

HOW TO GET HIGHER OPEN RATES
FROM YOUR EMAIL MARKETING
CAMPAIGNS



Deliverability

Deliverability is arguably the holy grail of email marketing. In order to maintain a high rate of deliverability we need to comply with best practises and maintain a good reputation with various Anti-spam institutes and organisations.

These organisations exist solely to enforce anti-spam legislations and protect the general public from spammers. To achieve their goal they employ various methods, one of which is using spam traps.

In this article we will discuss what a spam trap is, how it affects you and what you can do to protect yourself from them.

What is a Spam Trap?

Spam traps are email addresses used by various ISP's and spam houses to identify email marketers sending unsolicited emails, or those who employ poor data management processes. There are different types of spam traps:

Recycled:

For legitimate email marketers, this is likely to be the most common spam trap they come across and it is an indication of poor list management and lack of data cleansing procedures. A recycled Spam trap is an email address that did belong to someone but has been abandoned. After a certain period of inactivity, the email address provider reserves the right to retake this email address and use it to identify, and consequently block senders who are still sending marketing communications.

This is why most legitimate email marketers can fall foul to spam traps despite abiding by best practises when initially gathering their data.

Pure Spam trap:

A pure spam trap is possibly more serious. This is an email address setup by spam houses or institutions to identify email marketers sending unsolicited emails. As the email address does not belong to any individual, it could never have been used to sign up to any communications. This type of email address is obtained through illegitimate means, such as email harvesting software.

Hitting a pure spam trap is an indication of bad practises being employed to obtain data that do not abide by anti-spam laws.

Invalid email addresses:

Invalid email addresses, likely to be fake or have typos can also trigger a spam hit. If you are continuously sending to email addresses with typos it indicates a poor management of bounces. ISP's or spam organisations can convert the invalid email address into a spam trap.

A fake email address provided to you by someone could have already been a spam trap or for the above reason, converted into a spam trap after a few sends. This in an indication of poor data collecting methods.

How does this affect you?

Hitting a spam trap is detrimental to your deliverability and ultimately it will have a negative impact on your email marketing efforts. You could suffer from some or all of the following:

- Increase in bounce rates
- Decrease in open rates
- Reduced domain reputation
- Blacklisted or blocked by Spam organisations and ISP's.
- Suspension of your account by your ESP.

Overall, your email marketing efforts will suffer as a whole, and this can also have a detrimental effect on your ESP, therefore continuously hitting spam traps could end in your account being suspended.

Prevention is better than the cure

Implementing procedures to reduce the risk of hitting spam traps will ensure you stay on track to reaching your email marketing targets.

Begin from the ground up; the first phase of the process is gathering data:

- Do not use data purchased from a third party.
- Use a double opt-in for all of your sign up forms. With this method you verify the email address to prevent any fakes or typos.
- Reject all group addresses, such as info@ or inquiries@.
- If you gather data at events on paper, do small sends to these email addresses and verify signup details by directing these recipients to an online form with a double opt in.

Ensuring the process you use to gather data follows best practices and is obtained through legitimate means is half the battle. What most email marketers are guilty of is not monitoring the health of their list or performing regular data cleansing exercises. This in turn leads to falling into recycled spam traps.

- Offer a 'maintain details' option in all of your communications, which allows users to update their details, including email address.
- Remove non-engagers on a biannual or annual basis.
- Make any email addresses that bounce inactive.

Drawing up a plan to carry out this maintenance on a regular basis will ensure you have a plan in place and will go a long way to reduce the risk of falling into a spam trap.

I have hit a Spam trap- what do I do?

If you have hit a spam trap there will be a recovery period involved in restoring your reputation as a sender and bringing your deliverability rate back to normal.

The first step to take is to identify which of your lists you have had a problem with. The date you hit the spam trap will correspond with a certain campaign. Isolate the list you used for this campaign.

Provide your ESP with proof of how the data was collected, if there is a blacklist in place your ESP can look to get it removed based on the proof you provide.

Perform the data cleansing exercise I mentioned in the previous section of this article. Once you have the all clear from your ESP to begin sending again, use smaller, segmented lists and monitor your bounce and open rates to get an idea of how the recovery process is doing.

TIPS ON HOW TO IMPROVE EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

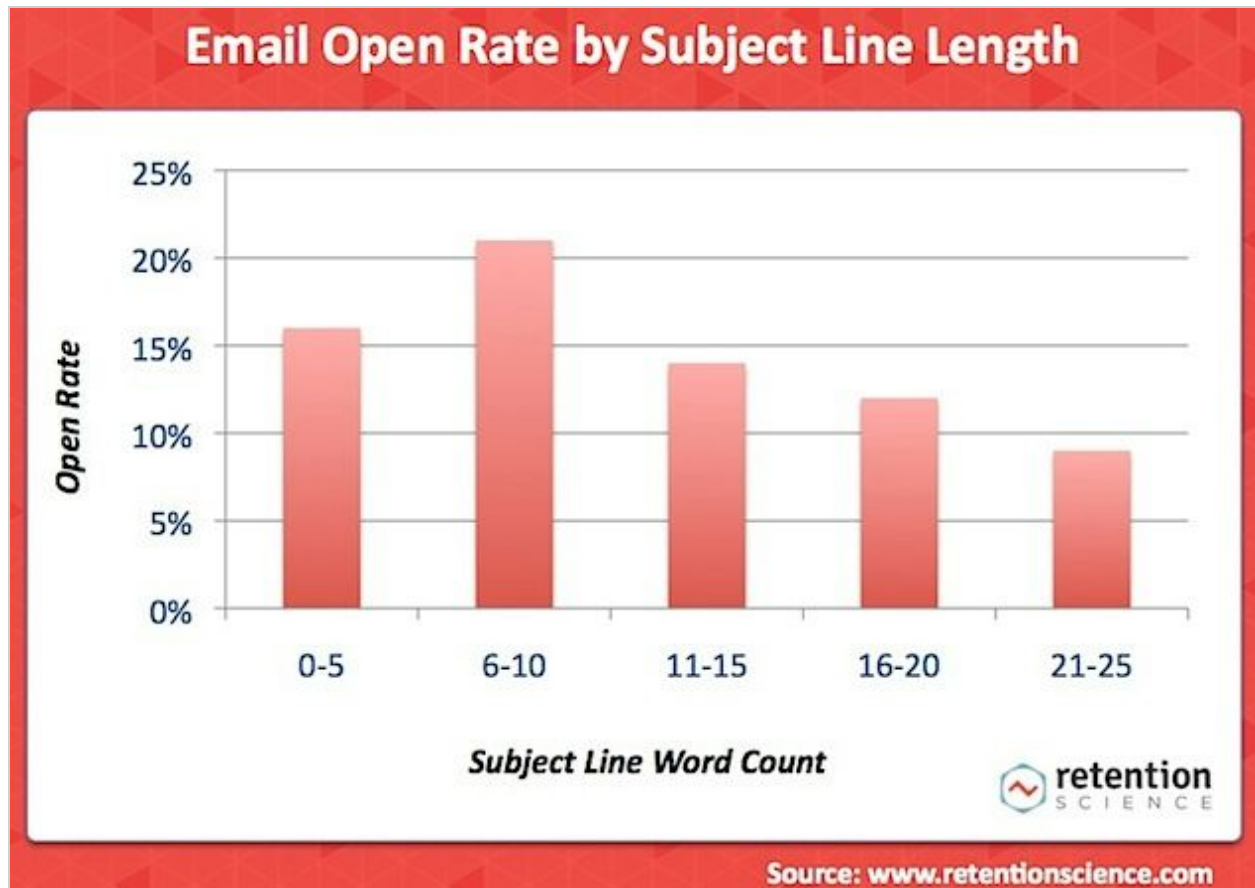
Subject lines are powerful elements of email campaigns. But that's not really surprising. Subject lines are basically the headlines of an email message.

Headlines are something writers and editors agonize over, and for good reason. Copywriter coach Chris Marlow writes "tests have proven many times that the headline is responsible for at least 50 percent and as much as 75 percent of an ad's success." Some sources report that 35 percent of email subscribers will open an email based on the subject line alone, which almost seems low compared to the headline statistic.

Statistics aside, with so much riding on subject lines, it's worthwhile review how to improve them. Here are seven ideas, in order of how well they've performed previously.

Use 6 to 10 Words

Subject lines with 6 to 10 words produce the best open rate. That's according to a study put out by Retention Science, a personalization platform, in early March of this year. Retention Science pulled its results from over 260 million emails sent via 540 different campaigns.



Shorter is better for email subject lines. Six-to-ten word subject lines do best, followed by subject lines up to five words long.

Personalization Is Worth the Effort

Experian (a data provider) and MailerMailer and MailChimp (two email service providers) have done studies in the last year that showed personalized subject lines get up to 22.3 percent more opens than emails without personalization. Given how many email opt-in forms ask for at least the first name in addition to the email address, it's surprising that only 30 percent of brands actually end up using that personalization data.

Use the Right Words

MailChimp and Adestra, a digital marketing firm, have put out valuable research about which words do best — and worst — in email subject lines. The best words to use include “urgent,” “announcement,” and “freebie” (which beat out “free” by nearly tenfold), according to MailChimp. Adestra gave “alert,” “daily,” and “free delivery” high points.

MailChimp recommends avoiding “Help,” “Percent off,” and “Reminder.” Adestra found a 18.7 percent fall off in clicks when the word “newsletter” was in the subject line.

Also remember to avoid spam trigger words. They can change over time, though HubSpot recently named “Cash,” “Quote,” and “Save” as spam offenders. Finally, remember that all the data about “best” and “worst” words to use is based on generalities across billions of emails. It’s a rule of thumb, not the law.

These next four best practices generally get good results, but they are not as backed up with the definitive quantitative research that the earlier best practices had. These tips will likely help your subject lines, but always measure and test to be sure.

Use Calls-to-action

Just like headlines, order buttons, and pretty much anything else in marketing copywriting, calls-to-action work. Use them.

Be Specific

Emails with vague subject lines get deleted. Think of yourself as you plow through an inbox with several hundred email messages. Anything non-essential and vague gets culled fast.

Capitalize Each Word

Both MailChimp and Madison Logic, a personalization platform, report that capitalizing the first letter of each word will give a small but significant lift.

Limit Punctuation

Restrain your inner grammarian if you have to; leave the punctuation out.

Testing Subject Lines

Those seven practices are helpful, but, as mentioned, they're a rule of thumb. They may or may not work the same for your list every time. The only real way to know is to test.

Fortunately, there's a lot of information available about how to test subject lines. Most email service providers even provide A/B split-testing functionality for subject line. That's good, but there's the issue of statistical relevance lurking around behind those reports.

Let's start with some basic figures.

1. Emails get a 2.2 percent median click-through rate in the U.S. market (according to Silverpop's 2013 Email Marketing Metrics Benchmark Study).
2. You need to see at least a 10 percent lift in the winning subject line to be sure you've got a winner, and 20 percent is better. Remember, a 20 percent lift from 2.2 percent is only 2.64.

Splitting a list in half is an acceptable way to do a subject line test, but it doesn't lend much in terms of results. With a split list, half your subscribers will have received the loser headline, and half the winning one. And, you won't know which subject line is the winner or loser until you've sent the email.

You do get a small lift from the winning half, but ideally you would have wanted to mail the entire list the winning headline. With a split list, you've kind of lost half your gain.

WHAT NOT TO DO IN YOUR SUBJECT LINES

- Don't write subject lines ALL IN CAPS.
- Don't make spelling mistakes.
- Don't plea with people to "Open Me!"
- Don't deceive readers with a false promise.
- Don't give away everything in your subject line.
- Don't use one word – like "Hi!" – as your subject line.
- Nix the punctuation!!!
- Don't add Re: to your subject line to deceive readers.
- D o n t d o t h i s
- Do not use percents over 100 in subject line, ie.. 1000%!