

Five points to consider when choosing your email database provider

 By [Chemory Gunko](#)

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Nowadays it seems that there are a million email and contact databases to choose from for your marketing - and whatever your budget, if you look hard enough, you'll find a price point to suit you.

What is it though that separates the bad and mediocre databases from the good - and what should you look for in a database if you want to return marketing results?

Reputation

There's a reason good databases return visible marketing results, and mostly it's got to do with how they look after the people on their database: what kind of information is being sent to them, the frequency at which they're receiving email marketing and the public image they've built up over the years.

You can easily test this for yourself: just think back to how often you've deleted a piece of email marketing just because you saw the sent-by name.

Whitelisting

Hand-in-hand with reputation goes whitelisting.

It's pretty common knowledge by now that a well-placed complaint to your ISP - or even the sender's - can get a sending domain blacklisted and out of your hair. The opposite though applies too.

Good database and sending companies have spent years building up relationships with the ISPs, and in many cases are whitelisted so that they don't get blocked as spam.

So, the database you're looking at may come in at a fifth of the price of more expensive databases, but what good does that do you if all your emails are stopped at ISP level - before they even get a chance to land in the recipient's junk mail?

Another key factor here is how up-to-date the records are

A database that lies around for six months can lose up to 50% of its relevance in terms of data integrity, purely because

people move jobs and change their contact details.

This can be a killer when it comes to sends, because sending out multiple times to bad batches of data will get you blocked as a spammer by multiple ISPs - potentially even your own.

The truth is that to maintain a database of a million people could easily cost you the monthly salaries of 40 or more dedicated database researchers - especially if you really want to use it to market effectively.

Segregation

Probably the most relevant piece of information to any potential sender is whom they'll be targeting on the database.

If you have the right information on hand in your records, this job is a breeze!

Training information can go to HR and training managers, executives and their PAs can receive management event information, and you can target mining executives with that great new mining indaba you've been planning for months.

Without this information though, your email send is just a "spray and pray" affair.

Sure, you can target mining people, because the database in question has sectoral segregation, but what good does it do you if your occupational health & safety marketing piece is sent to the receptionist and one of the underground workers receives it on his cellphone?

The ideal with targeted direct marketing, like email sends, is to target not only the sector, but also to find the decision-maker for that area of interest in that sector.

And, as many of you in the corporate sector well know, if you aren't reaching the decision-maker, you're wasting your money and time, because employees lower down on the ladder often don't have the power to put your ideas - no matter how relevant or great they may be - into action.

Unsubscribe policies

If you ask your database provider only a few questions, ask about unsubscribe policies.

What is the retention rate for mailers they send? What is the average unsubscribe rate for emails in your sector? How do they handle unsubscribed records?

If unsubscribes are handled poorly, or even just automated, you can lose a lot of valid records, very quickly. And sometimes this isn't even your fault!

A person could be having a bad day, or could be being spammed by another service provider, and you lose the record as a result.

This can get very scary when a provider is managing your own database for you, and you could conceivably drop 25 to 50% of your data in one fell swoop.

Opt-in

The holy grail of email marketing - opted-in records.

Yes - there really are people out there who really would like to receive your marketing, because it has value for them, it makes their jobs easier, and it helps them to stay in the know.

A good database provider knows this, and tries to make their categorisation and segregation relevant to this - so that you can hit the right people, with the right message, at the right time.

Not only that, but great database providers will be regularly researching and updating their current records, so that you have the freshest and most relevant people possible to direct your message towards.

These regular update emails also serve the purpose of keeping the database provider current in the minds of recipients, so that the emails are more likely to be welcomed as having business value.

Even smarter than that, it keeps the opt-ins recent, up-to-date and fresh, and saves you from the potential legal nightmares you can get into for spamming people.

You get what you pay for

Marketing, correctly applied, is always an investment.

It's the choices you make regarding media like databases that will quickly determine whether your marketing is an asset or just a wasted expense.

ABOUT CHEMORY GUNKO

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