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Comment: Solving the bouncing email problem

Email is the perfect way to get your message over but the number of delivered emails is falling, Volker Weiwer, CEO of eCircle suggests a few ways to keep your messages from bouncing



delivering the message

For the email industry the end of 2007 was marred by the national email benchmarking report from the DMA (Direct Marketing Association) which suggested that deliverability of emails is on the slide. It has always been a difficult process to quantify deliverability rates but the increasingly stringent practices that the ISP's (Internet Service Providers) are enforcing on ESP's (Email Service Providers) is the surest sign yet that deliverability is an issue that retailers must be aware of in 2008.

Take for example the spam traps that were being set in the closing months of last year. Internet Service providers (ISPs) were strategically creating false emails and dormant addresses to identify repetitive spammers. Knowing that the email addresses would warrant no response or send a 'hard bounce', the ISP's could easily identify brands who continually send communications to a fake email address.

The ISP's are under no obligation to send our emails and if the DMA's forthcoming 2008 Q1 report is to mark an improvement, the direct marketing industry must act to improve relations between the two service providers and before specific sectors are identified as being the worst perpetrators, the retail industry must make sure their email communications are in order.

Therefore, to ensure that emails are delivered safely into a recipient's inbox, diverting spam filters and blacklists, means there are four key areas that should be covered off. Firstly, deliverability starts with email marketing software; ideally your software should allow for constant updates to your database and ensure 'unavailable' addresses are deleted automatically. For example, new email addresses being delivered into the system through web forms and other imports should be automatically checked for duplicates and syntax errors, as well as blacklist-management.

Another key aspect is design for deliverability, the newsletter and email templates you use should be optimized at the programming process to ensure deliverability remains high.

Secondly, ESP's should take pro-active control and implement warning systems. In laymen terms this means testing, testing and more testing to monitor whether emails are delivered correctly into dummy accounts.

The third check should be to work and analyse client's individual demands. Therefore in addition to looking at the content of emails, email consultants should also be checking the classification of client's emails at the ISP's (especially important for companies who send their emails in-house and want to optimise their deliverability).

Finally, the ISP's keep track on all retailers by creating a credit-card like rating for them. But if such retailers work with email marketing companies, the majority will be in partnership with companies such as Return Path and the Certified Senders Alliance. This effectively acts as a certificate that recognises good practice in the eyes of the ISP's and ensures retailers are on the 'White-list'.

The DMA in turn can do everything possible to promote good practice but whilst you can lead a horse to water you, you can't make it drink and it's the poor performance of the few that are ruining it for the responsible. If retailers and their digital agencies can build a closer relationship with the ISP's, the DMA can identify email providers and brands that are not cleaning databases or checking the deliverability of their emails. If subsequent reprimands are then not implemented by our own industry – they will be by legislation and, detrimentally, the ISP's will continue to implement tough procedures.

by Marcus Austin (Web Editor)