

Arial Software Email Marketing Articles You Can Use

Testing Your Email Message Delivery

When it comes to using an installed email marketing software solution, your best delivery option is through an SMTP mail server. Typically, when you sign up with an Internet Service Provider (ISP), they provide a number of email addresses you can use plus use of their outgoing (SMTP) mail server.

Most email marketing professionals agree that one of the most important habits to incorporate into your email marketing is the message test.

Test the message for how it appears across multiple email clients. Test the server to make certain that it was not added to a block list since the last campaign. Test the connection to the database to ensure that the filters and queries that are in place are pulling the correct record set. Test everything.

Configuring test email accounts

The easiest way to test your message across multiple email clients is to sign up for every popular email account available. These include MSN Hotmail, Yahoo!, Gmail, AOL, Lycos and MyWay. Using an advanced web browser with the ability to remember usernames and passwords saves time; setting up all the accounts with the same user name and the same password makes this task even easier. Bookmark all the web email accounts for easy access from your web browser.

In your test email list, you should also add any company email accounts that are available for testing. Personal accounts set up through paid ISPs like Cox, Comcast or others should be included as well. You should be using Outlook, Outlook Express, Thunderbird, Eudora Mail and other popular email clients to check your test email accounts.

Setting up a test database table

Copy the table structure of the primary production table, and create a test table. It should be the same structure as the primary table, to ensure that there are no issues on the database side of things. Add all of your test addresses to the test table. Be sure to include some emails addresses that will absolutely fail, some from inside the company domain, and some from the domains of the test accounts. These messages will help when testing the bounce feature. Using a random selection of characters in the name portion of the email address should suffice. You might also add some poorly formatted email addresses, simulating what users might actually input into your database. (If these are not allowed during sign up to your email message, or if a double opt-in process is in place, testing for bad formats may not be necessary.) If you are using an alternate write back table, make a copy of it too, to ensure that the write back methods are working properly.



Setting up a test campaign

Create a new campaign specifically for testing. If there is already a production campaign set up, copy it, indicate in the rename that it is a test, and simply switch the new campaign to the test table using the Datasource tab. Preview the list on the Datasource tab to ensure the proper table and addresses are selected. Use this campaign to test new messages, subject lines, or anything else that changes before the campaign goes out live.

You should also use the test campaign to verify advanced SQL statements, views and queries, to ensure that the proper data is collected. Since this is a test table, it is safe to run the campaign to all the email addresses in the list. Check each email account to see how the message comes across, as various clients treat the messages differently when they are displayed. Adjustments can be made based on those discoveries.

It is important to set up a separate bounce account for your test campaign to ensure that the production table's bounces still record properly. Once you are satisfied with the test campaign, you can move to the production campaign, and simply connect it to the test table in the database to finalize everything before the live send. Making a seamless switch from the test table to the production table is made simpler by mimicking the production table when configuring the test table.

Testing the message

Test both the HTML and the plain text portion of your message by first testing each separately, then switching to send the message as a multi-part message. In the test email accounts, view the message by setting the client to read new messages in plain text, to ensure that the proper view is displayed. Based on the variety of ways the various email clients display the message, tweak the HTML code and or styles for the message.

Once the message is configured to appear neatly in most, if not all email clients, it might be a good idea to save that message to use as a template for all future emails. In the recipient clients, view the headers that come across ensuring that there is nothing that would cause an ISP to attempt to block your message. View any bounce messages that appear from your valid test addresses. These bounce messages will usually indicate if there is a problem with the mail server, or if something is poorly configured.

Testing the write back features

When testing the write back features, be aware that there may be problems when testing inside the network that might not be an issue outside the network. For example, when testing click through tracking, it is possible to see errors with the links if the submitter is in the same network as the Campaign Enterprise computer. This is because the click through should be attempting to go to the public domain name set up in the configuration area. If the link is engaged inside the same network where the domain is set up, it tries to take the short cut using the internal IP address, rather than going outside the network, then back in. It is imperative when testing the write backs for click through and opened email tracking that someone outside your network is opening



and clicking the emails to ensure that live customers can do so too. For bounces and email unsubscribe processing, use the Test Connection button found on the respective tabs. If there is an error connecting to the server in the test connection, it will fail when Campaign Enterprise tries to process those accounts. Test all the features that are planned for the production campaign to ensure that every feature works properly.

Also, don't forget to...

Seed the production list

All or most of the test email accounts should also be added to the primary list as seed accounts. Any problems that may have slipped by the initial testing phase and found their way into the production campaign can be captured and addressed as quickly as possible.

Enable debug mode

Should you run into any problems while testing any portion of the campaign, enable debug mode in the program. This will generate very useful log files that you can examine to help determine the causes. Should you require technical support to assist with troubleshooting, the first thing the support person will usually request is one of these logs.

Test run the production campaign

Before sending out to the entire production list, click Test Campaign and send a copy to an email that is easy to check, for one last final confirmation that everything is ready. Prior to running the test, Campaign Enterprise shows a preview available to help ensure that the right message is selected.

There is no such thing as too much testing and no excuse to not do as much testing as possible before sending a campaign to a large list of customers.

