

A Whitepaper of Email Marketing Questions and Answers

29 Questions and Answers: Maximizing Email Results



Introduction

This document summarizes the questions that were asked during the session and offline in the recent Pinpointe webinar: "Tips to Maximize Email Results (aka 'Email Marketing 101'.) We had dozens of questions that we were not able to answer online, so if you posted a question that we didn't get to during the online session, please check here, as we've done our best to answer and address all questions that were asked.

Q: WHERE CAN I LEARN ABOUT THE CAN-SPAM ACT?

You can check the FTC website at: www.ftc.gov/spam

Or call toll-free: 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357)

The CAN-SPAM act sets the minimum standards for email compliance in the US. Most email providers and ISPs (like yahoo.com, aol.com, gmail.com etc) have more stringent requirements.

Also note that compliance standards vary from country to country – many European countries have more stringent compliance laws.

Q: YOU USED THE TERMS B2B AND B2C - WHAT DO THESE MEAN?

"B2B" means 'Business to Business' - as in businesses communicating with other businesses, whereas "B2C" means 'Business to Consumer'.

Q: CAN YOU SHARE STATISTICS ON SPAM COMPLAINTS OR OTHER REPUTATION ISSUES?

This webinar covers topics related to email content vs. email spam filter operation however here are the top 3 reasons your email may be blocked by a SPAM filter:

- Hitting spamtraps / honeypots.
- Generating user complaints.
- Excessive hard bounces (undeliverable emails)

Complaints occur when the recipient clicks '**This is SPAM.**' When your email is reported as spam, networked spam filters share this information with thousands of other spam filters and if the complaint rate gets too high, your campaigns will quickly start going to the spam filter or worse, will be quietly dropped. ISPs who carry email traffic will generally "tolerate" a SPAM complaint rate of approximately 1 complaint per 1,000 ~ 2,000 emails. It is up to the sender or the Email Service provider to directly respond to any ISP requests regarding end user SPAM complaints.

At Pinpointe, we work closely with our business customers to ensure CAN-SPAM compliance, list integrity and email best practices. As a result, our spam complaint ratios are significantly better. Our sender statistics indicate that B2C (Business-to-Consumer) emails almost always generate higher spam complaint rates, as many consumers (e.g. @yahoo.com or @msn.com addresses) often hit the 'This is SPAM' button instead of deleting unwanted email, or opting out.

In general we see customers at aol.com are the most likely to complain; recipients at yahoo.com are the second most likely to complain. This is a general observation – your recipient audience may vary.

Q: WHAT IS A “SPAM HONEYPOT”?

Spam filter companies and companies that maintain blacklists often work directly with registrars to ‘re-cycle’ domains when they expire or when a company goes out of business. These become spamtraps (also called honeypots). Some honeypot-based blacklists are more devious. They host websites with embedded email addresses. Utilities that crawl websites and parse out email addresses (which is illegal in the US anyway) will capture the honeypot addresses.

Blacklists that are based on honeypots use this logic. When a company goes out of business or a domain otherwise becomes invalid, you should not be sending emails to anyone at that domain anymore. If a company is out of business and you send an email to them, then either a) you are not using good list management practices, and should be ‘penalized’ to clean up your act or b) you likely purchased or automatically generated the email address by combing websites for email addresses.

Q: CAN I GET A LIST OF SPAM HONEYPOTS SO I CAN AVOID THEM?

No. This would defeat the purpose – if blacklists made their honeypot addresses visible or available, any spammer would use these addresses as suppression list and avoid the honeypots. These addresses are always changing as blacklist managers/vendors are constantly using newly acquired domains.

Q: WE HAVE NOT SENT EMAILS TO OUR CONTACT FOR OVER A YEAR. HOW CAN WE CLEAN OUT EMAIL LIST BEFORE SENDING?

There are some services that will help you to clean known bad email addresses and some spam traps from your email list. This is especially useful (and highly recommended) if you have not sent to your email list for 6 months or more, and/or if you are using single vs. double opt-in processes when collecting addresses from your web forms. (Often, malicious spambots will submit invalid emails or honeypot addresses to your web forms – double opt-in is always recommended).

Services that clean lists include:

www.strikeiron.com

www.briteverify.com

www.freshaddress.com

Q: WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND DOING WITH HARD BOUNCES?

A: Stop sending to them immediately. If you receive a hard bounce (permanent delivery failure), do not send further emails. Continuing to send to hard bounces can cause delivery issues and

may get you blacklisted (see previous question.) Soft bounces should be removed after 5 attempts.

Most email providers like Pinpointe, manage your hard / soft bounces and unsubscribe contacts automatically. Spam filter companies and companies that maintain blacklists often work directly with registrars to 're-cycle' domains when they expire or when a company goes out of business. These become spamtraps (also called honeypots). Some honeypot-based blacklists are more devious. They host websites with embedded

Q: HOW CAN I TEST THE 'SPAM SCORE' FOR MY EMAIL?

A: Pinpointe and many other top tier Email Service Providers include a built-in spam checking tool. At Pinpointe you simply run the spam checker and we analyze your email against a spamassassin 'content-filter', to produce a spam score. Pinpointe then displays the phrases and wording that might cause delivery issues, so you can easily make adjustments.

Q: WILL PLACING THE RECIPIENT'S EMAIL ADDRESS AND/OR NAME IN THE SUBJECT INCREASE THE SPAM SCORE?

A: Many spam filters will classify your email as spam if you do this. This is a common spammer tactic so even if you make it through the spam content filter, most recipients have come to assume that these emails are likely spam and will either report you or will not open the email.

Q: CAN I PUT THE RECIPIENT'S CITY AND STATE IN THE EMAIL SUBJECT?

A: This depends on your contact database but generally we do not see this done frequently and it will likely look like spam to the recipient. However, consider using a split test tool like Pinpointe's split testing feature, to test the response in a small sample of your list.

Q: YOU MENTIONED THAT CREATING EMAIL CONTENT IN MS WORD AND THEN DIRECTLY PASTING THE RESULTS INTO AN HTML EMAIL OR CAMPAIGN EDITOR MAY NOT WORK. WHY?

A: MS Word is not designed or optimized for creating HTML content. If you create content in MS Word and then cut and paste the content into an HTML editor, and then look at the HTML content, you will see that they insert significant extraneous HTML formatting code. What's worse is that the HTML code created by MS Word is often either not supported by most email clients (including MS Outlook) or may at times include invalid HTML. This code can cause some SPAM filters to block your content because it may look like garbage content to the SPAM filter.

Instead, consider either using an HTML editor or design product (Adobe Dreamweaver is most often used).

Q: WHAT IS THE IDEAL EMAIL SUBJECT LENGTH?

The ideal email subject line length is 35 ~ 45 characters. Yes – that includes all spaces and punctuation! In email, shorter is better. Also some email clients will only display the first 40-45 characters of your email subject. For more information check out our webinar '[Using Split Tests to Improve Email Responses](#)' – we discuss the response rate vs. subject length in detail.

Q: HOW MANY LINES LONG SHOULD AN EMAIL BE LIMITED TO?

There is no set length, and it depends on the objective of the email but a guiding rule is **'shorter is better in almost all cases'**. Recipients skim emails briefly to see if they want to read further.

Tips to shorten the email:

- Use lead-in sentences with 'more....', which includes a link to a web page with more information.
- Use bullet points where possible
- Use headlines
- Re-craft the email to be shorter

For newsletters, be sure to put a list of topics at the beginning of the newsletter, so it is easy for the recipient to 'jump' to specific sections that may be of interest. A brief update, that is extending an offer to download a whitepaper or join an event, usually performs best if the email is short, to the point, and includes links to landing pages with additional information. Another common style is the 'educational, email blog's style. If you subscribe to 'The Motley Fool' for example, you've seen this. The writing style is personalized, 1 on 1 communication that typically covers a topic or two, and explains the topic in detail - but includes links to landing pages and external documents with additional supporting materials.

Q: WHEN SENDING AN EMAIL IS IT BETTER TO USE A 'SEND FROM / REPLY TO' ADDRESS SUCH AS 'SALES@MYCOMPANY.COM' OR 'MY [NAME@MYCOMPANY.COM](#)'?

A: In most cases, you will see better results by using a specific contact person (yourself for example) vs. a general address like 'support@' or 'sales@' or donotreply@company.com. Keep in mind that your recipients take only a second or two to decide whether or not to open your email. If they do not recognize your company, they are likely to skip over the email. Also, general addresses are less personal, which reduces open rates.

Actual results. Based on analysis of various campaigns across our system we have seen that using a specific personal name vs. a general email address can improve the net open rate by 15% - 35%.

Q: WHEN SENDING AN EMAIL IS IT OK TO USE A SEND-FROM OF [MYNAME@COMPANY.COM](#) AND USE A REPLY-TO OF [DONOTREPLY@COMPANY.COM](#)?

A: In most cases, this should be OK – setting a different reply-to address will reduce the bounce addresses that might clutter your inbox. However and valid, personal replies will also be sent to the reply-to address so you might miss them. Remember Email gives you the chance to develop and nurture a 1 to 1 relationship with your audience. Take advantage of this!

Q: WHEN TOOLS DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR DESIGNING HTML EMAILS?

A: We see that most customers use products like Adobe Dreamweaver for their main design, then perform any final modifications and tweaks using their online editor (like Pinpointe's wysiwyg email campaign editor). Note that only 45% of html is supported by the major email

clients, so be sure to avoid using the following content in any email design because this code will either be stripped or will not be displayed (and in some cases may cause the email to be blocked):

- Javascript
- Image maps
- Forms
- Flash or any other plugins
- CSS positioning or floats
- External CSS stylesheets
- Images as bullet points
- Background images (not supported by Outlook)

Q: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A 'HARD' BOUNCE AND A 'SOFT' BOUNCE?

A: A 'Hard' bounce is a permanent fatal errors such as - the domain no longer exists (company went out of business), the email does not exist (the person retired / left the company / died).

A 'Soft' bounce is typically an intermittent, temporary condition. For example, the recipient's email server might be temporarily overloaded or offline, or they maybe over their inbox quota size.

Pinpointe automatically manages hard and soft bounces. Hard bounces are automatically flagged and removed from your list so that you do not 'waste' email credits sending to non-existent emails (doing so can also damage your email credibility). Soft bounces are automatically re-tried 3 times.

Q: IS IT CONSIDERED 'BEST PRACTICES' TO OFFER A WEB VERSION OF THE EMAIL IN CASE THE MAIL CLIENT CANNOT DISPLAY INTENDED EMAIL?

Absolutely. Pinpointe's on-demand email service automatically creates an online version of each email campaign that is hosted on our system. A customized link to the web version can be easily inserted into all emails.

Q: CAN YOU SUGGEST A GOOD TEXT TO IMAGE RATIO?

A: There is no set, best ratio. Avoid using large image blocks. A guideline would be - use images only where necessary and use text wherever possible. In addition, you can use ALT tags for images - this will improve your text to image ratio.

Earlier SPAM filters relied heavily on specific keywords to determine how 'spammy' the email was. Spammers simply created images that included the spam words, or created an email that was a single big image. This allowed them to get by SPAM filters. However most SPAM filters now look at the amount of content that is text vs. images and if you are using a large number of images, content will often be considered SPAM.

Q: IF 70% OF EMAIL CLIENTS BLOCK IMAGES BY DEFAULT, WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON REPORTED OPEN RATES?

A: If images are blocked and the recipient does not download images, then the tracking image pixel will not be downloaded and the email open cannot be accurately tracked. The result is that actual open rates are / will be higher than what is reported. Presently there is no way around this.

Q: WHAT QUALIFIES AS A CALL TO ACTION (CONTACT US, DOWNLOAD, ATTEND...)?

A: A 'Call to Action' is your offer. For example, an offer a link to download a whitepaper, or registration to attend a Webinar, that is a call to action. A call to action might also be: " please call me at..." or "please email me at: ..." However we generally recommend using links within an email when possible because responses can then be directly and automatically tracked by Pinpointe.

Q: WHAT'S A "GOOD" OPEN RATE, AND A "GOOD" CLICK-THROUGH RATE?

A: There are so many factors that impact open rates that it is difficult to predict a 'good' vs. 'bad' open rate. It is more useful to look at your own open rates relative to other campaigns you are running to determine if one campaign is generally doing better / worse than others, based on net open rates and / or click through rates.

That said, assuming that you are following 'best practices' for the title, offer, content, send times, send frequency, list management etc, you might expect to see the following rough *unique* open rates for your **Opt-in / managed list**: 12% - 25% open rates are common; 35%+ are achievable. Less than 10% of campaigns achieve open rates above 40% (unique open rates.)

Q: WHAT IS CSS?

A: "CSS" means Cascading Style Sheet. For web design, it is considered best practices to collect all style definitions and put them into a style sheet that can easily be referenced. However, email clients generally do not handle CSS styles well, if at all. Please refer to the next question for more information on why this is important.

Q: WHAT'S THE DEFINITION OF AN INLINE STYLE?

A: When creating web pages, it is considered 'best design practices' to create what are called CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), which include all style definitions. You then reference the 'CSS' style sheet.

However, most email clients do not use CSS style sheets properly, so any styles must be included 'inline' within your email document. 'Inline styles' are styles that are defined directly within your HTML email, and should be contained between the <BODY> tags. Styles can be used to define fonts, font colors, spacing, table formatting etc that you may use repeatedly throughout an HTML document (or HTML emails).

Q: HOW DO YOU INSERT ALT TEXT WITHIN AN EMAIL?

When impeding any images in your email correspondence, keep in mind that most email clients (Outlook, Entourage, Gmail, etc) by default have image display turned OFF. So, if your email includes images, the recipient will see only a box with a red 'X' where the image belongs, until they manually enable 'display images' in their email client.

That's why it is useful to add 'ALternate' text that will be displayed in the event the image is not displayed. To do this, simply add the following information to a graphic image within your email:

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ALT="Insert your ALternate text here"
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Q: WHERE CAN I FIND MORE EMAIL MARKETING TIPS / WEBINARS?

Please check our blog for multiple email marketing webinars and whitepapers. Our blog can be found at: <http://blog.pinopinte.com>. Topics include:

How a SPAM filter works

Writing Tips to Improve Email Results

What's working in Email Marketing Today with Bob Bly

Creating Landing Pages that Sell

Using Split Testing to Improve Email Responses

Generating Leads with Content Marketing (Bob Bly)

... And More...

Pinpointe Questions

Q: WHEN USING PINPOINTE'S ON-DEMAND EMAIL MARKETING SERVICE, CAN WE ATTACH A PDF FILE TO THE OUTBOUND EMAILS DURING THE CAMPAIGN?

A: Yes. However, we recommend that you host the pdf and link to it in the body of your email. Most spam filters will automatically quarantine any attachments, sometimes including pdfs. Therefore your pdf may not reach your recipients. Pinpointe includes unlimited storage for document and image hosting.

Q: ARE ANALYTICS AND E-MAIL EFFECTIVENESS METRICS INCLUDED IN THE MONTHLY PRICING PACKAGES FOR PINPOINTE'S EMAIL SERVICES?

A: yes, advanced reporting, help and effectiveness metrics are all standard features. If you would like to learn more, or to schedule a live 1 on 1 demonstration of Pinpointe, please contact us at: 408-834-7577, Option #2; sales@pinpointe.com.

Q: DOES PINPOINTE INCLUDE SURVEY CAPABILITIES? DO YOU HAVE THE FUNCTIONALITY TO HANDLE SURVEYS AND RESULTS ATTACHED TO A DISTRIBUTED EMAIL?

A: Yes, Pinpointe includes full survey capabilities as a standard feature.

Q: WHAT SETS PINPOINTE APART FROM LOW END SOLUTIONS LIKE CONSTANT CONTACT?

A: Pinpointe offers the following advanced features and services:

- Pinpointe is the most feature-rich solution available today. Some advanced features include:
 - Split Testing
 - Autoresponders and trigger campaigns (Drip marketing)
 - Dynamic Content insertion
- Pinpointe transparently integrates with Google Analytics, so all of your campaigns can be tracked, monitored and analyzed within Google analytics.
- Take Pinpointe for a test drive at: www.pinpointe.com/free-trial.
- **Pinpointe Professional** edition is a powerful full-featured email system with WYSIWYG editor, spam checker, email previewer and more.
- **Pinpointe Enterprise** edition is for larger enterprises who need 5 ~ 250 users (seats) and send 300,000 emails – 5M+ emails /month.

Q: WHAT IS PINPOINTE'S PRICING?

Pinpointe's pricing is based on the number of emails sent per month. We offer some of the industry's most competitive pricing. There are no contracts, up front fees or long term commitments.

For the latest pricing please check www.pinpointe.com/get-started.

About Pinpointe

Pinpointe is a leading provider of on-demand email marketing automation software based in the heart of Silicon Valley, California. As former High Tech B2B marketers, we've been in your shoes. Our team has a passion for helping business marketing professionals communicate with existing customers, and target new prospects through behavioral targeting, improved segmentation and message personalization.

Other Resources

If you're a Business to Business marketer and are want to stay on top of the latest marketing trends, tips and best practices, then please sign up for our twice-a-month Tips 'n Tricks notes. Once or twice a month we'll send you a briefing with tips and tricks. We'll also include a link so you can op-out or update your preferences, any time.

Pinpointe Site: www.pinpointe.com

Pinpointe support Blog: www.pinpointe.com/blog

Contacting Pinpointe

Pinpointe sales and support are available from 8am to 8pm PST, M-F. We can be reached at:

(800) 557-6584 or (408) 834-7577, Option #2

General Information: info@pinpointe.com

Sales: sales@pinointe.com

Twitter (Email Tips): @Pinpointe (www.twitter.com/pinpointe)

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