

# Email Marketing Without SPAMming

By Aaron Turpen

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A few months ago, I wrote a series of articles on online marketing – the last of which dealt with email marketing and SPAM. This article in particular garnered many responses from readers both for and against the idea of mass-email marketing of any type. You can read that article online at this URL:

<http://www.aaronzwebworkz.com/resources/newsletter/articles.shtml?spam>

Although that article is itself a great resource, I still find myself being asked questions about the use of email marketing online. Since I didn't go into depth about the specifics of marketing using email in that previous article, I thought another was in order.

The definition of SPAM or UCE is hard to come by. Some people say that all emails that are not asked for are SPAM. Others contend that all emails that aren't wanted are SPAM. Still more say that SPAM applies to everything the recipient doesn't want to see. I personally consider only commercial emails that the user doesn't want to receive AND didn't sign up for knowing what he or she was getting into as SPAM (UCE). Jokes from well-meaning friends, newsletters, "updates" from those businesses I've asked to keep me updated, etc. are NOT UCE. If I asked for it, I can't complain about it as being SPAM. The only exception to this rule is the emails I may have asked for at one time, but have no way to respond to or remove myself so that I don't get it again.

Using my definition of what is SPAM or UCE, how do you go about sending email or marketing yourself online without crossing into that "SPAMmer" category? First and foremost, **KNOW WHO YOU ARE SENDING YOUR EMAIL TO.** You don't have to be familiar with each recipient personally, but you'd better know whether or not they really want to hear what you have to offer. Always keep that in mind when sending an email to anyone, especially if it's an email meant to market your product or service.

## Building An Opt-In List

For anyone with an established website and a known web presence, building an opt-in list is generally an easy affair. The best type of list is the "double opt-in list." This simply means that the subscriber to the list was required to complete at least two steps – apart from one another – to join the list. Usually this means that the user filled out a web form (name, email, etc.) and submitted it. They were then emailed with a "click here to activate your subscription"-type link. Once they click on the link, they are subscribed to the list. This strategy prevents those who aren't sure what they're doing from joining and, more importantly, keeps Bob from signing up his friend/enemy Larry without Larry's consent.

Whether your website is brand new or well established, you should be collecting customer contact information (email addresses) for further contact. You can provide a free newsletter, periodic updates via email, or “exclusive opportunities” for those who join. There must be some kind of incentive or you won’t gather many email addresses. For an established website, this is usually enough. You already have traffic to see your offer and sign up. You need do little more.

For the new site, though, this is only a portion of the battle. The real effort comes in marketing your offer to drive traffic to your website and build your opt-in list. There are a LOT of great ways to do this without causing much of a stir. My favorite is to participate meaningfully in discussion lists related to your business. I spend a lot of time in Web Design and Development forums speaking with others in the business as well as amateurs just looking for tips and help. Doing this without pushing myself down people’s throats has gained me both fame and website traffic.

Another way to gather fast results is to advertise in newsletters/e-zines related to your business. Every business has trade, gossip, or news-related publications both on and offline. An advertisement in an e-zine online can get you 3,000 people looking at an ad you only spent \$10 to list! The best thing about the Internet is that these ads can usually include a hyperlink so that they can read your ad (which hopefully contains some kind of call-to-action) and immediately click through to your website!

A slower and more time-consuming way to get the word out is to talk to the publishers of these e-zines, the writers who write articles for them, and even to the website owners of related websites and tell them about your product, service, or offer. If what you have seems interesting enough, they may write an article or include a “blurb” free of charge! Or even trade links with you to help each other promote your individual websites.

#### You Have The List, What Now?

Now that you’ve got a list of those interested, you’ll have more considerations. The first is the question of how each individual subscriber will remove themselves from your list if they so desire. Most list maintenance programs allow for this. At the very simplest, you can make sure they know how to email or contact you for removal. Make sure that EVERYTHING you send to this list of subscribers includes instructions for removal from the list. Not doing so immediately places you into the “SPAMmer” category.

What will you use to email to this list? There are a lot of options, including online email services, server-based bulk mail handlers, and PC-based software that does the same through your Internet connection. Each has pros and cons to consider. For instance, the online service may or may not store your list for you and therefore you may have worries about them stealing the list and selling it. This can happen. Another example is the PC-based system. If you routinely send out several thousand emails from your Internet account, your ISP may start to wonder just what it is you’re doing. Many will shut you down and ask questions later. Make sure they are aware of what you’re doing and don’t have a problem with it. This will keep you out of hot water.

#### What and When To Send

Don’t send things willy-nilly to your list. The more often you send things, the more often you will have people wanting to unsubscribe to avoid your constant barrage. As a general rule, sending twice a week at maximum is acceptable. The shorter your emails, the less likely you are to receive complaints or unsubscriptions.

Don’t send more than you have to. If you are sending your emails using an HTML format, make sure the design is simple, clean, and uses few graphics. The more you use, the larger the email. The larger the email, the longer it takes to download and view. Whatever you do, DO NOT include browser-control “features” or code that automatically redirects the browser to a website. Very few

people like these and it's not widely supported by many email clients, so a lot of your readers may see only garbage in their email.

Only send useful information for your readers. Don't send information that you wouldn't want to read if you were a prospective customer. Your email recipients probably don't want to read about your dog Tilly, your son's graduation from Webelos, or your new-found love of dirt farming. They want to know how your work/offer is going to benefit THEM. And they want to know this in as little time as possible. Try not to ramble. This is my biggest struggle. &#61514;

#### When You're Accused of SPAMming

When you do receive a SPAM complaint – and you will, eventually – try to be professional about it. Remove the person from your list immediately and, if needed, send all pertinent details (including the signup process and a copy of your Privacy Policy or Anti-SPAM Policy) to those who need it. Let the person know, in a business-like and non-aggressive manner, that they have been removed from your list and will not receive further contact from you. From then on, it's best to just ignore them if they continue to harass you with complaints. So long as they aren't receiving any more of your emails (without signing up for them), they have nothing to complain about.

Despite the horror stories you may have heard (usually perpetrated by SPAMmers who don't want things like SpamCop or similar services to exist), you will NOT be blacklisted after only one or two complaints. It takes several complaints about the same instance and issue to get blacklisted. Even then, these lists are generally temporary and will only last a few months at the longest. Unless you are a REAL SPAMmer or are ignoring one of the fundamental rules of non-SPAM emailing, you will never get yourself listed on one of those lists.

In the end, email is still a great marketing tool when used properly. If you take the time to do the research, learn what you need to know, and employ the tools you need to use; you will benefit greatly from this powerful marketing tool. If, instead, you rely on purchased "safe lists" and use nefarious tools like "header screens," you'll eventually reap the painful rewards you're due.

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