



**LYRIS™**

**Deliverability Debunked:  
A Do's and Don'ts Guide**

**Marketing Guide**

According to the latest studies, an estimated 20 percent of all emails sent in North America never reach the inbox of intended receivers. As such, the deliverability of email messages is a prime concern for all email marketers. The hours and resources you spend crafting relevant communications become a wasted opportunity if your message is never delivered to your customer's inbox.

As email has evolved, deliverability has evolved as well. Managing deliverability in 2011 can challenge even the most experienced marketer or well-established brand. Government regulations, inconsistent Internet Service Provider (ISP) policies, emerging technologies, and changes in user behavior all add to the complexity of deliverability.

**Deliverability Debunked:** This report provides email marketers a clean approach to deliverability. We'll not only give you a clear definition of deliverability and the laws that govern it, but we'll also work to debunk several of the most common myths that may be hindering your process. Lastly, you will learn from best practice examples that can easily integrate into your marketing mix to effectively increase both your positive sender reputation and delivery rate.

## The Law: What is CAN-SPAM?

There are specific laws written to regulate both sending email and controlling unsolicited email. Here in the United States, we have the CAN-SPAM law. The CAN-SPAM Act was signed into law in December of 2003 and applies to all commercial, non-transactional based messages sent within the United States.

Despite the requirements of CAN-SPAM, the United States is still one of the most lenient countries when it comes to regulating email. The law does not specifically require an email sender to gain permission before sending email. Compared to other countries, the U.S. email industry relies very heavily on voluntary adherence to best practices, and the legal requirements are pretty relaxed. However, the laws that we do have are very clear.

## Unsubscribe Compliance:

This simply means that a visible and operable unsubscribe mechanism, such as a link, must be present in all email messages, and subsequently, all unsubscribe requests must be honored within 10 days.

## Content Compliance:

This includes accurate "from" and "friendly from" lines, and subject lines that are relative to the content of the email and are not deceptive. Each email message also has to have a legitimate physical address for the publisher and/or advertiser.

## Sending Behavior Compliance:

This means not using open relays. An open relay is a server that is not properly secure and which allows third parties to send email. Additionally, email senders can't harvest email addresses that are taken from online postings, from content on websites, or through other means that bypass opt-in rules.



There are also specific laws at the state level within the United States. Additionally, if you send email outside of the United States, you'll need to make yourself aware of any international legislation that exists.

Here is a great example of a CAN-SPAM compliant email from PC Mall. The "from" email is a clear "deals and news from PC Mall" and the friendly from is simply PC Mall. The subject line "Double Take Deals While on the Go" clearly sets up the offer of portable tablets. And lastly there's a visible, easy to find unsubscribe link.

**Relevant subject line**  
**Friendly from line**

**Double Take Deals: Stay Connected While on the Go**  
PC Mall (deals@news.pcmall.com)  
Sent: Fri 7/15/2011 3:05 PM  
To: Alison Landis

**Visible unsubscribe link**

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### Deliverability Definitions

#### Deliverability or Delivery Rate:

We define this as the overall number of email messages that are accepted by the recipient server and can be attributed to a specific campaign or sender. The most common method of calculating your delivery rate is by looking at the percent of messages delivered (not bounced) relative to the total number sent. This metric is an important one to watch for indications of a decline or improvement in the delivery of email messages.

#### Unsubscribe Rate:

This is the percentage of email recipients who unsubscribed from a specific list either via a link or an email response. Many factors affect this rate, such as age of list, list quality, content, etc. It is important to watch your unsubscribe rates to identify spikes.

#### Inbox Penetration:

Inbox Penetration is the measure or percentage of delivery to the inbox versus bulk or junk folders. This is something to monitor closely as it has a large impact on your clicks and opens and ultimately ROI.

#### Content Filtering:

Filters act on the information contained in the email body (like an attachment) or on email headers (such as specific words in the subject line) to either accept or reject an email message. Companies or other organizations commonly use content filtering as a way to prevent spam from being delivered to the inbox of a recipient. For example, some causes could be if an attachment is too large or because of certain word filtering.

#### Authentication:

This is a method by which the recipient of an email message (both the ISP and

the individual) validates the identity of the sender. This differs from content filtering in that it is an automated process and is essentially a failsafe to determine if the sender is reputable or not. If the identity of the sender cannot be authenticated, the ISP or additional filters may reject or filter the email message.

#### Hard Bounce vs. Soft Bounce:

A "hard bounce" is an email message that was returned to the sender due to an invalid recipient address. Hard bounces might occur because the receiver domain name does not exist, or because the recipient is unknown or has perhaps left the company. A "soft bounce" is an email that gets as far as the recipient's mail server but is returned as undelivered due to an issue on the recipients' end, such as lack of space in the user's inbox.

## Deliverability Deconstructed: The Causes

### 1. Email Identity:

To earn a positive email identity, email marketers must authenticate their email messages to show that they are actually being sent from their domain and IP address. Email authentication greatly simplifies and automates the process of identifying senders for ISPs. After identifying and verifying that a claimed domain name has been authenticated or has authorized the sending Mail Transfer Agent (MTA), it is then possible for an ISP to treat suspected forgeries with suspicion, reject known forgeries and block email from known spamming domains. Does your company achieve this proof of identity? Here are the authentication protocols:

- **SPF (Sender Policy Framework):** SPF authorizes the IP address and the domain address of the outbound MTA. This works by having your domain publish what might be a long list of IP addresses that identify MTAs you authorize to carry your email.
- **Sender ID:** Sender ID validates the origin of email messages by verifying the IP address of the sender against the owner of the sending domain.
- **DK/DKIM:** Unlike SPF and Sender ID, DK/DKIM also uses a digital signature to authenticate a domain name and the entire content of a message.

Most of the time, the responsibility for keeping up-to-speed on authentication and executing the protocol rests on the shoulders of the sender's IT department or Email Service Provider (ESP). The key is to make sure that your company has adopted at least one of these protocols and has assigned responsibility to someone within your company or with your ESP to stay current with authentication protocols. Authentication protocols are your "license to send email," so make sure that they are in place and are reviewed regularly to assure optimal compliance.

### 2. Spam Complaints:

ISPs are first and foremost concerned with protecting their users from unwanted spam email. Many users do not understand the distinction between unsubscribe and spam. A simple click on the spam button is a quick fix way to stop receiving mail from

a specific sender but the impact of this action can be severe. A high number of spam complaints with an ISP will affect your deliverability and your mail will automatically be pushed to the spam folder or be blocked completely. We recommend keeping your complaint rate below 1 percent.

### 3. Spam Traps:

Spam traps, sometimes also known as "honey pots," are another clever way to catch spammers.

These are email addresses created by ISPs specifically to collect spam messages or old addresses that have been invalid for an extended period of time. ISPs and anti-spam companies use these addresses for the purpose of catching email marketers who are not following best practices. These addresses are either never used for communication and therefore will never opt in legitimately to an email list, or are old email addresses that should be removed over time because they were invalid.

### 4. Unknown User Rates:

Higher rates of unknown users and bounce rates will signal to an ISP that your email list is not being properly maintained. Hard bounce rates higher than 10 percent will disrupt or limit your deliverability.

### 5. Blacklists:

A blacklist refers to a list of domains or IP addresses of known or suspected spammers. ISPs use blacklists to determine which email messages should be filtered out before delivery to protect their customers. There are a number of blacklists out there, some more important than others. It is imperative that email marketers keep their IP addresses and domains off these lists to ensure the highest possible email deliverability rates.

Because blacklists don't generate bounce-back messages, you may never know that your email messages aren't reaching their intended recipients – and that skews your campaign analytics, decreases your conversion rates and affects your ROI.

## What to Do If You End Up on a Blacklist?

1. Determine the root cause
2. Fix any problems found
3. Contact ISP - Fill out black list form
4. Clean up process – adopt best practice
5. Wait...

- **Determine the cause.** What in your current process is causing the problem? Are your IP address and authentication protocols correctly set? Are you sending to addresses acquired through a third party? Are you neglecting to process your unsubscribe requests?
- **Fix the Problem.** Once the problem area or areas are identified, fix them!
- **Contact the ISP.** Many of them have online forms to fill out and submit to a specific address to request removal from their blacklist.
- **Create a new sending process by adopting some best practices.** A new, cleaner process will keep you from returning to the blacklist.
- **Lastly, wait.** Have patience and allow the ISP time to process your request. The waiting period will give you ample time to get a great new process in place.

## Improving Email Deliverability: Best Practices

Best practices are not necessarily the same as the laws that govern email marketing. Compliance with laws is the minimum requirement; best practices are the standard that should be met when using email marketing. Following best practices means that you have improved the experience of those who receive your email and that your company has met the expectations of ISPs with regard to email etiquette. Both will work to improve your deliverability and increase response rates.

Lets walk through some easy to implement best practices with real-world examples from the technical front-end set up, opt-in techniques, setting customer preferences, creating relevant content and engaging with your audience to create coveted immediate interest.

## 1. Establish Strong ISP Relations

To tackle problems that arise through the authentication process, invest in building and maintaining good ISP relations, or work with an ESP that has already established positive relationships with ISPs.

### Helps Stay Current on:

- |                     |                        |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| ✓ Public Blacklists | ✓ Bulk Folders         |
| ✓ ISP Filters       | ✓ Junk Boxes           |
| ✓ Spam Filters      | ✓ Email Authentication |
| ✓ Spam Traps        | ✓ Certified Mail       |
| ✓ Content Filters   |                        |

Know the technical standards for each ISP and make sure you comply. This can be a full time job since each ISP has unique standards that do change with some frequency. If you don't use an ESP to send your email, make sure you have tasked someone at your company with becoming familiar with the sending infrastructure and how well your company complies with the known technical standards of each ISP.

## 2. Register Domains:

If you haven't done so already, take the time to fully register all domain names that could apply to your company, including "cousin" domain names. If potential customers decide to visit your website, don't take a chance that a typo could take them to a website that masks itself as your company website.

- For example, if your company is "godaddy," be sure to also register names that sound similar, like "go mommy" and names that look similar, like "godadddy" or "g0daddy."
- Also, be sure to register all of the top-level domain names for your URL – including .com, .org, .net and .biz. And just for safety's sake, also register names that can be used against you, like "<your company name> sucks." This will help ensure that if you ever do have a brand issue, you have at least circumvented the proliferation of potential attack sites.

Registering a domain name is often less than \$10 a year – a very economical investment in your positive online reputation.



**Best Practice: Double Opt-In:**

A double opt-in means sending a confirmation email to subscribers to complete their registration. This asks the subscribers to verify their intention to receive your email communications. At the same time it assists in determining the accuracy of the address and helps to keep you in good sender standing.

As you can see in this example, our client The British Museum utilizes a clear double opt-in as part of its e-newsletter sign up process. When a subscribers fill

out the sign-up form online, this triggers an automatic email, like the one shown here, which asks the subscribers to confirm their subscription. Notice in the email that the “Confirm” call to action button stands out well from the email contents and clearly signals an action must be taken.

Only after this confirmation occurs does the subscriber's address enter the company's email list.



**3. Utilize Feedback Loops:**

Feedback loops are free tools provided by ISPs to help email marketers get feedback from those who receive their email messages. When you sign up for feedback loops, you automatically receive complaints whenever an ISP's user clicks on the “spam” button in email messages sent by your company.

Getting this feedback helps your company proactively manage complaints. By understanding and acting upon the feedback of your email recipients, you can enhance delivery, streamline content and maintain a positive reputation with the ISP. Not every ISP offers a feedback loop, but your company should sign up for all of the available feedback loops provided by the ISPs that are represented in your email list, including AOL, Yahoo!, EarthLink, Gmail, etc.

Without feedback loops, you might never know if a customer reports your email as spam, and you could end up on a blacklist with little warning. If you set up your email campaign correctly before deployment, you can even use feedback loops to delete those individuals who have reported your communications as spam in the past. This enables you to take a non-responsive subscriber off of your list and reduces the likelihood that you'll get a future spam report.

**4. Perform Routine List Hygiene:**

Keeping your email list freshly up-to-date may seem like another mundane task to add to your already busy schedule. But, like the saying goes, a little effort goes a long way. Routinely scrubbing your email lists is a surefire way to increase your delivery results.

- Start by removing all hard bounces after every campaign mailing.
- Remove any inactive addresses that have not opened a message after 4 - 6 months.
- Implement a double opt-in registration process. This involves sending a confirmation email asking subscribers to verify that they actually do want to opt in.
- We recommend that you do not purchase third-party email data. If you do however choose this option, keep dates of when the email addresses were acquired to determine age and quality of the list. Also, be sure to inquire how long it has been since the list was emailed.
- Implement an easy, accessible unsubscribe process. If an attempt to unsubscribe fails for users, they are more likely to flag you as spam on subsequent mailings that they receive.

**Set Clear Expectations: Preference Centers**

Preference Centers are not only a great way to get to know your customers' interests, but also allows them to control and customize the content they receive from you.

Preference centers set clear expectations between you and your customers from the point of registration. Most importantly, they provide you with a wealth of information you can use to create relevant email sends. This gives your customers exactly what they want from

you, when they want it. It makes them feel more in control of their inbox and that means they will be more likely to engage.

Here is a great example of setting up preferences with one of our clients, Matches Fashion. The options allow subscribers to set preferences based upon gender, favorite designers, specific sizes, and even favorite store location. This allows Matches to send targeted email campaigns, creating greater relevancy and an increased likelihood that the email will be opened.



**5. Build Your Brand Reputation: Create Relevant Content**

More ISPs are reviewing user engagement (open rates, click rates, response rates, and spam flags) as additional ways to gauge the legitimacy of an email sender. To help drive these metrics you need to create highly relevant content every time you communicate with your subscribers.

The email content should match the needs and desires of your intended recipients. Try to envision your email through their eyes when creating your message content. Is it tailored to their demographic, behavioral patterns and personal preferences?

Here are some additional ways that help you personalize your content to create immediate interest and relevance:

**Two-Way Communication:**

Including a feedback call-to-action link in all of your email communications establishes a two-way communication stream and helps limit any spam complaints. Direct feedback from your customers also allows you as a sender to hone the content or frequency of your sends to fit your average customer desires. We recommend that you avoid having a general "from" address containing "noreply@", such as "noreply@lyris.com". This sends a clear message that you do not want to hear from your customers.

**Send with Consistency:**

Consistency sets an expectation for your subscribers. Use consistent "from" and "friendly from" addresses. We use the term "from" address to distinguish the actual email address that appears on your email sends. The "friendly from" address refers to the proper name that is shown as the owner of the "from" email address. Usually, this is the name that will appear as the sender in your recipient's inbox. Recipients do not tend to open emails from unknown or unfamiliar names. If they don't recognize you, many will flag your email as spam.

**Safe Sender Links:**

Always include a clear link in your email template asking your customers to add your company's "from" address to their safe senders list or address book. This is a sure way to signal to an ISP that your email is desired and should be delivered to your subscribers' inbox without fail. This practice is even more important overall because it helps to limit the burden on ISP spam filters. You will also see lower spam complaints. Most importantly, this increases the likelihood that your email will be delivered properly and read.

## Personalization:

You can also make your communications more personal, with a more familiar or friendly tone. This gives the perception that a true relationship has been established with your customers and it gives them a little comfort when hearing from you. Who doesn't like to be addressed by name with information or an offer that fits our own interests?

The level of personalization can vary and doesn't have to be too complex to get the job done. Simply using the recipients' first name, or referencing part of their past purchasing history shows that customer interests are important to you and builds a stronger rapport. This also helps with open rates and responses, which produce a stronger sender reputation for your brand.

### Rekindle Relationships: Re-Engagement Campaigns

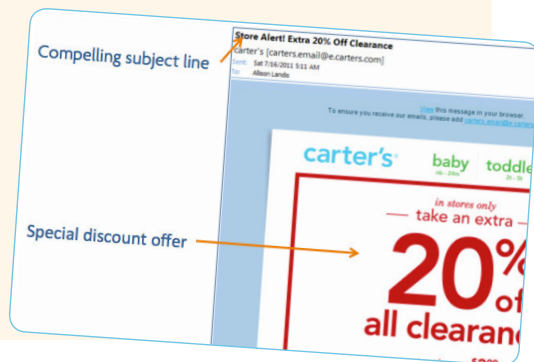
Send a "re-engagement (or 'win-back') campaign" to your inactive subscribers to rekindle relations before removing them entirely from your list.

This type of campaign involves sending a re-permission or re-opt-in email to see if the customer's tastes or opinions have changed. You can also entice inactive subscribers to re-engage with a compelling special offer or discount.

This example here from our customer, Carter's, leverages a compelling subject line and 20 percent off clearance sale to lure inactives back into the fold.

Of these subscribers, 80-95 will not opt in again, but it does clean your list and protects and builds a better sender reputation. Remember, routinely scrubbing your email list includes removing any inactive addresses every 4 - 6 months.

An engagement campaign may be your chance to encourage an inactive customer to begin engaging again.



## 6. Engagement is Now KEY:

The email marketplace is not only complex, it's dynamic as well. The use of mobile devices to view and send email continues to skyrocket. And popular email providers are rolling out inboxes that adopt more features seen on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. So subscriber engagement with your email messages has never been a more critical factor.

Email content that the recipient finds useful and desirable enough will do well. Marketing-only material may fail. Offer something of value for just receiving the email (such as free content, discounts or special exclusive offers) to help build your customer interest and ongoing engagement.

## What's Hot in 2011

### Mobile is NOT the Future, It's NOW:

Faster networks and richer capabilities have catapulted the number of mobile subscriptions throughout the world to over the five billion mark. Mobile is not the future, it truly is now. In fact, according to eMarketer, 73 percent of mobile users are interested in shopping by phone. Brands in 2011 need a mobile strategy and content to stay relevant and engaged with their customers.

The unique characteristics of mobile marketing make it a notable channel where marketers are able to know just where their customers are and engage with them at any given point in time. The latest trend of location based social networks, such as Foursquare, allow users to interact at a specific physical location. Marketers have the ability to then provide offers and services specific to that location.



## Defining a Email Mobile Marketing Strategy:

- Design should be simple – remember real estate on even the largest smartphone is limited.
- Use plain text or simple HTML.
- Include a “view mobile” link in your header for easy access to your mobile-formatted content.
- Focus on making an immediate impact with your content, and less on the overall design aspects.
- Best practices to minimize deliverability issues are key in the mobile space, as many spam or bulk folders are usually out of a user's normal view on a mobile device.

## The “Social” Inbox:

This past year the most popular email providers have launched many new changes to their email services. These new features not only create more noise with the integration of the user's social media feeds, they allow users to better manage and control their inbox by more prominently featuring the most relevant emails and filtering out those that are less desired. The “social inbox” creates a whole new set of challenges for marketers.

So what do all of these changes mean for deliverability? More than ever, best practices need to be implemented to get your emails delivered. Creating relevant content that is valuable and engaging for your customers is essential. Give your customers what they want, when they want it. Create preference centers to design custom content that will create immediate impact. Safe sender programs will add you to your customers' address books and ensure priority delivery. Create periodic re-engagement campaigns to refuel interest in your brand.

## Key Takeaways

There's no question that deliverability cannot be ignored by any brand today. Remember that an estimated 20 percent of all emails sent in North America go undelivered. You want to make sure you do everything you can to get your emails delivered.

- There are laws in place all over the world governing email. Know the laws and make sure you are compliant for every country and state where you send email.
- Be proactive in continually evaluating and honing your process. Your sender reputation should be viewed as just another component of your overall brand reputation.
- Create engaging content that your audience finds relevant.
- Creating strong preference centers will allow you to create powerful, impact campaigns.
- Think about your customers' mobile behavior. Create a mobile strategy that reaches your customers on the go, wherever they are.

Even the most experienced email marketers know that managing deliverability can be a challenge. But deliverability is a critical element to the success of your email and online marketing campaigns, and is therefore an important area to manage proactively. Following a few simple best practices could be all you need to maximize your delivery potential and minimize the possibly of your hard work going unread.

## RESOURCES

Learn more about Lyris:

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### About Lyris, Inc.

Lyris, Inc. is the online marketing expert delivering the right mix of software technology and industry knowledge to help its customers simplify their marketing efforts and optimize campaign ROI. Through its on-demand integrated marketing suite, Lyris HQ, and reliable on-premise solutions, including Lyris ListManager, Lyris provides customers the right tools to optimize their online and mobile marketing initiatives.

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