

Tips to Bounce-Proof Your Email List

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Keeping your email lists fresh is critical to the success of your online marketing and fundraising efforts. In the early days of the Internet, with customers signing up in droves to hear your latest e-news, there was no need to worry about email address attrition rates or errors during registration.

Unfortunately, those days are over! Due to error-ridden databases, privacy concerns, excess spam, and the high turnover of email addresses, many organizations are now finding they are losing email addresses faster than they can gain them. Customer retention has reemerged as the key to profits.

Here is what you can do to bounce-proof your email lists and increase your customer retention rate:

DON'T LET ERRORS GET INTO YOUR LIST

Have your members enter their email addresses twice during registration

This will reduce typos and help your donors recognize how important an accurate email address is to you.

Validate email addresses at the point of registration

Examine your current methods for validating email addresses at the point of registration. Does your software check to ensure that the email address being typed in to your website is valid? Consider upgrading your software or using a real time validation service so you can catch your prospects when they want you most.

Confirm your registrations

Present all new registrants with a confirmation page, which lets them review what they have typed and correct any mistakes made.

Implement a double opt-in process

Many organizations are requiring all new registrations to check their email and click through on a custom link to confirm that your

email was successfully delivered to them. While this is the best way to validate an email address, it often results in a significant drop off in registrations, sometimes more than 50%.

Decide if this trade-off makes sense for you.

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.

IF ERRORS SNEAK IN, CATCH THEM ASAP

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 donors will forget why they gave you their email addresses in the first place. This is also the time to make a good first impression by thanking your donor for their interest and perhaps making a pitch for one or two of your favorite programs.

Utilize a list hygiene and correction service on a regular basis

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 donors and engage their interest.

EVEN GOOD ADDRESSES GO BAD - PLAN FOR DONOR RECOVERY

Face the facts

People change their email addresses daily. 30% or more of your email addresses are going to need updating each year.

Determine how much a working email address is worth to you

Properly analyze the results of all of your online efforts. Be sure to separately analyze the value of a new donor versus a recovered donor. Loyal, repeat donors are the stable of every successful organization. Don't focus your efforts solely on new donor acquisition.

Put someone in charge of donor recovery

Many organizations lose sight of the basics. Donor retention may be less sexy, but it will likely yield you a higher ROI. Make sure you have identified the resources, budget, and priority for your donor retention efforts.

Plan your email address acquisition methods to assist with later recovery

Consider collecting a name, an alternate email address, a postal address, or a phone number.

UPDATE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS LISTS

Provide email address update links on your site

Make it easy for your donors 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 donors 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.

Utilize an ECOA (email change of address) service

ECOA companies provide you with current email addresses for your "dead" addresses. Moreover, they will update your list with your donors' preferred email addresses, solving the problem of infrequently checked email accounts. Top ECOA providers can update 10% to 15% of your bounce list on your first run and double these results over the course of a year.

Utilize an email appending service

A reputable email append service can help you find guaranteed deliverable email addresses for up to 20% of your customer list. Sophisticated nonprofits already know this is the best way to jumpstart your email marketing efforts.

Develop a donor recovery plan and follow it

Determine how much time you can let pass before your donors or prospects will forget why they came to you in the first place? How frequently are you planning to do your database updating? What is the most cost-effective process for recovering a donor? Review the costs and benefits of your options and decide what is best for you.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ROI!

The payoffs for bounce-proofing your email list are substantial: lower donor acquisition costs, increased response rates and donations, reduced messaging and support costs, and the decreased likelihood of winding up on some system administrator's blacklist due to high bounce-back rates. Follow the basic suggestions above and you will maximize the return on your marketing investments. Isn't today a good time to start?



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fundraising costs and maximize the participation of their members. For more information on how we can help "Build and Update" your email list, visit www.freshaddress.com/nonprofit or email inquiry@freshaddress.com.