

HOW TO
BUILD



HEALTHY



OPT-IN



EMAIL LISTS

Introduction

Email marketing has become very technical over the years. The average marketer is busy crafting new content, analyzing performance data, and weighing the benefits of incorporating the latest social sharing button in their email campaigns. There is a lot to keep up with, but no matter how advanced or hectic it may get, we can never lose sight of the key aspects of permission-based marketing that brought us to the dance, especially the importance of maintaining a [healthy mailing](#) list, something we all learned in the early goings.

Without the proper attention, or with even casual provision, your list can easily spiral out of control. Once this happens, you are susceptible to wasting valuable effort and money on contacts who either can't receive your messages for whatever reason, or no longer wish to hear from you. Regular upkeep will ensure a clean and healthy list, allowing you to enjoy higher open rates and inbox delivery, as well as boost the return on your investment.

[Email list management](#) is something many marketers are struggling with, but that does not mean you have to be in the same boat. Keeping a healthy list is a relatively easy task when you know what action must be taken to achieve it.



Signing Up and Opting In

Maintaining a clean mailing list is a practice that starts at signup. Here is what you can do throughout the process to ensure you get off to a good start:

- **Make Signing Up Convenient and Concise** - The [signup form](#) on your website or blog should be easy to spot, easy to use, and more importantly, easy to understand. Potential subscribers should not have to spend time wondering what exactly it is you're requesting, or why you're asking for it.
- **Confirm the Opt-in** - How you design your signup form is crucial, particularly in regard to the [opt-in option](#). Some marketers leave their opt-in boxes pre-checked as a way to make the process more convenient for the subscriber. But is best to leave this box empty. It may seem like a matter of preference, but when it comes to the do's and don'ts of permission-based marketing, this is definitely one of the don'ts.
- **Double Up** - The signup process is not done even after users have expressed their interest by signing up on your website. If you want to experience as few problems as possible, it is advisable to go one step further by exercising a [double opt-in](#). After someone signs up, send a welcome email with a link that gives them the opportunity to confirm their subscription and make it official. Be sure to make this task as easy as the initial signup process.

Optimizing the signup process gives you the opportunity to keep your growing list

happy. Engage new prospects from the very beginning and keep things simple.

Find the Right Frequency

Effective list hygiene is more than just identifying inactives and removing email addresses. A lot of it is based on your actions. How often do you send out that newsletter? How often do you rely on an [autoresponder](#) to convey your message when you don't have the time to send something more personal? How many times per week are subscribers receiving your sales offers in their inbox? This is something you need to think about because it could be the very reason why your numbers are down.

The right frequency is tough to nail down because it varies from marketer to marketer. A bi-weekly [newsletter](#) might be perfect for your business partner but alienate the members of your audience who feel as if you are contacting them too much. Likewise, providing daily updates may be necessary to keep some subscribers interested, yet a disastrous strategy for others. There is no way to determine what is too often or too little without testing. Once you have your results, adopt a sending schedule that works for your audience, and stick with it.

Stay Relevant

Today, email marketers must work harder than ever to stay up to date. In addition to the brands they regularly communicate with via email, consumers are locked into their connections on Facebook and Twitter. To make matters worse, both your direct and indirect competitors are ramping up their efforts in attempts to win the consumer's attention in the inbox, a tactic that has resulted in many of them being viewed as spammers. The perception of spam has gone from being unsolicited email to any email the consumer does not want to receive. This is why the importance of relevance has increased tenfold.



Consumers are so fed up with irrelevant content that they would often rather reach for the convenient “This is Spam” button than bother with unsubscribing from a marketer's mailing list. Sending messages that address them by name is no longer enough to get their attention. They want content that is tailored to their needs and preferences, quick to tune out those who are not able to deliver. Needless to say, failing to provide your audience with relevant content can make for a very unstable list.

So how does one solve the relevance dilemma? This is a question that can be answered in a number of different ways, yet it all equates to knowing your audience. More than likely, you already have a wealth of data on your subscribers in the form of profiles and the information logged in your reports. Anything else you need to know can be obtained through [email surveys](#), polls, and conversations. When you deliver relevant content on a consistent basis, maintaining a healthy list is much easier for the simple fact that you are giving the people what they value.

Divide and Conquer with Segmentation

Segmentation is a powerful method for creating relevant content and keeping your list in good shape. It is the key to delivering communications your audience is most likely to respond to. If you ran an automobile dealership, you wouldn't try to push an SUV on a prospect who insists that they prefer sports cars. Why take the same one-size-fits-all approach with the subscribers on your list?

Following is some criteria you can use to take the big master list you have, and segment it to target your communications more effectively:

- **Demographics** - More than likely, your list is chalk full of data that can be used for [email segmentation](#) purposes. Gender, age, and location are just some of the criteria you may already have at your disposal. While demographics segmentation doesn't let you get too deep, it does tend to be considerably easier to execute than other strategies.
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- **Purchase History** - You can also make your communications more focused by basing your segmentation strategy on purchase data. For example, if you know you have a few customers who buy the same items from your store every month, you can place them in a group away from the occasional shoppers and target them with special messages to butter them up right around the time they make their usual purchase. You can take this a step further by tempting them with special offers on similar items they might be interested in.
 - **Activity** - The activity associated with your [email campaigns](#) gives you a lot of criteria on which to base your segmentation strategy. As an example, you could create a segment comprised of subscribers who open your message and do not click your links, as well as a segment that contains subscribers who click your links but do not make a purchase. For the list members who are not resulting in conversion or opening your emails at all, you can place them in a separate segment as part of a re-engagement campaign designed to increase their activity.

Uniquely marketing to smaller groups on your lists is far more effective than sending the exact same message to the masses. Your subscribers expect you to both know who they are and target them accordingly. Through segmentation, you enhance the viability of your list by sending out more focused content. The added benefits can range from better responses and customer retention to upselling opportunities and greater loyalty.

Address Bounces

[Bounces](#) contribute to the hygiene problems on several mailing lists. This happens for a number of reasons. Perhaps you have a few invalid email addresses because of data

capture errors that occurred at signup. Maybe the recipient's inbox has reached its capacity limit, or their ISP's mail server is down due to technical difficulties. These are classic examples of bounces. It is important to make yourself familiar with them and how they can affect the quality of your list.

In the email domain, bounces come in two flavors: soft and hard. A soft bounce refers to an email that is sent and turned away before it is successfully delivered to the recipient's inbox. Any email addresses that are attached to soft bounces should not be removed from your mailing list right away. In many cases, they are the result of a temporary problem that sees your message eventually delivered.

A **hard bounce** refers to a message that is sent to an inactive email address. This is often the result of the subscriber who switches ISPs and picks up a new email address in the process, or the one whose employee email account was deleted after moving on from the company. No matter the reasoning behind them, hard bounces are something you must deal with. You can try to reduce them by including brief text in your messages that encourages subscribers to update their profiles should they ever change their email addresses. The only other thing you can do is remove the addresses that are hard bouncing. Remove the dead weight and your list will instantly be in better health.

Get Rid of Unsubscribes

Your mailing list will breathe much easier by removing all the email addresses of people who opt out of your communications. Don't view it as a sign of defeat. View it as honoring the subscriber's request and maintaining the overall health of your list. If you are running your own campaigns, you will have to manually remove unsubscribes, which is much easier when you have an efficient database system in place. If you have a good ESP then it's no sweat at all. A company that is truly on the ball will handle all your unsubscribes while you kick back and focus on the marketing aspects.

The most important part here is making sure those names are off your list. Remember, this is a requirement of the [2003 CAN-SPAM Act](#). After 10 business day, keeping someone on your list who explicitly opted out could lead to more trouble than you are equipped to handle. Besides, it is better to spend your time on interested, engaged subscribers who want to hear from you.

Never Buy Mailing Lists

Building an **email list** can be hard work. It can get so frustrating that some marketers opt to take the easy route of purchasing a list to give themselves a good running start. This is a temptation that must be avoided at all costs. Buying a mailing list may seem like a wise move, but if you are an online marketer of any sort, it is actually one of the worst decisions you could ever make, one that ends in a waste of money, time, and effort.

Remember, "If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is." This adage perfectly sums up the tempting email list you may have been eyeing. The vendors selling these lists only make matters worse. They promote them as valued investments,

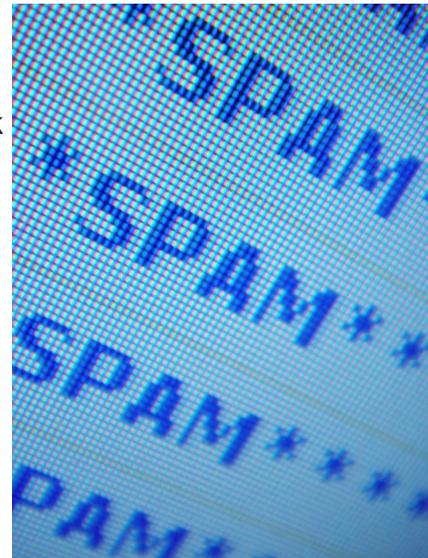
claiming to have a vast database of names stocked with consumers who are interested in your offerings. At first glance, it all looks delicious. Your very own target audience just waiting for you to reach out and send them what they want. Sadly, these lists can be described as nothing more than fool's gold.

If you have been considering buying a mailing list, here is word of advice – don't. It is a bad move for many reasons, including the following:

- **Inaccuracy** - One of the biggest problems associated with buying a mailing list is its hit or miss aspect. In most cases, all you get is a name and email address, which certainly is not enough information to accurately target prospects. Instead of wasting time on the maybes, you could be focusing your energy on an audience that is actually interested in what you have to say.

- **Blacklisted** - Nevermind what the money-hungry vendor tells you – where does that big bad list really come from? Chances are, the vendor obtained it from a collection of websites and shady practitioners who sell email addresses on the black market. And even if consumers did give a specific company the permission to contact them, the fact of the matter is that they did not explicitly give that permission to YOU. This means you can usually expect poor results at best, and a myriad of spam complaints at worst.

- **Shutdown** - Buying a mailing list can bring your email marketing endeavors to an abrupt halt. Most ESPs have policies in place that must be adhered to in order to continue to use their services. These regulations are designed to ensure that no spam is being delivered through their system. By purchasing a list, you run the high risk of violating [email marketing best practices](#) and having the account with your trusted ESP permanently shut down.



Now that we have established that taking such short cuts is very likely to result in major problems, this leaves you with no other choice but to naturally build your house email list. Collect contact information from members of your target audience and try to build relationships with consumers who are more likely to give you some action. Use your website, social havens, events, and exiting sales channels to grow your audience and open up more marketing opportunities. Building your list in this fashion requires more time and effort, but also delivers better results and helps keep problems to a minimum.

List Hygiene Made Easy and Effective

As an [email marketer](#), you probably have more than enough on your plate. And even

though it is extremely important, it is understandable to put off cleaning your list in favor of other essential tasks. With Benchmark Email's advanced, easy to use [Clean List Feature](#), you can make sure your list is in tip-top shape by removing the dead weight, and free up the time needed to focus on the core objectives of your business.

Unlike other tools that are both overly complex and inefficient, the Benchmark Email Clean List Feature is highly effective with a degree of user-friendliness that makes scrubbing your mailing list a hassle-free task. To get started, simply sign into your account and click on the "Lists" tab . Next, click the magnifying glass to view the list you want to clean, and select "Clean List" from the "Contact List" option at the top right of the screen.

Benchmark Email software allows you to easily remove hard and soft bounces, unsubscribes, and subscribers who have not opened your messages in the last "X" number of campaigns. You can make sure your list is as clean as a whistle while saving precious time and money in the process.

The Simple Things are the Most Important

If you maintain a list of contacts, then making the ongoing effort to maintain the health of that list is a necessity. Everything from purchasing names to failing to address bounces threatens its quality. Give your list the attention it deserves, and it will reward you with satisfying results time and again.

About Benchmark Email

Take powerful features by the dozen, sophisticated list management, hundreds of email templates, ultra-precise reports and dazzling email and video email. Now, package all that together for an extremely affordable price. Sound appealing? That's us.

There's a reason – or 100 – that more than 73,000 users trust us with their email marketing campaigns. With a second-to-none feature set, headache-free tools that make every campaign a snap and extremely reasonable price plans, we're the email marketing service for businesses of all shapes and sizes.

At Benchmark, we're more than email marketing experts, we're innovators. Our main aim is to perfect our email marketing service, but we also follow social networking, search engine optimization (SEO) and Web 2.0 just so our 100% Web-based software is completely compatible with the ever-changing Internet world.

No other service gives you this robust, standard range of features for just \$9.95 a month to start. Find out for yourself by enrolling in our free, 30 day trial at www.benchmarkemail.com/register.

Contact Benchmark Email

We welcome your feedback and would love to talk with you about your email marketing needs. Please contact us at the addresses below.

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