LESSON 11: GETTING INBOXED – YOUR GUIDE TO EMAIL DELIVERABILITY

EMAIL LIST SECRETS

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INBOXED

As an email marketer, your job is to write highly engaging contact that will grab the attention of your readers and make them want to click and then keep on reading. That means you need to know how to write a great subject heading that really jumps out at the reader and it means you need to know how to write a fantastic email body that provides value and makes the reader *glad* they decided to click!

But none of this is going to be worth *anything* if you don't also know how to get your message into the inboxes of your readers. This is absolutely essentially, seeing as you can't very well build trust or make conversions if none of your emails get read!

Before your subject line can have *any* impact on your readers, it first absolutely needs to make it into their inboxes. Even the most eye-grabbing heading in the world won't work if it doesn't get seen.

Problem is, there are quite a few challenges that you will face if you want your messages to show up in the inboxes of your contacts.

The first and most obvious challenge is the spam filter. Spam filters are built into pretty much every single email client and their job is to make sure that our mailboxes are filled to the brim with

spam trying to sell us Viagra and handbags, or 'Nigerian princes' that are giving us millions of dollars…

Problem is, these spam filters can be a little *too* effective sometimes and end up blocking content that the recipients actually agreed to receive – just like your messages!

This is one issue. The other issue is the fact that most inboxes are now divided into multiple sections. These days, providers like Google Mail and Outlook will divide messages into 'Primary', 'Social', 'Marketing' and other subcategories. Users can create their own categories sometimes too.

The idea behind this is that it prevents us from getting notifications every single time that we get a new message from Facebook or every single time we get any kind of new sales attempt.

This is useful for most of us as we would otherwise be inundated with messages throughout the day. However, it is actually not such good news for us marketers because the fact of the matter is that few people will check their 'social' inbox on a regular basis and the same goes for the 'promotions' inbox. Think back to your own use, when was the last time you clicked on one of these?

That means that to all extents and purposes, it's not much better getting messages into 'Social' than it is getting them into 'Spam'!.

In this report, we'll look at how you can not only avoid the spam folder but also get yourself into the 'Primary' folder!

How to Avoid the Spam Folder

First, let's start with the basics and look at how you can avoid the spam folder.

We need to think like a programmer here and consider the way that the filter has been designed and what tools it might use. A good place to start is by asking what the folder is *for*. What is the objective of the spam filter?

The answers are:

    a) To keep out unwanted marketing messages that were unsolicited
    b) To keep us safe from viruses and phishing scams

If you've been following the advice I've been sharing in these reports, then your mailing list should be filled with contacts that actively invited you to contact them. In other words, it shouldn't involve sending unsolicited messages at all.

And what this means is that you *don't belong* in the spam folder. So that's nice to know!

But there are a few things that might end up making the filter mistake you for spam. One such thing is the inclusion of certain key words. The spam folder looks for keywords like 'shopping', 'buy', 'free', 'Viagra' etc. and will then block those emails on that basis. Think of this like 'reverse SEO' and after you've written your message, scan through to check for any words that might look like spam.

Similarly, you also need to avoid trying to use cheap tactics to get readers to look at your subject line. Avoid using multiple exclamation marks or all-caps as these are things most people don't want in their subject line and that might look like spam.

In order to protect users from viruses and other types of attack, spam filters will also look for other tell-tale signs. These include things like very long documents and certainly attachments. You also need to be careful about using images – because spam filters can't read what the image is of, it might treat it suspiciously.

Of course, it is okay to use images in some cases, but avoid large image files and make sure that there is a good ratio of text to images.

To an extent, it is impossible to be 100% certain that you have effectively managed to avoid the spam filters. The best thing to do then is to write in a way that is natural and that offers value to the reader and then to just hope that the spam filter sees that.

Email Sender Reputation

There's another big factor that can have a large hand in affecting your deliverability and this is something called your 'email sender reputation'. Essentially, the email sending reputation works a lot like a credit score. This is a score that is shared between email providers that will allow them to get an idea of the kind of content you are sending. If you have a bad sending reputation, then it means that you've sent lots of spam emails in the past and you are going to be much more likely to be blocked or dropped in the spam box.

But if you send a lot of high quality emails that get read and provide value, then your sending reputation will be good and that means your message will be much more likely to get let in and you'll be much more likely to get read.

The first thing you need to do is to try to ascertain what your score might be like in the first place. This score is tied to your domain, so it's important that it's good or you'll need to set up an entirely new email address and transfer your contacts over – which will in turn confuse your subscribers and hurt you badly.

Take a look at your open rates. The industry standard open rate is around 20%, so if yours are much lower and have been diminishing over time, this is a bad sign.

If you are concerned, then you can try using a number of different sites and tools such as 'Return Path'. These claim to be able to give you a reliable score but often it will be clear simply from your statistics.

How to Improve Your Sender Score

So how do you go about improving your score?

One of the first and most important things to do is to look for the email addresses that are bouncing and to remove them from your list. These are the people that have either closed down their email or that sometimes used a fake account when they signed up (this is why it's very important to use double-opt-in when set-up your mailing list). When an email bounces it hurts your sender reputation, so it's very crucial that you keep on checking which accounts aren't working and you remove them from your list.

Almost as bad as returned and bounced emails are emails that never get opened. This is why it's so important to ensure that you use subject lines that engage your audience and that you build trust with your subscribers so that they *want* to hear from you in future.

A lot of this comes from *forgetting* all of the attempts to 'hack the system' and instead just concentrating on delivering value for your end users.

Of course, getting blocked is also very bad for your score, as is receiving a complaint. Once more this points to the importance of *quality* over quantity when it comes to your contacts. You need to build lists that are filled with people who *want* to hear from you and who love your content. You need to *avoid* inundating people with nonsense they never asked for and that is just trying to ram sales down their throats.

The worst case scenario is that you get blacklisted. There are various sites that will help you to see if you're on a blacklist and if so, then you'll either need to contact the owner of the site that blacklisted you to try and get yourself removed *or* just set up a new email address. At this point, that is probably the best strategy.

One trick that some email marketing will use is to 'warm up' their IP address/domain name. You do this when you start out by sending your emails out only to your best contacts – people that you *know* will open your messages. This way, you can get some good metrics out there early on and keep on impressing as you build momentum. For a similar reason, it is always a good idea to get your friends and family to sign up to your mailing lists and to ask them to actually open your messages and read them!

Finally, try to ensure that your messages are sent regularly and consistently. This is another good sign and it's something that both your recipients *and* the email clients appreciate.

Getting Into the Main Inbox

Now your final challenge is to try and get your messages into the 'Primary' inbox rather than social or marketing.

There are a few small tricks that you can use to increase your chances of getting into this inbox.

One is simply to mention the recipient by name. This is a feature that most autoresponders will offer and its benefits go beyond just improving the friendly tone of your messages.

Similarly, it's a good idea to try and structure your messages like a letter, rather than structuring them like a newsletter. That means writing the person's name followed by a comma and then talking about the things you'd like to let them know.

Again, images can be iffy here. Many sites recommend removing them entirely but looking at my primary inbox right now, several messages with images attached have made it through. The take-home is probably just to use images sparingly and knowing the risks that they represent.

Try not to include more than one link, keep all your messages nice and short and don't try and sell anything – it's *super* hard to sell things without using any of those negative keywords that we touched on.

But you know what the VERY best way to avoid the Social inbox *and* the spam filter is? The very best way to make sure that your readers are actually receiving your messages?

That's just to ask them to consider adding you to their primary inbox. That sounds pretty simple but it's something that a ton of marketers forget – just like they forget that they can *ask* people in their posts to sign up for the mailing list.

So, just mention in your email that you want to make sure your readers get your messages and that you'd really appreciate it if they would add you to their primary inbox and 'whitelist' future messages for you.

You can even tie this in with the sign up process: if you use a double opt-in, then mention to your readers that they need to look for the confirmation inbox in their spam folders and other inboxes and that they might want to consider whitelisting you at that point to ensure that they don't miss future correspondence from you.

Nothing is foolproof, but if you keep all of these tips in mind and ensure you are delivering great value then your likelihood of getting seen will go up immensely. Good luck!