

*Benchmark*  
EMAIL

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GUIDE

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## Welcome to Your Quick Start Guide

We have formatted this quick start guide to help you dive right into the basic mechanics of email marketing. This is a step-by-step guide with chapters occurring in the order in which you would naturally go through the email marketing process.

### *What This Is Not*

We want this guide to be fast, mechanical and efficient. We will not take time with excessive definitions, back story, or theories about the the how & why. If you feel like you need a more thorough primer on the overall topic of email marketing, we have written a comprehensive manual entitled The Benchmark Email Complete Guide to Email Marketing. You can download that [here](#).

### *You Will Be Guided Through These Steps*

#### **1. Get Subscribers**

Customers, clients or prospects give you permission to email them because they want to get information from you. Let's call them subscribers.

#### **2. Organize Your Lists**

You organize email lists of these subscribers based on location, spending patterns or any other category that makes sense to you.

#### **3. Create Your Content**

You create or write content to send these clients. This can include text, e-coupons, links, pictures and even video. Let's call these newsletters.

#### **4. Schedule Delivery**

You schedule the email delivery to some or all of the members of your lists. You may choose to have different newsletters to go out at predetermined times.

#### **5. Subscribers Respond (Open & Click-thru)**

Customers receive your content in their email inboxes. When they read your newsletters, we call these opens. They respond to your marketing campaign by coming to your store, performing a click-thru to your links, etc. Emails that are undeliverable are called bounces.

#### **6. Track Your Success Online**

You monitor the success of your campaigns with online reports and make adjustments accordingly. The measuring of all those opens, click-thru activity and bounces is called tracking.

## Step One - Get Subscribers

*Customers, clients or prospects give you permission to email them because they want to get information from you. Let's call them subscribers.*

You could craft the greatest, most-impressive email campaign, but it means nothing if you don't have anyone to send it to. So before you do anything, you must have customers, clients, members or prospects who have given you permission to email them because they want to get information from you.

### **You Need Permission**

You should only send bulk emails to people who are expecting it from you and specifically you. It's really that simple. There are stiff legal penalties for breaking the law when you cross certain lines. But it's also possible to experience severe consequences when you comply with the law, but don't use best practices. Reputable email marketing companies will hold you to these best practices so that they can ensure delivery of your email newsletters and those of all their other clients.

### **Spam**

The sending of unsolicited email in identical or near identical form to a list or group of people is called spam. The [CAN-SPAM](#) act is very clear in that you are not to harvest email addresses and send bulk emails to people who don't want them. It goes further in regulating the types of commercial messages you can send so as to not be deceptive or misleading. Buying email lists, borrowing email lists, and making lists from people with whom you don't have a relationship puts your company at tremendous risk.

We're not attorneys, so don't take this as your legal advice. We can just tell you some situations that are red flags for us:

- Don't use purchased email lists
- Don't use third party email lists
- Don't trick people into being on your list



If you have to ask “what if?”, then you probably shouldn’t do it. Remember that the spam tag isn’t decided by you. It’s the perception of the recipient and the server administrators that counts.

### ***How to Properly Build Your Permission-Based List***

It’s not hard to build permission-based lists. It only takes common sense and a minor dedication to your methods. The good news is that technology can automate the process. Paper and pen work, too. And when the two worlds meet, you have even more power!

### ***Your Lists Should Be at Least “Opt-In”***

This means that a person has explicitly consented or given permission to be sent bulk email from the sender. All your email lists should be at least opt-in.

### ***And Probably “Double Opt-In” (or Confirmed Opt-In)***

In this preferred method of obtaining permission, the person signs up for email contact via a form, check box, sign up box, etc. A second step is added in where the person responds to a verification email before any email marketing is sent. This is the safest way to build your email lists.

### ***And Give People the Option to “Opt-Out” (or Unsubscribe)***

The action a person takes when they no longer want to receive email from a company. It requires a web-based mechanism by which people can ask to be removed reliably from an email list. This request must be honored within ten days. Your email service provider should provide this for you automatically. Not giving people this option is asking for big trouble.

### ***Use Those Sign Up Boxes!***

A good email marketing company can provide you with one of these - basically HTML code that you copy and paste into your website, social network page or anywhere else you’re on the net. People see a box that they can easily use to sign up for your newsletters. Because a verification email is sent, your list is double opt-in and considered to be the best kind of list.

## ***Place Buttons Or Links to Your Sign Up Box***

If you often visit forums, participate in social networking or are active in places where you can't place the code for your box, put a link to it whenever you can.

## ***Don't Let Your List Go Stale***

A good rule of thumb is six months. Even if you built your list the correct way, a person might forget that they have subscribed to your newsletter. They might hit that spam button.

## ***Frequent Trade Shows***

You can find lots of people who have similar interests all in one place. Shake hands, say hello, and kindly ask for permission to send your new contact a newsletter. If you didn't get written permission to add them to your list, make sure that you use the confirmed opt-in method when you manually add them to your lists. Every new contact added this way gets an email with a link in it that they must click on to activate their subscription. A good rule of thumb is that if you get a business card at a trade show, immediately email them and ask them to confirm that they want to be on your bulk email list.

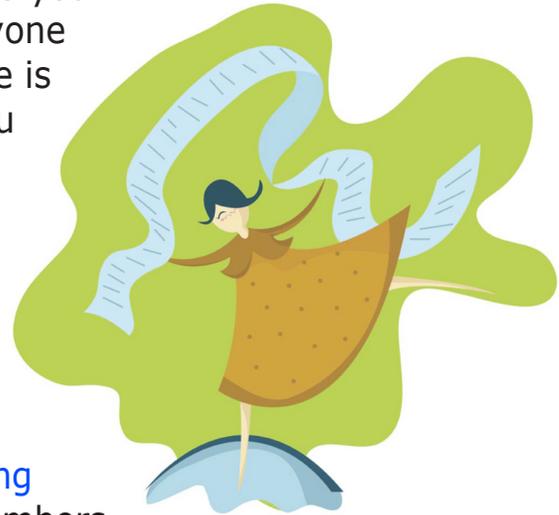
## ***Don't Buy Lists***

Never. Don't do it. There are not thousands of eager people who volunteer their names and contact info just waiting for strangers to buy their email address and send them spam.

## Step Two - Organize Your Lists

*You organize email lists of these subscribers based on location, spending patterns or any other category that makes sense to you.*

You could just input all your contacts into your email marketing account and send everyone the same emails at the same time. There is nothing wrong with that, especially if you have a simple business or organization and are sending generally-toned email campaigns. But some people find that there's power in specialization, localization and target marketing. Some people may have unique needs and you may want a way to send them unique information. [Good email marketing software](#) lets you easily separate the members



of your list into different segments. That's the easy part. It's up to you to decide how to organize your contacts into different lists or segments. Here are some suggestions:

### **Location**

This is probably the most obvious. If you ask your customers where they live as they sign up or subscribe, you can cater specials, news and community outreach to particular neighborhoods. Mentioning landmarks and points of interest that only someone in that community would care about is a great way to endear your company to these customers.

### **Birthday**

If you know your customer's birthday, why not welcome them back to your store or restaurant with a small giveaway? They'll be happy you thought of them and they'll probably bring friends.

### **Purchasing Behavior**

If you're manually building your list (with permission, of course), then you might also be able to input the customer's consumer behavior as an

entry. Maybe you have a list segment for your big spenders and one for infrequent customers. You might decide to send specials to reward those who buy often, or you might go the other way and try to entice those peripheral purchasers.

## ***Target Market Segments***

If you know a bit about demographics and psychographics, you'll have a good clue on some very powerful segment ideas. If you set up these different fields before you build your list, you can identify unique needs to capitalize on.



## ***Responders***

When you track who opened your email and clicked back to your website for a purchase or visit, you can segment this population of your list and target specific marketing to this fertile, valuable part of your list.

## ***New Subscribers***

Those that are new to your list might need to hear about information that would quite frankly bore your long-time subscribers. Segment them and give them the attention that they deserve.

## ***Openers***

It's also possible to analyze who opened your email marketing, but then did nothing else. You might want to try a different approach to get action out of this half interested portion of your list.

## ***Non-Openers***

If you have people that never even open your emails (but delivery tracking tells you they've received them), then you might try some different methods to get their attention. You might eventually decide that these addresses are a waste of your time and resources.

## Step Three – Create Content

*You create or write content to send these clients. This can include text, e-coupons, links, pictures and even video. Let's call these newsletters.*

In short, you want to send your subscribers news about your company or organization. You may want to let people know about an upcoming event or sale. You may want to include pictures or video demonstrations of new products.

### All Newsletters Are Not the Same

Different templates, different themes, but what are the major types of professional email newsletters that businesses and organization use most? Here are a few examples:

#### Newsletter

A newsletter is probably the most-used and least threatening type of marketing you can send your customer. It really is a generally-toned, multiple sectioned communications piece that reads like a mini-newspaper. You'll have information sections that brand your store, service or products. You might have promotional sections, a place for a survey and maybe an e-coupon. The focus here is content of varying types that all have one purpose in mind: the general promotion of your company.



#### Promotions

A promotional email has only one purpose: hyping a product or service. This focused communication will stick to one topic and is much shorter than a newsletter. Give the customer the facts: what it is, how much it is, and why they need it.

#### Event Invitations

If you know the difference between a proper wedding invitation versus an announcement in a newspaper, then you'll see the benefit of having a special template section dedicated to promoting your company's special event. An email event invite has to do two things: generate interest and convince the recipient that they've got something to leave the house for.

## Holiday Templates

After you've sent your customer newsletters and special promotions, you might be looking for another excuse to send them marketing. This is the [beauty of the holiday template](#). While it might be easy for a subscriber to decide they're not in the mood for your newsletter, they may open your newsletter because it has a holiday theme. Why? Holidays make people happy. It's a day to celebrate, take time off or even share something in common.



While you could just put specials on a Thanksgiving template, you can also be a bit more subtle about it. If you sent out a Thanksgiving themed newsletter with nothing but facts about the holiday, a little history and maybe reasons people in your community are thankful, you'll accomplish a longer term goal: your subscribers will recognize your newsletter as entertaining and thought provoking and will be likely to open more of them in the future. You'll be in their minds, too, and you never had to try to sell a thing.

## Survey or Poll

This can be sent on its own or included in any newsletter. The store can get vital customer response by sending out goodlooking, easy-to-use customer polls. The customers feel like they have a voice as the store fine-tunes its operations based on the feedback it gets. The best part? The polls let you ask any question you want and you can create more list segments based on these answers.



## Content

Your email campaigns mean nothing if they don't include interesting, compelling content. Is what you're sending of interest to your subscriber? If you need help deciding what to send, how to write it, and how to craft compelling subject lines, our complete email guide can help you out. You can also just visit the section online [here](#).

## Step 4 – Schedule Delivery

*You schedule the email delivery to some or all of the members of your lists. You may choose to have different newsletters to go out at predetermined times.*

### **Don't Worry, It's Just a Plan**

There are major events in our lives and minor events that take a major effort. Mostly all of them take some kind of thought and at least a few reminders to do them. Running away from a bear when you see one? Maybe you only think about that once and do it. Changing phone service to a better plan or trying a new restaurant might take a few mentions. Please note the specific definition of email marketing campaign.

*An email marketing campaign is just one in a series of newsletters that you send to a list of clients. Each new newsletter that is created and sent to a list (or lists) is considered a new campaign.*

### **How Scheduling Works**

Some people like to create their email marketing when they feel inspired and send it all out within a few minutes of finishing. There's nothing wrong with that if that's how you work, but you should at least know that you can schedule your emails and that there is a knowledge base of scheduling best practices.

As you create your email, you can choose what day and time you'd like to send it. You can also save it as a draft so that you can put off deciding when to send it until later on. If you've taken advantage of list segmentation, you can duplicate your email and send it to one list at a specific time and another part of your list later on.

### **Scheduling Best Practices**

There are some things that are just plain common sense. You don't want to send email newsletters to business contacts on the weekends if you only have their office email address. But there are some tidbits of experience that can help even those who are the brightest:

## **Weekday Emails**

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are the best weekdays to deliver your campaigns. Monday is too busy as it starts the week, and Friday sometimes is not the most productive day because it starts the weekend.

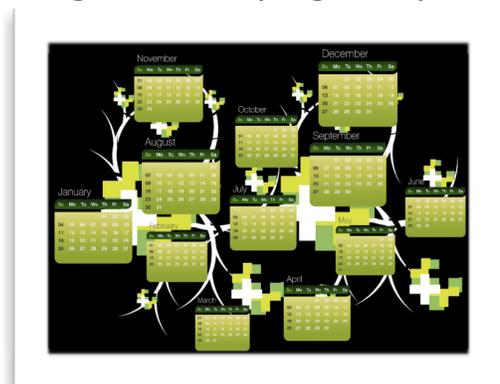
## **Sunday Instead of Saturday**

Saturday is just too deep in the weekend to be a prime emailing day. But recent studies have shown that not only is Sunday the best weekend day, it's actually one of the best days of the whole week on which to send out newsletters. More and more, people are using Sunday to check on email and shop online.

## **Send Often...not too Often**

We mentioned this before, but it is very applicable here. If you wait too long to send your first email or let too much time lapse between your newsletters, your previously eager list may just change their minds about your communications or might be not as responsive as they once were. They might totally forget that they subscribed to you and regard your out-of-the-blue email as spam. Don't forget that they signed up for newsletter because they want information. This is why permission is so important: You only have people on your list who are anticipating information from you.

The last thing you want to do is burn your list out. There's also the question of ROI – Return On Investment. Although email marketing is very inexpensive, there is some cost. If you send out too many emails and your response stagnates, you could be wasting money and time. Worse yet, you could be perceived as spamming, even though you have permission to send the person email.



If your email marketing company has a [great autoresponder feature](#), you'll have the benefit of a "set it and forget it" approach for your email campaigns.

Whereas scheduling means you manually choose dates to send out your individual newsletters, an autoresponder works by setting up your newsletters to go out so many days after a subscriber performs an action (like signing up, taking a survey, etc.)

**Here's an Example:**

You set up four different email marketing newsletters to go out to people who use your sign up box. The first day, a welcome email goes out. On day five, they receive a discount coupon. Day ten sees them getting a detailed newsletter that functions as a service or product catalog. On day fifteen, a customer survey is automatically sent out. You only have to set this up once and the campaign automatically is in play for as long as you like.



## Step Five - Subscribers Respond

*Customers receive your content in their email inboxes. When they read your newsletters, we call these opens. They respond to your marketing campaign by coming to your store, performing a click-thru to your links, etc. Emails that are undeliverable are called bounces.*

You face three major tasks when trying to get your subscribers to act on your email marketing campaigns:

Was it **delivered** at all?

Was the **subject line** interesting enough to open?

Was the **content** of the email compelling enough to elicit action?

### Delivery

In a perfect world, you would just send out your email newsletters to everyone on your list, they would all be delivered to their inboxes, and everyone opens them up and enjoys your fine marketing efforts. It makes sense that this would happen, doesn't it?

And now the bad news: the world isn't perfect. Thousands of emails are sent each day that never get to the addressees' inboxes in the first place. Your email messages must navigate a myriad of gatekeepers on the way to their final destinations. Basically, they have to jump the hurdles that are set up to catch spam. Yes, your email's content, who sent it and who delivered it all factor into the success of your email's delivery rate.

### Reputation

Whether or not your email is delivered depends on these gatekeepers evaluating the reputation of who sent it, the reputation of who delivered it, and analyzing the content to see if it just might be spam. This means that your domain name matters as well as the IP address of the server your email was sent from.



## ***Your Reputation is a Score***

Your email reputation is like a credit score that ISPs and email security vendors use to block spam, which makes up for over 80% of all email. Individually, your return address references your domain and that domain will be assigned a score based on:

### **Spam Complaints**

If real people report your email as spam, your reputation could be taking a hit. Many email hosts have "report spam" buttons that are easily clickable by its users.



### **Spam Traps**

Internet Service Providers will reactivate old email addresses that are no longer used for the sole purpose of catching spam. Since the email address is old, no mail should be sent to it and anything it receives is most likely unsolicited. Spam traps are usually being sent to because of people purchasing email lists (with old addresses) or worse, legitimate marketers using stale contacts.

### **Hard Bounces**

The number or percentage of email sent to unknown or nonexistent addresses.

### **Volume of Email Messages**

Differences or spikes in sending volume. Both spammers and legitimate email marketers send out volumes of email, so consistency counts as does the other factors if this one is high.

### **Does My Choice of Email Service Providers (ESP) Help My Reputation?**

Yes, yes, and yes. The top email marketing service providers are constantly working behind the scenes so that your email campaigns have the highest delivery rates because it's in their best interest. Make sure that your ESP provides email certification, tracks open rates & complaints, provides excellent unsubscribe mechanisms, maintains excellent relationships with the major ISPs, and makes sure that all its customers adhere to email marketing best practices so that everyone's reputation isn't harmed by the actions of a few.

## A Good Subject Line

We can't stress how important this is. This is the line that your customer reads in his or her inbox and they'll base their decision to open the email based on it. First impressions count.

## Be Interesting

If you remember only one thing, let it be this. Times, trends, rules and people all change. So what works one year might be spam the next. But if you write your headlines so that they are interesting in context with what else your client receives, you're halfway home. You want your headline to be the one that stands out and demands to be opened.

## Know Your Limits - 55 Characters or Less

You could write a longer subject line, but some email clients, like Yahoo, cut off your subject line after 55 letters or spaces. If you go over this limit, you risk an incomplete thought.

## Good Strategies for a Good Subject Line

- ask a question*
- name drop*
- get emotional*
- illustrate a benefit*

## Avoid Spammy Headlines

You know what they are because you get email yourself. Do you open any message that says "Buy Now" or "Don't Miss Out"? Instead, use words that mean something to your audience without coming across as pushy. People are savvy and tired of being hustled and hassled. Respect that and just give them the facts they care about.

## Don't Use Trigger Words

Spam filters are ruthless because they have to be. There is so much junk email, and they're charged with eliminating it before it ever gets to the reader. Certain words are denoted by these filters as likely to contain junk email. While there are many [spam filter trigger words](#), here are a few to avoid:

*Afford*  
*Opportunity*  
*Save*  
*Free (especially in combination with certain words)*  
*Earn Money*  
*Eliminate Debt*

Using these won't automatically put your message in the trash, but there is a scoring system in play. If you have a good reputation, you're in better graces, but don't forget that the readers themselves have probably developed a natural aversion to those types of words. If you're still not sure, your email marketing service should have an easy to use [Spam Checker](#) right in your email creation dashboard.

### ***Finally, Don't Use ALL CAPS***

Because that's a quick ticket to the Spam box.

## Step Six - Track Your Success Online

*You monitor the success of your campaigns with online reports and make adjustments accordingly. The measuring of all those opens, click-thru activity and bounces its called tracking.*

Only a madman works without any kind of way to grade his or her performance. It would be lunacy to send out email marketing messages without gauging how effective they are.

Of course, a good indication is a general uptick in business activity and that might tell you if the email marketing is working generally, but what of the performance of the individual messages that you send out?

In order to refine your message so that you are sending out marketing messages in the most optimized fashion, you need an effective way to measure:



*How many of your emails made it to the inboxes of the individual recipients*

*Which email addresses are no longer valid*

*What percentage of your list opened up your emails*

*Who individually opened up your emails*

*Who clicks on the links that you provide within your emails*

*Who forwards your email campaigns to their friends*

*Who unsubscribes from your list*

*The performance of one campaign versus another*

## **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 clients 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 [www.benchmarkemail.com/register](http://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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