

A close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The hands are positioned over the keyboard, with fingers pressing down on the keys. The background is blurred, showing the laptop's body and a desk surface.

Deliverability 101

Your Guide to Developing an Email Strategy That Improves Deliverability and Drives Results

Most marketers know that sending one-off emails to our entire database can lead to disastrous results and negatively impact our email deliverability. This practice does very little to improve engagement and convert leads into customers; many times, it actually lands our messages in our recipients' spam folders. Therefore, having the right email strategy in place is crucial to ensuring the success of your sales and marketing teams.

You must have a plan of action and a defined purpose for how an email is intended to fuel business growth before clicking send. This requires you to know your audience, have clear calls-to-action, and always follow best practices. While this guide does not take an in-depth dive into crafting an email marketing strategy, it does cover basic rules that will help set you up for success and improved deliverability.



A Broad Overview of Email Marketing Strategy

To ensure optimal deliverability and engagement, every email your organization sends should have a defined purpose and fit into your organization's overall email marketing strategy. While your email strategy will be unique based on your organization's needs and overall mission, each email sent should support your efforts to drive demand and generate ROI.

There are several things to consider when crafting and fleshing out your organization's email marketing strategy. First, you must identify the different segments or customer groups that you wish to target and engage through email. If you don't already have these available, define the customer personas for each of these groups so you can identify their primary pain points and interests. (Keep in mind that these will vary depending on who your contacts are and where they are in the sales funnel.)

Once you have a clearer perspective of who these customers are and what they need from you, outline the types of content and resources that will best serve them as they move through each phase of the customer journey. For example, prospects should be emailed different content than current clients, and current customers will require different information than customers who are up for renewal.

Finally, your email plan should have a defined cadence and length. While certain segments — such as current customers — may only require an occasional email, other groups will require more consistent communication. In many cases, you can expect customers to transition from one email campaign to the next as you learn more about who they are and they move further through the sales funnel.

A robust and effective email marketing strategy will require you to create a personalized plan of action for each of your customer groups. Developing these will take time and energy — something that everyone in a company should be aware of. Act-On customers are encouraged to contact our Professional Services team if they require additional resources to help them craft their plan.



Email Strategy & Deliverability

Now that we've expressed the importance of having an actionable email strategy, we will go into more detail about how deliverability plays a role in ensuring the success of your email marketing efforts. Similar to how legal practices can get in the way of business needs, deliverability can interfere with the efficacy of your email marketing efforts if you don't take it into consideration when crafting your email strategy.

To verify your email strategy is optimized for deliverability and engagement, you should consider your target audience, the total volume of your send, your sending cadence, and the potential for email fatigue (either due to seasonal factors or over-sending). This might seem like a lot, but we're going to break things down further throughout the next few pages to better explain how each of these factors plays a role in setting you up for both deliverability and marketing/sales success.

How to Use Segmentation to Target the Right Audience

Ensuring your email is sent to the right audience is extremely important — both for deliverability purposes and to drive engagement that improves your bottom line. Emails that are not targeted to the correct audience wastes resources and negatively impacts your email reputation.

While there will always be emails that are necessarily broad because you have yet to determine where certain contacts are in the sales funnel, these types of emails should only be a small portion of your total send.

As previously mentioned, having defined customer personas can help you improve the personalization of your marketing efforts so your message reaches your target customers. If your organization hasn't yet developed unique and specific customer personas, a good place to start getting to know your customers is through market research. Conducting interviews, surveys, and focus groups are all great ways to gather accurate and relevant information about who your customers are and what they need, enabling you to improve your product and overall messaging.

Once you've developed your customer personas, collect the necessary information from your prospects and current customers to segment them into your defined segments. This will help you deliver the right messaging content and improve your chance of success throughout the sales cycle. Below are a few ways to consider segmenting your contacts:

- **Position Level at Organization:** Companies that target contacts based on their position level at their organization and go the extra mile to reach out to decision-makers and influencers see better results. You should aim to collect this information via form fills and store it all within your CRM to help you in your segmentation efforts. Grouping your contacts based on their role within an organization will empower you to provide more relevant content and resources to assist them throughout the decision-making process.
- **Stage in the Customer Journey:** As we mentioned before, optimizing your content based on where your contacts are in the customer journey is extremely important. Besides having a positive impact on ROI, a good content strategy is also important in terms of deliverability. By segmenting your customers based on their stage in the customer journey and tailoring your content to match that phase, you ensure that your messages get delivered to and read by the right people and (hopefully) also convinces them to choose you instead of your competitors.

For example, near the top of the funnel, there is a very high likelihood of spam or abuse complaints due to customers being fatigued and annoyed by your messages. Therefore, your content at this stage should focus on introducing your customers to who you are and be designed to help you collect information you can use to improve the personalization of your future marketing efforts.

- **ISP and Filtering Companies:** In the world of deliverability, your audience does not only consist of the end-recipients of your email — ISPs and filtering companies matter too. The ISP or filtering company your email is received by before reaching your recipient can have a large impact on your potential for deliverability and overall results. For example, filtering companies like Barracuda will fake click on all emails unless their IPs are suppressed from reporting. Being aware of this can help improve your understanding of the data you collect.

Therefore, at a high level, a sender should know the following: what percent of their target audience is B2B or B2C and how many of their contacts use Google vs other ISPs. We discuss each of these factors and how they impact deliverability below:

- **Google:** The percentage of recipients using Google is important because the ISP is the dominant force in today's industry and is becoming more strict about which emails can be delivered to the inbox folder. Google is also placing more importance on the reputation of a sending domain. These two factors can impact your overall potential for deliverability, so it's important to keep them in mind.
- **B2B:** B2B emails also present a challenge to senders because they have to worry about ensuring their emails make it through not one but two filters and then the ISP.

Knowing the percentage of your customers who use B2B emails matters because it will help you decide how to tailor your emails to make it past the various filters and determine which tools you'll need to get a full picture of the inbox landscape.

- **B2C:** Knowing how many recipients use B2C email can provide you with many important insights. For example, the platform that your recipient uses for email can easily be correlated to their age and technical proficiency (AOL users are, on average, much older than Gmail users). Another advantage of B2C emails is that you can use reporting functions available through Postmaster sites and traditional monitoring tools to gain a clearer understanding of the inbox, improving your chance for deliverability.



Email Volume

Your email sending volume can have a drastic effect on deliverability and reputation. High volumes require a good reputation, and lower volumes rely less on it. Furthermore, intermittent and randomly high volumes of emails sent can tank deliverability and reputation, whereas consistent sending can bolster it. In other words, best-in-class senders can get away with sending millions of emails in under 20 minutes, whereas a low reputation sender may struggle to get 20,000 emails accepted and delivered to the inbox in 3 hours. The key factors to getting to a good sending volume (other than the rest of these best practices) are consistency and gradually increasing your send. More on these topics below:

- **Consistency:** This term should not be confused with cadence. Consistency does not refer to the number of emails a single individual receives but instead the number of emails sent by a sender on a weekly basis. ISPs want to see consistent sending where volumes do not spike or plummet week by week but remain as regular as possible. A 2-2.5x change in the consistency of your sending is allowed before this change begins to impact your deliverability. Note: This is mainly true for domains and IPs for volumes over ~50k per month.
- **"Ramping Up" Email Volume:** This term refers to a slow and planned increase in email volume over a defined time period that enables you to eventually achieve your desired average weekly volume. Plan to start with a very low sending volume and double every week for most ISPs. These increases can be faster if necessary and can even be done daily, but we advise you to implement a lengthier process to ensure a good deliverability reputation. If you run into issues, we recommend pausing your efforts at the previous volume until the issue is resolved or a week has passed.

Email Cadence

The cadence, or the frequency a sender wants a recipient to receive emails, should be a part of your overall email marketing strategy. In addition, it's important to ensure that recipients are only enrolled in the programs you want them to be.

If you are unsure how to determine the best cadence for your customers, the frequency of emails should be informed by the sales cycle of your product (if it is a 9-month sales cycle, weekly emails are far too much for the average customer) and who your customer is. Based on data Act-On has gathered, top- and middle-of-funnel recipients and current customer emails should be spaced out to avoid fatigue. In contrast, bottom-of-funnel prospects, new onboarding customers, and actively renewing/reselling customers require a higher cadence of emails and support.

One of the best practices for most senders is to make sure there is one person in charge of running all email programs, determining the appropriate email cadence, and checking in to make sure that the company is not over-sending to customers by putting them into too many automated programs.



Email Fatigue

Fatigue is becoming a pressing issue in the world of deliverability because it is the main contributor to ISPs' decision to institute features such as promotions and clutter folders. Email fatigue can negatively impact your results, so having a solid strategy for who you target and how you target them is essential for preventing fatigue from affecting your customer base. As mentioned earlier, there are two types of fatigue that a sender has control over: single source fatigue (over-sending) and seasonal fatigue (how many emails your recipients get during certain peak times of the year). There is also general email fatigue, but the main strategy for preventing that is sending your recipients email communication that they want and trust.

Email Fatigue from a Single Source (Over-Sending)

Senders can prevent single-source fatigue by using the correct cadence for their target customer. Act-On has built several tools to help marketing automation users set the right email cadence. To start, Act-On users can set up email fatigue suppression rules within their instance (Act-On users can learn more [here](#)). This allows you to define the number of emails a contact can receive over a certain period of time. Act-On users can also prevent email fatigue by setting up their automated programs so that follow-up email sends are triggered only when the recipient completes an action. For example, a recipient won't receive the next email in a program until they open the previous one or click on a CTA. Although each of these methods is effective on its own, Act-On recommends both for best results.

You can also set up your automated programs to have waiting steps designed to lessen the number of emails received. By controlling your cadence based on user action, a program can be sped up or slowed down. Furthermore, additional information can be delivered to an individual who is actively consuming it and can be skipped for someone who isn't. Remember, not everyone wants to read every single piece of information about a product.

Seasonal Fatigue

Seasonal fatigue is the other compatible fatigue, but there's an easy solution: avoid it altogether by limiting your send around holidays. Act-On's Deliverability Team Manager and Senior Consultant have hosted a [webinar](#) on this topic with the 4th quarter and winter season in mind. If you want the short and simple version of the topics discussed in this webinar, these are the key takeaways:

- Email customers prior to the holiday to either pre-sell for an event or notify them to look for your email
- Avoid the high traffic days altogether
- Pivot messaging to be seasonal



Conclusion

Having the right email marketing strategy in place helps ensure good deliverability and empowers your organization to personalize your marketing efforts and drive results. If you are interested in teaming with Act-On to develop and execute effective email strategies, we have internal resources and external partners that can work with you to create a customized and templated personal strategy.

Please contact your account manager to get in touch with Act-On's Professional Services and learn about our available packages.