

Email Marketing Secrets ESPs Will Never Tell You.

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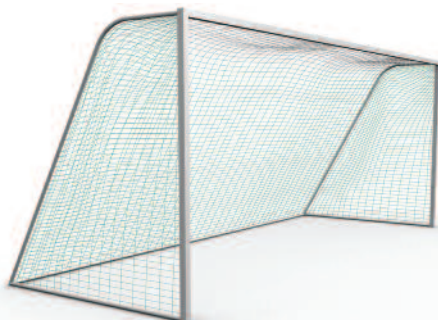
Email service provider (ESP) solutions are easy to use, convenient and provide the capability to deliver all types of targeted email marketing campaigns. While most are inexpensive to use and offer tools to get started quickly, they may not be as effective as you think. Here are 10 interesting secrets your ESP will never tell you, and they could be the reason why your email marketing campaigns are simply not delivering the best results.

Secret #1

Subservient to the ISP.

The CAN-SPAM Act permits Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to set their own rules of what emails they will let pass through their servers and those that are denied. You can imagine the havoc that would occur if an ISP like AOL or Comcast decided to block all emails from your ESP. This leverage allows the ISP to dictate the terms for free passage of your ESP's emails through their servers. Things like third-party authentication, list reviews and email approvals are just some of the things that your ESP may be doing to appease the ISP.

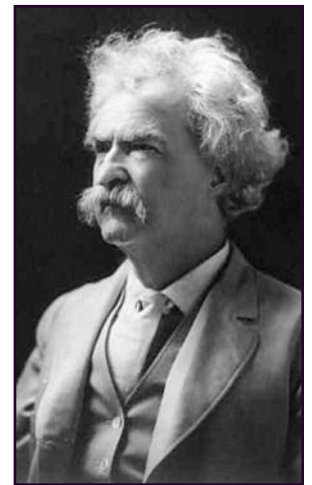
Why should you care? If an ISP decides that all communications from your ESP should be stopped, there is nothing to prevent it from doing this. With more unwanted marketing messages clogging up your inbox and the ISP's infrastructure, I believe it's only a matter of time before stricter guidelines will be imposed, essentially eliminating the flow of email campaigns as you know them today. The easiest first step is to blacklist communications from the 150-plus top ESPs that broadcast "on behalf of" their customers. Where would this leave you?



Secret #2

Samuel Clemens on behalf of Mark Twain.

Did you know that your email is not really coming from "you" when you use an ESP? When prospects open your email, they typically see an "on behalf of" address from the sender (a.k.a. you).



Why should you care? When a prospect or client opens one of these emails, it will be obvious that the message is not personalized. An unpersonalized message appears like a general marketing message. In the world of viruses, spam and phishing, these messages, when received, will likely get deleted before they are ever seen!

Secret #3

The Goalie.

Free passage through your recipients' ISP does not guarantee delivery to the intended person's inbox. Your prospect or client's email server can easily block all messages from your ESP and you may never know it.

Why should you care? If your messages are not delivered, they can't be opened, read, clicked on and forwarded.

Secret #4

Easy is Not Always the Best.

Most ESPs offer dozens of templates for you to choose from. Using templates as an email marketer can make your life easier, but is that the best way to get results?

Why should you care? People tend to choose a small portion of a template library for their email messages. Your prospect can easily receive emails from several vendors and even your competitors with the exact same template that you are using. The only difference would be your logo. Branding is very important in marketing your company's product or service. Generic does not work for most companies, and finding a template that matches your company's look and feel could be challenging. Don't you want your messages to be distinctive?



Secret #5

Every Company Has a Shakespeare, Right?

Your ESP offers the capability to "deliver" your messages, but what about the actual message? What you say is more important than how the message is delivered.

Why should you care? Overlooked by most ESPs is the requirement that in order for messages to be read there has to be something compelling to read. Studies show that people scan the content in emails looking for items they like. Professional writers are trained and experienced in creating interesting communications that catch the reader's attention within a concise and readable format. Companies should consider hiring a professional writer to create marketing copy that resonates with their clients and prospects.

Secret #6

"Outta Sight is Outta Mind and Outta Mind is Outta Money, Honey" - Mae West

ESPs can give you the capability to create and deliver email campaigns. As a result, most are implemented in a "one-off" approach, rather than a coordinated series of messages.



Why should you care? The goal of marketing is to create top-of-mind awareness through persistence and consistency. The Nurture Marketing's marketing methodology offers a series of best practices and guidelines to create coordinated campaigns to achieve top-of-mind awareness. Sending single, "one-off" messages rarely work and they can lead to the complacency of the sender thinking that they are doing something positive, but in fact they are wasting both time and money.

Secret #7

Why is my ESP advertising their brand?

Many ESPs include their own logo and contact information on the email communication that you are paying them to broadcast.

Why should you care? If you are paying for a service, it should not promote the ESP. Utilize email marketing to educate and inform -- not advertise; certainly you should not be advertising your ESP!

Secret #8

Preview?

Some, but not all ESPs, show you a preview of your message in a Web site format, -- not exactly the same format as an email.

Why should you care? What you think your customers will see when they receive your email may not be exactly the same as what is being delivered. In most cases, the graphics you are sending will show up blank, delivering an incomplete and inferior user experience.

Secret #9

Statistics Lie.

Many ESPs want to bolster their results by fiddling with their statistics to make results seem better than they really are. The most common practice is how they measure opens, clicks and opt-outs. ESPs typically present "open" statistics as a percentage of the total email sent, which is the way it should be. However, when presenting click-through rates, they present those as a percentage of opens -- not as a percentage of all emails broadcast. Even more interesting is when they present opt-out rates, they go back to the larger total emails sent number. This manipulation of statistics can create false impressions on the effectiveness of an email campaign.

Why should you care? You need to trust your ESP to provide metrics that are meaningful -- not metrics that make its service performance seem better than it actually is.



Secret #10

Hidden Costs?

How much of your time are you spending with your ESP to load your database, create your email and download results? It may be more than you think.

Why should you care?

ESP's advertise the ease-of-use of their products. However, when calculating the cost of any email marketing campaign, you should also take into consideration the total time spent cleaning your lists, creating copy, consolidating campaign results, generating leads and evaluating results.



The good news is that competition in the ESP space is intense and there are a lot of choices. Before selecting an ESP, make a list of your email marketing requirements. If your email marketing initiatives consist of multi-step, "nurture" campaigns, it is important to find an appropriate ESP. The key is finding an ESP that offers a hybrid approach, combining a server-based platform that integrates with your email client such as Microsoft Outlook. With hybrid solutions, each campaign is centrally managed, but the actual delivery utilizes an individual's email client application such as Microsoft Outlook to send outbound personalized email messages. With this approach, email campaigns are unobtrusive to the sender and fully transparent to the recipient significantly increasing their deliverability and effectiveness.