even as possible in terms of valid email addresses and demographic information, consider taking the following steps before splitting your email list into two parts:

- **Remove Inactive Users**: Begin by removing all of the most inactive users from your main list. This may simply be users who have never opened an email, or it may be users who haven't opened an email in a very long time. You'll need to decide for yourself what the criteria will be.

- **Remove Highly Active Users**: Also remove your most active users. This most likely will mean people who open the majority of the emails that you send, but it may also simply mean anybody who has opened an email within the last month or the last two email sends.

- **Sort Alphabetically**: Often, the best way to sort a list and then split it down the middle is to sort the list alphabetically. It will often give you the most randomized data.

- **Do Not Sort by Join Date**: However you choose to sort your list before splitting it, be sure that the list is not sorted by the sign-up or join date of the users. Your most recent sign-ups will be more active and likely to open than your older ones. If you sort by join date, one list is likely to respond to the email better than the other one based simply on the fact that they have engaged with your company more recently.

- **Split Your Highly Active or Highly Inactive Users Separately**: After you have sorted and separated your main list, use the same technique to sort and separate your highly active or highly inactive users. The split the results back into the two new segments of your main list. This will ensure that each of your A/B segments will have a sampling of average, highly active, and highly inactive users.

- **Check the Percentage of Email Service Provider Addresses**: Do a quick check of each of your newly halved email lists. Make sure that you have roughly the same percentage of Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo! and any other large email service providers on each list. If you do not, you may risk having your results altered if one of your email service providers sends your message to the junk or spam folder.

Best Practices for Image Testing

As with any test, make sure that you're testing a pure A/B split of your list and don't make any other variable changes other than the change in the image. You're looking to see if making a change in how

you display and choose images can improve your email performance. You can't do that if you change other factors at the same time.

Also, be sure to use similar alt and title text behind the images. For email clients that don't load images, the alt and title text can impact performance significantly. Don't allow changes in alt or title tags to make the data in your test unclear.

Finally, be sure to plan out your image tests so that you know what you're testing when. Consider starting with placement or density and then moving on to image type or color.

Best Practices for Copy and Text Tests

As with all tests, make sure you are doing a pure A/B split of your list and don't try to change more than one factor at a time. If you are testing "command" headlines against funny headlines, then make sure that the headline font, size, and placement is the same for both. Be sure that what you're testing is isolated.

Make sure that the same copy writer creates the copy for both versions of your test. Small differences in the tone or style of a specific writer can account for test variations that may not be true to your initial goal.

Best Practices for Subject Line Tests

As always, be sure that your A/B list split is clean. This is particularly true of subject line tests. If you have an uneven balance of user states or email service providers, you're incredibly likely to have invalid open-rate data at the end of the day.

Test subject line concepts over several sends. Even if you are incredibly cautious about the quality of your A/B split, there are still factors that you won't be able to account for such as long-tail opens and possible timing issues. In general, test your subject line concept three to five times before determining what the data means.

Be aware of inbox deliverability! Your subject line can have the greatest impact on your ability to get into the inbox instead of the spam or junk folder. If you're testing multiple subject line concepts, be sure to always check deliverability before you send to your list.

Best Practices for List Segment Tests

Segmenting your list may be tricky, and you want to be sure not to over-email people. Take the time to run an extra manual check to ensure that you haven't inadvertently included the same people on multiple email lists that are being sent at the same time. Few things will get you marked as spam by a user faster than delivering multiple emails to their inbox on a given day.

Don't segment too small! You still need a critical mass of users in order to make the time and effort of sending a unique email worth your time. You'll need to determine "how small is too small" for a list based

on your own business needs, but don't fall so in love with list segmentation that you create email lists that don't really have any value.

Take the time to think through your business needs and the best way to segment a list for you. You may have a list segmentation that is entirely different from the ones that we've suggested above.

Best Practices for From Address Tests

As always, make sure that your A/B split is clean. Because your success metric will be open-rate, it's imperative that your lists be as similar as possible.

Test the "from" address early. Because it can have such an impact, you'll want to settle on your preferred format early and stick with it.

Be aware of spam issues! Your from address greatly impacts your ability to make it into the inbox. Test to make sure you're being delivered before you send to your entire list.

The best "from" address can be situational. One may work better for transactional emails and a different one may be better for marketing emails.

Best Practices for Send Date and Time Tests

As always, make sure that your A/B split is even. Younger people will be online more often, and older people may be tied to a more regular email schedule. Be sure that your list is an even split of all of the database.

Be sure to try your day and time tests several times. Sometimes, there are factors that you cannot control for such as ISP slowdowns, holidays, and unexpected news events that keep users offline. All of those factors may impact the data from your test of a day and time to send. Be sure to try at least several times before being comfortable with your final data.

Think outside of the box! Just because most case studies say to send on Monday or Wednesday at noon or four o'clock Eastern Standard Time, that doesn't mean that that's what will be best for you. Take the time to think about when you might see the best results.

Best Practices for Offer and Promotion Tests

In addition to testing your offers for bottom line revenue and profit margin promotion, consider the viral and acquisition value of an offer. Did an offer get you a lot of shared attention on the internet or did it get you many new customers? That may be worth it even if it didn't generate as much up front revenue as you were hoping for.

Don't lose money! Particularly in the era of social shopping and huge discounts, it's often considered necessary to offer massive promotions to generate customer interest. However, the math on that often

doesn't add up and you end up losing money. A less well-responded to offer that makes a profit may be better than a popular offer that actually loses money for you.

Remember that there may be segments of your database that respond to one type of offer better than to another type of offer. Offers may not be "one size fits all", and you may want to test different offers to different portions of your database.

Consider that timing plays a role in offer success as well. You may want to run an offer test several times in case you've inadvertently sent an offer at a time when a product was unpopular or people were generally not spending as much money as usual.

Section Summary

In this section, you learned everything that you will need to know in order to effectively test your email marketing channel and improve it. Key points included:

- Before you begin to optimize your email campaign, be sure to understand both list segmentation and A/B testing.
- Email is particularly good for testing elements of your marketing strategy because it is both real-time and highly flexible.
- Always be sure when doing an A/B split test that your list segments are as similar as possible.
- Ways to segment your email database include by email service provider, by customer behavior, by demographics, and by user state.
- Popular email components to test include graphics tests, text and copy tests, subject line tests, list segment tests, "from" address tests, day and time tests, and offer and promotion tests.
- While testing email components to an auto responder list can be difficult, long-tail testing times can mean valuable information from auto responder tests.
- After you run your email marketing tests, take the time to collect and consider the data before making decisions.

Appendix One
Multi Channel Marketing and Email Marketing

While the email marketing information in this book is designed to be applied to both pure-play internet companies and multi-channel retailers alike, if your business is multi-channel with online being only one component of that, then there are some email marketing best practices and realities that you should keep in mind. Many of these can be applied to your marketing efforts between your online and offline channels in general, but we've contextualized them specifically to your email marketing strategy.

Are Your Email Offers Better Than Your Offline Retail Offers or Affiliate Offers?

As you've probably read within this book, email often relies compelling offers to drive sales. Also, as noted in this book, because the cost of sending email is so low, those offers can often be incredibly generous while still maintaining a high return-on-investment. That makes it tempting to generate fast, quick, profitable sales through a generous email promotion. But are you then training customers to buy only online and not visit your retail outlets because they know that they can get a better deal by waiting for your email? If you run a multi-channel business, offline retail outlets are important to your brand presence. Consistently making better offers and discounts via email can drive people to only buy from you via email.

Does Your Email Marketing Program Support or Sabotage Your Offline Program?

Similar to the above question, you'll need to ask yourself if your email program is supporting or sabotaging your offline program. It's not only about promotions. Is your email program sending a different message than your offline program? Is it easier to find items in stock via your email marketing program than offline? Are you reallocating inventory to online or email promotions while limiting what's available offline? Your various marketing channels should work to support each other. However, the low cost and high return of email marketing can often mean that it's actually undercutting your offline efforts. In fact, sometimes it can undercut your other online efforts as well. Take the time to look at all of your marketing channels and make sure that email is working as a support system rather than a detractor. You may be surprised at what you find.

Are You Using Email to Drive Consumers to Stores?

One important way that email can contribute to your offline brand presence is to be used to actually drive customers into your stores. Remember, there's a benefit to having customers visit your land-based, brick-and-mortar locations. Once your customers are in the door, the merchandise as well as one-to-one sales associates are in front of them and they are more likely to buy more merchandise at a higher dollar value. Are you using your email marketing program to send users to your stores?

If not, consider sending geographically targeted email campaigns that offer an in-store discount when the email is provided. You can also use geographically targeted emails to promote regional in-store sales or even special in-store consumer events. You don't always need to be using email to promote online

purchases or transactions. Utilize your email communications channel to grow your offline business as well.

Is Your Email Messaging the Same as Your Offline Messaging?

Because email marketing can often be turned around with lightening speed, the risk of your email messaging being slightly different from your primary offline brand messaging is possible. It's important that you have an auditing program in place to regularly check that the email message you send out resonate with your overall brand message. Of course, you don't want to do this in such a way that you take away the power of the flexibility and real-time communication of email marketing or the ability to test out new tones, offers, or concepts. You do, however, want to put a process in place that that will allow you to make sure that what you say online and in email is the same as what you say offline or in person.

Are You Capturing Email Addresses at All Possible Points?

Much like your email marketing and online strategies should complement your offline marketing efforts, your offline marketing efforts should complement your online and email initiatives. Are you collecting email addresses from leads and customers at every possible opportunity? Are your in-house sales staff trained to convince customers to provide an email address when purchasing? Do your print collateral pieces and offline catalogues actively solicit people to go to their computer and provide you with an email address? The right value proposition can result in an email sign-up even if the user is nowhere near a store.

Increasingly, you can also use mobile technology to capture emails at offline retail locations. Consider an iPad or other mobile tablet that allows users to enter their email for an incentive while they're waiting to be rung up at the register. Much like email can grow your offline business, your offline business can increase the number of viable leads in your database.

Appendix Two
B-to-B Email Marketing

The email marketing processes detailed in this book are designed to work whether your target is business-to-consumer (B-to-C) or business-to-business (B-to-B). However, if your primary email marketing program is a business-to-business program, you'll want to keep the following in mind.

Be More Aware of Your Tone

Somewhat obviously, when dealing with business professionals, you'll want to be more aware that your tone, spelling, and grammar reflect a similar level of professionalism. While you always want to have correct grammar and spelling, general consumers may be more forgiving of a mistake (or possibly not notice it at all) than would a business professional. More often than not, a business-to-business email will have a greater potential dollar value on the other end of it, so grammar, spelling, vocabulary and tone can mean more. Think about how you'd speak in a meet-and-greet meeting with a potential client. Your business-to-business email should sound like that. It should be the virtual equivalent of a man in a suit.

Also, you'll want to stay away from a tone of writing that is too hard sell or promotionally based. You may have a longer business-to-business lead cycle than with business-to-consumer, but that doesn't mean that you should force the pace. Decision makers in business scenarios need to be courted, so consider every sales email a step in that process.

Consider Different List Segments

When you're considering how to split your business-to-business email database list, you may want to consider some additional methodologies. Work title or decision-making status is a popular one. You may want to handle email communications to direct decision makers differently than you would to people who will ultimately only be networking introductions. You may also want to consider the department that the individual works in or their industry sector. If you, for example, sell laptops, a potential client who works in a marketing firm will have different needs than an accountant or an IT professional. As with all list segmentation, think about what will provide the most targeted list to communicate with and then divide your list using that criteria.

Be Aware of Business Schedules

The day and time that you send is important with any email campaign. However, with business-to-business emails you have a slight advantage in that you know that the majority of your recipients will be at work between nine in the morning and five in the evening on weekdays. That means that you can make more strategic decisions about when to send your email for the best chance of getting noticed. Certainly stay away from weekends, and there's an argument that Monday is not good as well since many people are overwhelmed with catch-up work and full inboxes on Monday.

Pay More Attention to Mobile Display

More business-to-business clients than business-to-consumer clients will read your email on a mobile device, particularly a smart phone. Be extra sure that your email templates and content display appropriately on mobile devices and smaller devices like smart phones. If your email opens up in a mobile application and is nothing but blank screen, you've lost your opportunity. Increasingly, business-to-business clients are reading more than half of their email communications via mobile devices. Make sure that your email strategy supports that.

Provide More Contact Information

Many business-to-business promotions or transactions are more complicated than a consumer purchase and your lead or potential client will want to contact you with questions or further communications. While you may want to limit how much direct contact information you put in a B-to-C email, you'll want to err on the other side of the scale for B-to-B. For example, you might not want to send a mass B-to-C email that gives every recipient the contact information of a specific customer service representative. However, in a B-to-B emailing, you want to encourage contact back, so you may want to include direct contact information for a sales agent or customer service contact. When it comes to business-to-business email, more contact information is typically better.

Including Networking

Including social networking links is always important in email, but it's even more important in business-to-business email. Because your lead generation to conversion turn around is often longer in the world of business-to-business, it's more important to make every connection that you possibly can. Make sure that all of your business-to-business emails include opportunities for your leads to connect with both your brand as well as individuals and representatives via the appropriate social or private network.

Appendix Three
Email Marketing and Intracompany Communications

If your company is large enough, it may make sense to use an email marketing platform to manage intracompany communications. Here are some things to consider.

Why Use an Email Marketing System for Intracompany Communications?

There are a number of reasons to use an email marketing system for intracompany communications.

- **Easily Send Emails to Only One Department**: Because with an email marketing system you can easily create and manage email lists, it's incredibly easy to send an email to the entire company, just one department, or only a few departments. You won't need to manage going through and creating inbox groupings or adding individual contacts to a list.

- **Reduce Group Replies**: Is there anything more annoying than sending an email to the entire company or a department within the company and then having to deal with the confusing and unnecessary series of replies to the original email that everybody is now copied on? By using an email marketing system, you'll negate that effect. Marketing emails are non-reply emails, so a user will have to craft an entire email to ask any follow up questions. That's much better than having a hundred people copied on a question about break room rules!

- **Track Who Opens**: Using a marketing email platform to send intracompany communications means that you have access to all of the other tools that come with a marketing email platform. That means that you not only know how many people read the important company information that you sent out, but you can know *exactly* who read it and who didn't. That tells you who you need to follow up with!

The Cost of Using a Marketing Email Platform for Intracompany Communications

If cost is a concern for you, remember that there are a number of free email platforms available to you, including Comm100.

You'll also want to make sure that you don't mix your intracompany email list with your consumer or business-to-business list. Keep intracompany and external marketing email accounts separate.

Appendix Four
Best Practices Summarized

Throughout this book, we've provided you with best practices summaries for all areas of email marketing. We've compiled them here for your easy reference.

Appendix Four (a)
Email Newsletter Best Practices

While we will cover various email best practices in extensive detail in Section 5 of this book, here are the top five best practices that you should always consider when thinking about and designing an email newsletter.

1. Excerpt Content and Link to the Full Version: If you are including a column or article, always simply include an excerpt or "tease" within your email newsletter and then link to the full article or column on your website. Not only does this drive valuable page impressions to your website, but it also avoids your email newsletter being flagged as spam instead of going to the inbox because of a questionable word usage in your full content.

2. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links: Make sure that all links to your website, partner sites or other locations are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition. Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, in email design it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

3. Prioritize the Content That Users Will Care About in the Top Three Inches: In a typical email preview pane, you will have approximately three inches to display your content and allow a reader to decide whether to read the full email or not. Make sure that your most engaging newsletter content appears within these top three inches and do not waste the space with graphic headers or filler "welcome" content.

4. Use a "Table of Contents" or "In This Email": Because email newsletters tend to be longer and users tend to scan them quickly, use a table of contents or a quick list of what's in the email near the top so that users can quickly refer to it to see what content they may want to read.

5. Allow Readers the Option of Reading the Newsletter on a Webpage: Particularly for users who read their email on their mobile device, the option to click a link and instead see a hosted version of the newsletter on a webpage instead of having to read the entire newsletter within their inbox is a huge benefit. Offering this option will significantly increase the number of users who explore your newsletter.

Appendix Four (b)

Direct Sales Emails Best Practices

In Section 5 of this book, we will cover email best practices in great detail. However, here are five key best practices for direct sales emails that should be practiced.

1. One Call-to-Action: Though you may feature multiple products in a direct sales email, do not ask customers reading the email to do anything other than purchase as you will distract them from the intended goal. Do not clutter your direct sales emails with content links, information links or even social media links.

2. Use Equal Amounts of Text and Images: Though it is important to use images to show your product or engender emotion, always remember that many email clients do not display images. Always make sure that there is an amount of text equal to the amount of space taken up by images so that users can know what the offer or product feature is without having to load images into their email browser.

3. Be Careful of Spam Words In Your Text: We'll talk about common spam words later, but a direct sales email has a higher risk of using words that may trigger email provider spam filters. For example, words like "free", "sale" and "discount" can result in your email going to spam if not used properly.

4. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links: Make sure that all links to your product purchasing pages are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition. Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, in email design it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

5. Put the Best Offer at the Top and In the Subject Line: Offers are what sell products, so be sure that if you're making multiple offers or promoting multiple products, your best offer is not only first on the list, it's also featured in the subject line.

Appendix Four (c)
Auto Responders Best Practices

In Section 5 of this book, we will cover email best practices in great detail. However, here are five key best practices for auto responders that should be practiced.

1. Always Include the Auto Responder Name in the Subject Line: Because you are sending multiple emails spaced out over multiple days, you always want to include the name of the auto responder program that your subscriber signed up for in the subject line so that they recognize you in the inbox.

2. Be Sure to Have Subscribers White List You: Because auto responders run a higher risk of unsubscribe requests and spam complaints, be sure to ask users to add you to their contact list or address book in the first welcome email that they receive to help negate the chances that you will end up in their spam or junk folder.

3. Do Not Overdo Offers: While the ultimate goal of your auto-responder program is to generate sales or revenue, too many offers can result in subscribers fleeing from your list early in the auto responder sequence. Present offers contextually and don't create auto-responders that look and feel like repeated direct sales emails.

4. Make Links Clear and Visible & Use Text Links: Make sure that all links to your product purchasing pages are clear and visible. When possible, default to blue, underlined links for easy user recognition. Though in web design it is often unadvisable to use the words "click here" in a link, in email design it typically is more effective to use the words "click here." Make sure that your links are text links and not image-based links as images may not appear in all emails.

5. Use Personalization Fields: While always important in email marketing, because an auto-responder list can not be easily segmented, be sure to use the features of your email marketing program, such as those at Comm100, that allow you to personalize fields within your auto responder email with the subscriber's first name, handle, user name or other submitted information.

Appendix Four (d)
Customer Conversion Email Best Practices

Because converting leads or prospective customers to active or registered customers is one of the hardest parts of the marketing cycle, it's important that you optimize any of your customer conversion emails as much as possible. Here are five important best practices to keep in mind when creating customer conversion emails, whether they are information-based or offer-based.

Personalize Your Emails

Everybody responds better when you call them by their name! If possible, capture a subscriber's first name or user name when they sign up for your email list and use an auto fill feature, such as the one available with the Comm1000 email products, to present the user's name or user name in the subject line, the welcome line of the email body, or both.

Consider Sending from a Personalized Source

Because with a customer conversion email you are trying to instill trust and confidence and build a relationship that will lead to purchases, consider sending the email from a "personal" source. A special offer sent from the president of your company carries more weight than just a generic offer in an email, especially given how many offers many of us receive in our email each day.

Single Call to Action in Offer-Based Emails

If you are sending a special offer email rather than a series of information-based emails, use a single call-to-action to streamline user into purchasing rather than distracting them with other options.

Provide Company Contact Information

Leads or prospective customers aren't tied to your product or brand yet, so you want to make it easy for them to contact you with questions as well as to know that you are a legitimate business. Make sure that your company contact information is easy to find and clear in your email. And, of course, because you want to be CAN-SPAM compliant, make sure that your physical mailing address or business location is included.

Segment Your List When Possible
In many cases, you won't have much information to work with when dealing with a lead or prospective customer email list. After all, because you want to make it easy for people to give you an email address, you don't want to ask for too much information when you request the email address. However, if you are able to get any type of information from your leads or prospective users when they sign up for your email, such as gender or geographic location, try to segment your lists before you send the email to put the most targeted information possible in front of people. If you k now, for example, what the gender of your subscribers is, then you can use language and graphics that will appeal specifically to each gender.

Appendix Four (e)
Best Practices for Revenue Generating Email Marketing During the Active Customer Life Cycle

Best practices for emails designed to increase sales or generate revenue are incredibly similar to those used to acquire new customers. However, here are five important ones to keep in mind.

Make the Call-to-Action Clear: Ultimately, you want clients to do one thing when they get a sale or revenue generating email, and that's make a purchase. Make the call-to-action to buy or purchase clear in a text link (not an image link) and don't clutter the email with too much information or other options for the customer to get distracted by.

Segment, Segment, Segment: The more you can put the exact right product in front of the exact right customer, the more you will convert sales. Avoid, when possible, sending one blast email to your entire database. Instead, split the database into segments and give them the most topical or useful information and products for them.

Don't Overdo the Images: While it's true that images sell products, remember that many email clients do not download your images and therefore your subscribers may not see the images that you're hoping will sell the product. Make sure that you include compelling copy that will make them want to either click through to your landing page or alternatively download the pictures in the email.

Be Careful of Spam Words: Much like with customer acquisition emails, sales and revenue generating emails during the active customer life cycle can run the risk of using too many words like "free" and "on sale." Be careful that you don't load your email up so much that it ends up in a spam or junk folder.

Make Unsubscribing Easy: Also not unlike customer acquisition emails, sales and revenue generating emails during the active customer life cycle can run the risk of being marked as "spam" by users if the users feel that you are sending them too many offers, too frequently. In addition to monitoring your email metrics and calendar, make the unsubscribe link easy to find to avoid being marked as spam rather than simply unsubscribed from.

Appendix Four (f)
Expanded Best Practices for by Email Type

Earlier in this book, we gave you some brief lists of best practices to use when sending various types of emails. To make email sending a little bit easier for you, the next several sections will sum up best practices in easy-to-use checklist form for any type of email that you may be sending. Feel free to print out these pages and use them whenever you're putting together an email send for a specific type of email. In this section, we'll cover a best practices check-list for sales conversion emails.

Subject Line Best Practices for Sales Conversion Emails

A sales conversion email should practice all best practices for subject lines in general including:

- **Urgency**: Create a sense of urgency so that users will open your email as quickly as possible, but do this without creating a sense of your email being outdated if a period of time passes before users see it.
- **Content**: Use words that are proven within your industry or email list segment to create actions and responses. Don't use words that may get you into trouble with spam filters. If appropriate, repeat your company or newsletter name in the subject line of the email.
- **Length**: Do not write a subject line that is longer than thirty-five to fifty characters.
- **Personalization**: If it's appropriate for your industry or email list segment, include a personalization field to use the subscriber's first name or site user name in the subject line of the email.

HTML Design Best Practices for Sales Conversion Emails

As a general rule, the following are design best practices for sending sales conversion emails:

- **Minimize Images**: Even though you are most likely selling or promoting a product, limit your use of images to no more than thirty percent of your email template. Remember, images won't load in the large majority of email service providers.

- **Use Alt and Title Text**: Because your images may not load, be sure to apply both alt and title text behind the images so that text displays when the images don't load. Make the text a compelling call-to-action and make the image a link to your landing page.

- **Optimize the Top Three Inches**: Most email service providers will display the top three inches (about five hundred pixels) in their email preview pane. Make sure to optimize this space by not

including images, placing a call-to-action in it and making sure that the main sales pitch of your offer appears there.

- **Maximum Email Width of 600 Pixels**: Make sure that your email template does not exceed six hundred pixels in width. It may not display in the email preview pane if it does.

- **One Column May be Appropriate**: For sales conversion emails, it may be more appropriate to use a single-column email template rather than two columns. You only want readers to focus on the deal, offer or revenue-generating event. You do not want to distract them with a great deal of extra information and links that may deter them from following through on your desired action.

- **Don't' Trap Calls to Action in an Image**: As tempting as it is to use graphic buttons or links in your html email, be sure to not trap the call-to-action or any important information in an image. Again, your users may not see the image, and if they don't they may not know where to click. Make sure that links and calls-to-action are all text-based.

- **Easy-to-Find Unsubscribe Rules**: Make sure that it's easy and clear to users where to unsubscribe from your email list. If you don't, they may mark you as spam which could impact your ability to get delivered to the inbox for a long time in the future.

- **Follow CAN-SPAM Rules**: Make sure that you have followed all CAN-SPAM rules including a physical mailing address, an unsubscribe link or address and an indication that your email is an advertisement.

- **No CSS!** Stay away from coding your html email template using CSS as many email service providers will strip it out. Use traditional <font> and <table> tags instead.

- **Format Text**: Format your text so that it is interesting to look at, using a variety of bold fonts and font colors. Avoid italics if possible, though.

- **Format Links**: Format links to look like links so that users recognize them. The best option is a blue font with an underline. However, if you can't make your font blue, at least make links underlined. It's also advisable to make them bold.

- **No Dark Background Colors with Light Font Colors**: Because many email service providers will strip out your background image or misread your font colors, a dark background with white or light fonts can end up looking like a white background with white fonts or a dark background with black fonts. Stick to light background colors and dark fonts.

- **Include Social Sharing**: Include social sharing elements, but don't rely on buttons or images.

Content Best Practices for Sales Conversion Emails

Content is the area of an email where you will experience the largest variation in best practices. Here are the most important best practices for sales and conversion emails.

- **Single-Call-to-Action**: If the goal of your email is to drive a single or targeted revenue generating act, then only give users or readers the choice of one action to complete. Don't suggest that they buy a product and then also suggest that they read an article. Keep your call-to-action to only one motivation, and that motivation should be to purchase, sign-up or click through.

- **Keep It Reasonably Short**: The more copy you put in an email, the less likely a user is to complete your call to action. You also increase your risk of ending up in the spam or junk folder. Keep your copy to a minimum and include only the highlights that will inspire your reader to click-through.

- **Don't Use Too Many Navigational Links**: While navigational links are great in content or retention emails, in a revenue generating email they can take users away from finishing a revenue-generating activity and onto a content or website page that doesn't promote the offer. Strip navigational links out of your revenue generating or conversion emails and focus on the single call-to-action.

- **Do Include Contact Information**: Though you don't want to distract users from your call-to-action, you do want to make it easy for them to contact you if they have questions or problems. Including contact information also builds trust with your users or readers. In a revenue-generating or sales email, be sure to include contact information prominently.

- **Be Careful with Spam Words**: Sales, revenue-generating and conversion emails are often the most likely to end up in the junk folder because they've overused spam trigger words like "sale" or "cash." Write compelling email copy without emphasizing potential spam words too heavily.

- **Personalize**: In most cases, your email will perform better if you use a personalization field in the body of the email or the call-to-action. As always, consider if personalization is appropriate for your industry segment.

- **Segment Your List and Your Content**: The more targeted you can make your offers and content, the more likely your offers are to convert. In the case of revenue-generating emails, try to segment your database by purchase history or average spend in order to put the most compelling offer or revenue generating event in front of the most likely candidate to take advantage of it.

- **Provide Terms and Conditions Notes:** Whenever you're sending an offer in an email that has terms and conditions applied to it, be sure to include either the full terms and conditions or a disclaimer that terms and conditions apply and can be found at a specific url within the email.

Appendix Four (g)
Best Practices for Driving Clicks to Page Impressions from Emails

Clicks count! At the end of the day, your readers can't make you any revenue directly from your email. They'll need to either click through to a landing page where they can make a revenue-generating transaction or to a website where you are monetizing their visit through an impression-based web advertisement. Either way, you'll need to follow basic best practices for driving clicks from your email to your landing page or website. Here are the key points that you'll need to keep in mind in order to successfully accomplish that.

Link Appearance
How your links appear in your email can determine how effective you are at driving click-through activity to your website or landing page. In general, the following are best practices for link appearance in html email templates.

- Make links appear in a blue font
- Make sure that links are underlined to denote that they are links
- Use a bold font for your links
- Do not include your links in a block of text but instead separate them out and pad a minor degree of white space around them.

You may decide not to make your links a blue font for brand or design reasons. While a blue font has been shown to drive more clicks, as long as you underline your links most users will recognize them as links.

You may also consider using a larger font size to make links stand out more from the rest of your text.

Link Placement
Make sure that you get at least one, if not multiple, links above-the-fold in your email. That means in the top three inches, or roughly five hundred pixels, of your email. This will ensure that users don't need to scroll outside of their email preview pane in order to click through to your website or landing page.

Image Links
If you want to maximize your click-through ratio from your email to your website or landing page, it's important that you don't "trap" links or calls-to-action within images. While image buttons work exceptionally well on a webpage to drive clicks, because images often don't load in emails your entire call-to-action to click may be lost if you use an image to convey a link. Make links and calls-to-action text based.

If your brand department insists that you include graphic buttons for links or calls-to-action even though it is not an email best practice, be sure that there is a text-based link and call-to-action directly below or above the image and that the image includes alt and title text that repeats the call-to-action.

Link Density
As a general rule, the more opportunities that you give a user to click from your email to your landing page or website, the better. However, keep the following in mind.

- Too many links can send you to the spam or junk folder. If your test send of your email ends up in the spam or junk folder, try removing some of the links.
- If your email is a revenue-generating or conversion email, you may want to include multiple links, but they should all be for the same call-to-action. Don't distract users with other actions or options that don't contribute to your end goal.
- If your email is a content email or retention email, navigational links to your website and multiple links to various contact and content pages can add to your overall link density and opportunities for click-through actions.

URLs in Text-Only Emails
Though you cannot generate tracked click-through actions from the text-only version of your email, you can increase the number of users who navigate from your text-only email to your website or landing page. Include urls for your offer or promoted content at both the bottom and the top of the email. Separate urls from content by a full paragraph break. Most importantly, keep urls in text-only email versions short and memorable.

Call-to-Action Text
Writing your call-to-action text can have the greatest impact on your click-through actions. Though we've covered calls-to-action in great detail earlier in this book, we've provided the best practices again in this summary for you.

- **Keep Your Call-to-Action Simple:** Don't make the wording in your call-to-action too long or too complicated! Keep it simple, clear and easy-to-understand.
- **Segment and Tailor Your Call-to-Action:** You can also tailor subject lines by gender, customer loyalty and just about any other criteria that you could come up with to segment your list with. The more tailored the call-to-action is, the better it will perform.
- **Personalize Your Call-to-Action:** While you'll want to be careful that your personalization doesn't sound too much like customer spying, a personalized email and a personalized call-to-action will almost always improve performance.
- **What, Why, How:** If you're struggling to write good calls to action, following the basic "What. Why. How." rule can help to improve your performance. In short, have your call-to-action tell users what they should do, why they should do it and how to do it. Here are three examples:

- **Most of All, Make Your Call-to-Action Persuasive with Action Words and Commands:** This, of course, is easier said than done! Determining which words, commands and concepts will resonate with your audience and cause the best response can take time and creativity. However, it's well worth the effort. Of course, you'll need to then implement…

Appendix Four (h)
Expanded Best Practices for Customer Win-Back & Retention Emails

Customer retention and win-back emails will have a number of similar best practices to other emails. However, you'll want to take particular note of changes in content, offers and even subject line practices. While you want your customer winback and retention emails to result in revenue-generating activities over the long-term, you don't want to sacrifice customer affinity and relationship building.

Subject Line Best Practices for Retention and Win-Back Emails

A customer retention or win-back email should practice all best practices for subject lines in general including:

- **Reduce Stress on Urgency**: This element become somewhat trickier with a win-back or retention email. While you still want create a sense of urgency to open the email, because win-back and retention emails don't require a time-sensitive offer (in most cases) you want to also give the email long-term value so that it will be forwarded around based on its content. If your email is a limited time offer to win-back resistant clients or customers, then certainly be sure to include urgency in the subject line. If it's not, focus more on the import and value of the content to give your email a longer time frame in which people may share or open it.

- **Content**: Use words that are proven within your industry or email list segment to create actions and responses. Don't use words that may get you into trouble with spam filters. If appropriate, repeat your company or newsletter name in the subject line of the email.

- **Length**: Do not write a subject line that is longer than thirty-five to fifty characters.

- **Personalization**: If it's appropriate for your industry or email list segment, include a personalization field to use the subscriber's first name or site user name in the subject line of the email. However, remember that with a customer retention or win-back email, you may be hoping for a greater number of forwards or shares. You may want to experiment and test with personalization versus non-personalized content several times.

HTML Design Best Practices for Win-Back and Retention Emails

As a general rule, the following are design best practices for sending win-back and retention emails:

- **Minimize Images**: Even though images will engage your readers or subscribers visually, limit your use of images to no more than thirty percent of your email template. Remember, images won't load in the large majority of email service providers.

- **Use Alt and Title Text**: Because your images may not load, be sure to apply both alt and title text behind the images so that text displays when the images don't load. Make the text a compelling call-to-action and make the image a link to your landing page or website.

- **Optimize the Top Three Inches**: Most email service providers will display the top three inches (about five hundred pixels) in their email preview pane. Make sure to optimize this space by not including images, placing a call-to-action in it and making sure that the main value proposition of your email appears there.

- **Maximum Email Width of 600 Pixels**: Make sure that your email template does not exceed six hundred pixels in width. It may not display in the email preview pane if it does.

- **Two Columns Will Likely be the Better Design Choice**: Unlike sales conversion emails, where a single column and a more simplified display will likely be your better choice regarding design format, a win-back and retention email will likely perform better if you use a two-column email template format. As we discussed earlier in this book, two columns will allow you to get a greater amount of information inserted above the fold. Because win-back and retention emails are generally no as laser-focused as sales conversion emails and include more information and more varied information, getting more preview copy into the top three inches via a two-column format is more important. Remember, the most important information should go in the top left corner!

- **Don't' Trap Calls to Action in an Image**: As tempting as it is to use graphic buttons or links in your html email, be sure to not trap the call-to-action or any important information in an image. Again, your users may not see the image, and if they don't they may not know where to click. Make sure that links and calls-to-action are all text-based.

- **Easy-to-Find Unsubscribe Rules**: Make sure that it's easy and clear to users where to unsubscribe from your email list. If you don't, they may mark you as spam which could impact your ability to get delivered to the inbox for a long time in the future.

- **Follow CAN-SPAM Rules**: Make sure that you have followed all CAN-SPAM rules including a physical mailing address, an unsubscribe link or address and an indication that your email is an advertisement.

- **No CSS!** Stay away from coding your html email template using CSS as many email service providers will strip it out. Use traditional <font> and <table> tags instead.

- **Format Text**: Format your text so that it is interesting to look at, using a variety of bold fonts and font colors. Avoid italics if possible, though.

- **Format Links**: Format links to look like links so that users recognize them. The best option is a blue font with an underline. However, if you can't make your font blue, at least make links underlined. It's also advisable to make them bold.

- **No Dark Background Colors with Light Font Colors**: Because many email service providers will strip out your background image or misread your font colors, a dark background with white or light fonts can end up looking like a white background with white fonts or a dark background with black fonts. Stick to light background colors and dark fonts.

- **Include Social Sharing**: Include social sharing elements, but don't rely on buttons or images.

Content Best Practices for Win-Back and Retention Emails
Content is the area of an email where you will experience the largest variation in best practices. Here are the most important best practices for win-back and retention emails.

- **Short Blocks of Copy**: The more copy you put in an email, the less likely a user is to complete your call to action or to read the full email copy. You also increase your risk of ending up in the spam or junk folder. Keep your copy to a minimum and include only the highlights that will inspire your reader to click-through. Consider text blocks that then have a strong call-to-action to click through to the website or landing page to read the full content.

- **Load Up on Navigational Links**: The point of a win-back or retention email is to drive users back to your website for useful content, information or offers. You can increase this click-through impact by increasing link count, and a great way to do that is to include navigational links to the departments, areas or sub-sections of your site. A user may not be interested in your choice of content in your email, but may see a navigational link to the clearance section fo your website and take advantage of it.

- **Do Include Contact Information**: Though you don't want to distract users from your call-to-action, you do want to make it easy for them to contact you if they have questions or problems. Including contact information also builds trust with your users or readers. In a revenue-generating or sales email, be sure to include contact information prominently.

- **Be Careful with Spam Words**: Sales, revenue-generating and conversion emails are often the most likely to end up in the junk folder because they've overused spam trigger words like "sale" or "cash." Write compelling email copy without emphasizing potential spam words too heavily.

- **Personalize**: In most cases, your email will perform better if you use a personalization field in the body of the email or the call-to-action. As always, consider if personalization is appropriate for your industry segment.

- **Segment Your List and Your Content**: The more targeted you can make your offers and content, the more likely your offers are to convert. In the case of revenue-generating emails, try to segment your database by purchase history or average spend in order to put the most compelling offer or revenue generating event in front of the most likely candidate to take advantage of it.

- **Segment Further Based on Customer State**: If you are sending an email to win-back lapsed or abandoned customers, your email will perform better if you segment your list based on "customer state." For example, customers who have not purchased within a year may need an offer of a 70% discount in order to purchase again. However, customers who have not purchased within the last three months may only need 10%. Take the time to segment your win-back list based on status and you'll be able to spend less promotional money in the form of discounts while also seeing a higher return on effort.

- **Provide Terms and Conditions Notes:** Whenever you're sending an offer in an email that has terms and conditions applied to it, be sure to include either the full terms and conditions or a disclaimer that terms and conditions apply and can be found at a specific url within the email.

Appendix Four (i)
Best Practices for Creating Content for Your Emails

At the heart of it all, the email that you send is basically content that you want your readers to care about. Whether that content is information-based or an offer or promotion, how and what the content for your email is can make a huge difference in performance. Here are some best practices for creating content for your emails.

Choosing and Selecting Content

The first question that you are undoubtedly asking yourself is "What content should I put in my email?" There's not a proven algorithm for knowing what will resonate with your users or readers. In fact, the best option is to always test a variety of content over a period of time and then track results. You can then use those results to create a best-practices list and internal knowledge of what will work for your users. However, if you're just getting started, here are some tips to follow.

- **It's NOT What You Would Want**: One of the most common content generation mistakes that often happens in crafting email content is that the person in charge of creating the email centers the content around what he or she would want to read or see in an offer rather than using data to determine what actual readers and subscribers would enjoy. Even if you've never sent an email before, your company will have some data on what type of content resonates the best with users. This may be sales data on the types of items or discounts that work the best, or it may be web

analytics that show which pages or content types do the best on your site. Regardless of what sources you use, remember that you want to put content in your email produce that will make users want to read and open it. That may mean that the content or offers don't personally align with your instincts or what you like!

- **Ask Around!** No matter how small or large your company is, there are easy and quick web tools out there to survey or poll your existing traffic or members about the type of content or offers that they'll like. If you have an existing social network program, you can use Facebook Questions or a tweet-back campaign to accomplish the same goal. In reality, it will only take you a week to ask users what they want to read or see. The one caution, however, is to remember that the types of users who will respond to polls or questions will be your most active and engaged users. You may want to do the work to find out what the less active and engaged users are, and that may require looking closely at your sales and web analytics.

- **Competitor Research**: If you have a competitor who has a successful email marketing or newsletter program, or even a more robust content section than you do, you can feel fairly safe in emulating the types of content or offers that you have seen them promoting. Particularly if they have been running an email program for quite some time, they have likely tested and perfected the types of content and offers that work best. Again, however, the one caution would be that you may be receiving a specific email based on a list segment that you are falling into. For example, if you have a dummy account at a competitor from which you've made one test purchase, or no purchases, you may be getting different email content than their best customers do. However, it's a great research jumping off point!

- **Seasonal Content**: Seasonal content is always a great way to improve open rates. Remember though that December is the most active email marketing time, so even with great content you may see reduced results because there's simply so much email in most people's inboxes. However, making your content targeted to holidays, seasonal fashion trends or trends in your industry or other time related or seasonal elements is always a great way to make the content more relevant to your readers and users.

- **Test! Test! Test!** Of course, at the end of the day, it's all about testing. You'll only develop over time and by keeping great records and reporting on email activity what content your readers and subscribers love and what content they hate. Never assume that you already know what your subscribers will want to read. Pay attention to what they're actually telling you with their behaviors.

Correct Grammar Counts!
It may be a world of SMS abbreviations, but test after test has shown that proper grammar in your email counts for improved conversion rates. Take the time to have the English major in your office (or a professional copy writer) review and edit your email. It only takes one user who notices a grammar or

spelling mistake in your email to then begin a social media campaign that makes you look less professional than you really are!

Determining the Length of Content
How long you make your content in an email is also important. You want to put enough content in to get your message across, but at the same time you run risks if your content is too long. Those risks include:

- Ending up in the spam or junk folder
- Having users be overwhelmed by the amount of content in your email and just not reading it
- Having formatting issues as the content gets so long that it creates display problems in various email clients.

The best emails will be under 750 words total, and that's frankly a great deal of text. However, as your determining the length of your text, here are ways to make it more visually appealing and less likely to end up causing problems.

- **Use Short Text Blocks**: Your email will almost never be the best place to put the content of a full article or robust product description. Use shorter text blocks of one hundred to two hundred words that then have a strong call to action to click through to your landing page or website for more information. You'll get the double benefit of a more text-friendly email as well as increased web traffic.

- **Format the Text**: We'll cover best-practices for formatting content below, but make your content visually interesting by using font colors, sizes and bold tags. If text is more visually compelling, it's also more likely to be scanned or even fully read.

- **Break Up Text with Headlines or Images**: Break up your larger blocks of text with headlines or images (though obviously limit the use of images as previously discussed). Again, if there's too much text in a large block, users will be overwhelmed by it and it's unlikely that they will read it. Keep your email visually interesting with other elements placed in between text areas.

Words to Avoid in Your Email Content
There are about 200 words that can get you into spam trouble with your email content. That's not to say that you can't ever use these words, but it is to say that you should minimize them and certainly don't use them in the subject line. We've provided a complete list of spam-trigger words (the most recent version available) in section six of this book. However, the following short list constitutes what are often referred to as "email disaster words." If you're having a problem staying out of the spam or junk folder, these are the words that are most likely to be putting you there.

Free	Opportunity	Click here
Visit our website	50% Off	Call now

Subscribe	Prizes	Special Promotion
Bonus	Information you requested	Great Offer/Deal
Discount	Important information	All New
Save up to	regarding	One Time
Winner	Guarantee, Guaranteed	Order Now

Again, you certainly can use these words in your email, and you've most likely seen emails from companies that use these words. Ending up in the spam or junk folder involves a complex matrix and algorithm that's different for each email service provider. Of course, the more you use the above words (as well as the list of words provided in section six of this book), the more likely you are to experience deliverability problems. Be aware of these "disaster" words and know that if you over-use them or begin to experience deliverability problems they are your likely culprits.

Formatting Content

Finally, how you format the content in your email is almost as important as what the content itself is. Here are some best practices for content formatting in email newsletters or promotions.

- **Don't Copy and Paste from Word!** If there's one rule of "doing things on the web" that you should always remember, it's "Don't copy and paste content from Word." While many email marketing platforms, including Comm100, will overwrite any "special characters" that translate from Word as "garble", you may later find that in some cases they displayed inappropriately. Word content is not web-ready content. Always copy your content into Notepad before inserting it into your email template. Then use your email platforms html or Wiziwig tools to format headlines, fonts, etc.

- **Use Bold Tags, Font Colors and Font Sizes**: As we noted above, making your content visually interesting is also highly important. Within your individual text blocks, use bold tags, font colors or even various font sizes to highlight keywords and trigger words. Remember, however, that it's important to do this using inline <font> tags rather than a CSS call.

- **Underline Links**: In a previous section, we provided great detail on the best practices for improving click-through. For a full summary, you should read that section if you skipped over it. However, at a minimum, remember that when formatting content you should always format links with an underlined font in order to improve click-through activity.

- **Use Headlines**: Be sure to break-up your content by using larger, bolder headlines to convey to users what exactly each section is about. It will help readers scan your content for the pieces that are most interesting or important to them.

- **Small Text Blocks**: We've said it frequently because it's important! Use small blocks of text that then use strong calls-to-action to have users click to your landing page or website for the full content or information. It will keep your email more text-friendly and increase web traffic.

- **Readable Font**: Finally, make sure to use a readable font! Arial and other non-serif fonts in a ten or eleven point font size are often considered the best fonts for email templates. Stay away from heavy serif fonts, script fonts or novelty fonts.

Appendix Four (j)
Best Practices for Email Landing Pages

In some cases, the links from your email will lead directly to product or content pages on your website. However, in a great number of cases, the links from your email will lead directly to landing pages that you have developed specifically for the product, promotion or special that you are offering in your email. A good (or great) landing page can make the difference between a successful email campaign and a sub-par email campaign. How do you optimize landing pages? Here are some basic best practices to keep in mind.

The Three Second Scan

The first important best practice for a landing page is to make sure that it passes what is known as the "three second scan." Most internet users will decide whether to stay on a page or abandon it in under five seconds, so it's safe to say that you have three seconds to convince a user to stay on the page. What does that mean? It means all of the following:

- Your page needs to load quickly!
- Users need to be able to know what the offer is and what message you are conveying within seconds of landing on the page. How do you do this? Buy keeping it simple as we'll discuss in the following actions.
- Users need to be visually compelled. No matter how great your offer or copy is, if a user isn't visually compelled immediately, he or she will lose interest in the page before you have a chance to sell them.

The internet moves quickly, and so do its users. Even a loyal customer coming from a specific email promotion may not give your landing page much time or attention if it doesn't impact him or her within the first three seconds.

Only One Action

Not unlike your sales and conversion emails, you only want users to be able to do one thing when they get to your landing page. That may be purchasing a product, signing up via a form or even clicking through to another destination. No matter what the action that you want them to take, it's important that you not distract them with other possible actions. Only present one promotion per landing page. It's actually recommended that you don't include your standard site navigation on landing pages either. After

all, if users start drilling down into your website, they may never return to complete the desired action on your landing page. Remember the customer funnel that we discussed earlier? When you get a person to click through from your email to your landing page, you've convinced them to move one step further in your funnel. However, the ultimate goal is to move them all the way through the funnel. Don't distract them from that desired path with other options or choices.

In short, your landing page should only promote and encourage users to do one specific thing. It may seem counterintuitive, but years of marketing studies have proven that the most effective landing pages simply tell people what to do and do not present them with other options.

Use Short Forms

In some cases, the action that you'll want users to complete on your landing page will involve having them fill out a form. You may want them to join an email list, fill out a survey or sign-up to receive a postal mailing. When you are asking users to fill out a form on a landing page, the best practice to remember is to keep the form as short as possible. The more information that you ask users to provide, the less likely they will be to actually complete and submit your form. Only ask for the information that you absolutely, one hundred percent need in order to make the sign-up or form submission valuable to you. Every extra question that you ask or field of information that you require will actively reduce your conversion rate.

In short, if you have a form, keep the form short! Identify exactly what you need and only ask for that. The more information that you ask for, the lower your conversion rate will be.

Compelling Call-to-Action

It might go without saying, but your call to action must be strong. You have more freedom to use stronger and more compelling words on your landing page than you would in an email because your landing page doesn't need to make it past the spam filters of email service providers. Keep your calls-to-action short and tell users exactly what you want them to do. "Buy now," "Sign-up," "Join Free" – all of these are high converting calls to action. Make them easy to read and find and don't leave any question in the user's mind as to what you want them to do. We covered some best practices for calls-to-action in emails earlier in this book, and many of them apply here as well.

It should be noted that there are some marketers who believe that using a softer call to action on a landing page can be more effective. Calls to action like "Buy Now" may be more commitment than a user on a landing page is ready to make. "Learn More," for example, may work better. They only way you'll know what works best on your landing page is to test!

Visually Engage

Also somewhat obvious is that you want to visually engage your users. You are not limited in the use of images, videos or Flash technology on a webpage the way that you are in an email. With that said, you want to use images to further move your user though the experience of the landing page, not to distract them. Again, you'll want to do some a/b testing, but here are some basic considerations.

- If your Flash component causes the page to load slowly or browsers to crash, it's not worth having on your landing page
- Don't use so many images that the user is too distracted from the ultimate goal of the page.
- While the data is mixed, videos that begin to play as soon as the page loads can cause abandonment from the page as much as they may cause conversions. Many people browse the internet from work where an auto-loading video with sound may cause them to immediately click away from the page.
- You'll have options with images that you'll want to think through. What will work best with your target audience? Lifestyle images? Product images? Abstract images? There's no right or wrong answer, and ab/ testing of your landing page is the best way to determine the answer.

What do you need to know? Your page needs to look professional and be visually compelling. As we noted, you won't have very much time to convince users to stay on your page or abandon it.

Use Lots of Whitespace
Or dark space! The best landing pages, however, won't be crowded or busy. You want a great deal of open space around the margins of the page so that users are immediately drawn to your value proposition, sales graphics and call to action. The less you distract them and the more you make the design elements related to your desired revenue-generating action the focal point of the site, the better your landing page will convert. A great deal of blank white (or background colored) space on the page will focus your users' attention and draw them immediately into the action that you want them to complete.

Design Above the Fold!
In designing an email template, "above the fold" means designing the email so that the most important things for your user to see and do are in the top three inches of the email. When you're designing a landing page, the meaning is somewhat different. "Above the fold" in web-speak means everything that is visible on a standard web browser. In other words, you don't want users to have to scroll down the page to find your call-to-action or your value proposition or, certainly, your most compelling images. In general, you'll have six hundred pixels worth of height to be above-the-fold in most web browser resolutions.

Above-the-fold design has become out-of-vogue with many web designers currently. The argument, of course, is that users have become more used to scrolling. However, if you want to be sure that your web pages convert at the highest possible standard, designing to have your message and call-to-action appear above the fold is still your best option.

Use Bold Buttons
Unlike in an email template, you'll have the option of using buttons and graphics to denote important calls-to-action. You won't be limited to experiencing the highest conversion rates through text links. In fact, your conversion rates will almost certainly be higher if you use large and prominent buttons for your

links and calls-to-action. Make your buttons easy-to-read, large and easy-to-spot. Most importantly, make sure that they look "clickable." Scan the internet for examples of buttons that you like. Chances are that if you design something similar, you will get outstanding results.

Build Trust
You never know who will come to your landing page. It may be a dedicated customer who already trusts and advocates for your brand. However, it may also be a completely new user who found your landing page through a social media forward or an email forward. Be sure to build trust with your users on your landing page. If you are collecting any information or requesting an email address, be sure to make users aware of your privacy policy and any online trust and privacy organizations that you belong to. You may also want to consider a few customer testimonials, but remember that you want to keep the page simple. In short, give your users the tools that they will need to trust you, but don't overdo it and clutter your landing page.

Don't Overwhelm with Terms and Conditions
The chances are good that your offer or information request on your landing page has some terms and conditions applied to it. You certainly want to make users aware of those terms and conditions *on* the landing page. If you do not, you obviously risk a customer service nightmare at best and a press and social media nightmare at worst. How do you accomplish this? You have several options. The first is to make the terms and conditions small and near the bottom of the page. The second, and the more common, is to simply note that "Terms and Conditions apply" and then have users click to generate a pop-up window or text drop-down that reveals the full terms and conditions.

In short, you want to be absolutely sure that any terms and conditions that apply to your offers are on your landing page. However, you do not want to make them visible enough that they will actively discourage customers.

Test!
Finally, the most important best practice for landing pages is to test them, test them, test them. Google Website Optimizer is a great free tool to set up basic a/b tests of landing pages so that you can see which graphics, calls-to-action, background colors and headlines work the best for converting users. As you compile data, you'll be able to build your own in-house best practices list for landing pages specific to your company!

While there were many best practices presented in this section, if you only remember one of them, remember that the best landing pages keep their design and their user requirements incredibly simple!

Appendix Four (k)
Best Practices for Auto Responders
Auto responders, which we've been discussing throughout this book, are one of the most popular and (if done correctly) effective email marketing techniques available currently. But how do you "do" auto

responders in a way that will optimize their return on investment? The following best practices should assist you in crafting a successful and robust auto responder email program.

Use Basic Email Design Best Practices!

The first thing you'll obviously want to do is to design a great email template with great content and that leads to a great landing page! This entire section of this book was designed in order to give you the tools to do exactly that. Auto responders are no different from any other type of email marketing when it comes to the application of best practices for content, design, landing pages, formatting, subject lines and spam protection. If you've read and absorbed the parts of this book in this chapter prior to reading this list of best practices for auto responders, then you have all of the information that you need in order to design great email templates, develop great content and optimize your deliverability, open rate, click-through and landing page conversion rates.

Be Sure Your Content is Timeless

You'll never be able to tell when and where a user may get your auto responder. For that reason, it's absolutely critical that you ensure that the content contained in your auto responder isn't time or date specific. Even if you haven't changed your auto responder text for two years, users should still feel as though your content may have been written that very day. Avoid references to trends, slang, current events or pop culture references. Use events, references, language and images in your auto responders that won't date the email content. Avoid images that include fashionable clothing that may trend out of style. Don't reference seasons or holidays. The basic rule of thumb is to create content that can be read on any time or date and will be relevant and important to the user.

Timeless Means No Offers with Expiration Dates!

Remember when you're developing your auto responders that you can't use offers and promotions that have expiration dates or that feature products that you have a limited amount of stock of or will not be carrying for the long term. It's easy to believe that you will regularly update your auto responder content, but the reality is that most email marketers turn their auto responders on and then forget about them (we'll give you a best practice on how to avoid that further down in this list). Any time an offer goes out that isn't actually available to users, you risk alienating customers as well as damaging your brand through press, viral, word of mouth and social media. Only include offers, promotions and products in your auto responders that will be available no matter when a user reads the email.

Don't Number Your Auto Responders by Issue Number

While you may see many auto responder campaigns that list an issue number in the subject line or body of the email, this is actually considered to be a poor idea. Firstly, it's always possible that somebody may not begin receiving your auto responders until partway into the series depending on their email list sign-up status or the potential that their auto responders may land in the spam folder initially. Secondly, many email marketing studies show that has issue numbers rise, subscribers start to realize for exactly how long they've been receiving an email and may be more prone to unsubscribe. Keep your content and subject lines timeless as discussed above. That certainly includes not using issue numbers.

Use Proven Content: FAQs and Popular User Articles

Your auto responder list will be users who are newly subscribed to your product or information list. However, you most likely have a great deal of data about what is useful to new users based on your existing website or email activity. A good place to start is to take content from frequently asked questions that your existing customers submit (or that exist in your website's knowledge base) as well as the most popular articles or products from your website. Even if your website is fairly new, you most likely have a good idea of what the best and most important things that a new user would want to know about are. Utilize that knowledge to ensure that your auto responders are highly relevant to your recipients.

Space Emails Out with a Tail

You'll also want to think about how you'll space your emails out. You'll want to consider putting emails closer together at the beginning of your auto responder when your users are most engaged and most excited about receiving your information. A spacing of two to three days between emails is often considered ideal. However, as you go deeper into your auto responder list, you'll want to space emails out further so that you do not risk annoying subscribers with too much email and ultimately having them mark you as spam or unsubscribing from your email list entirely. As you reach the end of your auto responder list, five days to a week in between emails is enough to remain relevant in your subscribers' minds without actively creating a problem with unsubscribe requests or spam complaints.

How Many Auto Responders Should You Send?

There are many different thought processes on the appropriate number of auto responders. Some email marketing platforms will only allow you to have ten or less active at any one time in order to guard against potential spam complaints and deliverability issues. Some companies believe that up to twenty auto responders is appropriate. Most studies, however, come down in the middle that between twelve and fifteen auto responders are the ideal number to send. Ten may not be quite enough to build a significant brand relationship with your new users, but more than fifteen can exceed the limit of a user or subscriber's tolerance. In the end though, you'll have to rely on that old marketing tool testing to figure out what's ideal for you. Your information may truly be so compelling that users want to receive twenty auto responders and react to the well. On the other hand, you may find that if users haven't acted on your offer or developed a relationship with you by as early as the third email, it isn't worth your time to continue to send to them and the decrease in positive email metrics isn't worth the low return on investment for follow-up emails. You'll have to do some testing to truly find your best solution. However, starting with an even dozen auto responders is a great launch point.

Avoid Increasing Offer Quality

While it's tempting to believe that you should increase the incentive of offers with each auto responder, you may actually end up alienating customers that way. It's true that if customers have not acted upon your offer or completed your revenue generating event by the time the first several emails have been sent, the offer presented may not be sufficient for them. On the other hand, remember that the same subscribers who read your first email will also read your tenth email. If you offered 10% to new

customers in the first email and 50% off to new customers in the tenth email, you may ultimately end up alienating the customers from the first email and they will not become loyal, repeat customers. You'll have to balance your business needs when making these decisions. However, building customer loyalty should always be a priority!

Pay Attention to Tracking Reports

There are few email programs where a tracking report can give you more valuable information than with auto responders. Why is that? Because you can make changes that have immediately trackable results since your auto responders are always being sent. Is there an auto responder where the open rate is particularly low? Chances are that the content of that auto responder isn't that important to your subscribers and you should change the content. Is there an auto responder where you unsubscribe request rate is incredibly high? If so that content needs to be changed immediately. Are there auto responders where the click-through rate is very high? If so, that type of content or promotion should be emulated or repeated in other auto responders. Auto responders are a great opportunity to take real time email data and use it to immediately improve your email marketing program.

Schedule Content Reviews

The final best practice for auto responders is to not forget to audit and update your content occasionally. As we noted earlier, because your auto responder program is always running in the background and isn't usually topical and, in fact, is such a popular marketing tool because it's low maintenance, you may forget to check in and "freshen up" content or images. What's the best way to avoid this? Take the time to actually schedule a day every six months or even once a quarter to review your current auto responder copy. Whether you use Outlook calendar reminders, project management software or a smart phone app to send you task reminders, make sure something tells you that it's time to check in on your auto responder content and make sure that it's all still accurate and compelling.

The great thing about auto responders is that, after you initially set them up, they require very little work while still offering a great return on investment. However, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't apply some basic thought and best practices to developing them. If you do, you'll have a completely optimized email marketing auto responder program that can deliver results even when you're not working!

Appendix Four (I)
10 Best Practices for Designing Your Email

This has been a long section of this book with many important points contained within it. However, you've now completed the entire section and should be proud of all of the information that you've learned and can now apply to creating and designing your email template, its content and even its landing pages. You may be looking for a short list, however. If you want a quick summary of the ten most important best practices to consider when designing and email template, then here you go!

1. Design for the Top 600 Pixels by Three Inches

Your email will most likely need to sell itself within an email preview pane no matter what email service provider it's sent to. You'll have about six hundred pixels of length across and about three inches of depth. You need to make sure that your value proposition, your call-to-action and any key information that will compel users to keep reading is in that space. Avoid heavy use of graphics that may not load when designing the email preview pane section of an email template.

2. Make Links Look Like Links

If you want the best click-through possible, you'll want to make your links not only look like links but also stand out. At a minimum, links in your email should *always* be underlined. Ideally, links will be formatted in a blue font and will also be bolded. If your style guidelines prohibit links from being bold or blue, make sure that they are underlined. Do not ever use images or buttons to denote a link or, if you do, make sure that there is a corresponding text link nearby.

3. Minimize the Use of Images

While images do have unquestionable visually compelling results, always remember that in the vast majority of your subscribers email service providers inboxes images will not load. The more you use images, the more that the vast majority of your email subscribers will see blank white space. While you certainly want to include some images for those who can see them, don't rely on images alone to sell your product or convey your message. Be sure that any information that it is critical that your subscriber know is not trapped in an image. Always use alt and title text behind images to ensure that there is still copy appearing even when your images do not load.

4. Minimize Copy and Text

Obviously, your email must contain copy and text. In fact, that's the core of any email. However, you never want to include so much text that you may risk going into a spam folder or junk folder and don't want to overwhelm users with more text than they can read. User shorter text blocks that link back to full articles or product pages on your website or to specially designed landing pages.

5. Be CAN-SPAM Complaint

While this is a best practice, it's also the law. You'll need to ensure that your physical mailing address is in the email, that users can unsubscribe from your email with either a single click or by replying to the email and that the email in some way conveys that it is an advertisement. If you're confused about CAN-SPAM, you may want to revisit the section in this book dedicated to it.

6. Make it Easy to Unsubscribe

While this may seem counter-intuitive, the risk of making it difficult for users to find a way to unsubscribe from your email is that they will instead mark your email as spam. This will impact your sender reputation and deliverability for a long time to come. Make it easy and simple for users to find a way to unsubscribe from your email so that they don't hit the always easy to find "spam" button!

7. Personalize Subject Lines and Email Content

With very few exceptions, emails will perform better when you use a personalization field such as first name or user name in the subject line and body of the email. The one exception is if your industry deals in private or personal information where your users may feel uncomfortable seeing their name or user name in the subject line or body of the email. Be sure to find an email marketing platform such as Comm100 that supports personalization features. Then use them to increase both your open rate and your click-through rate.

8. Avoid Using CSS
As "old school" as it sounds, your email template design is unlikely to translate across multiple email service providers if you code it using CSS. Many email service providers, and Gmail in particular, strip CSS from the <body> and <head> sections of your email template. If you must use CSS to code, make it inline CSS. However, using <font> and <p> tags within your email template will produce a far more consistent design and display.

9. Minimize the Use of Spam Words
As you will see in the next section of this book, it will most likely be impossible for you to completely avoid using any word that has been identified as a potential spam trigger word. However, be aware when creating copy that spam filters look for particular words and will assign your email a spam score based on them. The best thing that you can do is to use those words in moderation and write copy that avoids using them at all when possible.

10. Always Test!
While we think that it's important for you to test various email designs against each other, what we're referring to here is that you test send your emails to a smaller seed list of recipients prior to sending them to your entire list. This will ensure that you get a chance not only to make sure that your design displays appropriately across multiple email service providers but also to make sure that you're going into the inbox instead of the spam or junk folder. You can then make adjustments so that when you do you send to your main list, your email is optimized for the best results possible. Ten minutes of testing can save hours of crisis management!

Appendix Four (m)
Encouraging Existing Customers to Join Your Email List: Best Practices
As we discussed above, the most valuable customers to have on your email marketing list are existing or previous customers. What are the best ways and techniques to encourage previous or existing customers to join your email marketing list? In the quest to build your email database, previous and existing customers often present the lowest hanging fruit and the easiest opportunity. In this section, we'll cover the best practices for getting existing and previous customers registered on your email list.

Best Practice: Use an Opt In Form When Users Check Out or Register
The easiest and most streamlined place to capture your existing and previous users' email addresses and consent to opt-in to your email list is when those users purchase on your site or when they register

as a site member. In both instances, users or customers will need to provide email addresses in order to receive login information, purchase receipts or other necessary customer communications. Since they're already providing you with information and interacting with your site, it's a perfect opportunity to request that they allow you to email them with additional information and offers. This is typically done by putting a consent check box below the spot where users enter their email address. Depending on your email system, that consent check box can either automatically update your in-house database and include those users on email lists, or you can query your user database periodically and upload all contacts with a positively check consent box to your email marketing platform. If you are doing the latter process, be sure that you don't overwrite anybody who has unsubscribed from your email list. Also, if you are manually uploading opt-in emails, be sure to do it fairly regularly. The longer that you wait, the more likely it is that a subscriber will forget about you and subsequently mark you as spam when you do eventually email them.

Best Practice: Use a Negative Consent Opt-In Form
There are two types of ways to construct an opt-in check box where your customers enter their email addresses. The first is called a "positive consent form." This means that users must actively check the box in order to be on your email list, and your text next to the box should say something similar to, "Check this box in order to receive special offers and deals from us." A "negative consent form" means that the box is already checked and users must proactively uncheck it if they do *not* want to receive email from you. In this case, you text next to the email consent box should read, "Please uncheck this box if you do not wish to receive future emails from us." While a negative consent form does mean that you may experience some heightened spam complaints occasionally, almost every case study ever done has shown improved results with a negative consent form. While users are unlikely to actively check a consent box, they are equally unlikely to remember to uncheck it. To optimize your email collection of existing customers, choose to use a negative consent form.

Best Practice: Offer a Clear Value Proposition
In the case your existing or current customers, giving them a compelling reason to join your email list is no different than the same need with raw leads. Even though your existing customers may already have a relationship with your company, brand or product, that doesn't mean that they necessarily want to allow you to email them. After all, our inboxes are all very crowded these days and many people simply don't want extra "junk email." Be sure to give your customers a clear value proposition for why they should allow you to include them on your email list. This may be exclusive offers and discounts, useful information, early access to new products, monthly contests, or a host of other features that can encourage users to join an email list. The best value proposition for you may require some research and some testing. However, once you determine what it is, you'll see an increase in customers opting into your email list.

Best Practice: Assure Privacy
This best practice applies to virtually any time you solicit uses to join your email list, regardless of their previous relationship with you. Be sure to ensure users of your commitment to your privacy policy and

that you will not share, sell or rent their email. If possible, become accredited by an online trust and privacy monitoring organization such as Truste (Comm100 is Truste accredited). Information has become the currency of the internet, and users are increasingly aware that they want their private contact information to remain private. Be sure to give them that assurance whenever you are asking for an email address of any kind.

Best Practice: Solicit Customers in Operational Email Communications
When a customer registers at your site or makes a purchase, you have a golden opportunity to request that they allow you to add them to your marketing email list even if they don't opt-in to your email list at the time of registration or purchase. Almost all registrations or purchases require follow-up confirmation or receipt emails. Those emails are likely to experience a high open rate as they are highly relevant to customers. Utilize this communications opportunity to request again that customers allow you to add them to your email marketing list and provide them with a link to a confirmation page to add themselves to the list. You can also include this invitation in any and all of your customer service email templates.

Best Practice: Solicit Customers via Social Media
Many of your existing customers will have a relationship with you via one of your social media channels. Be sure to periodically solicit customers via these channels to join your email list. You'll need to emphasize the benefits and exclusive offers or content available via email when you do this since many of your social email followers may already feel as though they've given you a valid communications channel by following you on a social media network. However, it's important to you to encourage them to transition to an email list for long-term revenue and valuation goals.

Best Practice: Solicit Customers in Print Mailers
If you communicate with your customer base via print mailings, even if it's only once a year, it's a perfect time to encourage them to join your email list. Remind them that by allowing you to communicate with you via email, they save a tree and resources when you no longer need to send them print mailings!

Appendix Four (n)
Designing an Email Sign Up Box: Best Practices
For soliciting your existing customers to join your email list, most of the work can be done when they purchase or register. However, if you're advertising your email list on a search engine or other website or if you are soliciting visitors on your website or social media channel, you'll need a well-designed email sign-up box. The difference between a well done email sign-up box and a poorly designed email sign-up box can be the difference between healthy email list growth and slow and tedious email list growth. In this section, we'll cover the best practices of designing an email sign up box.

Best Practice: Use a White Box for Text Entry
It's possible that, as you are surfing the internet looking for examples of email sign-up boxes, you'll see a number of "trendy" email sign-up boxes where the field in which a user enters his or her email is shaded grey or another color that "snaps." While that color usage may draw attention to the area of the page

where the email sign-up box is located, most case studies reveal that users are more comfortable with entering text into a white box and also recognize a white text box as an area where they are supposed to enter information. If you want to use color or design to draw attention to the area of a page or landing page where users enter their email address, use best practice webpage and graphic design elements to draw a user's eye to the correct area of the page. Do not, however, use a color other than white for the actual field in which a user enters his or her email address.

Best Practice: Show a Sample Email Format
It may seem as though, in the current day and age, all users understand what format they need to enter their email in. However, this isn't actually true! Either within the text box itself or below the text box, provide users with an example of what their entered email address should look like. For example:
Enter your email address above (ie: yourname@email.com)

Best Practice: Make the Submit Button Large, Clear and Near the Field
The most important part of your email sign-up box or form is the submit button. Not only does it need to be clear and easy to spot, it needs to actively encourage users to click it. Consider the use of graphic arrows and even animation surrounding your submit button. Color is one of the most important elements of any action button on a website, and your email sign-up box is no exception. If you have a standard website color palette in which a certain color is consistently used to indicate that a user should take an action by clicking a button, use that color. Otherwise, select bright, attractive, action-oriented colors. In some case studies, red has been shown to be particularly effective in a submission button. Finally, make sure that your submit button is big, easy to spot, and near enough to the text field where users enter their email address that there is a clear mental relationship between the button and the text field. While experimenting and testing various elements of your email sign-up box is important as a whole, you may want to take extra time and resources to test the color, text, positioning and placement of your submit button early on in your email collection process.

Best Practice: What Should Your Submit Button Say
Keep the text on your email submission button short, clear, and friendly while also telling users exactly what you want them to do. Popular and effective phrases include:

- Join Now
- Join Free
- Begin Receiving Offers Now
- Submit Your Email
- Register

Best Practice: Keep Everything Above the Fold
Not unlike any web design best practice, if you want to experience the best optimization from your email sign-up box, make sure that all elements of it are above the fold. This is true if your email sign-up is a module on your website or if you have made an entire landing page dedicated to capturing emails. The

value proposition, email entry field, privacy assurance and, most importantly, the submit button, should all be placed well above the fold in a standard web browser layout. The most effective online marketing solicitations always happen above the fold!

Best Practice: Assure Privacy
This best practice applies to virtually any time you solicit uses to join your email list, regardless of their previous relationship with you. Be sure to ensure users of your commitment to your privacy policy and that you will not share, sell or rent their email. If possible, become accredited by an online trust and privacy monitoring organization such as Truste (Comm100 is Truste accredited). Information has become the currency of the internet, and users are increasingly aware that they want their private contact information to remain private. Be sure to give them that assurance whenever you are asking for an email address of any kind.

Best Practice: Offer a Clear Value Proposition
Users who do not have a previous relationship with your company will need a strong incentive to actively join your email list. After all, our inboxes are all very crowded these days and many people simply don't want extra "junk email." Be sure to give potential subscribers a clear value proposition for why they should allow you to include them on your email list. This may be exclusive offers and discounts, useful information, early access to new products, monthly contests, or a host of other features that can encourage users to join an email list. The best value proposition for you may require some research and some testing. However, once you determine what it is, you'll see an increase in individuals joining your email list.

Best Practice: Don't Ask for Too Much Information
We've mentioned several times that the more information that you have on your email subscribers, the more you can segment your email list and the more effective it will be in returning results. However, the moment when a user joins your email list is not the right time to ask them for a great deal of information. You want to make joining your email list as painless as possible. The more information that you ask subscribers for, the more likely they are to abandon the process of subscribing to your email product. Keep the information required to join at a minimum. If it's possible, only ask for their email address. It's often also fine to ask only for an email address and a first name. If you want to collect additional information after that, you can do so in a follow up or on a second screen after you have captured their email information. Adding a name to the database without detailed information is better than not adding a name to the database at all because your potential subscriber became overwhelmed with the length or size of your email sign-up form. Keep the information requests to a minimum when initially capturing an email address for your database.

Best Practice: Check for Email Format or Duplicate Emails
If it is possible for you to do so technologically, check for proper email format or duplicate copies of the email in your database at the time of email submission. Checking for email format will ensure that, if you require a double opt-in, your new subscriber actually receives your confirmation email. If you do not

require a double opt-in, it ensures that your potential subscriber double checks his or her email and then enters the correct one. This not only means that you are more likely to actually contact your subscriber via email, it also means that you will be sending out fewer bad or "bounced" email addresses. Every time you send to a bad email address, you risk your email sender reputation.

Checking for duplicate emails in the system helps to control instances where a user may previously have marked you as spam and inadvertently joins again, only to mark you as spam again.

The more that you can check and confirm email address quality at the time of sign-up, the healthier and better your email list will be.

Best Practice: Display a Confirmation Page
Regardless of whether you are using a single opt-in or double opt-in email sign-up form, after your new subscriber has entered his or her email address, be sure to display a confirmation screen confirming that you have received the subscription request. Otherwise, your new subscriber may continue to click the "submit" button, generating site errors for you. If you are using a double opt-in sign-up system, use the confirmation screen to remind your new subscriber that he or she needs to check his or her inbox (including the spam folder!) for the confirmation email and should add your email address to his or her contact or address list. A confirmation screen is also an ideal opportunity to present users with other actions to take, such as purchasing opportunities or social media links. Don't waste any opportunity to interact with your new subscriber, and that includes the confirmation page!

Best Practice: Use Landing Page Best Practices
Finally, whether you are developing a landing page that is entirely devoted to email capture or whether you are incorporating an email capture box onto a webpage that includes other content, be sure to use all best practices of web design and landing page design (covered extensively earlier in this book). No matter how compelling your email offers are, if you use poor landing page or web design, you won't be able to convince users to sign-up for it.

Creating a compelling email sign-up box may seem overwhelming, but if you simply follow the above listed best practices, you'll be able to create a high converting email sign-up box. Of course, always remember that all marketing modules, including email sign-up modules, should be tested with various looks, designs, copy and positioning in order to find the best performing solution.

Comm100

About Comm100

Comm100 is the leader in customer service and customer communication software. Comm100 focuses on developing and managing fully integrated customer communication solutions to enable businesses to communicate with their customers more effectively through multiple channels, including live chat, ticket, email marketing, forum, knowledge base and help desk. As business grows fast, Comm100 has built a large customer base around the globe.

About Comm100 Email Marketing

Comm100 Email Marketing is the powerful email marketing software that's entirely hosted by Comm100. Comm100 Email Marketing helps you develop and maintain good relationships with your customers and increase your sales revenue at a very low cost.

With Comm100 Email Marketing, you can get:

- ➢ High Inbox Delivery
- ➢ Easy Email Creation
- ➢ Robust List Management
- ➢ Insightful Report & Analysis
- ➢ Intelligent Autoresponder
- ➢ Free Fully Featured API
- ➢ Guaranteed Privacy & Security
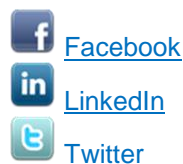- ➢ Personal Coaching & Support

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