



Outdoor recreation retailer realized a return on investment through batch email cleansing within weeks.

About

A large outdoor recreation retailer with roots in the direct catalog business has 29 stores across the United States, as well as the largest e-commerce site for outdoor gear. The retailer offers a unique shopping experience that can entertain a family for an entire day.

Outdoor enthusiasts turn to them for superior clothing, equipment, and merchandise for fishing, hunting, camping and other outdoor activities. Its customers are passionate about the outdoors – and passionate about the retailer. Many choose to subscribe to its communications.

Objective

The company had amassed a large number of suspected “bad” email addresses. Leadership wanted to confirm those emails were truly invalid, so they could ensure all opt-in subscribers wishing to receive communications were included in weekly email marketing campaigns.

Solution

The retailer decided to purchase an email cleansing service from Experian Data Quality to identify any potentially valid email addresses in the suspected bad email address population.

A common problem

As all online retailers – and marketers – know, dealing with bad email addresses is a widespread challenge in today’s email-centric atmosphere. Retailers often do not have a system in place for recording, tracking and analyzing bounced emails, meaning that a potentially significant number of subscribers do not receive regular communications, special offers, and other emails.

The company faced this challenge head-on. It collects email addresses through various channels, including in-store, online and through the call center. The e-commerce site uses standard front-end email validation to confirm form and syntax only, and other channels do not check emails at the point of entry.

It had monitored email bounces for years, separating out any bounced addresses from the general marketing population. In attempting to minimize email spam, the company did not distinguish between hard and soft bounces – all were treated similarly.

It is important to note that while both hard and soft bounces signify that an email has not reached its intended recipient, there are big differences between the two types. Hard bounces are in fact “bad” emails: emails that have invalid domains, user names, or other errors that cause an email to be undeliverable or rejected by the recipient domain.

Soft bounces, in contrast, signify that a single email has not been delivered, not that all future emails will fail. Soft bounces happen when a recipient's inbox is full, when the recipient's server is busy, or under certain other conditions. Emails that have soft bounced may not be "bad" – and therefore could be an important asset to a marketer's database.

Over a 10-year period of collecting email addresses, the retailer's pool of bad emails had grown considerably. The direct marketing team wondered if any portion of the suspected bad addresses was in fact valid – but the retailer had not come across a suitable way to identify the true bad emails.

The fast and easy solution

The company entered into discussions with Experian Data Quality, and quickly discovered a solution to the bad email problem: a batch cleansing of suspected invalid emails. Experian Data Quality offers an email batch cleansing service, which checks email addresses for several different types of errors. At any point in the process, if an email fails a certain check, it will be deemed "invalid."

First, the email syntax is examined. Next, the email address is tested to ensure that the user name format is compliant with the particular email domain. Then the email address is compared to an internal database of known bad email addresses. Finally, a request is sent to the email service provider to determine whether the user actually exists (only certain domains allow this last check).

After a quick data test on a sample of bad email addresses, the company purchased a batch cleansing of the email database. According to the data management manager, the project was fairly low-effort from his perspective. "The cleansing process was easy for us – we just sent the file off to Experian Data Quality. Our biggest effort was working with our IT group to create a new process to 'unflag' certain bounced emails."

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— Data management manager for outdoor recreation retailer

The retailer soon received the processed file back from Experian Data Quality. A significant portion of the email addresses were designated as valid, so the team updated their marketing database with the new data.

Measuring the impact

The company began testing the recovered email addresses through email marketing communications. Two weeks later, the data management manager was more than satisfied with the results. "We reached ROI in far less than two weeks. The data test had given us an estimate of what to expect from the cleansing – but the results far exceeded expectations. This was 100% worth our time and money."

Armed with greater confidence in the quality of its email data, the team can ensure that as many subscribers as possible are able to receive its weekly marketing communications, maximizing return from these campaigns.

Results

The retailer was able to realize a return on the investment in the email batch cleansing service within two weeks. A sizable portion of the suspected bad emails was recovered, tested by the marketing team, and then added back into the retailer's marketing database, meaning that the company can now contact as many subscribers as possible through email.

Let us help you with email validation.

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