

MODUL PERKULIAHAN ELEARNING

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***WRITING FOR EMAIL MARKETING***

Dosen

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**INTRODUCTION**

There are two basic types of e-mails you will be writing as a copywriter. The first is the “solo e-mail.” This is an e-mail promoting a single product or offer sent to a distribution list. The second is the “e-zine.” This is an online newsletter, written and distributed for marketing purposes. A typical strategy is to build an e-list of prospects by offering a free subscription to your online newsletter. Then, once you own those names, you can send them both e-zines—which can contain ads for your products—and solo e-mails promoting your products.

**GETTING PAST THE ISPS AND SPAM FILTERS**

Everyone seems to agree that e-mail marketing is one of the most effective and powerful forms of Internet marketing today. After all, it is quick to deploy, provides immediate measurable results, and delivers a high return on investment. But there is a downside. Successful e-mail marketing requires experience, expertise, and knowledge of the constantly changing e-mail filtering, spam-eradicating, firewall-building software industry. It has been said that more than one out of five e-mails have problems with delivery—which significantly erode response rates and program effectiveness. It’s not enough to build a list of interested customers or clients, send them informative, engaging e-mails once a week or once a month, and market products or services to them in the process. You’ve got to know how to get the messages delivered, and then read by the recipient. In other words, creating wonderful e-mail messages is only part of the process—the messages are absolutely worthless to you if never received by list members. As a result of corporate and ISP filters, blacklists, and constant e-mail address flux, permission-based marketers face obstacles in their attempt to deliver solicited, confirmed-consent messages to the inboxes of customers and subscribers with whom they’ve established relationships.

Deliverability is key. With e-mail, it’s simply the ability to complete delivery of a message to a recipient’s inbox. We’re not talking about readability—those factors that increase the open/read rate—but the process of getting the message into the inbox of the intended recipient. Simply put, what can you do to ensure receipt of your messages? Let’s agree on one thing: Delivery begins when a recipient grants permission to receive your messages. If your e-mail marketing strategy is based on this premise, delivery challenges are significantly minimized. With permission, the customer or recipient can provide recourse if an ISP, spam filter, or blacklist blocks your messages.

A number of factors hinder or prevent solicited e-mail delivery:

1. **ISP-blocked incoming mail**. The most common version of ISP blocking. Many ISPs, especially large ones, maintain internal blacklists of IP addresses that are denied any incoming connections. Frequent customer complaints about traffic from particular sources are the most common cause of this kind of blocking. ISPs tend to block IP ranges without any notification, as they routinely handle complaints about hundreds of thousands of individual e-mail sources.
2. **ISP-blocked outgoing mail**. Your ISP blocks outgoing traffic to another ISP. This is rare, as most ISPs block incoming traffic, but it has been known to happen.
3. **Distributed content filters**. Several anti-spam companies help ISPs and corporate Internet users cope with the influx of unsolicited e-mail. These blocking systems employ complex content analysis processes that scan message content and create message “signatures” that are disseminated among the filtering company’s client base.
4. **Public list**. Publicly accessible blacklists and whitelists, maintained by volunteers, are often used by smaller ISPs and companies without dedicated e-mail administrators. Listing criteria can be reliable or nearly arbitrary, depending on the list owner’s preferences. Administrators select the lists that most closely match their company’s policy.
5. **ISP content filters**. Similar to distributed content filters, ISPs often employ content filters created internally or adapted from others. Content filters scan for a variety of red flags and they can even learn new patterns in spam e-mail, such as inserting periods in words that would normally trigger a block.
6. **User content filters**. Almost every e-mail client provides junk mail filters. These vary widely in complexity. Microsoft Outlook’s filter searches for offensive keywords and key phrases, whereas more robust filters can be configured to run from a user’s desktop.
7. **User lists**. Recent upgrades to e-mail applications, including AOL, MSN, Yahoo!, and Outlook, allow users to compile their own blacklists and whitelists of individual and domain addresses. There are also “challenge/response systems” which extend this process by requiring non-whitelisted senders to respond with a code or other confirmation before their messages are delivered.
8. **Message bounces**. A “soft” bounce is a temporary failure where the e-mail wasn’t delivered but may be retried in the future. It could be because the mailbox was full, or the receiving mail server didn’t respond to the delivery attempt. A “hard” bounce means the message is permanently undeliverable. Maybe the address is invalid, or a remote server is blocking your server. Naturally, you want to minimize the number of “hard” bounce backs, those permanently fatal messages that mean loss of contact and “no sale.” There are a number of ways to ensure greater delivery rates. The first requires cooperation from the recipients, as you want them to add your e-mail address to their “accepted” messages list.

**HOW TO GET INTO THE RECIPIENT’S ADDRESS BOOK OR WHITELIST**

Getting your “FROM” address added to your recipient’s address book or personal whitelist—a list of approved sources from which the user will accept e-mail messages—is, more and more, a crucial step in getting your e-mails into the inbox, rather than into the spam, or worse yet, the trash folder. More and more people, both business and consumer e-mail users, are adopting the use of spam filters, or upgrading their e-mail programs to include some form of spam filtering/whitelist feature. You need to remind people to take the step of adding your FROM address to their address book/whitelist. Consider adding a single sentence at the top of your e-mail.

Here are three examples of effective reminder statements:

1. **To ensure our e-mail** isdelivered to your inbox, please add the e-mail address delightfulmessages@ourcompany.com to your Address Book or junk filter settings.
2. **To ensure regular delivery** of our e-mails, please add us (youwantthis@thiscompany.net) to your Address Book. Thank you!
3. **To guarantee delivery** of this newsletter, please add ournewsletters@mycompany.com to your e-mail Address Book.

You may wish to go so far as to explain to your recipients how to set their junk filter settings in a special section of an e-mail message, or devote an entire mailing to this issue. Review the process for the major e-mail applications and Internet Service Providers, and write up a step-by-step instructional e-mail message. I’ve had a number of clients offer phone customer support assistance to any reader who may need a “walk-through”!

**TRIGGERING SPAM FILTERS**

The means which the various ISP and e-mail server programs use to identify unwanted or inappropriate e-mail messages change fairly often and it is necessary to be aware of new implementations. But some important essentials can be reviewed.

Be careful with terms and characters used in your promotional e-mail campaigns. Microsoft’s Outlook Express junk e-mail filter will send your emails straight to the “Deleted Items” folder if it finds things such as “for free,” “cards accepted,” or “order today” in your e-mails. However, the list is under constant revision, and you should regularly update your in-house list of unwelcome words. Visit this URL to view a current list of words and terms that Outlook will filter: <http://office.microsoft.com/assistance/9798.newfilters.aspx>

Among the various filters AOL applies to incoming mail, one in particular (while easily avoided) will completely block your AOL message delivery if triggered. This new filter is an HTML validator that scans incoming messages for HTML syntax and formatting errors. If invalid HTML is detected, the message will be rejected.

The error itself does not need to be a glaring omission to trigger this filter. Any syntax inaccuracy may be sufficient. Ending a link tag, for example, with “<a/>” instead of the correct “</a>” will cause your message to be rejected. This filter was presumably employed to combat a favorite spammer tactic of inserting nonsense HTML code to foil standard content filters.

Establish procedures for proofing e-mail campaigns. Your proofing checklist should include HTML validation. Popular HTML editing software already offers effective validation tools and will highlight any errors on the fly, as your message is being created.

For a complete reference specification of HTML formatting, visit the World Wide Web Consortium documentation pages (<http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/>). Also, you can use the HTML validator in your e-mail application or a third-party validator such as the W3C Markup Validation Service (<http://validator.w3.org/>).

Here are 10 ways to help increase the likelihood your e-mail messages will be accepted by the receiving ISP and avoid future deliverability problems.

1. **Create a reverse DNS**. Make sure your outgoing mailing IPs (Internet protocol) have valid RDNS (reverse domain name system) entries set up. This ensures that when a receiving e-mail server checks who owns the IP trying to connect to it, you’ll come up as the result, passing one of the many basic checks ISPs do to deter spammers.
2. **Set up an SPF**. A Sender Policy Framework (SPF) is an additional step to verify an e-mail sender’s identity. The protocol is fairly easy to set up; your network administrator should be able to do it in less than five minutes. SPF adds another layer of authentication to your outgoing e-mail and protects against “phishing” attacks on your brand. You should know that some ISPs, such as AOL, require SPF to be implemented to be considered for their whitelists.
3. **Make only one connection**. When connecting to an e-mail server, send only one message per connection. Some systems still try to shovel as many messages through one connection as possible, which can be likened to throwing 500 e-mail addresses into the “BCC” field. ISPs frown on this technique, as spammers who want to get as many messages in before being blocked typically use this approach.
4. **Limit sending rate**. Though the ideal send volume depends on the list’s nature, a good rule is to limit your transmission to 100,000 or so messages per hour. Keep in mind you will also need to accept feedback in the form of bounced messages—your outgoing speed shouldn’t affect your ability to receive bounces.
5. **Accept bounces**. Some e-mail systems, especially older ones, have a nasty habit of rejecting bounce messages. These “bounced bounces” arrive at the receiving ISP and can raise red flags. Nothing irks an ISP more than sending a response that a recipient doesn’t exist, only to have the notification rejected and the mailings continue.
6. **Validate HTML content**. One of the dirtiest tricks in a spammer’s arsenal is invalid, broken, and malicious HTML code. If you use HTML in your messages, make sure your code is error-free and follows W3C HTML guidelines, as discussed earlier.
7. **Avoid scripting**. Security risks due to script vulnerabilities in e-mail browsers have increased over the years. The result is that most scripts are stripped out of messages. Some e-mail systems reject messages outright if scripting is detected. For greatest delivery success, avoid using any scripts in messages. Instead, direct your readers to your Web site, where use of dynamic scripting can be fully implemented.
8. **Understand content filtering basics**. Ignorance of filtering approaches is no excuse for not getting messages delivered. Read bounce messages, track which messages had high bounce rates and low open rates, and see if you can reverse-engineer offending content.
9. **Monitor delivery and bounce rates by ISP/domain**. After every delivery, run reports by major domain and ISP on your messages. Look for unusual bounce, unsubscribe, spam complaint, and open rates at specific domains.
10. **Monitor spam complaints**. Even the best permission marketers with world-class practices receive spam complaints, particularly if they have a high AOL subscriber base. Monitor the number of spam complaints for each mailing and establish a benchmark average. Look for mailings with spam complaint percentages that vary from the norm. See if you can determine what may have caused the problem. Was it the subject line? Too many messages in too short a time? Remember, a high number of spam complaints may result in an ISP blocking current, or even future, messages.

Some resources you can use to monitor complaints are:

AOL Feedback Loop: <http://postmaster.info.aol.com/fbl/index.html>

SpamCop: <http://www.spamcop.net/fom-serve/cache/94.html>

Abuse.net: <http://www.abuse.net/addnew.html>

Diagnosing the root causes of deliverability problems will help you prevent them. You must monitor your delivery rates religiously because the rules around delivery change every day! Don’t make the mistake of understaffing or underfunding around this issue, as it undermines the overall effectiveness of your e-mail marketing program (and your company image at the same time).

Remember, to reach full delivery, you must:

1. **Monitor**: Use a seed list–based monitoring system that tracks your true delivery rates across all major ISPs. Know when a problem occurs, and don’t rely on your bounce-backs to give you all the information you need. Some mail just never gets delivered, or is put directly into “junk” folders or trash bins—and you’ll never know without such a system in place.
2. **Analyze**: When you’re at less than 100 percent delivery, it’s high time to find out why. You should look closely at the individual e-mail, as well as the e-mail program as a whole. There are lots of reasons for failed delivery—and early detection ensures smooth future deliveries.
3. **Resolve**: Create strong relationships with ISP tech-support people to have a valuable resource to troubleshoot alongside your staff members. ISP relations should be a high priority.
4. **Optimize**: Use information from all sources to solve your e-mail delivery problems. Small changes in creative copy, list, or server configuration can make a world of difference in your delivery rates.

Make sure you are tracking your deliveries, testing for ISP blocking and spam filtering before a large mailing, and react quickly to problems when they arise. Although complicated, it’s imperative in the creation and maintenance of a truly successful e-mail marketing program.

**LONG VS. SHORT E-MAIL COPY**

“What works best in e-mail marketing?” which asked for the umpteenth time the other day. “Long copy or short copy?”

It’s a quandary for direct marketers much more so than for general marketers. Here’s why: There’s a widely held viewpoint that, on the Internet, the less copy the better. Web marketing experts tell us that the Internet is faster paced than the “snail mail” world, that attention spans are shorter, and long messages get zapped into oblivion with the click of the mouse. “Keep it short!” they extol in countless advisory e-zines.

General advertisers, for the most part, also believe that when it comes to copy, the shorter the better. Often their print ads have large pictures and only a handful of words. So they have no trouble embracing the “people don’t read” mentality that the Web marketing gurus say works best.

But traditional direct marketers whose products are typically sold with long-copy direct-mail packages and self-mailers—newsletter publishers, seminar promoters, magazines, book clubs, insurance, audiocassettes—have a problem. It goes something like this:

“In print, I have to use long copy to make the sale . . .or I just don’t get the order. We’ve tested short copy many times—who doesn’t want a cheaper mailing piece with less ink and paper? But it has never worked for our product. Now my Web marketing consultant says the e-mail should be just a few paragraphs. If a few paragraphs won’t convince people to buy offline, why should things be any different online?”

And they are right. Just because a person buys online doesn’t change the persuasion process. If she needs the facts to make a decision, she needs them regardless of whether she is ordering from a paper mailing or a Web site. Yet we also have a sense that the Web marketing gurus have at least a clue as to what they are talking about. We sense that our 4-page sales letter, if sent word for word as a lengthy e-mail, wouldn’t work. People would click away long before they got to the end.

I think I have some sensible guidelines to answer this puzzle. **First**, we need to quantify what we mean by “short” versus “long.” When a Web marketing guru talks about “short” e-mail, he probably means only three or four paragraphs. So when he says long copy doesn’t work, by “long” he means e-mails of more than a few paragraphs.

If I say “long copy does work,” I mean long compared to the typical e-mail—not compared to the typical direct mail letter on paper. A “long” e-mail, which may fill several screens, is closer in length to a 2-page letter—short by direct-mail standards—than to a 4-page letter. And it doesn’t even come close to an 8-page letter.

**Second**, we need to quantify how much shorter online copy is than offline. Should you translate your entire package, word for word? Should you compress it to half its length? Less?

Kathy Henning, who writes extensively about online communication, says, “In general, online text should be half as long as printed text, maybe even shorter.” Not a precise formula, but a good starting point for estimation.

**Third**, and most important, we need to remember that the copy for e-mail marketing campaigns is not wholly contained within the e-mail itself. It is really in two parts.

**The first half of the message is in the actual e-mail**. The e-mail contains a link to a page on a Web site or server. When you click on that link, you jump to the page, where the remainder of the message is presented, along with the online order mechanism.

In a traditional direct-mail package, the message is unevenly split. Consistently, 98 percent of the copy is in the letter and brochure, with the remaining 2 percent on the order form. In e-mail marketing campaigns, the division is less balanced and more varied.

The diagram on the next page of an e-mail marketing mode shows the various ways the total copy can be divided between the e-mail and the response page. There are **four options**, as shown in the box at the center:

1. **Short e-mail, landing page** (left upper quadrant)—Many marketers with simple lead-generating offers use short e-mails (the traditional three to four paragraphs) with a link to a “landing page.” A landing page is a short Web-based form, usually with a headline, a couple of paragraphs explaining the offer, and a mechanism for the recipient to fill in his information and submit his response. This format is similar in length and style to the traditional one-page sales letter and business reply card used in lead-generating paper direct mail.



1. **Long e-mail, landing page** (lower left quadrant)—This is similar except the e-mail, by Internet marketing standards, is “long.” For convenience, define a short e-mail as any e-mail that, when printed out, takes half a page or less. By comparison, any e-mail that takes more than a page when printed out is “long.” This format is similar in length and style to a direct mail package with a 4-page letter and a simple 4- by 9-inch order card.
2. **Long e-mail, microsite** (lower right quadrant)—This format has a long e-mail and a long landing page. The microsite is a custom URL designed specifically for the offer. Unlike a landing page, which is usually a single screen, the microsite’s lengthier copy requires many screens. The microsite can be broken into distinct pages (see www.hypnoticwriting.com) or it can be one continuous document through which the reader must scroll (see [www.surefirecustomerservicetechniques.com](http://www.surefirecustomerservicetechniques.com)). This long e mail/microsite format allows for maximum copy, and is ideal for translating lengthy mailings, such as magalogs (12- to 24-page, long-copy self-mailers that look like magazines), to the Web.
3. **Short e-mail, microsite** (upper right quadrant)—This format combines a short e-mail up front with a long-copy microsite on the back end. It is ideal for offers that require a lot of copy but are being transmitted to prospects who might not read a lengthy e-mail.

The bottom line: E-mail marketing can work without having e-mails competing with War and Peace in word count. By strategically splitting your copy between the front-end e-mail and back-end response page, you can get your message across without having time-pressured Web surfers fleeing in terror.