

## Email List Rental: To Do or Not To Do?

A direct marketer recently approached us with the following question:

*“Our client wants to use 3<sup>rd</sup> party opt-in emails to generate prospects. With the number of firms offering the use of their email lists, how can we judge the reliability and accuracy of these email lists when there is no opportunity to see them firsthand? (Note: Email list rental companies do not release their lists; they not only handle the “select” matching but also deploy the marketing messages on behalf of their clients). How can one tell the difference between legitimate email list vendors from the not-so-legit? It is difficult to discriminate by pricing, since prices range widely for both consumer and B2B email lists.”*

This is a great question, particularly considering the “wild, wild west” nature of the email list rental industry, where questionable providers and practices might be the norm, rather than the exception. “Buyer Beware” is certainly your best approach when considering email list rentals. Here are some critical areas you should focus on:

- 1) **Due Diligence:** How long has the company been in business? Does their web site look legitimate? Is the company U.S. based? Is the person you’re speaking with using a fictitious name? -- try using LinkedIn, Plaxo or even FaceBook to find out. Is the company recognized as a trusted and knowledgeable provider in the industry – do they exhibit and speak at industry events, offer periodic webinars, or win industry awards? Can they provide you with three legitimate references from brand name companies you can call to check on their integrity, experience, and specific project results? In the end as with choosing most services, the integrity and experience of your partner are the most important criteria you should rely on.
- 2) **Data Sources:** Is the list opt-in, proprietary/branded, or compiled? In other words, is it made up of several lists from different sources or is it a specific list of subscribers to a specific journal or 2009 MacWorld attendees? If it’s from multiple sources, is the original web site and date/time stamp available with each opt-in, if necessary?

- 3) **Testing:** Email list rentals are very difficult to do even with the best providers so find a partner you're comfortable working with who will help you think through your needs and develop a program, including a couple of test projects that will generate the leads or ROI you're looking for. Be sure to set reasonable lead figures or ROI numbers and track your results very carefully so that you can analyze these and optimize your campaigns going forward, if your returns look promising.
- 4) **Deliverability:** Build a deliverability clause into your list rental contract. If the server or domain they are using to send from is being blocked by the major ISPs, you'll need a money-back guarantee so you're not paying for emails that were never delivered. Carefully watch your open and click-through rates and, of course, your performance metrics to ensure your ROI goals are being met.
- 5) **Activity Levels:** Are the people on the list engaged? Are they hand-raisers or decision makers or do they all work somewhere within the industry you're targeting? Does the list provider offer recency/hotline names?
- 6) **Targeting:** How far down can the list provider drill? Can you get companies of a specific size, specific job titles, do they offer specific verticals?
- 7) **Price:** If it looks too good to be true, it probably is!

In summary, a successful email list rental requires a lot of time and research on your part. You should exercise care when choosing the list provider, look carefully at the list and how it was acquired, build deliverability analytics into your contract, and allow for a couple of tests before committing fully to the program. With caution and patience, your new prospects/customers can become a revenue producing segment of your email database for years to come.