

The benefits of using an email service provider

→ This guide can be found at www.pauldesigns.co.uk/pdflibrary/emailprovider.pdf

→ This document has been written by an independent expert



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Five reasons to outsource your requirements

1. Minimise the impact on your time

The most obvious benefit to using an external email service provider is that they do the work for you and allow you to determine quite specifically how much you want to be involved.

ESPs offer a range of services, from a simple delivery service through to a fully resourced campaign management team. Costs are very reasonable whatever your approach and our Email campaign planning and Questions for your ESP sections will help you decide which is best for your situation.

2. Take care of the legalities

ESPs will ensure that you comply with current email marketing law by including options such as unsubscribe and even administering any updates to your list. They will ensure you are always in compliance with future changes as they implement central changes on behalf of all clients to protect their business.

3. Access the latest technology for delivery

If you are sending large numbers of emails, you can encounter issues during delivery such as reduced bandwidth which can lead to a slowdown in the speed of your network, the queuing of important communications on your server and delays in getting your emails sent out. If you use a mass market internet service provider for those emails you may also incur problems with monthly data limits or even experience them placing a block on your activity to protect their other users.

ESPs have access to dedicated email servers which can handle hundreds of thousands of emails at the same time – and if volumes do build unexpectedly, can access additional (overflow) server space elsewhere to ensure your expectations are met.

4. Get a fully personalised, fully compatible template

An ESP has experience of sending emails to many different email clients and therefore understand all the basic needs of each one. They can also monitor the ever changing protocols and security filters which those different clients use to try and combat spam.

Consequently they know how to build and distribute an email template which is compatible with as many of these as possible. You can therefore be confident that whether your clients are using a mac, a pc, windows vista, windows xp, gmail, hotmail, btinternet, outlook, entourage or lotus notes, what they see when your email arrives is what you intended when you sent it out.

5. Track interest and activity

The single biggest advantage of using an ESP is their ability to tell you which of your clients received your email, who opened it and who, if anyone, clicked on the various links. These figures will generally be slightly understated but what they will do is provide feedback on which messages are working well and which are not, helping you to learn and develop the content of such emails in the future.

Some ESPs can also monitor how many of your 'delivered' emails are diverted into spam folders rather than actually hitting the client's inbox. This is relatively new development and costs a little more than the standard, undifferentiated offering – but can be very useful, particularly if your list is a significant size.

➔ For more information please visit www.pauldesigns.co.uk/emailmarketing

➔ For pricing information please visit www.pauldesigns.co.uk/pdflibrary/emailpriceguide.pdf

➔ To find out more, or ask a question please get in touch at www.pauldesigns.co.uk/contact

Questions for your outsource supplier

How many emails do I get and what happens as my numbers increase?

How much flexibility is there in the price your ESP is quoting and will you get any further discounts if your email numbers increase?

How do you check html code compatibility?

Different email clients (and different versions of the same client) all display certain html slightly differently. You want to be sure your own template is compatible with as many as possible and that your end clients therefore see what you see.

How do you protect my client email address list?

What level of security is in place to protect your clients' data from hackers searching around email servers looking for new people to spam.

Can you track inbox and spam filtering separately?

Tracking which clients open an email and which, if any link within it they click on when they do open it is now relatively standard amongst ESPs. Tracking those which are redirected into spam folders, however, does not – and most distributors, even some large corporations, have no idea how many of their emails never reach the intended recipient.

If you want someone to track this level of detail, they need specific technology – and beware, it will cost you a little bit more.

How do you handle excess capacity (to avoid queues)?

For emails, the time you send them out can have a significant impact on how many people read them. How does your ESP employ additional servers to ensure timely distribution – ie: to prevent campaigns backing up behind each other – if you and all their other clients want their emails to go out at the same time.

How do you categorise the various types of 'bounce'?

Email bounces are categorised into 'soft' bounce (e.g.: out of office) and 'hard' bounce (e.g.: email box does not exist). However, some email clients can occasionally produce a hard bounce even though an address is otherwise valid – for example, if there is a short term closure in the system or perhaps too many emails are hitting that server at the same time.

You should therefore ask your ESP how they treat hard bounces and ensure they do not delete otherwise valid email addresses from your future campaigns.

Who are your other clients?

As with any potential supplier, ask for the name of their existing clients so you can get an idea of the type of businesses they are used to dealing with. Also ask if you can contact one of them for a reference – and make sure you do actually make that contact.

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How to send successful emails

1. Ensure you have a clean list

Once you are sure your list can legally be contacts (here), the next step is to ensure the details are correct. This is crucial for any email campaign as one spelling mistake in the address will mean a bounced back message – or (perhaps more importantly) delivery to the wrong person.

It is therefore worthwhile spending time making sure you input the details accurately and that you keep your files fully up to date. This will save time in the long run and avoid clogging up your inbox with lots of unnecessarily returned emails.

2. Choose your time of delivery

Certain times of the day are better than others - but which does depend on your client base.

If you are a business customer, it is likely that on a Monday morning, you will run through your emails very quickly and delete those which you consider unimportant. As an email distributor, therefore, you would want to avoid getting caught up in this exercise as it reduces the chance of your message being read. The same goes for Friday afternoons just before people leave for the weekend - and just after lunch most days of the week.

If you are trying to contact working people at home, the opposite may apply. Evenings and lunchtimes could be good for catching them online as they try to catch up with personal issues outside office hours.

For home workers, and particularly retired people, the time you send an email is probably less important. However, as with anyone, they will be more receptive when they are actually online. This could mean targeting the early evening or even the weekend but is probably much more a factor of chance than the other groups.

3. Have an engaging subject line - but watch the words you use

To capture the imagination have a credible yet relevant and engaging subject line, which will appeal to your audience. This is the first thing they will read and many people will open or delete an email on the strength of the title.

However, note that this is also where spam filters get data to assess your reliability. Use care in the words you use and take time to get it right. Thanks to the millions of spam emails trying the same tricks, words such as 'win', 'prize' and 'free' will now count against you.

4. Be relevant - and concise

It only takes one click to delete your message, so make sure what you have to say is interesting, you come to the point quickly and you keep it short. List or summarise any features and benefits up front, then elaborate - or offer a link to an article on your website - for those who want the details.

5. Don't forget that opt-out option

We've said it before but it is worth restating. You must, by law, allow clients to opt out of your email communications. Due to the amount of emails sent every day, some clients may prefer not to be contacted in this manner and you should therefore put your opt out policy (which could be as simple as replying to your email with the subject 'please remove my details') at the bottom of your note.

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