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Ten Tips for Avoiding Spam Filters

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Introduction

Today, email marketing is a key component of most companies marketing mix. And, with it come many ideas, thoughts and challenges to achieving desired results. One key objective of email marketing is for the sent email to actually be delivered to the intended reader, without being filtered as spam.

Spam filters score each email as it enters the system to determine which emails will make it to the intended reader and which emails will be filtered and therefore not delivered. Spam scores are like golf, the lower your score the better you are. Here are some ranges:

- 0.0 - 4.5 – excellent: clean up is optional
- 4.6 - 7.0 – decent: the strictest filters may object; clean up the easy-to-find issues
- 7.1 - 10.0 – danger: you need to clean up the big issues as well as the easy-to-find smaller ones
- 10.1 - 13.0 – likely undeliverable: requires a thorough review and clean up
- 13.1+ – major problems: you need an overhaul, then recheck (possibly more than once)

After sending hundreds of thousands of emails over the years, Astadia assembled what it believes to be the top ten tips to help you improve email marketing deliverability by avoiding spam filters.

1. Keep your subject line clean

Don't space out your words (L.I.K.E. T H I S) or use str@nge charact3rs. Beware of using all capital letters. They're fine for a short headline, but not for large areas of text. Don't be afraid to use the word "spam" (it's better than saying "sp*m"). Avoid starting your subject with "Free" (it's okay to include it after the first word). Never say "as seen" – it will increase your spam score by a whole point or more – and the word "offer" is also a bad idea. Also beware of quotation marks, dollar signs and exclamation points. And save your toll-free number for the body of the email, not the subject line.

2. Be careful how much HTML you use

It's tempting to send your entire email as one big graphic (or a collection of images) because you have full control over the fonts and layout. However,

a 100% HTML message will raise your spam score by a half a point. Use images where needed but for areas of text, use actual text. This also gives you a benefit when your recipients have images turned off in their preview pane or emails – they can at least see part of your message and decide if they want to turn on images or not.

3. Use high quality HTML

Beware of the HTML that is generated by Microsoft Word and other non-HTML tools. Unbalanced or invalid tags will get your email flagged as spam, as will empty tags (example: ``). Validate your HTML through a free validator, such as the one provided by the W3C: <http://validator.w3.org/>

4. Do not use invisible text

All of the text in your email should be human-readable. On the flip side, overly large font sizes can trigger spam filters as well.

5. Include text-only email

When sending HTML email, always include a text-only version and be careful to keep it as close to the original HTML copy as possible. The closer the copy, the less likely that your email will be blocked.

6. Check partner and advertiser spam records

Does your email include advertisements from third-parties? If so, be certain that those companies and their domains are not listed as spammers. If they are, you will inherit their bad score.

7. Include privacy policy

Include a link to your privacy policy in your email footer. No real spammer would ever do that – at least not with a working link – and the spam filters know that.

8. Check your unsubscribe language

It's an important practice to include a way for recipients to manage their email subscriptions with your company. However, because many spammers include unsubscribe language in their emails (and don't actually do anything about it – or worse, mark your address as valid and active) spam filters have

begun to negatively score the following phrases:” to be removed” and “to unsubscribe.” Try other phrases such as “Manage your subscription” or “If you no longer wish to receive...”

9. Use beneficial terms

For e-newsletters, consider adding the following beneficial items into your subject line: “news” or “newsletter”, the publishing frequency (“monthly”), the date of the newsletter and the issue number if applicable. These terms can actually lower your spam score.

10. Don't mention anti-spam laws

Spammers often claim that they're compliant with spam laws and the spam filters have caught on to this. You can lose up to 3.4 points for saying that you observe all spam laws. In fact, mentioning House Bill 4176 will add 2 points to your score and H.R. 3113 adds almost 3.

11. Engage Astadia

Although the title of this document is “Ten Tips for Avoiding Spam”, we couldn't resist the chance for an opportunistic sales pitch! Our Marketing Practice helps companies ***improve marketing effectiveness and generate higher quality sales leads.***

For more information about any of the tips in this document, or for more ideas on how Astadia can assist with marketing your organization, **call 1-877-7ASTADIA** or contact us at marketing@astadia.com.

About Astadia

Astadia is a management consulting and on-demand technology solutions company that helps businesses become more productive in sales, marketing, customer service and employee performance. With offices across the U.S. and in Europe, Astadia serves businesses, large and small, with subject matter expertise in a wide array of industries. Enabling Customer Relationship Management, Human Capital Management, Marketing Automation, Partner Relationship Management, and Sales Force Automation, Astadia is the largest deployment partner for Salesforce.com, Eloqua, Xactly and other leading SaaS solutions. For more information, visit www.astadia.com or call 1-877-7ASTADIA (877-727-8234).