

Bad data is harming your email marketing efforts: Here's how to fix it

 By [Ross Sibbald](#)

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Anyone who's spent any time around the marketing space knows how valuable data is. It's no accident that the value of data is frequently compared to that of oil. Like oil, data's real value lies in the way you use it. And just like the wrong kind of oil can damage your car's engine, bad data can seriously harm your marketing efforts.



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This is especially true for email marketing, which is a vital part of the toolkit that enables organisations to speak directly to their customers.

Bad data can impact everything . . . from how many people see the messaging you send out to its impact and even your organisation's reputation.

Fortunately, cleaning up your data and repairing your marketing efforts isn't rocket science.

The importance of getting it right

While tighter regulatory frameworks – such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and South Africa's Protection of Personal Information (PoPI) Act – have had an impact on email databases, they've also brought new significance to the email marketing space.

If you're compliant with these regulations, the people in your database actually want to get mails from you.

On the one hand, that means there's an increased chance of them reading what you send. On the other, if those mails lose that appeal, they're more likely to unsubscribe or view your brand negatively.

Even if that weren't the case, customers increasingly expect marketing messages to be tailored to them as individuals.

That makes sense. If you're on the verge of retirement, you wouldn't want your bank to send you an email about student loans.

[Research from Salesforce](#) suggests that 62% of customers expect companies to send personalised offers or discounts based on items they've already purchased. A [Deloitte study](#) meanwhile found that 48% of customers are willing to wait longer for a product if it's personalised.

The need for hyper-personalisation

This speaks to a wider need for hyper-personalisation, something which is becoming increasingly important in the marketing space as a whole.

This means ensuring that the emails you send out include more than just a customer's first and last names. You also need to factor in things like gender, geo-location, buying behaviour, past buying behaviour, frequency of purchase, purchase types, dropped basket/cart history and so on.

So, for example, if you have an ecommerce store, you could trigger off an email with relevant content based on a customer's interaction on your website or suggest a similar product next time they are on your website. If, for instance, someone buys a pair of running shoes, you could send them a mail with your latest specials on running shorts and t-shirts.

Database erosion

It's also important to remember that the information you have on your customers should be updated constantly. Failing to do so means a risk of your databases becoming irrelevant.

Email addresses, for example, can fall out of date as people move jobs, get married, change names and change service providers.

According to [research from SiriusDecisions](#), up to 30% of a contact database goes bad each year.

Databases can also get muddled, with surnames and first names mixed up, ages entered incorrectly, and interests confused. This can even happen when customers are asked to input the data themselves.

Ultimately, this kind of polluted data can have a domino effect within the organisation.

Because messages don't get through or end up being read by the wrong people, the results of an organisation's email campaigns can end up being skewed. Not only does the organisation end up missing out on leads and sales, bad data can result in the marketing and product strategy being misinformed.

Keeping it clean

It's vital, therefore, that organisations keep their databases as clean as possible.

While becoming GDPR-compliant may have been a painful exercise for many organisations, it did provide them an ideal opportunity to refresh their databases.

In truth, however, those databases should never have been allowed to get into the state they were in prior to GDPR.

Any company that's serious about email marketing should make use of email address-cleaning tools or email hygiene software on a regular basis. They should also allow customers to easily and simply update their profiles online or at other customer touch-points, such as during call centre interaction or at point-of-sale.

Remember, it's not about the size of the database. Be prepared to cull your database. If there are customers who are not engaging over an extended period of time, be prepared to remove them. It is more effective to communicate with customers who are engaged, and the ROI will be better.

Additionally, organisations need to set strict rules when it comes to things like email bounces (three to five is the usual threshold before an address should be removed from a list).

Perhaps most importantly, however, organisations need to put effort into proper profiling and segmentation to ensure that they can deliver relevant and well-timed communication that produces real results.

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Commercial Director at Tiltle

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