

You can have too much of a good thing

A visit to a good Indian restaurant goes bad

Last week, a friend and I headed out to a very good, local Indian restaurant. to satisfy a craving for some naan and sag paneer. When we arrived, there were barely a couple of other people in the place, and so the hostess told us we had our choice of seats. After we sat down, a male server came by to take our order.

After the meal was served, a female server came by to see whether everything was satisfactory.

And then a different female server came by to see if “everything was OK.”

And then the male server came by to ask how everything was.

And then one of the female servers came by again to see how things were.

And then the other female server came by.

And before we were even done with the meal, one of the female servers asked if we needed a box for our food.

I lost count, but we were asked if everything was OK at least six or seven times by different servers and in fairly short intervals.

After all these unnecessary interruptions, my friend and I were annoyed, and left wondering if they needed the table (although a good half the restaurant was empty).



Photo by Chan Walrus from Pexels

Checking in is good...but doing it too often is not

After ordering, we should all expect two contacts in a restaurant: one to get asked if everything is to our liking, and a second one, closer to the end of the meal, to ask whether we want to have food boxed up, want to order dessert, or need our check.

But this restaurant took follow up and checking in to a level that was beyond annoying. They interrupted us too many times, seemingly without cause. Was it that the servers didn't communicate with each other? Were they bored because they didn't have enough customers? Who knows what motivated these servers, but all that checking in was way too much of a good thing, turning it into a bad thing.

Too much contact or follow up is disruptive, intrusive, annoying, and unnecessary.

What is true about overzealous restaurant servers is the same with email marketing. As I said in my [last blog post](#), your email marketing should aim to be "just right." Just right

means sending not too much, nor too little email, and sending relevant, useful information too. In the Indian restaurant experience above, not only were these serves constantly interrupting, they weren't doing it with any real purpose.

So the next time you want to send one more email to "make sure people got the message," think about your last restaurant meal. Was it enjoyable and peaceful? Or were you annoyed because the servers kept asking you if everything was OK or you wanted another drink before you even finished the one you had in front of you.

Think like Goldilocks to improve your email marketing

I was on vacation for a couple of weeks, and during that time, I didn't hear from one of my friends at all. She didn't want to know if I'd arrived safely, what I was doing, or anything else. On the other hand, another acquaintance texted me several times, wanting to know how my flight was, what I was doing, was I having any fun, and so forth. And yet another friend sent me just two messages, both because she saw something that related to me and wanted to let me know.

In other words, I got too little from one friend, too much from another, and just the right amount from the third. I felt like I finally understood how Goldilocks felt when she broke in to the bears' house.



The Goldilocks Approach to Email Marketing Defined

All email marketers should apply a Goldilocks test to their email marketing, and figure out what make the “just right” email campaign. The Goldilocks test involves awareness of three issues: timing, quantity and content relevance. To be like Goldilocks, ask yourself whether you email marketing is too cold, too hot, or just right.

Too cold!

When the porridge goes cold, you don't want to eat it.

Your email marketing is too cold when you don't send any/enough email to your contact list, or you send irrelevant email that gets ignored/deleted. In this case, you risk being forgotten, or you are making your contacts think you are not in business any more, or worse, that you don't offer anything that is of value to them.

Too hot!

On the other hand, if the porridge is too hot, you can't eat it because you don't want to touch it and risk being burned.

Your email marketing is too hot when you send too much email. You are overwhelming your contacts and risk alienating them. If you send too much email, your contacts don't know what is valuable. Also, too much email is annoying. Statistics back this up. More than a quarter of people who unsubscribe from email lists do so because they say they get too many emails. Read more [here](#).

Just right!

When the porridge is at the ideal temperature, you can eat and even enjoy it.

The "just right" email campaign is when you send timely email that is valuable to your contacts. If you send well-timed, relevant email, you are doing your list a service. Your contacts will benefit from your email. A well thought out email campaign will have a better open rate, less churn, and may result in action on the part of your contacts (a sale, donation, download, etc.).

What makes an email marketing campaign just right for you? Please let me know in the comments.

Trust is essential and must be earned

My last blog post detailed an ongoing attack on my inbox by a “lead generation company” called Bark. As of today, I’ve continued to receive dozens of emails from both the same sender (“Kate Potter”) or with the same subject line (“new customers looking for your services”). In fact, I got at least six since last night.

But all I have to do is see who the sender is or read the same subject line to hit delete. Bark can continue to send emails until the end of days, and I will never open them. Why? Because I don’t trust that Bark is legitimate. In fact, Bark has earned the opposite reputation, that of a spammer, an illegitimate business that seeks to worm its way into getting you to click or call by sending emails that may have the veneer of legitimacy but are a front for a scheme.



Too many bad actors

Cybersecurity and privacy threats are rampant, and we have to guard constantly against them. There are just too many bad actors seeking to damage businesses and people by installing malware or by phishing to get passwords in order to steal identities.

Clicking on links in emails always opens us up to problems. That is, unless we trust the sender and know they are not acting maliciously.

Reputation matters

In order to keep opening and reading email, we need to trust

the sender. Generally, we trust senders we have a relationship with. We know some senders personally or we've conducted some kind of transaction with them (donation, purchase, etc.) and thus we trust them.

However, if we don't trust the sender, we may not even open the email. And if we do open the email, we are certainly not downloading attachments or clicking on links.

Spammers don't understand trust

Trust is essential in the keeping yourself safe from cyber threats. And that is what Bark and many other spammers don't seem to get. They seem to think that as long as they are hiding behind a *vener* of legitimacy (looking like legitimate business query or coming from the correct industry), then we will just trust that they are real. But trust is earned. And when you send the same email over and over and over again, you are not earning trust. You are causing suspicion. When you attempt to send the same email from a different sender's names, you are not engendering believability, nor are you increasing the chance that the recipient will open the email.

Endnote

I just checked Bark on WHOIS. All information has been "redacted for privacy." In other words, there is no contact information whatsoever. All I can find out from WHOIS is the name of the domain registrar for this "company." And I can use this information to register a complaint.

How not to do email marketing

My inbox is under attack. In just the last couple of days, I have received no less than 15 emails from either the same sender or with the same subject line.



A barrage of junk

The first one came in on Sunday at 3 a.m. from “Emma Thompson” with the subject line “New customers looking for your services.” When I opened it, it said someone was seeking PR services. I deleted the email because I thought no serious agency would be sending out emails on Sunday at 3 a.m.

Later that morning, I got an email from “Kate Potter” with the subject line “Web designer quote.”

And then an email from “Mia West” with the subject line “New customers looking for your services.”

And then at least ten more emails throughout President’s Day from “Kate Potter” with alternating subject lines:

“Mobile Software Developer Quote”

“Photographer Quote”

“Packaging Designer Quote”

“Web Designer Quote”

Interspersed were two more emails from “Mia West,” subject: “New customer looking for your services.”

Notice a pattern? Same sender and/or same subject line.

This is lead generation?

I opened some of these email and found they all came from a supposed lead generation outfit called Bark(dot)com. This “company” found my website and copied my contact information into their database, and then began “contacting” me.

Perhaps Bark(dot)com is a legitimate business, but it doesn’t act like it. In fact, it is acting in a downright shady manner. Its marketing “method” is more like a spammer’s than that of a legitimate business’ email marketing technique.

If it acts like spam...

What makes these emails look and act like spam, and therefore be wholly ineffective:

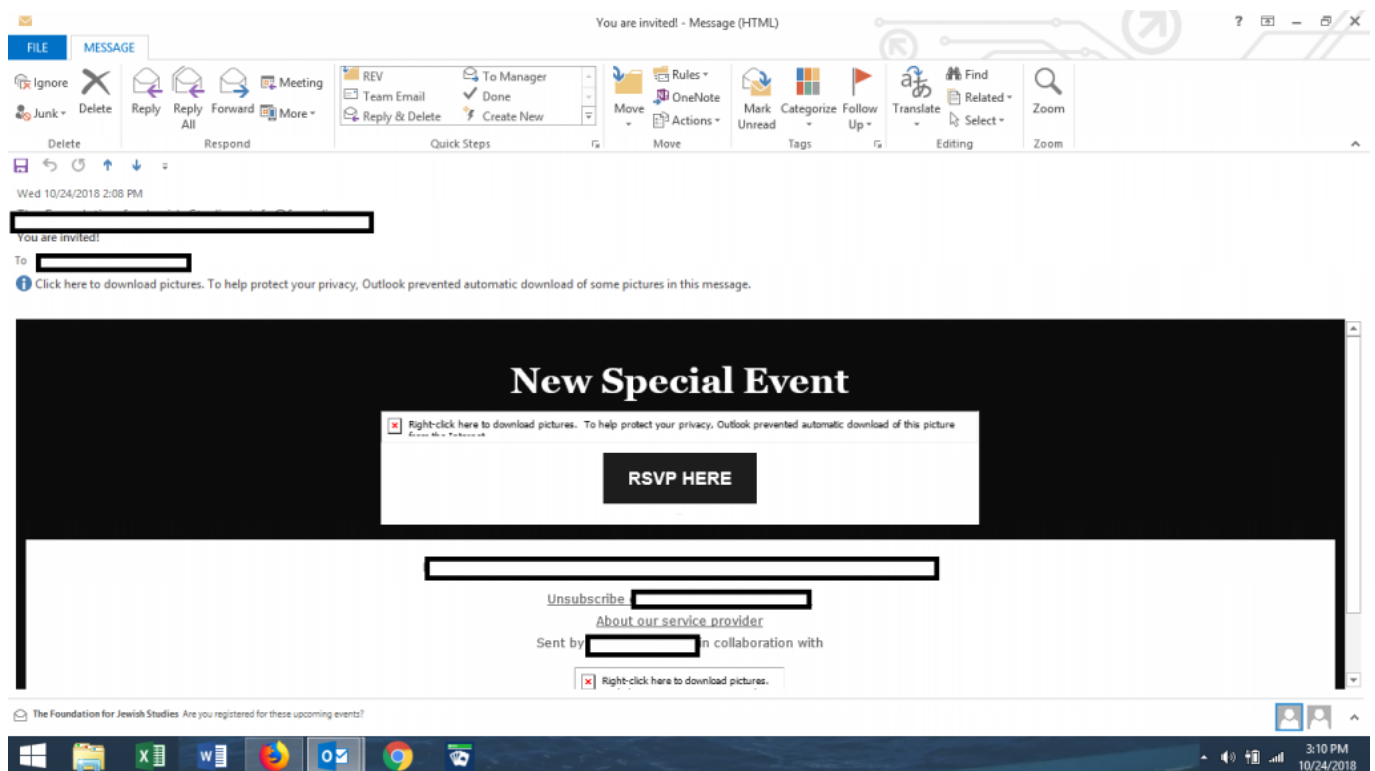
- Sending during non-business hours and days
- Sending the same email time after time
- Sending way too many emails in too short a time span
- Sending emails that are not relevant and not personalized

Update

Since writing this post, I received six more emails, making it over 20 emails in a 48-hour time period.

The biggest email marketing mistake

I've lost count of the times I've gotten an email that looks like this:



If you are getting poor response to your email marketing, emails that look like the above could be the reason.

As you can see, this email is mostly images. There's very little text, and the text doesn't give me any relevant information. The important information about the event I am being asked to RSVP to is embedded in an image. If I wanted to know more (date, venue, type of event, all the *relevant* information) so that I know whether I want to click on the RSVP button, I'd have to download the images. This is an extra, and unnecessary, step that places the burden on me.

Don't send all image texts. Ever. That is the biggest email marketing mistake I see done time and again.

Legit or spam?

Not a week goes by that I don't get several unsolicited emails from people/businesses who think I need financing, or a direct marketing list, or help with my website, or (just got this today) think I may want voice over talent (!). Almost all these emails are personalized to me, or at least to my website (as in "Dear Deborahbrody.com"). Some get my name from my website (presumably after doing a search) and some from LinkedIn. Others, I don't have the foggiest idea of where or how they found me (or even why they are contacting me). Very few seem to know much about my business, and none are companies I have done business with in the past. In short, lots of businesses reach out via email to try to drum up sales or generate cash.

Is it legit, is it spam, or is it a scam?

But how many of these are legit, and how many are scammers/spammers? Where do we draw the line between an honest attempt to generate a lead based on internet research, and spam? There are probably a few indicators of spam/scams:

1) Using the same pitch over and over and over, sometimes from different names within the "company." In other words, more than one inquiry.

2) Adding, without permission, your name to an email marketing list, and putting the onus on you to unsubscribe (this is a

direct violation of the CAN-SPAM rules and can/should be reported as such).

3) A sketchy sounding proposition (financing with no credit check, for example).

Is this company a legit spammer?

For the past several weeks, I have been getting emails from something called Imparture about social media marketing classes in Washington, DC. I was getting about three emails a week, every week. They all had the unsubscribe feature, and finally, this week, I unsubscribed (not that I had subscribed in the first place). Then yesterday, I got a personalized email from "Elliot.: Here it is:

Hi Deborah,

Did you get a chance to consider my last email?

Check out our upcoming [Google Analytics training course](#) taking place in Washington DC.

There are only a few spots left so sign up if you are interested.

All the best,

Elliot Jay

Client Relationship Manager

Imparture

London / New York / San Francisco

Now, I don't know Elliot, and as I said, I had already unsubscribed from these emails. I wrote him and told him I would be reporting him for spam. Then, today, I got this email from "Noah":

Hi Deborah,

I came across your profile and saw that your skill set contains Social Media Marketing, and wanted to reach out with an opportunity.

We have only a few spots remaining in our upcoming [Social Media Marketing Immersive course](#) in Washington DC.

This course will give you an advanced level of understanding regarding Social Media Marketing, and add significant value to your skillset – might this be something of interest?

You can find out more about the course, as well as sign up, [here](#).

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

All the best,

Noah Kelsey

Client Relationship Manager

Imparture

London / New York / San Francisco

I looked up Imparture and the company does have a website, a LinkedIn profile, and even a Twitter account (with only 500 or so followers), which look legit enough. On the other hand, I did find a review stating that the company had scheduled a class, cancelled it, and didn't issue refunds (sketchy!).

This company may indeed be legitimate (albeit with questionable customer service), but its marketing practices are definitely spammy. As I said before, *I have never signed up for a class or to get these emails*. And I have "unsubscribed" and have since gotten two more emails. Any legitimate marketing effort would ask for permission to add you to a list, and would respect an unsubscribe request. This

company has failed on both ends. It added me to an email list without my express consent (and again, I am not sure where/how they got my email address), and it has ignored my unsubscribe request, twice so far.

Do not be a spammer!

If you are a legitimate business, do not follow the scammer's playbook. Sending unsolicited mail is against CAN-SPAM rules. Want to learn more? Check out the FTC's [CAN-SPAM Act: A compliance guide for business.](#)

Have you had a similar experience? What is your take on the legit versus spam discussion?

2 big digital marketing mistakes with easy fixes

It happened at least twice this week (and it's only Thursday of a short work week): I came across two different digital marketing mistakes. One involves email marketing and the other involves content marketing. And I see different organizations making the same mistakes every single week.

These two digital marketing mistakes are common, and yet easily fixable. Take the time to make these fixes today, and I can promise you almost instant results.

Big digital marketing mistake #1: Sending an all-image/graphics email

Even though email marketing is one of the oldest and most useful forms of digital marketing, there are still lots of organizations that make the mistake of sending out emails that

are completely image/graphics-based. I just got one last night. It was made up of several images that provided information about promotions at different locations. And I couldn't see any of the information.

The big problem with these emails is that in most email clients (Outlook, Gmail, etc.) you have to download images in order to see them. So, if your email is made up exclusively of images, your recipients will not see anything unless they specifically click on "download images." And unless your email subject line is extremely compelling and/or descriptive, your recipients may not take that extra step, and your email marketing campaign will be a waste.

Easy fix: Use images in email sparingly, and make sure the important information (i.e., dates, costs, location, etc.) is *text-based*.

Big digital marketing mistake #2: Not having a sharing mechanism on your content

Just this week, a lawyer I know shared a link to a blog post his firm created regarding GDPR (the new European data regulation that went into effect on May 25). I checked it out, and thought it would be useful to my network, but when I went to share it, I found that there were no sharing buttons of any type. In 2018, more than ten years into Facebook and Twitter, and 15 years into LinkedIn, there is simply no excuse for not having sharing buttons. Sharing buttons allow your readers to easily share your content to their preferred social media network (mine are at the very bottom of this post if you'd like to share this content).

Social sharing is key to content marketing because it amplifies the reach of your blog post or article or microsite.

Easy fix: Add sharing buttons to your blog and to any other page on your website that a reader may want to share (for example, your contact page). There are many different plug-ins

available to do this work for you (ShareThis, AddThis, etc.). You can also read Hubspots's useful cheat sheet: [How to Create Social Media Buttons for All the Top Social Networks](#). Or simply search "social sharing buttons."

Have you seen these digital marketing mistakes? Are you making these digital marketing mistakes? I am interested in your experiences. Please comment to let me know.

You do know you can segment your mailing list, right?

Today, I got an email about a six-week communications leadership seminar. It sounds interesting, except it takes place in Chicago and I live near Washington, D.C. The target audience for this seminar is business professionals who live in the greater Chicago area yet this email was probably sent to the whole list.

Email marketing is great because it is relatively inexpensive, and because it is highly customizable. Say you are a retailer with stores across the country. You could send emails to your customers in specific locations announcing the opening of a new store or a change in hours, or perhaps a change in location.

In other words, with email marketing you can send targeted email messages that are relevant to their recipients at a relatively low cost.

Yet the email I received about the Chicago seminar is not relevant. It is just clutter in my inbox. Why did I get this email? I'd venture to say it is because the list owner did not either a) segment the list, or b) gather enough information from the recipients to allow for segmentation, or c) both.

Most email marketing programs allow for list segmentation. If you are marketing to a diverse audience, you will have to gather some relevant information to be able to segment your list or to be able to personalize it. If you don't gather information that will allow segmentation and/or you have an email provider that doesn't allow for segmentation, you need to make some changes ASAP. That is, unless you are trying to get your email deleted or generate a few unsubscribes.

How to run your organization into oblivion

About a decade ago, I was on the board of a small nonprofit that provided educational programming. I lasted all of a few months since I was fighting a losing battle with the other board members and a spectacularly uninformed (and very young) executive director.

This nonprofit had very little money but insisted on a color brochure printed on heavy paper, listing their courses. The ED would then mail it first class (read, the expensive way) because it would take too long to prepare it for the cheaper, bulk/nonprofit rate.

Among the things I suggested was to print the brochure on cheaper paper (like newsprint), use the bulk rate, and to consider going all electronic instead. All these ideas were

dismissed. One board member thought it was crucial to print the brochure on good paper because it made it seem more serious (?). The ED was balking at using the bulk rate because it meant pre-sorting the brochure. And another board member said that many people wanted the printed brochure and would never abide an electronic format.

Like I said, it was a losing battle and I believe that there's no sense in discussing change with people who don't want to change.

Here we are a good ten years later, and I just got their latest brochure. Yes, I am still on the mailing list even though I have not signed up for a class or donated any money or shown any interest whatsoever. It is still printed on heavy paper, and has full color (which adds to the expense). They are now using the nonprofit/bulk rate. When you use the bulk rate, you have to be aware that delivery will take longer than using first class postage. Apparently, it is not something that this nonprofit understands. I got the brochure yesterday (May 10). The front cover has a banner telling me spring classes begin on April 26, 2017.

This nonprofit continues to print an expensive brochure. However, it doesn't print it out with enough lead time to be able to overcome the slower bulk delivery rate. In effect, this is a complete waste. If you are using a brochure as your only means to communicate your offering, then it better be timely.

And, it seems this organization does not review its database. It continues sending out brochures to people that have not indicated any interest in years. Of course, this adds to the cost of the printing and mailing.

Can you imagine if they had provided this brochure electronically? They would be able to send it out at precisely the right time. They would be able to gauge interest from the

open and click rates. They would be able to scrub their lists of any bad addresses. They would increase their reach through the ability to share online. But why change?

Here's how you run your organization to the ground: you waste your precious resources and keep doing it until you have nothing left. You keep doing things the way you always have even though it has never been cost-effective. You don't adapt.

Sigh.

5 Email Marketing Mistakes You Need To Fix Right Now

Email marketing is still an incredibly effective marketing tool, *if* you are doing it correctly. Sadly, that's a big if. Often, marketers make the following five mistakes. Are you?

Here are five email marketing mistakes that may be affecting your campaign's performance.

1. Not getting permission

Are you sending out your email marketing that haven't signed up for it? Then not only are you making a crucial mistake, you

are also running afoul of the CAN-SPAM law. This is huge mistake that you must stop right away.

2. Sending image-only emails

Did you know that Outlook and many other email programs do not show images until the user authorizes their download? This means that if your email is all images, and no plain text, your recipients will not see anything except a bunch of red xes. Don't make your recipients work so hard! Send both text and images.

3. Sending too frequently or too many emails

When people sign up for your email marketing, they are indicating interest in getting information from you. However, they are not indicating they want their email box to be flooded with your stuff. And yet, some marketers feel that reach is not enough to cut through the clutter, and frequency is needed. Excessive frequency will not cut through the clutter, instead it may get you cut off entirely.

4. Not checking your analytics

How many people open your emails? How many click on links? How many bounces are you getting? If you don't know the answers to these questions, you aren't checking your analytics. You are missing out on valuable information that can help guide your future email marketing efforts.

5. Not cleaning up your list

Periodically, you should go through your list. You should pay special attention to recipients that are not opening your email. If they've been on your list for a long time, keeping them on does not improve your email marketing. You could try sending them an email asking them if they wish to remain on

your list or whether there is information that they need from you and aren't getting. If you get no response, then delete them from your list. Getting rid of these users will actually help increase your open rate.

How many of these email marketing mistakes are you committing?
Which mistakes would you add?