

5 Good Reasons to Outsource Your Email Send

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It's not that I'm against managing your email send in-house, it's just that I've found it to be better in theory than in practice. Clients hire me to optimize their email marketing efforts; they're looking to increase their return on investment. And often, outsourcing to a reputable email service provider (ESP) is part of the solution. Here are five good reasons to outsource your email send, along with the number one objection for doing so (and why it's a paper tiger).

1. Building Relationships with ISPs

Recent research found false positives (opt-in mail filtered as spam) running as high as 19%, or nearly 1 in 5 emails sent. Getting into the inbox is critical to your success with email and a good ESP can help you accomplish this by having relationships with ISPs, the 'gate keepers' of your recipients' inboxes.

Could you do this yourself in house? Maybe. You'd need at least one person, dedicated full-time to the task, that pro-actively reaches out to the ISPs you are mailing to before there's a problem. Even then, you may not succeed.

At a conference last month in Chicago, representatives from AOL and MSN confirmed that they really don't have the personnel to build relationships with every small mailer out there and prefer to work with ESPs who represent multiple mailers.

2. Tracking and Reporting

Another big issue—without metrics like open rates and click-throughs, it's hard to know which parts of your email campaign are working and which could use some tweaking. Effective email marketing isn't about the send—it's about the results of the send. And that means tracking and reporting.

Some in house systems do offer tracking and reporting, but my experience has been that many companies don't use it. They cite resource limitations ("the tech folks haven't have time to set it up"), unusable data ("we get reports, but I'm not quite sure what's what"), cost ("adding opens rate tracking would require an upgrade to our system") or some combination.

But the bottom line is this: If you're serious about email marketing, if you want to optimize your return on investment, you need to have robust, reliable and timely tracking and reporting. In most cases, using a good ESP is the easier way to get it.

3. **Keeping up with the Technology**

Asking a site visitor to take the next step is the 'call to action'. This is the "contact us", "join our mailing list", or "sign up today" option, which informs the site visitor of the correct next step. Most people are grateful to be guided through the process of evaluating a product or service, so if you tell them that the next step is to sign up for a 30-day trial, many of them will.

Email is constantly evolving. When the large ESPs starting tracking open rates, I submitted a request to have our in-house system do the same; "not technically possible" was their response. I was a marketing person but at that moment I knew more about the technology of tracking open rates than my technical team.

ESPs have to stay up on technology—it's their business, their bread and butter. They are constantly looking for ways to improve their service and provide additional value to their customers. It's a competitive field. Few in-house technology teams have that kind of motivation. And even those who do often find themselves understaffed and over their heads very quickly. Small things, like an unsubscribe link that goes bad, can cause big problems. For most organizations, it's not worth the risk.

4. **Managing Subscribes, Bounces and Unsubscribes**

Some in-house systems handle this, but others require that you do it manually. While it may not seem like much with a small list, a larger list requires much more attention. And now, with CAN-SPAM, not only do you have to remove people who unsubscribe, you have to do so within 10 days.

Any outsource solution worth its salt will handle these things automatically. In addition to saving you time, you'll get things your in-house system probably didn't provide—like differentiation between types of bounces, automatic removal after a certain number of bounces and immediate unsubscribe to stay ahead of CAN-SPAM.

Another perk: double opt-in, the gold standard for permission-based marketing, can be daunting to manage on your own but is usually a breeze with an ESP. Why? Because they've got it down to a science and you can take advantage of their learnings to optimize your confirmations.

5. **Getting Sound Advice**

Another benefit of working with an ESP is the advice they can provide. Even if you don't pay for one-on-one consulting, most ESPs provide education to their customers, ranging from optimizing your list growth to avoiding spam filters to elements of good email design.

They see themselves as an ally whose goal is to help make you successful, because if you're having success you'll maintain and perhaps expand your email program. Few if any in-house solutions offer that—typically it's a technical sale with a one-time fee. They may help your IT folks set it up, but then you're on your own (especially where the marketing side is concerned).

I Know What You're Thinking: But What About the Cost?

This is the number one objection I get when I suggest to a client that they should look into outsourcing their email send. But it's not a stopper. There are reputable ESPs that will fit into any budget—from \$15 a month up based on list size and/or volume.

Plus, when you add up the benefits:

- Increased deliverability
- Enhanced tracking and reporting
- Latest technology
- Automated subscriber, bounces and unsubscribe
- Great advice

It's really no contest. I've found time and time again, with small, medium and large businesses, that the benefits of using a reputable ESP far outweigh the costs.