

How to Improve Deliverability with Email Validation

In today's digital age, email communications continue to increase in frequency and importance. Businesses use email to inform consumers of special deals, changes to their accounts, updates on important regulations, and virtually any other relevant news.

As customer databases grow, companies face the challenge of dealing with bad email addresses. Unlike a poorly formatted postal address, which in some cases may still result in a successful delivery, invalid email addresses are worthless. Without a suitable solution, certain customers may never receive essential information, and prospects may never learn of an offer to entice them to buy.

Companies can improve email quality. This resource highlights the need for email accuracy, reviews the different features of email data quality products, and offers tips for companies getting started.

How reputation affects communication

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) rely on a mailer's reputation to determine what messages can be delivered to an inbox. A study by Return Path determined that 77% of delivery problems were based on a poor ISP reputation. A slightly poor reputation will cause some messages to go into the spam folder, and as the sender's reputation worsens, messages may be partially or fully blocked.

A sender's reputation is based on several factors. Below are three important metrics that every mailer must consider.

Bounce rate - the number of messages that are returned as undeliverable divided by the number of emails sent.

Complaint rate - the number of people who report your messages

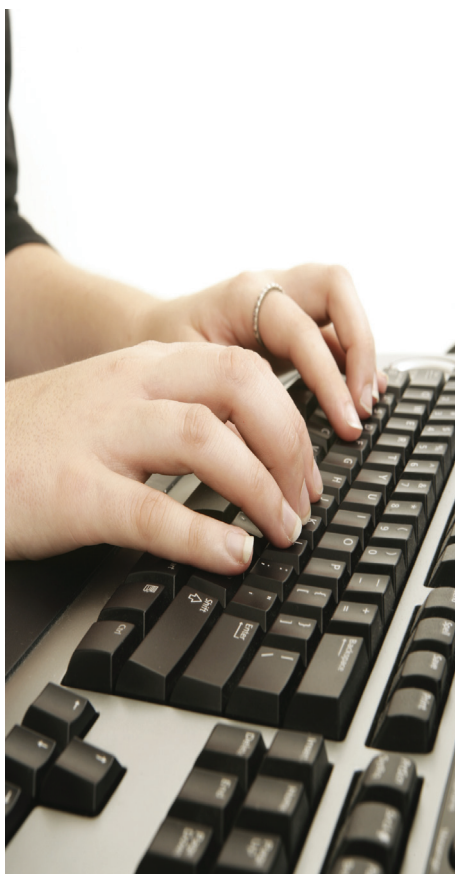
as spam divided by the number of emails delivered.

Spam trap hits - the number of emails delivered to addresses used to trace and catalog spam.

With these metrics, the higher the numbers, the worse the reputation. Once a sender's reputation is damaged, communications may not reach the intended recipient, decreasing campaign effectiveness and the ROI. A damaged reputation takes time and effort to fix. To improve and/or maintain a positive reputation, businesses leverage email validation tools.

The role of email validation

Email validation starts with the identification of undeliverable email addresses, but most comprehensive validation services also flag spam traps and addresses that are likely to generate complaints. A full suite



of validation services leads to reduced bounce rates, fewer complaints, increased inbox delivery, and lower mailing costs.

Validating email addresses as they are captured reduces data entry errors and fraudulent attempts, resulting in a larger, more accurate email list for customer and prospect communications. According to research done by Intelligent Search, companies using email validation report as much as 75% reduction in bounce rates and 20% growth in open rates.

Front-end email validation

Check email addresses immediately as data is entered to ensure that invalid emails never reach the database. Most often, the email address is validated without affecting any customer interactions. However, if the email is invalid, the person entering the address is prompted to remedy the issue immediately.

This prevents rework on the back end and ensures that customers receive requested communications.

Email list cleansing

Run email addresses through a list cleansing service to test for syntax errors, spelling mistakes, domain validity, and other errors that prevent mail from getting to the intended recipient. At any point in the process, if an email fails a certain check, it will be deemed invalid and the reason will be provided.

The process is quick and easy, and involves minimal effort on the part of the purchasing company.

Five layers of email validation

Whether you're verifying email

addresses at the point of entry or on the back end, it's important to understand the five different layers of email validation:

1. Look for syntax errors. This is the most common form of email validation. Is there an "@" sign? Are there forbidden characters such as an asterisk? Are there the necessary amount of characters (for example, not name@company.c)?
2. Check for spelling mistakes. Online forms will often require users to confirm their email address by entering the address a second time. Many people end up copying and pasting from one field into the other. If the two fields match, the system accepts the data, regardless of any errors.
3. Ensure domain validity. Many domains do not accept or transmit email. For some, this is clearly defined, while for others (such as recently purchased domains) the necessary functionality may not have been turned on.
4. Compare against a list of known spammers. This tactic can help weed out illegitimate registrations and defend the quality of your data. Some email verification providers maintain master lists of known spammers and fake email addresses.
5. Verify the username. Many providers allow a third party to verify an account's existence. This is done by emailing that particular service and waiting for a response.

How to improve email accuracy

Organizations need an email data quality strategy that ensures the accuracy of existing and new email addresses. Email validation prevents bad addresses from

entering the database, improves deliverability and improves lead quality, which ultimately strengthens the ROI on email communications. Below are three steps to help companies get started.

Step 1 - Evaluate the problem

Determine the amount of budget wasted on undeliverable emails and which data entry channels produce bad emails.

Step 2 - Determine your validation requirements

Decide which channels require email validation and whether functionality is needed on the front end, back end, or both.

Step 3 - Identify criteria

The ideal email validation tool will leverage multiple verification techniques. Additionally, it should fit within your existing customer experience to ensure usability.

About Intelligent Search Technology

IST is a part of Experian® QAS®, a leading provider of address data quality software and services.

Experian QAS is an address data quality software pioneer. The company's products capture, validate, cleanse, standardize and enrich customer contact information. Experian QAS provides data validation software and services to more than 10,000 customers worldwide in retail, education, health care, insurance, finance, government and other sectors. The company was established in 1990 and has offices throughout the United States, Europe and Asia Pacific.

©Copyright 2012 Experian. Registered in England no. 2582055. Experian QAS is QAS Ltd and exists in our own right.