

Opt-in-email Marketing

Opt-in email is a term used when someone is given the option to receive email. Typically, this is some sort of mailing list, newsletter, or advertising. Without obtaining permission before sending email, the email is unsolicited bulk email, better known as spam.

Opt-in email marketing is the process of inviting website visitors to sign up for your email list, often using a lead magnet or other incentive to convince them. The key here is that the people who populate your email database actually want to hear from you.

When a prospects opts in to your email list, he or she gives you permission to send marketing emails.

What is an opt-in email list?

An opt-in email list is a collection of email lists with information that your subscribers have willingly given to you. This means they are aware that you are adding them to your list and agree to receive mass emails, newsletters, or other forms of digital communication from you.

With laws concerning the collection and use of personal data continually changing, it is now wiser to employ a double opt-in when growing your email list. A double opt-in simply means a new subscriber will receive a confirmation email where they will click a link to confirm that they genuinely want to be added to your list.

This method also has an added benefit in that it ensures your list is only built up of people who really want to engage with your emails. In order for subscribers to sign up to receive emails from you, they have to fill in a subscription form, usually online.

Reasons why you should take opt-in seriously

1. To comply with regulations

One of the main reasons you should be serious about an opt-in email list is that there are laws that govern the sending of emails. These are mostly meant to deter unsolicited communication. Two of the most common regulations are the CAN-SPAM Act in the United States and the GDPR laws in the European Union.

2. Avoid tarnishing your brand image

People want to be in control of their inboxes. For most, that means being able to regulate the type of emails they receive. Sending emails to subscribers that have not opted in for your correspondence is a fast way to get yourself reported for spamming. That, in turn, will lead to your Sender Score and deliverability being affected.

3. Grow an engaged list

By choosing to build an opt-in email list, you ensure that a greater number of your subscribers are interested in what you have to offer. This results in you having a highly-engaged (and profitable) list. This is one of the main reasons you should stay away from unethical practices such as renting or buying lists, as they rarely engage.

Double Opt In

Even if you didn't know what it was called, you've likely witnessed double opt-in email marketing in action. You visit a website and join the company's email list. You then receive an email (or other message, such as a text message) that contains a link.

If you want to join the list, you have to click the link. Otherwise, you won't hear from the company. This is called double opt-in. It's a way of protecting the integrity of your email list.

People sometimes make mistakes. They type in the wrong email address — which very well might belong to another person — or change their mind after opting in. A double opt-in gives them the chance to realize they didn't enter the right email address or to decide against joining the list.

Difference between Double Opt In and Single Opt In

There's nothing inherently wrong with a single opt-in strategy. As long as you confirm on the lead capture form that the user wants to receive marketing messages from you, you've covered your bases.

It also depends on what types of correspondence you'll send the subscriber. If you use your email list primarily to send coupons and other offers, I'd advise you to try double opt-in. You don't want to get tossed in the promotional or spam folders in your subscribers' email clients.

For newsletters and other non-salesy emails, a single opt-in strategy should suffice. As long as you're using some form of opt-in email marketing, you're protecting your prospects and keeping your email list clean.

Forms of opt-in email

1. Unconfirmed opt-in / Single opt-in

Someone first gives an email address to the list software (for instance, on a Web page), but no steps are taken to make sure that this address belongs to the person submitting it. This can cause email from the mailing list to be considered spam because simple typos of the email address can cause the email to be sent to someone else. Malicious subscriptions are also possible, as are subscriptions that are due to spammers forging email addresses that are sent to the email address used to subscribe to the mailing list.

2. Confirmed opt-in (COI) / Double opt-in (DOI)

A new subscriber asks to be subscribed to the mailing list, but unlike unconfirmed or single opt-in, a confirmation email is sent to verify it was really them. Generally, unless the explicit step is taken to verify the end-subscriber's e-mail address, such as clicking a special web link or sending back a reply email, it is difficult to establish that the e-mail address in question indeed belongs to the person who submitted the request to receive the e-mail. Using a confirmed opt-in (COI) (also known as a Double opt-in) procedure helps to ensure that a third party is not able to subscribe someone else accidentally, or out of malice, since if no action is taken on the part of the e-mail recipient, they will simply no longer receive any messages from the list operator. Mail system administrators and non-spam mailing list operators refer to this as confirmed subscription or closed-loop opt-in. Some marketers call closed-loop opt-in "double opt-in". This term was coined by marketers in the late 90s to differentiate it from what they call "single opt-in", where a new subscriber to an email list gets a confirmation email telling them they will begin to receive emails if they take no action. Some marketers contend that "double opt-in" is like asking for

permission twice and that it constitutes unnecessary interference with someone who has already said they want to hear from the marketer. However, it does drastically reduce the likelihood of someone being signed up to an email list by another person.

3. Opt-out

Instead of giving people the option to be put in the list, they are automatically put in and then have the option to request to be taken out. This approach is illegal in the European Union and many other jurisdictions.

4. Address Authentication

Email address authentication is a technique for validating that a person claiming to possess a particular email address actually does so. This is normally done by sending an email containing a token to the address, and requiring that the party being authenticated supply that token before the authentication proceeds. The email containing the token is usually worded so as to explain the situation to the recipient and discourage them from supplying the token (often via visiting a URL) unless they in fact were attempting to authenticate.

Practices to Create Effective Email Opt In Forms

1. Do Not Ask For Too Much Information on Your Email Opt-In Form

Email opt-in forms should be short and sweet. If you ask for too much information, you'll scare off people who don't have the time or energy to fill it out or who worry about their privacy.

A top bar with a single field can work extremely well. Since users only need to input their email addresses, you've already overcome plenty of objections.

Some marketers like to ask for subscribers' first names, too. It makes it easier to personalize emails in the future. However, if you don't need it, don't ask for it.

2. Give Your Visitors a Great Reason To Opt In To Your List – Use a Lead Magnet

Lead magnets are among my favorite strategies for collecting more email subscribers. They incentivize opt-ins by providing added value.

You might have noticed on the Neil Patel exit popup above that he offers a free cheat sheet. It's super simple to create, but it also has an excellent impact on opt-ins. Neil's conversion rate averages more than 7 percent, which is much higher than average.

Your lead magnet might look different. You could offer a toolkit, template, checklist, video, or anything else you think your audience would like. Make sure to communicate value on your opt-in form.

Ideally, the lead magnet should answer one question: "What's in it for me?"

3. Make Your Opt-In Form Visible to Your Website Visitors

You can put email opt-in forms wherever you want on your website, but some locations tend to work better than others. You want as many people to see these forms as possible.

Sidebars are popular spots, but they don't always perform as well as other locations. I've already recommended top bars, which are always visible to your visitors, but exit popup can work well, too.

The page takeover Hello Bar appears when a visitor attempts to exit the browser. If it's eye-catching and offers significant value, visitors will want to stay on the page.

Using Hello Bar, A/B test different types of forms and various locations. The more data you collect, the better, because you don't want to squander opt-in email marketing opportunities.

4. Use An Actual Opt-In Form – Avoid Using a Link To Your Opt In Page

There's nothing wrong with building an opt-in page on your website. In fact, I encourage it, especially if you can optimize it for SEO and generate organic traffic.

However, it's not the best strategy when you want to direct people to sign up for your email list. When you insert a link to your opt-in page, you create an extra step in the process. They have to click the link, fill in the form, and click the CTA button.

That's a lot of work. Instead, use top bars, sliders, and similar tools to present your form to visitors. You can also include a form in your navigation bar, header, or sidebar if you wish.

5. Tell Your Visitors What To Expect From Your Emails

Adding just a couple lines of copy to your email opt-in form can make a huge difference. Set subscriber expectations from the beginning so you don't irritate or confuse anyone.

Here, I've set two expectations:

What: Advice from marketing experts

When: Once per week

By setting those expectations, I've reassured potential subscribers that I won't spam them every day and that they'll always receive something of value.

6. Be Creative With What You Write on Your “Subscribe” Button – People Do Not Like Boring Buttons

There are limitless call-to-action phrases you might use on your CTA buttons. Limiting yourself to the boring word “subscribe” can reduce conversion rates.

Furthermore, using your CTA to reflect your headline can help increase conversions. People like symmetry — it's comforting and familiar.

I've made just a small tweak to this page takeover. Instead of using the word “Subscribe” as my call to action, I've changed it to “Download the Book!” It's not only more exciting and original, but it also recalls the headline and the promise I made in it.

Psychologically, this strategy focuses the prospect on what he or she will get rather than on what he or she has to do to get it.

7. Use Social Proof to Your Advantage – Show How Many People Are Already Subscribed to Your Email List

We're not done tweaking this fictional exit intent popup. We can make it even better with social proof.

I plucked a random number out of the sky, but you should use your actual subscriber count. When people see they're not alone, they'll feel more comfortable subscribing to your list.

Other forms of social proof can work well, too. Let's say I've just started an e-commerce email marketing campaign, so I don't have many subscribers yet. Maybe I'll use a (fictional) quote from my business partner.

I'm using a customer testimonial as social proof. If this was for a marketing business, a quote from Neil would also serve as expert testimony, which is often even more powerful.

8. Use a Privacy Statement – However, Do Not use the Word “Spam” in It

Privacy statements put your subscribers at ease and let them know how you use their information. If possible, though, avoid mentioning the word “spam.”

It's sort of like reverse psychology. Even if you're reassuring your subscribers that you “won't spam” them, they read the word and their pulse quickens. They wonder why you're mentioning spam at all — maybe you actually *are* a spammer and you're trying to throw them off your scent!

Words matter, especially in marketing. Choose them carefully. Link to your privacy statement when you create your opt-in form, and make sure to word the entire statement in a positive way.

9. Use Your Creativity and Call Your “Newsletter” Something More Interesting

The word “newsletter” makes me think of those long, boring letters people used to send to family members during the holidays. Who knows? Maybe they still do.

You can get more creative than that. Come up with a name for your newsletter that makes people laugh or reveals a hint of your personality.

For instance, let's say you own a tattoo parlor or sell tattoo-related equipment. You could call your newsletter The Weekly Ink. It's a play on the word “ink,” which is used for writing as well as for tattoos.