

Improving Communication With DNSBLs

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Overview

- What's the problem?
- What to do.
- What not to do.

What's the problem?

The Problem Is...

SENDERS ARE

FROM MARS,

DNSBLs Are

From Venus


Source of Miscommunication

- Simply put, Senders and DNSBLs think differently
- **Motivation/objective**
 - DNSBL: Minimize abuse (fewer mailboxes)
 - ESP: Maximize deliverability (more mailboxes)
- **Customer**
 - DNSBL: ISP, Mailbox Provider
 - ESP: Marketer
- **Success metric**
 - DNSBL: Lower complaints at mailbox provider
 - ESP: Marketing ROI, high opens, mailboxes sent to
- **Language Spoken**
 - Same words mean different things
 - Different words to mean the same thing

What to do.

Do: Listen Before Talking

- Two ears, one mouth
- Ten fingers?!
- You are blocked/listed for a reason
- Ask for information and insight
- Remember they have different data



“It's always nice when a removal request includes something like, “...or let me know if there's something else you see which needs to be fixed.””

- Spamhaus Editor

“If you approach us with the facts as you know them and ask for the facts as we know them, we can almost always do business and resolve the SBL quickly.”

- Another Spamhaus Editor

Do: Be Concise

- Try not to...

USE ALL
the words!



Do: Prove Identity and Problem Up Front

- Emailing from your company domain helps prove IP ownership of the problem IP space.
- Include all IP addresses and error messages
- Where do you see the block listed?

Do: Have plenty of data...

- Complaint rates
- Reputation scores
- Be prepared to share your list acquisition and list management practices
 - opt-in
 - list gen
 - inactives removal
 - FBLs
 - bounce management
 - Frequency

...but don't share it all right away

- Remember, listen first
- Be concise
- Share what is helpful and relevant
- Don't overshadow by oversharing

Do: Be Truthful

*“Don’t give me the “pretty” version of what happened.”
- Spamcop Deputy*

- Dishonesty never helps
- Future communications are derailed
- The data tells its own story

Do: Use a Translator

- ESPs
- Deliverability Consultants
- Experience communicating
- Leverage it!
- Limit DNSBL contact to senior staff

Do: Try to Compromise

- Not everything is black and white
- There may be wiggle room
- It doesn't hurt to ask

What {not} to do.

Don't: Go through the back door

“Hey friend, could you look at this listing for me?”

- What they hear: “I am too important for your process.”
- Knock on the front door first
- Use the published removal procedure
- Avoid using personal contacts
- If you must escalate, explain why

Don't: Demand Removal

*“You must remove me from your list.
I’m not a spammer.”*

- What they hear: “Do your job.”
- Demands are not well received
- Removal is the obvious request
- Removal happens when problem is fixed
- That’s their job!

Don't: Mention CAN-SPAM Compliance

“My client is CAN-SPAM compliant.”

- What they hear: “My client follows the law.”
- CAN-SPAM is a U.S. law.
- Bare minimum legal requirement.
- In the abuse world, CAN-SPAM means “can spam”
- Note: Blacklist owners may mention CAN-SPAM -- if they accuse a sender of not following CAN-SPAM, that's bad. They are saying "you're clearly not following best practices if you're not even following the law.”

Don't: Claim the DNSBL is ruining your business

“Delist me right away. You are ruining my business.”

- What they hear: “I need to spam to make money.”
- Remember, same words, different meaning.
- Objective: Never sound like a spammer.
- That is something a spammer says.

Don't: Ask for Unredacted Headers

- Rookie mistake
- You won't get them
- Rule #1 of spam traps is don't discuss your traps



Don't: Threaten Lawsuits

**DONT
EVEN
GO THERE**

Don't threaten to sue me.

When I have to get lawyers involved, everything takes longer.

- Spamcop Deputy

A lawsuit threat most often ends any discussion of SBL removal, with the listing remaining active.

- Spamhaus Editor

Threatening us will just slow down the progress of the problem solving.

- Trend Micro

Examples

(based on a true story)

Transactional Mail Blocked

- Client sent bulk mail from non-contiguous IPs
- Listing impacted transactional
- DNSBL recommended sending similar types of mail from single or continuous IP
- Allows DNSBL to block offending IPs only
- DNSBL will delist transactional if no traps on those IPs

Multiple ESPs

- **Sender used at least three different ESPs**
 - Geography
 - Business Unit
 - Affiliate Mail
- **Assumption: they are avoiding detection**
- **Explanation: different programs, legacy, no overlap**

Commitment Before Information

- Mailing old addresses
- Assumption: bought a list
- Explanation:
 - System error
 - Infrastructure details
 - Made commitment to suppress millions of addresses up front
- More information would have saved millions of addresses*
- Unnecessary - did not speed removal

* the program is probably better off without these addresses, but they were not related to nor did they impact the listing.

Blaming the Traps

- Client mailing only inactives*
- Assumption: traps are wrong (are opening, clicking)
- Sender requested 1-2 actual trap names to disprove
- Request not granted (never is, don't ask)
- Issue was incorrect calculation of activity
- Issue corrected, traps stopped, IPs delisted

* so they thought

Legally Required Email

- Legally required email
- Asked DNSBL to overlook resulting trap hits

The fact is that your customer has a list so full of dead email addresses, spamtraps, and other junk that any such mailing as you describe will do very little good and will simply hammer mailservers to very little purpose.

If {sender} commits to using this mailing as an opportunity to prune the deadwood out of its customer list, we would appreciate that at least there was some point to the exercise.



Thank You! Any Questions?
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