



EMAIL MARKETING: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

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Introduction

Email broadcasting is very much cheaper than postal direct marketing. However, the rules governing email marketing can seem rather harsh compared with using the normal postal system.

The thing to bear in mind at all times is that **if an Internet Service Provider (e.g. hotmail, aol, btinternet.com) decides that bulk emails coming from particular servers constitute spam, they will put a block on their clients receiving email from those servers.** This then not only stops your email broadcasts getting through to those ISPs but also any other business's broadcasts from the same servers. Getting such a block removed is time-consuming and difficult.

That can't happen with posted mail, but is a very real concern for email broadcasters.

So what is spam? In essence spam is any email you send to someone who hasn't given you their direct permission to contact them on the topic of the email. While that definition is wider than current CAN-SPAM laws specify, it nonetheless covers the typical situation whereby people may mark your email as spam when they see it in their in-boxes – they marked it as spam because the email contact was totally unsolicited. That spam marking is noted by the ISP and if a significant number people mark an email as spam, the ISP will block the server that sent it.

So in order to send an email broadcast, you need the permission of the recipients for you to make that contact with them. By far the most important aspect of email marketing is this concept of permission. It's the only thing separating you and your clients from the spammers of this world.

There is one exception within the UK (but not always in other countries) and that is business addresses only. To use personal (consumer) email addresses you still need prior permission.

Why email broadcasters are very concerned about where your list came from.

Spam defined.

Permissions.



Permission

So what type of permission must you have for personal email addresses?

Permission can be obtained from potential recipients of your emails in any of the following ways:

- They opted in via your web site.
- They completed a newsletter subscribe form or ticked a checkbox on another form. This checkbox cannot be checked by default and it must clearly explain that checking it will mean you will be contacting them by email.
- They completed an offline form, say on some marketing material, and indicated they wanted to be emailed. If someone completes an offline form like a survey or enters a competition, you can only contact them if it was explained to them that they would be contacted by email AND they ticked a box indicating they would like to be contacted.
- They purchased something off you in the last 2 years.
By making a purchase from you they have provided their permission implicitly. Feel free to email them but it's always better to ask anyway, so why not include an opt-in checkbox as part of the checkout process?

What does NOT constitute permission?

- You obtained personal email addresses from a third party.
- You purchased a personal email address list, were provided with one by a partner or bought a bankrupt competitor's customer list. Those people never gave YOU permission to email them and they will consider your email spam.
- You scraped or "copy and pasted" the addresses from the Internet

We follow the Best Practice guidelines of the Direct Marketing Association.



One thing to remember is that people forget. They forget they gave you permission. They forget they agreed that a company could pass their details to a third party. The longer the time that passes without email contact, the more likely they are to forget what permissions they once gave. It may seem hard, but the recipients' judgements (even if wrong) are paramount on this as they are in control of marking your email as spam – and if a lot of people do that, your emails could get blocked even to people who do want to hear from you.

Best Practice

So what should you do?

- Build your customer database from your website and marketing material by clearly asking people to opt in to receiving email contact from you.
- If you obtain a list from a third party, make sure it is a business address list only.
- Before obtaining a consumer list from a third party who say that the listed people agreed for their addresses to be passed on to other businesses, request that the list supplier will allow you to email under their company banner (as they have the original permission) with words to the effect of 'You asked us to keep you informed of other companies' products and services that we thought you might like to know about and so here is information on...[your content]'

We are always happy to advise you about your lists. Sometimes there may seem hurdles in the way of what you want to achieve, but it is our job to help you over them.

We are very experienced in building creative html emails for broadcasts and can also build templates that you can then edit online to your needs. We can do everything for you, or pass varying levels of control back to you. It's your choice.

We are fully conversant with the special requirements of html email coding so that the many different email software packages render your email as you intended. We test against the major types before broadcast and also test against the most common spam filters.