



Are you a Spammer?

Are you sending email campaigns? Are your lists clean? Here are 7 tips to avoid being accused of spamming. If you send a campaign to a bad list, you could get into some **legal troubles** (not to mention look like idiots, get banned by ISPs, targeted by anti-spammers, and flooded with hate mail). Here are some "red flags" to look out...

1. **Generic addys:** Don't add generic email addresses, like "info@", "webmaster@" and "postmaster@". It's a sign that you've 'scraped' those addresses from websites, or had a secretary or intern sit down and surf for emails from prospective companies
2. **Department addys:** Similarly, be careful not to add generic department email addresses: president@company.com, marketing@, sales@, etc. It's a sign there is no personal relationship with someone in that company, and that you might be targeted anybody in that department who will listen to your pitch.
3. **Messiness:** See lots of duplicate email addresses? Lots of emails in ALL CAPS or MiXeD CAsE? You're may be using a **Frankenstein list** of customers thrown together from different sources, different databases, and different departments. Make sure you're not sending a general marketing newsletter to a list of customers from the tech-support department, or to a list created from offline warranty registrations, contests, etc.
4. **Stale list:** How "fresh" is the list? If you've been collecting the list for 5 years and are only just now getting around to sending an email newsletter, you're going to get tons of spam complaints. Keep the most recent emails, and move the old ones to a "snail mail an invite" list.
5. **List spike:** Say you send a regular e-newsletter with a list of about 500 emails. There's a big event or conference coming up. All of a sudden, you generate a list of 3,000 emails to send an invite to. Don't spike your email list by exporting your entire Outlook address book. Even if you can justify it: "but I have a prior business relationship with these clients." That might technically be legal, but it doesn't make it effective. If you're sending an invite to customers, make it look like a one-time invite, not a 5-page email newsletter that they're stuck with forever. And put an "opt-out" message at the *top* of the invite, not hidden at the bottom. Better to get a hundred opt-outs than a hundred spam complaints to your ISP.
6. **Suspicious size:** If you're a local business with a staff of 3 people, and a customer base of about 50, you probably shouldn't have an email list of 100,000.
7. **No website:** Do you even have a website? Is your email list is from a customer sales database, instead of an online opt-in form? If so your email should be of the "customer alert" variety, not the "weekly newsletter" type. Make sure your campaign has at least has a domain name to point replies to. Don't send a campaign from an "@aol.com" or "@yahoo.com".