

# EMAIL MARKETING FUNDAMENTALS

BEST PRACTICES FOR  
BETTER DATA, TARGETING,  
AND BRAND PROTECTION

*A B2B marketing guide from Informa Markets – Engineering*

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# WHY MUST THINGS CHANGE?

When it comes to email campaigns, bigger isn't necessarily better. Smarter, smaller, and more tightly focused campaigns that drive results are just the start of what you can achieve with the right practices.

More than 300 billion email marketing messages are sent every day, and that number is growing year after year. The global e-mail barrage is led by US marketers, who send more than 231 million marketing emails a minute ([Statstica](#)). Because marketers can't knock on every door or call every prospect, email remains the primary channel to reach target audiences and, overall, offers an ROI as high as a reported \$36 for every dollar spent.

When planning an email campaign, marketers primarily focus on crafting the most effective message, subject line, body copy, and call to action to drive results. While these are all critical considerations, so much of the success of an email marketing program depends on factors that must be addressed long before messages are created and sent – namely the quality of your email list and the database from which it's drawn.

Following current best practices can help ensure that the databases and email lists you use are optimized for success and that your messages are seen by the right people with the highest propensity to buy.

B2B marketers nearly universally use email for newsletters and other types of content marketing. Unfortunately, many emails don't reach their intended targets for various reasons that can limit deliverability and your brand's reputation.

## READ ON TO LEARN:

- What's wrong with traditional email marketing processes
- Warning signs of weakness in your current processes
- Best practices for improving your audience targeting
- How these practices protect your budget and your brand

# THE PROBLEM WITH TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” goes the saying. But consistently poor campaign results may be a sign that your email marketing practices are outmoded.

For years, email lists were bought and sold based on the number of names, or contacts, emphasizing quantity over quality. This created a “bigger is better” mentality and a shotgun or batch-and-blast approach that led marketers down a path of inefficiency and audiences to cry “spam!”

Let’s say you’re a provider of a technical product or solution for engineers or manufacturing buyers and want to reach 100 people who are most interested in it. You could blast 50,000 names from a database assuming, perhaps rightly, that those 100 would be “in there somewhere.” But you’d be spending more than you need to reach that magic 100, while potentially turning off the other 49,900.

Today’s tech and best practices let you find those same 100 people in a list as small as 6,000 (for reasons we’ll discuss below). In contrast, the old approach can rapidly burn your budget and cause poor engagement, audience email fatigue, and damage to your email sender reputation.

While you may achieve acceptable top-line numbers by casting a wide net, lists that target too broadly can wear out your welcome and damage your reputation.

To get noticed, and reputably so, your email must first be properly delivered. Better targeting improves deliverability, but still, many messages are delivered to the right email server only to be blocked or otherwise diverted. The key to deliverability is inbox placement, or the number of emails that are not only delivered to a server but reach the recipient’s primary inbox. There’s much to learn that can help you improve on this metric.



# RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS

Below are three areas that may be the causes of problems that can be corrected, but may also indicate symptoms of more fundamental issues relating to your marketing practices.

## Poor email metrics

When your email metrics (inbox placement, opens, clicks, and more) are down, you're probably sending too many emails to the wrong people or too broad of an audience. This may stem from outdated systems or practices, lack of targeting, or data-related problems with your contacts or lists, whether homegrown or purchased.

## Reductions in your reputation score

Your email sender reputation score, as tracked by major email internet service providers (ISPs), considers many factors. These include email content quality, engagement levels, unsubscribes, spam/junk, complaints (i.e., being marked as junk or spam), volume, and bounce rates. Negative actions in these areas can result in a poor sender reputation score, which can be costly and time-consuming to repair.



## Techno-frustration

Many software tools and systems are designed to help you meet your goal, but research indicates users aren't very happy with them. In a recent research report, Content Marketing Institute (CMI) found that 61% of B2B marketers believe their organization "either hasn't acquired the right technology – or has the technology but isn't using it to potential."

These and other pain points are symptoms that it's time to reconsider the two most critical, fundamental aspects of modern email marketing: how you manage your database and how you slice and dice it to create lists. Best practices follow.

# BEST PRACTICES: DATABASE MANAGEMENT

## Practice good database hygiene and optimization

Good data hygiene practices ensure the effectiveness, accuracy, security, cost-effective management, and compliance of your database while protecting your sender reputation. Your organization should regularly back up, update, audit, evaluate, review, cleanse, and validate your database to maximize impact.

## Employ email validation and verification tools

It's essential to use email validation tools to periodically validate email quality and weed out "bad" email addresses. In addition to verifying active emails and other benefits, this practice can prevent you from falling victim to a spam trap or honeypot email address used to lure and block potential spammers.

These traps can ultimately cause ISPs to block your organization's emails from reaching inboxes, negatively impacting your email deliverability and sender reputation. Getting blocked is a major marketing headache that requires time and resources to adequately resolve.

## Purge inactive contacts

When contacts in your database are inactive for a prolonged period, it's time to consider purging them from your database. Doing so is preferable to repeatedly sending emails to inactive contacts – even newsletter subscribers – because dormant addresses can be used as spam traps or otherwise negatively impact your sender reputation, deliverability, and engagement metrics.



Remember, bigger isn't necessarily better: The strongest databases and lists are the ones that reach the right, most interested and engaged contacts. Before you permanently purge inactive contacts, however, you may consider attempting to first breathe life into these inactive prospects with a re-engagement campaign.

## Enhance and enrich your data

As the cornerstone of email marketing success, your database can increase your chances of achieving your marketing goals through data enrichment and enhancement activities. Leveraging contacts' demographic, firmographic, and behavioral data allows you to target your audience more effectively and efficiently through your email marketing efforts – but you have to do the work to ensure your data is continually updated.

The following practices will help you further flesh out your database:

### Practice progressive profiling

This tactic builds a contact's profile incrementally and cumulatively. The objective is to add personal information to contact profiles incrementally over time, with each email engagement and other actions. These include not only clicks related to customer and prospect interactions, but also individual interests and behavioral data gained through email clicks (opens, engagements), content downloads, event/webinar registrations, and website activity.

You also add profile data gleaned from your web visitors by giving them opportunities to tell you what products or services they're interested in. Next, you can get more specific data from these now-known visitors with each subsequent visit, and leverage this information to tailor campaigns to their identified interests and needs.



### Append your data

Software and third-party vendors facilitate relatively simple updating of contact profiles with critical demographic and firmographic data to fill gaps and increase marketing effectiveness. This includes the automatic addition (appending) of profiles with company names from contacts' email domains. Profiles can also be automatically appended using properly structured outside data sources.

# BEST PRACTICES: EMAIL LIST MANAGEMENT

## Practice smarter segmentation

Audience segmentation is the practice of creating groups based on basic demographic and firmographic data such as a contact's role, location, industry, and company type and size. You can make significant improvements by adding more data to flesh out your contact profiles via customer personas; prior interactions; and behavioral and other data (as cited in the above database practices).



Greater personalization leads to smarter segmentation and, in turn, tighter lists. By improving your audience segmentation, you can create and deploy lists that overcome the pitfalls of traditional “shotgun” email marketing.

## Maintain a strong suppression list

This practice involves multiple components such as eliminating hard bounces that aren't delivered; vigilance in complying with user unsubscribes to prevent unwanted sends; filtering out people who aren't likely to be interested; and, again, purging inactive users.

## Comply with standards & regulations

Your department and those who help manage your marketing technology systems must follow all pertinent anti-spam regulations (CAN-SPAM Act, GDPR, etc.), email provider rules, and applicable industry-specific guidelines. This not only ensures your messages reach the right, targeted inboxes but minimizes non-compliance risks to your organization.

## Keep your lists current

If your audience evolves but you find your organization using lists that are aging, are out of date, or contain errors stemming from old contacts, you should update your lists to reflect changes in your database.

# THE BIG PICTURE ON SMARTER, SMALLER LISTS

In this report, we've shared our knowledge and best practices to help you create smaller, more tightly focused lists; reach customers with the highest level of interest; and engage those who have the greatest buying intent. These practices, we've found, will improve your email marketing success and improve your brand's reputation.

## ABOUT US

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