

Discoveries and Opportunities:

6 Fixes to Dramatically Boost
Email Marketing Results



Engagement Marketing Solutions



DISCOVERIES AND OPPORTUNITIES: 6 fixes to dramatically boost email marketing results

“Mistakes are the portals of discovery.” — James Joyce

Although it can be embarrassing, making a mistake is not the worst thing that can happen. The real problem is not learning from it. Unfortunately, not all email marketing mistakes are obvious and easy to address—yet they can still severely damage your program if left unaddressed. Following are six email marketing mistakes that can hamper and even hamstring a program’s ability to attract and retain subscribers, boost loyalty and increase revenues and return on investment.

Fix these, and you’ll achieve much better results.

Mistake No. 1 No Preference Center

Because consumers’ interests, preferences and email addresses are in a constant state of flux, making it difficult for them to update and customize communications preferences is a huge mistake—yet many marketers make it.

The preference center—a Web-based subscription-management page—boosts engagement and helps retain subscribers, thus reducing list churn, or the rate at which your email list goes bad, which is widely estimated to be as much as one-third to one-half annually. It will also help you learn more about why subscribers leave. Ideally, a preference center is comprised of two separate but related pages, each with a design that supports a tight focus.

A Preference-Update Page is designed for subscribers who don’t want to end their relationship with you. It allows users to update account information and preferences for content, format, frequency, even the channel they use to hear from you. You should also link to your unsubscribe page, in case that’s what your subscriber really is trying to do.

The Combination Unsubscribe/Preference Page allows email recipients to unsubscribe with a minimum of clicks and no password to enter. However, you should use the unsubscribe page as an opportunity both to retain the relationship and increase the relevance and value of your email program. Include various alternatives to unsubscribing, including changing interests, newsletters, format and frequency.

Essential Elements of a Preference Center

Each company’s preference center will be different based on goals, offerings, resources, etc., but the following should serve as a good list of preference page elements to get you started:

- Email address update
- List of emails (e.g., newsletters, solo offers, company news, third-party offers) that can be subscribed to or opted out of
- Option to change content or interest preferences (e.g., downhill versus snowboarding, cycling versus running, etc.)
- Option to change format (text, HTML, mobile-optimized HTML)
- Option to change frequency (to receive more or less email) if appropriate or offered
- Option to change or add communication channels (email, RSS feeds, direct mail, SMS)
- Option to change password if appropriate
- Option to unsubscribe from individual or all publications
- Option to view all current subscriptions

Here are four ways to optimize your preference center for improved results:

1. Promote it! Link to the preference page in your welcome email. List the type of options subscribers have to customize their emails, and explain the benefit that a few minutes spent on the page will deliver.

If you’re just launching a preference center or expanding the options, promote it prominently in your current messages by explaining the benefit and linking to the page. If your cadence allows it, put this information in a solo email and send mid-cycle.

2. **Link to the preference center in every message you send, even transactional emails.** Put the link to the preference center in your email administration footer and promote it with language that tells readers how and where to go to manage their subscriptions.
3. **Include descriptive language.** Consider including language promoting your preference center as a way to manage the subscription, not just unsubscribe. For example: “Click here to manage your subscription preferences, change newsletters or unsubscribe from this publication.”
4. **Confirm all changes, either via a confirmation email or confirmation page on the site.** This allows subscribers to check for accuracy and gives them assurance that the changes have been received.

The preference center makes your subscribers partners in your email program and gives them more control over what goes into their inbox. The time it takes you to build a useful preference page will be repaid to you in reduced list churn and a stronger relationship with your subscribers.

Mistake No. 2 Not Managing Expectations

It's important to let subscribers know exactly what they can expect from you even before they opt in to your program. Then, meet or exceed those expectations throughout the relationship. This creates engaged subscribers who will anticipate your messages and act on them.

If you fail to meet expectations at crucial touch points during the relationship, your subscribers may disengage or opt out altogether. Here are some key touch points:

- **Before and during opt-in.** Describe your email program content, goals and value when you invite someone to opt in. Expand the description on your opt-in page.
- **Your privacy policy.** Clearly state what you will do with the information someone provides.
- **Confirmation email/thank-you page.** Sent immediately after opt-in, this message should include your name, email program/newsletter name, confirmation instructions for double opt-in or restating subscription particulars for single opt-in.
- **Welcome program.** The best way to set and manage expectations is with a series of emails sent immediately after confirmation. Restate what the subscriber signed up for, invite that person back to your Web site, provide contact information, link to your privacy policy, and link to past content.

To best manage expectations and build strong relationships with subscribers, tell them exactly what will happen when, what they need to do to meet their own objectives (subscribing, changing preferences, unsubscribing), and what you will and will not do with their data. Also, remember that your subscribers' demographics, behaviors and interests vary. They expect you to provide content and value in ways that meet their individual needs. Offer multiple communication channels, different message frequencies, customizable interests and a choice of formats (HTML, text or mobile-friendly). Then, honor their choices.

When managing expectations, it's also a good idea to under-promise and over-deliver. If in your sign-up process you promote “Special email-only offers,” be sure to deliver on that promise. Then, you can occasionally surprise subscribers with an added bonus, one-time offer, etc.

Finally, if you ask for certain information, subscribers will expect you to use that information accordingly. For example, if you ask for a subscriber's birth date, that person will assume you either will send some sort of birthday promotion or that your content will be targeted based on the person's age. Don't ask for data that you don't plan to use to add value to the relationship.

Mistake No. 3 Mailing Too Frequently—or Too Infrequently

Many email marketers think if a little email is good, a lot is even better. But email is different from other marketing channels.

While moving to a higher frequency can deliver increased revenue in the short term, it may actually end up costing you money over the longer term. You lose subscribers by annoying them to the point of clicking the spam button, unsubscribing or simply deleting your emails unopened. The rate at which your email list loses subscribers or “churns” then climbs significantly, requiring you to spend more money to replace these lost subscribers.

How do you know if you are over-mailing? Take the following steps:

- Track not only “process” metrics like click-through, bounce, unsubscribe and spam complaint rates but also “output” metrics such as total revenue per campaign, average revenue per email and average revenue per order.
- Compare different time periods during which you sent emails with greater and less frequency. Look for spikes in unsubscribes and spam complaints and corresponding drops in opens or click-throughs.
- Monitor subscriber comments and analyze the rate of frequency and channel preference changes (if you offer options). Conduct regular subscriber surveys to obtain direct feedback.



Most frequency discussions warn you not to send too much email, but sending too little email can also cripple your marketing program. Subscribers forget about you if you wait too long to start sending email or send infrequently. Quarterly mailings are for paper newsletters. Email newsletters should generally go out at least monthly.

Also, instead of trying to determine how frequently to send messages, ask yourself the real question: “How can I create an email program that uses demographics, preferences and behaviors to maximize my customers’ lifetime value?”

The right frequency is both unique to the recipient and directly driven by the relevance and value of the emails. “Batch and blast” emails sent twice a week might be spam-complaint material for a subscriber, but twice-weekly emails based on preferences and behavioral data could be the perfect cadence.

When you build your program around your subscribers, their preferences and behaviors drive the optimum frequency and your program success.

Mistake No. 4 Ignoring Subscriber Feedback

The failure to enable, monitor and respond to feedback and inquiries from individual email subscribers is a serious mistake. Although the number of people who contact you directly may be small, these subscribers are likely to be very active and may be vocal if you don’t respond in a timely and appropriate manner.

Email is a two-way channel. If you don’t solicit feedback, or if you ignore it when you get it, you miss the chance to improve your program, solve problems, expand to meet new needs or retain customers.

Soliciting and answering feedback demands more resources and time for your email program, but it is important to incorporate a comprehensive feedback process to avoid the problems that come from ignoring it. These are some steps to take:

- **Monitor your public inbox.** Designate at least one person on your team to monitor all inboxes associated with your email program and empower that person either to reply or to circulate the message to the correct person.
- **Make feedback management a daily process.** Don’t let any comment go unanswered for longer than 24 hours if possible, even if the answer is, “We don’t have the answer yet, but we’re getting it for you.”
- **Add a feedback email address.** Promote it in all your different email programs. Make sure you monitor feedback submit-

ted to your Web site. People may have trouble with your opt-in form or not receive a double opt-in email due to spam filtering—leaving your Web site as their primary feedback venue.

- **Stay in the loop.** Instruct customer-service personnel to route email comments to you after they have been handled, so you know what kinds of comments they’re receiving.
- **Know what is being said.** Monitor what, if anything, people are saying about your email program on social networks, community and bulletin board sites, consumer reviews, and email marketing industry blogs and communities. A number of industry bloggers write about worst and best practice emails they find in their inboxes, conduct creative reviews or may compare your emails to those of competitors. You might be surprised to hear what fellow email marketers are saying about your emails.

In this era of engagement, encouraging, monitoring and responding to subscriber feedback is critical to building relationships and delivering a world-class email experience for your subscribers.

Mistake No. 5 Relying on Process Metrics to Measure and Communicate Email Performance

One of the biggest mistakes marketers make is getting too ensconced with “process” metrics such as opens and click-throughs and then compounding the problem by communicating this data to management. Ultimately, the C-suite doesn’t care about open or deliverability rates. If you manage your company’s email marketing program, your primary focus should be on delivering against “metrics that matter” for your business. These might be revenue, leads, downloads, cost savings and similar “output” business metrics.

You need to monitor and analyze your email process metrics to help drive increased relevance and engagement, which lead to achieving your company’s business and marketing goals. But to get the resources you need, you must use the language of the CEO and CFO—revenue, costs, margins, etc.

Process metrics are diagnostic tools and should be tracked over time to determine how individual elements of your campaigns are contributing to overall success. Following are some sample email process metrics and what they measure:

- **Open rate:** Measures subject line effectiveness, trust and the strength of your brand.
- **Bounce rate:** Measures list churn and your opt-in process.



- **Spam complaint rate:** Measures relevance, whether you are delivering against expectations, ease of opting out and other factors.
- **Unsubscribe rate:** Measures relevance, customer engagement and whether you are delivering against expectations.
- **Click-through rate:** Measures relevance, offer and content quality, design and engagement.
- **Delivery rate:** Measures list-building practices, list hygiene and ability to follow deliverability best practices.
- **Forward/Share rate:** Measures subscriber interest and viral nature of offer/content.
- **List churn:** Measures your effectiveness at managing your combined churn factors—bounces, spam complaints and unsubscribes.

Output metrics measure your email program's progress against your company's strategic marketing and business goals. These are the metrics you provide to senior management. Examples include:

- **Revenue:** Dollar amount generated from your program over a given time period or campaign.
- **Cost savings:** Money saved by using email over higher-cost communications channels.
- **Share of wallet:** Use of email to increase greater share of customer spend.
- **Customer retention:** Use of email to minimize customer defection.

Overall, remember that your email program is designed to support your company's business and revenue goals. Process metrics help you improve aspects of your email tactics, but output metrics are the only metrics that matter in the executive suite.

Mistake No. 6 Getting the Timing Wrong

Using an urgent call to action is one way to get readers to open your emails, but it can backfire if you don't allow enough time for subscribers to open your messages.

A "Today Only" or "Sneak Preview" special tied to a specific time frame will encourage many recipients to open the message right away, but those who fail to do so in a timely manner will be disappointed.

There are many reasons why your offer timing might not be in synch with that of your recipients. For starters, not every email user goes into his or her inbox

every day. At busy times of the year, such as holidays and vacations, a day or more might elapse from the time you send the message to when subscribers check their inboxes. A new twist: Many people read your emails on multiple devices—laptop, PC, BlackBerry, iTouch/iPhone and other mobile devices. These people might originally see your email on their mobile devices, but then not act until they get in front of their PCs many hours or days later.

Also, deployment and delivery delays can keep messages out of the inbox during the offer period. ISPs and email providers might throttle your emails or delay delivery for various reasons, keeping your messages from reaching the inbox for a few hours. Taking the issue of various time zones into consideration can really make selecting the perfect send time complicated. The United States alone (including Alaska and Hawaii) covers six major time zones. When your email alerts subscribers to a midnight sale beginning at 12 a.m. PDT, it is 3 a.m. EDT, later than even most New Yorkers' bedtimes. Time zones are even more crucial for international marketers, where "Noon Today" in New York City is 2 a.m. tomorrow in Sydney.

Trying to hit a specific time can be tricky, but this doesn't mean you should abandon "Today Only" messages, especially if your list is designed to capture "deal of the day" offers. However, you can manage them so that you reduce exposure to bad timing. Here are a few tips:

- **Provide more advance notice.** Sometimes this is hard to do, especially if you don't want to tip your hand. When it makes business sense, however, consider alerting subscribers in advance of your "Friday Madness Sale."
- **Use the day of the week and actual date.** Consider using "Tuesday Only" rather than "Today Only." Before banking on this approach, test it to see what impact it actually has. Although using the day of week might seem less "urgent," it is also clearer to recipients.



- **Include the time zone for any time-specific event.** If you promote a sale or offer that begins or ends at a specific time, make sure you include the time zone and the date to avoid any confusion. Also, do the math for your subscribers by giving local time in your key time zones ("Midnight EDT/ 9 p.m. PDT/4 a.m. GMT").
- **Track the actual time it typically takes your emails to reach the inbox.** Use seed email addresses and determine both your best and worst delivery durations across major ISPs. Then, adjust your scheduled send times so that your emails will reach the majority of your subscribers within your targeted time window.

- **Send trigger-based reminders to those who haven't opened or clicked.** Be careful, however. If you send two emails too close together, you will certainly generate more spam complaints and unsubscribes. Test this approach on a subset a few times before instituting it.

Conclusion

Everybody Makes Mistakes; Smart Marketers Learn from Them

Email delivers \$45.06 for every dollar spent—the highest ROI of all marketing channels¹—and has relatively few barriers to hurdle to enter the channel, but you must work at it and learn from your mistakes.

Start by asking yourself whether any of the following could be occurring:

- Your team or peers see problems but fail to report them.
- Your recipients are having problems with your emails but have no easy way to relay comments or complaints.

- The metrics you are using don't convey the success or failure of your email program or accurately measure subscriber engagement with your emails.
- "Good enough" results are good enough. You aren't finding ways to collect more opt-ins, reduce unsubscribes, push for near-100 percent delivery or boost your conversion rate, order size or campaign revenue.
- You expect success to sustain itself. Something that worked two years might not be effective anymore.

Be willing to experiment, assess results honestly, and create an environment that encourages people to spot mistakes and suggest improvements. When you truly explore these unexpected "portals of discovery," you can make huge strides in your email marketing that generate substantial improvements in subscriber engagement, revenue and ROI.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Power of Direct," Direct Marketing Association, October 2008

To find out more about Silverpop's Engage solution and how it can benefit your company, please contact us toll-free at 1-866/SILVPOP (745-8767) or email us at info@silverpop.com.

Visit us at www.silverpop.com



SILVERPOP ENGAGE SEND TIME OPTIMIZATION

Deliver your message at the perfect time and increase opens, click-throughs and revenue

What's the best day and time to send your message? It's a question that's challenged email marketers for more than a decade. And over the years, it's been answered approximately 168 different ways. However, the correct answer has always been, "when the recipients are most likely to be looking at their inbox." But until now, that answer has been nearly impossible to achieve. How can you send emails to millions of recipients at the time that's ideal for EACH one?

One click. One send. 100 percent optimized email delivery.

What if you could schedule your mailing once, and know that it was going to reach each recipient at the exact day and time they are most likely to be checking emails? What if results showed that marketers who have done this saw a 30 to 100 percent increase in email-generated revenue the very first time they did it?

Now you can.

Silverpop's Send Time Optimization feature analyzes recipient behavior on a rolling basis to predict the ideal message delivery time for each recipient on your list over that recipient's entire lifecycle. The system can then deliver messages to those recipients, across any number of time zones, at the precise day and time they're most likely to be opening emails.

The power of Send Time Optimization:

- Messages are delivered to each recipient at the exact time they're most likely to be in their inbox.
- You get optimal worldwide message delivery in a single send—whether you're sending to one time zone or 10.
- The technology does the heavy lifting; no slicing and dicing your list, no sending the same message multiple times, and no comparing five different mailing reports. One click. One send. 100 percent optimized delivery. Worldwide.



Benefits:

- Consistent lift in revenue generated per email
- Increase in average order size
- Significant savings and reduced manual effort
- Optimized worldwide delivery across any number of time zones

To find out more about Silverpop's Engage solution and how it can benefit your company, please contact us toll-free at 1-866/SILVPOP (745-8767) or email us at info@silverpop.com.

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