

Top 10 e-Deliverability Tips: *a how-to overview for maximizing MagnetMail*

By: Richard Finstein, CEO, CommPartners

We cannot stress it enough. No matter how good your content and design, if messages aren't received you've lost a valuable opportunity to connect with every stakeholder in your organization.

Following these ten steps should dramatically increase the number of messages successfully delivered:

1. **Get white-listed.** Having recipients white-list key technical information about your organization—and the application you use to send emails (e.g., MagnetMail)—may be the most effective means for improving deliverability:

- Send a broadcast email to your list, encouraging recipients to follow white-listing instructions
- Above the header or in the footer of every message, place white-listing wording (see tip # 7). **For example:**
To ensure delivery of [INSERT NEWSLETTER TITLE HERE], please add '[INSERT FROM EMAIL ADDRESS HERE]' to your email address book or Safe Sender List. If you are still having problems receiving our communications, see our white-listing page for more details: <http://www.commpartners.com/website/white-listing.htm>
- Also include your white-listing wording on your subscription management page and on any confirmation emails that may be sent out

2. **Best practices—get permission.** A single opt-in (signing up on a subscription page only) is most often used. Or, use a double opt-in method: after a user signs up on a subscription page, send a confirmation email with a link the recipient must click to opt-in. Be aware that confirmation emails may be blocked by junk mail filters; therefore, recipients may not be able to complete the sign-up process.

When renting lists, make sure lists are opt-in recipients who anticipate receiving the type of information you are sending. Otherwise, you could face fines, high unsubscribes, complaints to email providers and being blacklisted.

3. **Manage lists carefully—especially unsubscribes and bounces.** The safest way to handle unsubscribes is to flag those email addresses in your database, so the record isn't exported on any future email lists. Short of that, MagnetMail offers effective ways of managing unsubscribes based on each account's setting (unsubscribe from group ONLY or ALL groups).

4. **Deliver the news.** To have effective, interactive e-communications, your messages must be **urgent**, **relevant** and **easy to read**. You'll achieve these three must-haves by approaching email as news readers need to know. Use a journalistic writing method: put the most important information at the top, where the recipient's eye will go first. Assume many people will never read beyond the first paragraph, so make sure it's attention-grabbing and newsworthy.

5. **Use MagnetMail's industry-leading deliverability testing module.** This advanced tool identifies any e-deliverability/usability problems before messages are sent, by analyzing three primary aspects:

- Usability—detects message elements that may degrade the user experience, such as broken links and images
- Spam—runs messages through popular Spam filtering software (Spam Assassin, Postini, and Brightmail) and returns data on how the message scored
- Display—provides a preview of how messages will render in all of the top email clients, such as Outlook, Hotmail, Comcast, YAHOO!, AOL, Juno, Gmail, etc.

6. Re-use "From" field and get it white-listed:

- To the extent possible, select one email address to use consistently in your "From" field that all recipients will recognize is from your organization
- It's important to consistently use the same "From" address that is in the white-listing information for that specific template
- Make sure the "From" field value is included in your white-listing information
- Use MagnetMail's hard-coded "From" field feature to reduce potential mistakes. Use of a vanity-domain email address that has your organization's name (e.g., "your organization" <news@organization.com>)

7. Provide key information at the topmost portion of your e-messages. This may be the most valuable real estate in any email. Use it to provide recipients with key options, such as:

- A link to a Web version of the message. Recipients who have trouble receiving HTML emails can click this link and view a full HTML version. Image blocking is becoming more prevalent, so this link is becoming increasingly important
- Also provide a link to a text version of your emails. Linking to text versions enables you to comply with W3C Accessibility guidelines and offers a user-friendly format for PDA users.
- A link to your white-listing information. This information may also be placed at the bottom of your email, just make it easy for subscribers to find

8. Join the Bonded Sender program. Bonded Sender rewards senders who exercise best practices by white-listing their messages with more than 34,000 organizations, including many ISPs, MSN and Hotmail.

9. Use the Spam Checker. The MagnetMail Spam checker is available on several pages: HTML editing, Send to Group, Send to Individuals, and Overview Tracking. It analyzes message content for attributes that may trigger Spam filters' red flags and provides instant reporting of potential problems. Reduce a high Spam content score:

- Don't use all-cap, screaming headlines in the subject line or email body (e.g., FREE PUBLICATION!!)
- In the subject line, minimize sales-pitch words (e.g., Free, Sale, Save, Shop, Promo, Win, Order Today, etc.)
- Get the "From" field right! Use MagnetMail's hard-coded "From" field feature
- Keep designs simple, with minimal use of images
- Be careful using colors (especially bright red)—loud, multi-colored emails may result in higher Spam scores

10. Test, test, test. Every detail in every email must be correct to reach your subscribers, so continually test, using pre-send diagnostics. Ask the following questions for every email:

- Is your "From" field recognizable?
- Will the subject line grab readers' attention? This may be all they will see!
- Have you sent a test message to colleagues to check for broken links and images?
- Have you used the Spam Checker?
- Is everything spelled correctly?
- Are your landing pages correct?

After you've completed this checklist, send a test email to all major providers (Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo!, etc.). While testing, pay special attention to your subject line—those 45 characters are what matter the most!

Author Richard Finstein is an e-marketing specialist and co-founder of CommPartners. He has 25-plus years of consulting and serving as a guest speaker at many association educational sessions, as well as devising technology solutions for associations and non-profits. In 1998, he co-developed the technology partner program with ASAE Services. Rich holds a marketing degree from University of Maryland.