

SPAM VERSUS EMAIL

INTRODUCTION

Some people hate spam; they absolutely and perhaps unreasonably hate it while some people just see it as a part of having an email address. On the other hand no one seems to mind getting an email from someone they know, even if the message is not currently of interest to them. In business we believe that it is always best to keep customers and potential customers onside and for that reason alone we recommend against spam. Beside the commonsense arguments spam is also illegal.

WHAT IS SPAM?

Simply put spam is an unsolicited email message.

Some people will classify any unwanted email message as spam even if it comes from someone they know, or from a company that they do business with. This is a very strict definition but it is worth knowing that this is how some people view a message they are not expecting. Some argue that the reason they are so against unwanted emails is that they have to pay for it to be downloaded and therefore every spam is costing them money.

More generally people will define spam as an email containing unwanted marketing messages from an unknown organisation or individual.

OPT IN MAILING LISTS

This is currently the most popular form of email marketing. Mailing lists are often maintained automatically through web based list servers that will handle requests to subscribe and unsubscribe automatically. Typically one email sent to a list server will be forwarded on to all the email addresses within the mailing group of the list server.

These services are usually unable to personalise messages and although they are very efficient, they can seem quite impersonal. Receiving a message that starts dear valued customer just doesn't cut it with a lot of people.

PERSONALISED BULK EMAIL

Personalised email is the best email and if it is done properly people needn't know that it has been produced in bulk. If you have ever used the Mail Merge function in MS Word to create a batch of personalised letters, you will be able to create bulk personalised email in exactly the same way. Instead of merging your documents to the printer, or to a new file for printing you simply merge to electronic mail.

We recommend using Excel to manage your email data base as it is more user friendly when it comes to sorting your recipients into groups. This functionality makes it possible to create highly personalised email messages.

If you have not used Mail Merge before you will find detailed instructions in the MS Word Help files, under Mail_merge.

Another option is to use the signature function in Outlook to manage a series of standard emails that you can quickly personalise before sending one at a time to your recipients. This is especially useful if the emails are being sent out as a follow up to a telephone conversation.

To create a signature in Outlook Express, select Tools on the menu and scroll down to select Options. Click on the Signatures tab to create and edit your standard signatures.

EMAIL MESSAGES THAT ARE VALUED

If you promote a newsletter or a tip of the month service on your website in the hope of building a prospect list, you must honour your promise by delivering news and tips that are of value to the recipient. If you have tricked your users into subscribing to a newsletter service and you send them marketing guff instead you run the risk of losing your prospect very quickly.

It is ideal to send an email to your recipients regularly, but not at the expense of sending rubbish. If there is no news, or no valuable information to pass on there should be no email. Companies that only send high value information to their recipients usually do well from their mailing lists. This is because by default your emails always convey a positive message about your company and the way that it operates. Often these emails although unrelated to any sales information will remind customers to make that purchase that they had been thinking about.

EMAIL ETIQUETTE

Try to ensure that your emails are sent by a person, rather than a department. People prefer messages that at least seem to be person to person.

Try to keep your messages short, and use clear language and short sentences. Avoid writing in capitals – this is email shouting.

Make sure that the return address used in bulk emails will reach a person who can and will reply to them if necessary. It is extremely frustrating for a user to respond to your email and find that their email is bounced back.

If you get an angry response to an email, call the recipient if you have their number. Sometimes wires get crossed, or it just isn't their day and your email gets mistaken for spam. If you call the recipient you will immediately confirm that the email was not spam.

Make sure that you treat your recipients with respect and remove them from your mailing list quickly if asked. It is good email etiquette to provide a short confirmation email stating that their name has been removed and to thank them for letting you know that they no longer require the service.

CONCLUSION

Email marketing is highly time efficient and cost effective. If used to positively reinforce your promise of service and value it could prove to be one of the best marketing initiatives you could undertake.

Spam, on the other hand has an enormous potential to harm your reputation, both with your existing customers as well as your prospects and suspects. Over the years we have received numerous offers of email address lists. When they first started arriving they were selling them by the thousand. The most recent email was offering to broadcast messages to 27.3 million addresses. With more than six years in the industry we do not know of one business that has benefited from such a purchase, (or perhaps they just haven't told anyone about it).