



THE MARKETER'S GUIDE TO EMAIL VALIDATION & HYGIENE

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THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF GOOD EMAIL HYGIENE

Whether you realize it or not, there's a price tag attached to every email address in your database. How well you manage the quality of those addresses can mean the difference between:

- A profit or a loss on your email marketing efforts;
- A Rolodex of satisfied customers or a costly lawsuit; and
- A lucrative holiday season or missed sales goals and irate executives

How focused is your company on email address quality? If the answer is "not very", you could be costing your organization a boatload in lost profits. Check out the example from a webinar we spoke at recently.

Sample Calculation

If weekly mailings to 1 million names yield \$100k revenue every week,
over one year...

Unmanaged:

\$5,200,000 revenue
\$3,052,000 costs
= \$1.70 revenue generated per dollar spent

Managed (focus on address quality)

\$6,568,000 revenue
\$2,289,000 costs
= \$2.87 revenue generated per dollar spent

65%+ Increase!

Assumptions:

\$1 cpm to mail

\$3 each for acquisition

25% of acquired is bad/problematic. If cleaned up, inbox placement increases from 76% (industry std.) to 96%.



TOGETHER STRONGER

That's a 65% improvement in revenue generated per dollar spent on email marketing **JUST** by focusing on email addresses quality. How is this possible? Emailing undeliverable, unengaged, and problematic addresses costs your company money. **Let's take a look at how:**

The Cost of Poor Email Address Quality

1.) Negative Impact on Delivery

Just because an address is deliverable doesn't mean you should send to it. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) use both negative and positive metrics to evaluate inbox placement. As a result, deliverable but unengaged addresses hinder your access to the inbox. As engagement drops, so does your ability to avoid the junk folder.

2.) Unnecessary Spending

There's a cost associated with every email on your list:

- Your ESP likely bills you based on the size of your list or the number of emails you send; and
- Your acquisition sources charge you on a per email basis.

Why burn money acquiring and sending to dormant contacts that will never engage with your company? It just doesn't make good fiscal sense. Without the proper hygiene protocols in place, this is exactly what you'll be doing.

3.) Low Customer Satisfaction

If you can't reach the inbox, you can't reach customers with the information they need. Things like promotions, order confirmations, and billing statements don't reach their intended target. This makes customers angry and what happens next is never good.

- They get annoyed and complain via social media.
- They contact your call center at a potential cost of multiple dollars per inquiry.
- In the worst case, they just up and leave you for a competitor.

4.) Data Breach Liability

There's a liability associated with every email address in your house file if a breach occurs. Carrying old, unresponsive email addresses creates an unnecessary risk. Minimize your exposure by purging dormant addresses from your database.

5.) WORST CASE SCENARIO – You Get Blocked or Blacklisted

Even the most cautious companies can run into big trouble when it comes to email address quality. We recently spoke with representatives from a leading brand that thought they had all their bases covered. Unfortunately, they didn't conduct any regular hygiene on their database. This resulted in a deliverability nightmare that forced the company to miss critical seasonal sales goals and took 90 days to clear up and return deliverability to its previous levels.

Protect Your Organization or Suffer the Consequences

When it comes to email list management and data hygiene, marketers have an obligation to protect their customers and themselves from unnecessary risk. The goal here is to make it impossible for your company to make a mistake. This can only be achieved by implementing a bullet-proof email hygiene strategy.

WHAT DOES CLEAN REALLY MEAN?

You might think your email list is clean if your last email campaign didn't generate any hard bounces. Well, that's a start. But a "clean" email list is more than one that has correctly formatted addresses, and "cleaning a list" involves much more than just removing undeliverable addresses.

Email List Hygiene Fallacy: 'My ESP Cleans My List for Me'

You might think, for example, that your email service provider or IT staff cleans your list every time you send because they remove hard-bouncing addresses. But that's like vacuuming a rug and calling it clean. You've removed obvious problems but haven't tackled underlying problems that reduce your email database's effectiveness.

A good rug shampoo attacks allergens and stains hidden deep in the fibers. In the same way, true email list hygiene goes deep into your database to make sure it continues to deliver maximum value for your email-marketing program. There are 2 major problems associated with letting your ESP handle your hygiene:

1. They don't tackle the bigger problem of junk addresses (deliverable but problematic).
2. They sometimes remove too many addresses because they lack sophisticated tools that can distinguish between different types of problems. If, say, you run into a blocking problem with Gmail, it doesn't necessarily mean that every Gmail address on your list is bad. Even so, your ESP might remove all of them anyway.

The Basics of Email Deliverability

Seems so simple but worth repeating: An email address has four necessary working parts:

- The user or mailbox name: johnsmith
- The @ symbol
- The email server name: gmail
- The top level domain: .com

Put all four those together to get a structurally valid email address: johnsmith@gmail.com. An email address missing any of those parts, even the period between the email server name and the TLD, is structurally invalid and undeliverable. Each part also must be spelled correctly.

TIP: Setting up email validation on your web forms catches and corrects incorrectly formatted email addresses before they hit your database.

Where the going Gets Rough...

Now, here's where email list hygiene gets more complicated: Even if the address is structurally valid and therefore appears to be deliverable, that doesn't guarantee your email will reach the inbox of a person who really wants to receive your messages. True email list hygiene also looks at the quality of your email addresses.

PROBLEMATIC EMAIL ADDRESSES

4 Types of Addresses that Wreak Havoc on Your Email List

True email list hygiene looks at the quality of each email address in your database. This runs a lot deeper than some marketers realize. Here are four types of email addresses that can create problems.

1.) Invalid Addresses: You need to ensure that every address in your database is formatted correctly, corresponds to a valid domain name that accepts email and corresponds to an actual working email address.

2.) Deliverable but Wrong Addresses: These addresses are deliverable but don't belong to your intended recipients, often because of keystroke errors. Suppose someone like a phone rep, cashier, convention registrar or some other third party typed "johnsmith@XYZ.com" instead of "johnsmits@XYZ.com."

Both might be deliverable, but John Smith and John Smits are different people, and one of them isn't your intended recipient. Even keystroke errors such as mis-typed domain names can create valid addresses. Gmial.com, for example, is a working (but NSFW!) domain.

3.) Deliverable but Problematic Addresses: You probably pay your ESP based on the number of addresses on your list. Sending to junk addresses wastes money, kills your metrics and drags down the effectiveness of your email campaigns and your entire marketing program. Many deliverable addresses are still problematic because they belong to "role" accounts or because they're disposable.

- **Role accounts** belong to functions instead of individual people: “info@,” “help@,” or “support@.” People can use them to sign up for email, but they generally aren’t personal accounts. Others might access the inbox associated with that role email and complain. Or, the subscriber leaves the company without unsubscribing. Your messages fall on deaf ears.
- **Disposable addresses** self-destruct shortly after use. People use these one-time-only addresses when they want something from you – a freebie, download, contest entry, whitepaper, etc. – but don’t want your email messages. Once they get what they want, the address vanishes on their end and turns into a hard bounce (permanently undeliverable) or spamtrap address in your database. You also lose your chance to continue marketing to that person, which is why you offered the incentive in the first place, right?

4.) Deliverable but potentially dangerous addresses: These are little time bombs scattered throughout your database, which you can inherit when you fire up old lists, rent or buy lists from sketchy sources, or have un-validated data. Sending email to valid but unsubscribed addresses is another potential deliverability-killer, too.

Some of these can be spam traps designed to snare spammers. Mailing to them will make you look like a spammer and damage your ability to reach inboxes in the long run.

HOW TO AVOID BAD EMAIL ADDRESSES

Here are 10 ways to reduce the chances that you’ll unwittingly allow invalid or problematic addresses onto your list:

DON'T LET ERRORS GET INTO YOUR LIST

- 1.) Validate at opt-in:** Blocking incorrectly formatted or mistyped addresses at point of entry is a start. However, a service like SafeToSend® also works to block problematic addresses, too, using a “Check – Correct – Protect” protocol.
- 2.) Reduce typos.** Optimizing your forms for mobile users helps reduce “fat finger syndrome” that often leads to typos. Show the entire data field, too, so that users don’t have to scroll left or right to see that they entered all characters correctly.
- 3.) Confirm your registrations:** Present all new registrants with a confirmation page, which lets them review what they have typed and correct any mistakes made.
- 4.) Implement a double opt-in process:** Require visitors to check their email and click through on a custom link to confirm that your email was successfully delivered to them.

Note: Double opt-in may cause a significant drop off in your registrations and annoy some prospects, but it will ensure that only valid email addresses are introduced into your list. Decide if this trade-off makes sense for you.

5.) Examine your off-line data entry procedures: Review the other ways that email addresses get into your database. Provide your data entry staff with a list of common top-level domains (.com, .net, etc.), domains (hotmail, yahoo, etc.) and standard email address formatting rules. If you do any significant off-line data entry, investigate implementing aggressive validation on these addresses at the time of entry.

6.) Think quality over quantity: Incentives have their place in your marketing program, but they can lead people to use phony or disposable addresses in order to grab a juicy freebie. Focus on building long-term value instead of quick payoffs in order to persuade people to use their genuine addresses.

7.) Sent value to their email address – Rather than directing registrants to download page for a whitepaper or other piece of content, send it directly to their registered email address. This will help ensure that they are giving you a valid address.

IF ERRORS SNEAK IN, CATCH THEM ASAP

8.) Send a confirmation message: Immediately email a welcome message to each newly registered email address. If there is a bounce, quickly implement an email address recovery attempt. The longer you wait, the greater the chance your customers will forget why they gave you their email addresses in the first place.

9.) Utilize a list hygiene and correction service: List hygiene services can identify and correct a majority of the invalid email addresses that result from domain errors, formatting problems, misspellings, and typos. Again, the longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to reconnect with your customers and engage their interest.

UPDATE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS LISTS

10.) Provide email address update links on your site: Make it easy for your customers to update their email addresses for you whenever they are interacting with your website. Put email address update links in your email communications. Enable your customers to update their email addresses with a simple click-through. Many companies require their readers to unsubscribe and then re-subscribe. This is too cumbersome for the visitor and often results in the loss of valuable historical data.

KEEP THE DECAY AT BAY!

You just cleaned your list. Time for lunch! When you get back an hour later, whoops!

- A thousand people just gave you disposable or bogus emails to grab your free download. A thousand inboxes just hit maximum volume and don't accept messages any longer. Time to start all over again.
- A portion of your list decays every day. Upwards of 30% of your list can go back in a year. Some deliverability experts say it's even higher than that depending on how you manage your email program.

Regular and thorough email list hygiene like the methods we described above will keep you ahead of the decay. It's like washing your car. No matter how shiny-clean and sparkling your car is when you leave the car wash, it's going to get dirty again soon. Schedule regular washes to keep it looking like new.

ABOUT FRESHADDRESS:

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