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Spam Report Reduction Guide

Introduction

What is a spam report?

A spam report occurs when one of your subscribers receives your email campaign and then reports it as unwanted. For subscribers, this can be as easy as hitting the 'This is Spam' button in their AOL account, or it can be as involved as finding the abuse reporting email address in your privacy policy and sending a complaint directly to Constant Contact or to another reporting service, such as SpamCop.

Why are my subscribers reporting my email as spam?

There are many reasons why a subscriber might report your email as spam. You can never precisely determine why a subscriber chose to take this action. But, many of the reasons are understandable e.g. they don't remember your company name, they are no longer interested in your products, they feel you send too many messages and become annoyed. Only you can review your practices to determine if there are some things you could be doing differently. This guide is designed to help you diagnose your spam report problem and find a way to reduce the number of spam reports you receive.

What can I do to reduce my spam reports?

What you should do to reduce your spam reports depends on your business, your customers and your practices. Below, we list some root causes of spam reports and some steps other customers have taken that help to reduce them. Read the various suggestions carefully and select the steps that seem most appropriate to your business.

Complaint Reduction Suggestion List

List Collection Practices

Experience shows that list collection methods and list maintenance are the best ways to reduce the number of spam reports.

1. Your List and Only Your List

You should only have on your subscriber list individuals who asked to be on your list. No third-party lists of any kind are acceptable for use in Constant Contact. So, if you have ever bought, rented or swapped lists with another business, you simply need to stop mailing to those third-party names.

2. How Old is Your List?

Over time, people forget what they subscribed to, or change their level of interest in a particular product or service. So, reducing your list (by age and activity) is one of the most effective ways to reduce your spam reports. This is especially true in industries where interest might be transient like vacation travel, wedding planning or sports league participation.

How old is too old? That depends on the nature of your business and how frequently and recently you have mailed to this list of subscribers. If you have been adding subscribers to your list, but not sending emails, then any name older than 1-year should be removed from your list.

Even if you have been mailing regularly, list age is often a source of spam reports. So, you should consider cleaning

out the older subscribers. Of course, some of your older subscribers may be your best and most loyal customers. Here are two different approaches to “aging” your list without losing your best subscribers. First, you can choose to keep only the subscribers who have opened or clicked-through a recent campaign. This way, you know the subscribers want your emails and are responding to your messages. The second option is to confirm the older portion of your list. Confirming your list means sending subscribers a one-time message asking them to confirm that they want to receive future messages from you. If they respond, you know they are interested and will remain on your list. If they do not respond, they are removed from your list. You can learn more about this option in Constant Contact by clicking on the Subscribers and Lists Tab and selecting Confirmed Opt-in.

3. Clear Messaging on Sign-up

This is a good time to review your email list sign-up process. When a new subscriber joins your list, the nature and frequency of your planned email communications should be very clear. Even if someone has just completed a purchase, you should ask if they want to receive future communications from you. If you want a happy subscriber base with low spam report rates, you should never add anyone to your list automatically.

4. No Pre-Checked Sign-ups

Do you pre-check the subscription box in your purchase flow? If so, you should change the subscription box to an optional, unchecked box. As the amount of junk email has exploded, customers expect that reputable companies will ask for permission, not presume it.

5. No List Collection Gimmicks

A few years ago, it was not unusual to see contests or giveaways used as incentives for subscription (e.g. ‘give us your email address and you will be entered in a lottery for a free vacation’). These methods gathered lots of email addresses but also generated a high number of spam reports. You want to build a list of subscribers who are interested in your product or service – not a gimmick. If part of your list was built using an aggressive collection campaign like a sweepstakes, you should remove or cleanse that list.

6. No Co-Registration

Have you used partners or advertising services to gather email addresses? This is often called co-registration. The customer is signing up for something else and is asked if they also want to receive information about your product category. Often, they are not given your company name or brand at the time of registration. The customer does not know your brand and does not know how their email address ended up on your list – they just start receiving emails from you. For this reason, co-registration will increase spam reports, and use of co-registration names is not permitted in Constant Contact.

7. Multiple Sources

If you have gathered email subscribers over time through different methods, you may want to do some detective work to determine which subscribers are complaining. You can do this by breaking up your list and then sending separate campaigns to each list source. Constant Contact can provide complaint data by campaign to assist you in determining the bad list source. Then, you can remove that list, or limit that list to subscribers who have opened or clicked through your campaigns.

8. Confirmed Opt-in

The most confident way to ensure your subscribers want to hear from you is to use a Confirmed Opt-in process with your subscribers. This process requires your subscribers to confirm their subscription by responding to an email before they can be added to your list. Many consumers do not understand the process and, therefore, do not confirm their subscriptions. So, your list will be smaller, but using Confirmed Opt-in, you can be sure the subscribers on your

list want to hear from you. This process is described in detail in Constant Contact under the Subscribers & Lists tab, Confirmed Opt-in. This process can be used for a portion of your list and may be an appropriate choice for older lists or lists that were gathered using practices that are no longer acceptable.

Subscription Management and Branding

Another way to reduce spam reports is to make sure your subscribers remember who you are and why they are receiving the emails you send. This is also an opportunity to reinforce your brand and build customer trust.

1. Use a Permission Reminder

Add a short paragraph to the top of your emails to remind subscribers of their permission, emphasizing the value of receiving your communications and offering them a quick link to unsubscribe. This should appear at the top of your email before you begin your content. This type of permission reminder is becoming more common in email publications. Below is an example that Constant Contact uses for our Connections mailing.

2. Company Name Familiar and Consistent

Did your subscribers join your list with the same company name or product brand that you are using today? Sometimes spam reports occur because there has been a transition in company ownership or product naming and, suddenly, your subscribers are receiving email from a company name they do not recognize. If you have made a transition, remind subscribers of your original brand as you phase in the new brand or new name.

3. Consistent FROM Address

Using the same FROM address consistently is another way to ensure that your subscribers recognize your email campaigns. Use a FROM address that includes the brand or company name they subscribed to. Avoid using a FROM address that looks too casual or spam-like, e.g. a first name. Your FROM address is the single most important factor subscribers use to determine whether to open your mail, or report it as spam. If you need to change your FROM address, notify your subscribers of the planned change. Ask subscribers to add the new address to their address book. This will help ensure that your email makes it past any local filters.

4. Recognizable Look and Feel

Subscribers who recognize your email campaigns are much less likely to complain. By using the same template with a familiar layout, color scheme and font selection; you will establish consistency with your subscribers. When they receive your next mailing, it will look familiar and remind them of their subscription to your list.

Mailing Content and Frequency

1. Content

Sometimes spam reports are simply a way for subscribers to tell you that you are not sending information or offers that are interesting or relevant to them. The more promotional the message, the more likely it is to generate spam reports. If you are experiencing a high number of spam reports, review your content. Does it look like spam? Is it too loud or too busy? Does it look like a deal that is too good to be true? Consumers are receiving a lot of junk email these days. The more you look like the junk, the more spam reports you will receive.

2. Targeting and Relevance

Is your content of interest to your entire audience, or only a subset? If you have a broad product line or a very diverse audience, it pays to segment your list and send messages that are relevant to a particular group. The less relevant the offer, the more likely a subscriber is to complain.

3. Frequency

Another complaint trigger can be sending too many mailings to the same group. While a subscriber may like your company, they may not want to receive multiple mailings per week about the same products or services. The appropriate frequency can vary widely by industry and by mailing type (promotions versus newsletters). Put yourself in your customers' shoes and ask yourself how frequently they think about or use your product or service. If your product or service is an infrequent purchase, send only periodic communications. If possible, you should set expectations about frequency during the subscription process and then be consistent with those expectations.