



**COMMON  
ROOKIE  
MISTAKES**

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# Hello.

Since 2001, MailChimp has been helping people of all experience levels—from email marketing rookies to seasoned veterans—create, send, and track email newsletters. In this guide, we'll outline some of the most common mistakes that new email marketers make, and give you tips on how to avoid making those same mistakes as you're getting started.

If you have questions along the way, feel free to [contact our support team](#).

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## Mistake: Not having permission

When you create a MailChimp account, you agree to comply with [all anti-spam regulations](#) and MailChimp's [Terms Of Use](#). These terms require that all lists be permission-based, consisting of subscribers who have signed up through a mailing list sign-up form or have given their explicit permission to be added to the list. You must have [tangible, confirmable proof](#) that the subscriber wants you to communicate with them, and your intent must be clearly identified.

There are two very important things to keep in mind:

- **Make sure you have received permission from *all of your recipients* before you send your first email.** [Permission](#) ensures that your recipients want to receive email marketing content from you. Before investing your time and money in an email marketing program, start getting permission from your customers. It's [easier than you may think](#), and some of the benefits might surprise you. Not only will it result in fewer spam complaints and decreased legal liability, but you'll also experience improved deliverability and increased open and click rates.

- **All recipients should understand *what they're signing up for* and *why they're receiving email from you*.** Your signup form should be very clear about your intent. It should also properly manage the expectations of your subscribers. Be sure to explain not only that your subscribers will be receiving email from you, but also what type of emails they will be receiving. Your [permission reminder](#), which you'll create as you set up a new list in MailChimp, should remind your subscribers where they originally opted-in and why they are receiving the email.

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## Mistake: Purchasing email lists

By now, everyone should know better than to buy a "totally legitimate list of 30 million opt-in emails" from a sketchy piece of spam they found in their inbox. That's pretty obvious, but there are still some vendors out there selling "opt-in" lists the old-fashioned way. They collect email addresses and ask members if they'd like to "receive special offers from third parties." Then, they sell those email addresses to other senders. It's not *technically* illegal, but many ESPs—MailChimp included—prohibit sending to purchased lists.

MailChimp is a strict permission-based newsletter delivery service. This means we do not provide, sell, share, or rent lists to users, nor do we allow [purchased, publicly available, third party, or rented lists](#) in our system. No exceptions!

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## Mistake: Assuming people want to hear from you

Did everyone on your list specifically give you permission to email them? If not, and you've added them to your list because you *assume* they want to hear from you, then you are sending spam. This is true even if you "spent lots of time assembling that list of prospects," "spent lots of money for this opt-in list," or the list is made up of "people in your industry who have certainly heard of you." MailChimp is a tool for sending email newsletters and permission marketing. It's

not for “sales” or “prospecting” to people who have never heard of you. If you want to send email to prospects, you should use your own server, not a hosted solution like MailChimp.

You might be thinking, “I get emails all the time from people I’ve never heard of, and I appreciate it.” It’s important to clarify that it’s different if someone sends one email directly to you, with a sales pitch. If, however, that same person “blasts” his sales pitch to an entire list of people, it’s spam.

Do not, under any circumstances:

- Send email campaigns to a list of “prospects.”
- Compile a list from all of your sales contacts—some will be potential prospects who’ve never heard of you or your organization.
- Use [purchased](#), rented, or third party lists.

If you have a list of clients and customers that know you, but they haven’t specifically opted-in for newsletters from you, send them [personal, individual email invitations asking them to join your list](#).

If you’re sending on the behalf of a client, make sure that you know the origins of their list. Don’t be afraid to ask the client how they got their list and if it’s permission-based. Remember, you can be held liable for spam even if you’re sending on behalf of someone else.

Not sure if your list is okay to use with MailChimp? [This article](#) provides a few scenarios that can help you decide.

Still not sure? Review our [Acceptable Use Policy](#) or [contact our compliance team directly](#).

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## Mistake: Sending to a stale list

When someone opts in to your MailChimp list, they’re giving permission to receive your email marketing campaigns. That permission can [go stale pretty quickly though](#), so you have a limited amount of time to reach out to your new subscribers before they forget having signed up for your list. Stale lists can lead to high rates of bounces, spam complaints, and unsubscribes. If you think that your

list might be stale, you might need to [reconfirm](#).

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## Mistake: Confusing transactional emails with email marketing

Do you have a list of customers who have purchased products from your e-commerce store? They'll probably expect receipts and shipping notifications via email. Those types of one-to-one messages are called *transactional* emails, and they're different from email marketing. That's why we developed Mandrill. [Mandrill](#) is a delivery API for MailChimp users who want to send transactional emails. Mandrill is optimized for emails like password reminders, order confirmations, receipts, and personalized notifications, and will help you manage and monitor your transactional messaging through advanced tagging, webhooks, and more.

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## Mistake: Being in a rush

One of the most common mistakes that people make with email marketing is hasty sending. Take the time to make sure your list is clean and all subscribers have properly opted-in. Asking the sales team for their contact lists and "blasting" out an email may seem like the best solution if you're on a strict deadline, but it can result in unanticipated headaches. Those contacts could have gone stale. Worse, they may have never given permission at all.

Let's say that you do send an email to a purchased or stale list. If those people don't know why they're receiving the email or never signed up in the first place, they might click the "Mark as spam" or "This is junk" button in their email program. Studies have shown that 10-30% of recipients have done this—even to emails they requested—thinking it was the only effective way to unsubscribe from a list. When that happens, alerts get sent to their ISPs, which may blacklist the sender for spamming. So slow down, take a breath, and make sure your list is in pristine condition before you push it out the door.

Rushing through the campaign creation process and not taking the time to consider the design, content, and subject lines of your email can prove problematic, too. You could find yourself faced with a decrease in your open and click rates and increase in your spam and unsubscribe rates. In the next few sections, we'll cover some of the most common content-related mistakes made by email marketing rookies.

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## Mistake: Not knowing your audience

Email marketing is often one of the first attempts at "real" marketing for small businesses. For email marketing newcomers, it might be tempting to use sensational phrases like "BUY NOW!" and "LIMITED TIME OFFER!" or to emulate marketing tactics that you've seen Company XYZ use in the past. Keep in mind, however, that the things that worked for another company might not be the best methods for addressing your own subscribers.

- Create content that will be relevant, interesting, and useful to your subscriber base.
- Keep [your subject line](#) simple and to the point. The best subject lines don't *sell* what's inside, they *tell* what's inside.
- Don't use pushy sales copy or gimmicky catchphrases. Not only can be it a distracting turn-off to your subscribers, but spam filters could penalize you if they deem your content to look "spammy."

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## Mistake: Not understanding spam filters

Spam filters look at a long list of criteria to decide whether or not an email is junk. In fact, the list of spammy criteria is constantly growing and adapting, because spam filters learn more about what junk looks like every time someone clicks the *This is junk* or *Mark as spam* button in their email client. Spam filters even sync up with each other to share what they've learned. There's no magic formula, but these tips will help you avoid common mistakes that often send email to junk folders.

- **Campaign metadata:** Some spam filters will flag a campaign if anyone with the same IP has sent spam in the past. When you send through MailChimp, your email is delivered through our servers, so if one person sends spam, it could affect deliverability for our other users. That's why we work vigilantly to keep our sending reputation intact, and it's important that all users abide by our Terms of Use.
- **Coding in your campaign:** Spam filters can be triggered by sloppy code, extra tags, or code pulled in from Microsoft Word. We recommend using one of our templates or working with a designer.
- **Content and formatting:** Some spam filters will flag emails based on specific content or images they contain, but there's not an all-encompassing set of best practices to follow or things you absolutely need to avoid. But, we do have a few recommendations.
  - Design your campaign to be clear, balanced, and to promote engagement from your subscribers.
  - Make sure your subscribers have opted-in to receiving your emails.
  - Be consistent. Try not to stray too far from the content and design that your audience already associates with your brand, website, or social media channels.
  - Use A/B or Multivariate Testing to learn how changes with your content affects delivery and engagement.

Looking for more information on this topic? Check out our [How to Avoid Spam Filters](#) guide and the [About Spam Filters](#) article in our Knowledge Base.

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## Mistake: Not testing a campaign before sending

Before you send a campaign to your entire list, make sure that you look at it in MailChimp's [Preview Mode](#) and send yourself several test copies of the email, utilizing as many email clients (Gmail, Yahoo!, Outlook, etc) as you can. Check to

make sure your images and links are behaving correctly and that everything looks just right. Once you hit send, there's no "undo" button, so it's very important to test as thoroughly as possible before sending to your entire list.

MailChimp's [Inbox Preview](#) can be a valuable resource as well. This feature automates the testing process and provides you with renderings of the campaign as they will appear across more than 40 different email clients in just a few clicks. MailChimp Pro and Monthly Plan account holders will be provided with a number of [free Inbox Preview tokens to use each month](#), and all users will be able to purchase 25-token bundles for \$3 each.

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## Mistake: Ignoring your campaign reports

One of the benefits of using MailChimp for your email marketing is the ability to [measure the results](#) of every campaign that you send. MailChimp reports contain [a lot of valuable information](#), and they can help you analyze your campaign's performance and provide insights that you can use to improve your future campaigns.

If a marketer isn't checking their reports regularly, they might not notice when their open rates drop significantly or that their list size is steadily shrinking after every campaign. They may not realize that emails they send on Thursday have the highest open rate, while emails sent on Monday tend to have much lower engagement.

After you send a campaign in MailChimp, take the time to navigate over to the **Reports** page in your account. Look for trends. Make changes to campaigns—or even try out [A/B testing](#)—to see if you can improve your open rates, click rates, and, perhaps most importantly, conversions.

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## Further education and support

These tips should help provide a solid foundation to build on as you start your

journey into email marketing. If you have any questions along the way, visit our [Knowledge Base](#) or [contact our support team](#).