

Email Marketing Deliverability: Getting into the Inboxes of Healthcare Professionals

Imagine you've carefully crafted and designed a fantastic email marketing campaign. Visually interesting, great content, the perfect call to action, the list is ready, and the campaign is launched. But over the next few days, the results you anticipated fall well short of your expectations and suddenly what seemed like it should work doesn't.

Healthcare marketers know that physicians and other healthcare professionals receive a tremendous amount of email communications. With physicians citing email as a preferred channel for receiving information on new medical technologies, email is—and will remain—an essential component of any healthcare marketer's toolkit.

Across the many segments of healthcare, content marketing is becoming an ever more prevalent and effective strategy for building awareness, disseminating key information and generating leads among healthcare practitioners, healthcare administrators, and health IT leaders. Understanding the intricacies, mechanics, and underlying methodologies and best practices for email marketing is essential to reaching and surpassing performance goals for this facet of your marketing plan.

Email deliverability is an intricate and ever-evolving topic, and this whitepaper is intended to serve as a primer to help you get started or brush up your knowledge, rather than a comprehensive playbook on the topic.

If you have questions specific to your marketing environment, [contact us](#) and we'll be happy to share our expertise.

In a recent MedData Group survey, physicians indicated that informational emails are the second most utilized form of communication in supporting their decision making process.

Deliverability: Getting Your Message into the Inbox

No matter how compelling your content is or how targeted your intended audience, if you are not getting into the recipient's inbox, your campaign plainly and simply won't generate results. Optimizing email deliverability is a complex topic, made evermore complex due to its constant state of flux. While multiple factors have significant impact on deliverability, two starting points include list hygiene and IP & domain reputation.

List Hygiene

Consistently monitoring and refining the quality of your list is imperative. It's important to pay close attention to and understand your bounce rates, both hard and soft.

Soft bounces indicate the email is temporarily undeliverable and can be associated with a full mailbox or content issues. Hard bounces mean the email is permanently undeliverable, perhaps tied to bad domain names, typos in the data, invalid email addresses or a permanent block due to getting flagged as spam. You should make yourself very familiar with the detailed reporting from your email service provider (ESP), and you should monitor and report on soft and hard bounces for each of your emails, as well as dissect that data further to understand policy-based bounces (spam rejection) versus nonpolicy bounces (bad addresses) for each email you send.

If you see jumps in your soft bounce rate, for instance, you should look closer to see if one particular domain has put a block on your email. If that is the case, your ESP can usually work with you to remediate. Hard bounces, on the other hand, will almost always be taken off your file automatically by your ESP after a single bounce. Continuing to try to send an email to an address that has hard bounced can seriously hurt your domain and IP reputation (which we'll discuss further in the next section) and by extension, harm your ESP as well.

A key aspect of list hygiene is also doing everything possible to ensure your list does not include spamtraps and moles. These are email addresses that once may have been valid and deliverable addresses, but due to inactivity by the owner of that account, they have been deactivated and taken over by the inbox provider (such as Hotmail or Yahoo) and used as 'traps' to see if mailers continue to email those accounts even though a real individual is no longer associated with them.

There are various 3rd party companies that offer services to not only check the validity of an email address, but also to cross check it against databases of known spamtraps. The best practice is to run this type of 3rd party hygiene on your file at least on a quarterly basis, ideally on a monthly basis. If you outsource your email data management or purchase third party lists, make sure you understand the list provider's list hygiene strategies and ask questions, including how they perform verification and validation. For example, MedData Group utilizes a triple verification and validation process when we license contact data to clients to ensure a thorough process that helps optimize results in both the near and long term.

IP & Domain Reputation

If you've ever encountered a sender block, you understand the importance of managing this key metric. Understanding how Internet Service Providers (ISPs), inbox providers (e.g. Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, etc.), and spam filtering software and services firms analyze your IP reputation is essential. A key provider of this metric today is ReturnPath, through their Sender Score service.

The majority of ISPs and similar types of companies share a great deal of sender and recipient data with ReturnPath in order to arrive at this score. The score is then shared back with those same providers to use as a component of their algorithms to determine whether or not an email should be classified as bulk or spam. Your Sender Score, which is the key measurement of your IP reputation, is the equivalent of a credit score, and it is utilized by the ecosystem of email providers to determine whether to pass your message through to a recipient's mailbox.

Think of this first step getting through the front door—this step gets you through the email provider's gateway. From here, you are still tasked with getting your email delivered to the actual inbox and not getting filtered into the bulk or spam folder. Mailers with low sender scores will have a very hard time reaching their target audience's actual inboxes.

ReturnPath reports that 83% of the time an email is not delivered to an inbox, it is due to a poor sender reputation.

(Source)

A critical decision to make as an email marketer is whether to utilize a shared IP or dedicated IP when sending campaigns. A shared IP is one that is used by multiple senders (generally pooled across multiple companies), and a dedicated IP is one that's used by a single sender, where the sender purchases and sets up the IP with their email service provider.

Generally, the best practice is to be on a dedicated IP, though this is not always possible, for economic or other reasons. Understanding how this choice impacts your sender score is important, so always find out if your email marketing partner offers one or the other or both. For example, on a shared IP, a poor score generated by another company's bad behaviors can negatively impact your score as well. You should seek a Sender Score of 93 and above, ideally targeting 97 or higher. Working with a partner that has a deep understanding of best practices for maintaining a high Sender Score will enable better deliverability and help you reach the performance results you seek.

You can check your Sender Score easily [here](#).

Maximizing Email Marketing Success

Understanding how to achieve high deliverability is the first step towards optimizing your email marketing program. Deciding where and how to invest in the right processes and email marketing infrastructure is critical to achieving the results you need. Although there are many moving parts and seemingly hidden mechanics, educating yourself on best practices and seeking out knowledgeable third party resources to help will pay high dividends for your email campaign efforts.

Brought to you by the experts at MedData Group

MedData Group lives and breathes the intricacies of healthcare email marketing daily. Do you have questions about your current practices? Do you want to understand how we can help you generate the results you seek? Please don't hesitate to [contact us](#).

Whether clients choose to work with us to license our healthcare audience data or have us manage their email and content marketing campaigns, we partner with our clients and regularly share industry best practices that help them reach their demand generation goals.



About **MedData Group**

MedData Group provides demand generation, content marketing, and data licensing for companies that want to engage with professional healthcare audiences and communities by using a fundamentally unique approach.

MedData Group publishes Medical Product Guide, the industry's go-to resource that provides clinicians and healthcare professionals with meaningful vendor, product and industry information. By distributing meaningful content to healthcare professionals, we are able to collect more data, glean deeper insights, and reach larger audiences than any other demand generation service. Using behavioral analytics and big-data techniques, our proprietary content and lead management system produces unrivaled insights that we apply to best-in-class marketing practices to achieve unmatched results towards helping our clients reach their business goals.

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