



Five Step Email Marketing Self Assessment Guide

By Megan Ouellet, Director of Marketing • Listrak, LLC • May 2, 2007

Is your once successful email marketing campaign converting as well as it did in the past? Unfortunately, email campaigns aren't capable of running on auto-pilot. Countless factors influence success – from consumer trust and brand loyalty to the state of the market, the economy, and even current events. While it's impossible to control all factors that influence buyer interest, you can control some. Regular and ongoing email campaign evaluation and assessment can help ensure exceptional results over the long-run.

Listrak, an award-winning email marketing provider, has identified five key questions marketers should use to evaluate the success of their email marketing programs, and we offer tips you can easily integrate in case your campaigns are under-performing. We will show you what to look for and how to integrate the information you gather from actual consumer response, click-through rates, and web analytics to drive even stronger buyer activity and profitability.

1. Do you have a structured course of action that carries through your entire campaign?

To ensure success you must begin by defining your goals before you send out the email. Knowing what you want to accomplish prior to developing your campaign will dramatically increase customer response as it allows you to a clear call to action that leads your subscribers through to the end goal.

For example, an email newsletter could be used as a tool to increase brand awareness by offering subscribers useful information such as white papers or case studies. Or, that same newsletter could be used to inform subscribers about a new product to drive online sales. Knowing in advance what actions you want to accomplish will help you create compelling content that your subscribers actually want to read. The

tone of each of these newsletters would be much different, as would the subject lines, content, and call to action buttons.

The call to action button gives the subscriber specific information regarding what to do in order to take advantage of the email offer. While the call to action button is simple and straightforward, the landing page that the button links to must be optimized so the subscriber reaches the expected information quickly and easily. Many times, email marketers will simply link a call to action button to the home page of their websites. This forces subscribers to search for the information offered in the email and most of them will leave the site instantly. When a subscriber clicks-through your call to action button, you have their full attention. The landing page should be designed to reiterate the offer, to provide additional information if necessary, and to make it as easy as possible for subscribers to reach the end goal of either downloading the information, purchasing the product, contacting a customer representative, etc. Landing pages should also link back to your main website, but the focus should remain on the offer you sent to the subscribers. Adding additional offers and information on your landing page could distract subscribers and cause them to leave your website.

Defining a structured course of action prior to sending out your campaign allows you to design a clear pathway for your subscribers to follow to your end goals, and you will see an increase in open, click-through, and conversion rates.

2. Are you tracking metrics that matter?

If you are using an email marketing tool, like Listrak, you have all the tools you need to track subscriber response in great detail. And if your email marketing tool is integrated with web analytics, like Listrak, you can track subscriber

clickstream data from your campaigns through your website to determine conversion goals. With the amount of information available to you it is important that you track the metrics that matter most.

Delivery rate: Delivery rate is one of the most important metrics; however, many email marketers look at the wrong numbers to determine the percentage of emails that are delivered. According to a report by ReturnPath, up to 22 percent of all permission-based emails are not delivered to the intended mailboxes. This is an astonishing number that affects every other campaign metric, but many companies do not realize that their number of undelivered emails is this high because they only monitor specific metrics such as hard and soft bounces. While this is important information to track, it does not account for the emails that are delivered to a junk mail folder or filtered by ISPs. To accurately track your deliverability rate, you must account for all of these things. More information on email deliverability follows in the next section of this white paper.

Abuse report rate: Many email clients allow users to report a message as spam without even opening the message, even if the user has subscribed to your list and has requested to receive emails from you. You should monitor this metric very closely as a high spam rate will ruin your reputation and will cause severe deliverability issues in the future. There are a number of steps you can take to ensure your users do not mistakenly report your emails as spam. First, during the opt-in process you should include a delivery schedule so subscribers know when to expect an email from you. And you should always adhere to this schedule. Next, follow subject line best practices by including your company's name and a specific title explaining what the message is about. Subscribers use the subject line as the gatekeeper – if they do not know what the email is about or who it is from, they will

either delete it or report it as spam. Finally, personalizing the subject line will show your subscribers that you have already established a relationship with them because you know their first names. It will also help your email stand out in the dozens of other emails sitting in the inboxes and will, therefore, boost the read rate of your messages.

Read rate: Read rate differs from open rate and some email marketing tools do not measure the difference even though it is substantial. The open rate tracks emails that were viewed in the preview screen of an email client as well as emails that were opened just to be immediately deleted or closed. The read rate tracks emails that were opened and remained open for five seconds or longer, giving the reader time to at least scan the email to see if any headlines capture their attention. While five seconds might not seem like a great amount of time, it is almost twice as long as the general marketing standard of three seconds. Measuring the read rate instead of the open rate will give you a more accurate impression of the number of subscribers that are viewing the information in your email campaigns.

Unsubscribe rate: With every email that you send, a number of recipients will unsubscribe to your list. It is a natural part of email marketing and something that you should expect. However, it is imperative that you closely monitor the number of recipients that opt-out of your list as it could be a sign that your emails are not relevant to your subscribers. If you send emails monthly, a "natural" unsubscribe rate is less than one percent. If you send emails quarterly, your unsubscribe rate could be as high as five percent. But these are just guidelines so you should measure your unsubscribe rate with every email you send and monitor it over time. That way, you will notice any spikes in your unsubscribe rate and you will be able to take action immediately.

Forward rate: Many email service providers offer an easy way for subscribers to forward the email to a friend or colleague. This feature is a great way to expand your marketing scope and reach customers you might not have found through traditional marketing methods. When tracking the forward rate, it is important to look at the overall number of forwards as it confirms that you are sending relevant, interesting messages. However, it is more important to capture the email addresses that your subscribers forward the messages to. That way, if the person converts you will know the exact marketing source that generated the business.

Click-through rate: The click-through rate tracks the number of times subscribers click on a call to action button in your email campaign and visit your website. This number is extremely important as it measures the relevancy of your email offering. However, it is not a measure of end-goal conversion and it should not be treated as such. When tracking this number, you must count the number of unique click-throughs instead of the overall number of click-throughs as it will give you a false impression and could lead you to make assumptions about your campaigns that are not true.

Goal Conversion rate: Integrating web analytics with your email marketing tool gives you an easy and quick way to track the metric that matters most – goal conversion. Google Analytics allows you to set four different goals (such as brochure download, customer representative contact, online demo, and online sale) and, when used in accordance with email marketing, you can track the individual subscribers that clicked-through your campaign to see which ones converted by completing your end goal. This measures the exact success rate of each email campaign. To learn more, read Listrak's white paper [Using Google Analytics to Increase Reporting Capabilities of Email Marketing Campaigns and Boost Relevancy and Response](#).

While tracking results of these metrics, it is important to remember that each email campaign is different so the results will vary. For example, a monthly email newsletter updating subscribers on corporate happenings will garner much different results from a targeted email offering a free trial of a new product. To gauge actual performance measurements, evaluate results against similar campaigns so you get an accurate idea of which campaigns worked and which ones under-performed.

3. Are your emails being delivered properly?

Delivery is still the number one area of concern for email marketers, and with so many factors that can affect it, it is something that you must closely monitor to ensure your email reaches your subscribers' inboxes with all of the design aspects and linking features in place. Eight out of 10 marketers struggle with deliverability issues but few know what to do to monitor and solve the problem.

The first step to solving this problem is to monitor your block percentage by ISP. Knowing who is blocking your email will help you pinpoint the issues as the different ISPs use different tools to determine the validity of an email. However, most use a reputation-based system that measure the number of complaints, number of bounces, number of messages sent, and the size of the messages. If your reputation reaches the threshold, the ISP will block your messages. Reputation is also impacted by factors such as the message's header and the source server's IP address, host name, from address field, reply-to address field, email text, image tags, and links to external websites in either plain text or HTML format. If the ISP finds any errors or abnormalities in these areas, your company could be blacklisted.

To measure your reputation online for free, visit www.senderscore.org. If you identify a problem there are several things you can do to fix it. For example, if your subscribers are mistakenly reporting your emails as spam, find out why. It could be a frequency issue that you can solve by sending them fewer messages, or perhaps it would be better to just remove them from your list altogether. After all, someone that reports you as a spammer isn't likely to make a purchase the next time you send them an email. If the problem is more technical in nature you should check to be sure your email is sent from a dedicated IP address and that headers, tracking links, and images contain your domain name. Maintaining an isolated infrastructure will help you overcome many deliverability challenges. To learn more, read Listrak's white paper [How Reputation Impacts Deliverability](#).

4. Are you testing your campaigns?

Getting your emails to your recipients' inboxes is only half of the deliverability challenge. The other half is making sure that your emails render properly in the different email clients. After all, it doesn't matter how many messages reach the inbox if they contain missing graphics, broken links, and garbled information.

To prevent this from happening, you must test your campaigns in different email clients. This is accomplished easily as you only have to set up email accounts with AOL, Yahoo! Mail, Google Mail, MSN Hotmail, and Outlook, and then forward the message to your different accounts to see how the message appears through the different email services. If you notice a problem, you'll be able to fix it before sending it out to your entire list.

Another way to combat deliverability issues is to test your campaigns through a spam score feature. Spam score evaluates messages using specific tests to determine whether or not the message will be delivered as spam. Spam score rates the message and gives you detailed reports on the areas of the email that may present a problem so you can edit the message prior to sending it. A low spam score greatly increases the deliverability of the message.

You can also perform tests in areas other than deliverability. A/B split testing is an email marketing best practice that allows you to test different sections of your email campaigns, such as subject line, images, content copy, call to action buttons, and delivery time. The tests are easy to perform. Simply choose the areas of your email you want to test, create three different versions of the email, extract 10 percent of the subscribers from your list, divide that group into three separate groups, and send out one version of the email to each test group. Be sure to carefully track your responses using the metrics noted above so you can send the best performing email to the other 90 percent of your list. A/B split testing is a best practice that will greatly increase your subscriber response.

5. Are you using email marketing best practices?

The testing and tracking will tell you how your current campaigns are performing, but there is always room for improvement. To ensure that you are getting the most out of your campaigns, be sure to follow email marketing best practices.

Best practices have been written on every imaginable area of an email campaign; from planning and strategizing white papers on [budgeting](#) and [workflow](#), to creative development

white papers on [welcome messages](#), [formatting](#), and [subject lines](#), to expansion white papers on [RSS](#) and [driving traffic](#) to your website, and everything in between . Following these best practices will improve the usability and relevancy of your campaigns to maximize your results.

About Listrak

Listrak is a leading provider of hosted email marketing software, allowing permission-based marketers to manage, send, track and grow their email marketing investment. We deliver email marketing intelligence through our intuitive web-based application. Leading marketers have come to rely on this intelligence to better manage email in their multi-channel marketing mix.

Listrak software helps companies, agencies and associations better manage customer relations in their marketing campaigns. Its web-enabled interface helps marketers engage their customers using an advanced profiling and personalization engine. Listrak's world-class support and professional services assist clients with enterprise integration. Its clients include L'Oreal, Motorola, Jeep, Pearle Vision, PR Newswire, The Islands of the Bahamas, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

To learn more about the many ways Listrak can strengthen your email marketing campaigns, or to sign up for a 20-minute web-based tour, visit www.listrak.com.