

5 Keys to Avoiding a Bad (Sender) Reputation

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Your Sender Score, a ReturnPath metric to gauge your reputation as an email sender, is pretty important. It determines whether or not the door to recipient inboxes is open to your email communications and whether or not you're even a welcome visitor. Heck, it determines whether or not you can even knock on that door as email marketers with poor Sender Scores are often not permitted anywhere near the premises! They either have their emails shunted to a spam folder automatically or recipient ISPs outright refuse the delivery of their messages entirely. Your Sender Score is pretty serious business.

If you have a less-than-stellar email sender reputation or you just want it to be better (and stay better), there are several things you can do to improve your Sender Score. It can take weeks or months to affect a positive change but if you follow the tips described below, you'll soon see your Sender Score improve and, with it, your deliverability.

1. Send Only to Those Who Have Consented

Make sure that the only ones getting your email are folks who want them. Obtain direct consent, first and foremost. Ensure that your email is only going to address holders who have made a positive choice to join your list by opting themselves in via email list subscription forms online or by having signed up to your list in person like at a tradeshow or expo. (Do note, though, that collecting or harvesting email addresses from a master tradeshow list distributed by the venue or host organization does not constitute a consented join request.) Confirm and occasionally reconfirm permissions with recipients on your list. Use double opt-in. Permission-based collection using transparent collection methods and consistent list maintenance are the hallmarks of the best senders!

2. Keep an Eye on Your List

List Management is key. ISPs and spam monitors will be constantly reviewing your campaigns for unsubscribes, spam complaints and undelivered messages. And while there is an acceptable threshold that saves you from any red flags going up immediately, you should routinely clean your lists and keep those numbers at a minimum. In particular, remove those pesky hard bounces. Leaving them in there can lead to your getting caught in a spam trap, damaging your reputation significantly and possibly worse: getting blacklisted. And if anyone wants to let go, make unsubscribing easy. The occasional unsubscribe is way better than being pinged as a spammer.

3. Drive Interaction and Engagement

Make use of compelling content in your mailings. Ensure relevancy with targeted marketing. Personalize with dynamic content. ISPs, spam monitors and email security services are paying more and more attention to what happens on the recipient end of things by putting a lot of weight on open rates, click-through rates, and interactions (such as replies, forwards, and moving emails to the spam folder). Interaction improves your sender score significantly as engagement is a surefire method of indicating that email communication from a particular sender is, in fact, welcome.

4. Stay Consistent

The two aspects of your email marketing campaign's execution that deserve your attention (as they sure do get the attention of ISPs) are your volume and send frequency. The combination of the two have a direct impact on whether or not you make it into the inbox regularly. Don't expect your delivery to be unaffected should you decide to send a million email messages one month, zero another month and ten million the month after. Do yourself a favor and avoid reputation penalties by simply maintaining consistency in both.

5. Warm up Your IP Addresses

Begin your campaigns by first sending to small batches of your list – segments you've earmarked based on opens and click-throughs. With this initially small send, you're not as likely to get flagged as spam nor get unsubscribes. If you send to your entire list all at once, though, you'll face a greater probability of encountering dissatisfied recipients and having any and all email messages originating from that one IP address getting shut down right away. So, save yourself some heartache: start small and start safe. Gradually increase the amount of recipients over time to warm up your IP address and prove you're a safe sender.

Keep your Sender Score (and, by extension, your sender reputation) healthy. Not only will you enjoy positive deliverability and the satisfaction that comes from successfully reaching your audience but you'll also be saving yourself from sender reputation penalties, account suspensions and maybe even fines.

