

Email Marketing First Time Buyers Guide

How to choose on your first email marketing solution



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There can be a bewildering range of types of email marketing solutions each with a number of different feature sets.

This guide aims to summarise the pros & cons of each type of solution and what to look for.

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Key Features to look for in your first email marketing solution

Key functionality that any solution and supplier should offer should includes:

1) UK support via telephone & email

If the support is based abroad you may have to wait several hours for a response. By the time the response has arrived you have gone home and it will be a couple of days till the issue is resolved.

2) Multiple users supported

This is essential if you want multiple members of your marketing department to access the solution.

3) Approval process

If the solution has no approval workflow then it will only be a matter of time before your campaign is delivered incorrectly.

4) Test & Seed list functionality

The ability to test your email to a single or set of seed addresses will save you time and ensure there are no issues with your campaign.

5) Multiple lists

You will require more than a single list if you are going to be sending more than a single newsletter. Check to see if the solution offers this capability.

6) De-duplication of email addresses

This should be automatic and prevent you from bombarding customers with multiple copies of your email.

7) Store data other than email addresses

You will want to store information such as names, purchase history, content preferences and more to use when personalising and segmenting your campaigns.

8) Appending data

As you collect more data offline you will want to add it to your lists. There should be an option in the solution to add this information to the solution without having to create a new list.

9) Unsubscribe management

This should entail the ability to add a link to your email that takes your recipient to a confirmation page stating they have unsubscribed. This should also flag the record in the solution to automatically ensure they are not sent to again.

Advanced solutions give you two types of unsubscribe – global and list unsubscribe. A 'global unsubscribe' will unsubscribe the recipient from all lists while 'list unsubscribe' will simply flag the record as unsubscribed from a single list.

10) Exclude lists

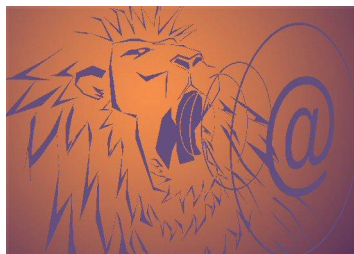
There will be times when you need to exclude certain customers. There might be people who have already taken you up on the offer, or addresses that have bounced. Therefore there should be an option to exclude a list of addresses you have uploaded.

11) Bounce Management

Receiving bounced messages into an email account and removing these is a very time consuming process. Make sure your solution collects the bounces and gives you the opportunity to view a report of these showing why they have bounced that can be downloaded.

12) Re-sending of soft bounces

This will ensure that emails that did not get delivered because of a temporary problem such as the receiving email server was offline, will get automatically re-delivered.



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13) Scheduling of campaigns

The ability to schedule emails for delivery will enable you to set-up and queue emails well in advance.

14) Delivery speed & Scalability

If you are sending high volumes of emails (50,000 – Several Million at a time) ensure the solution is capable by asking for a pilot campaign.

15) MIME format

Around 5% of your list cannot read HTML emails. Ensure the solution can automatically deliver a plain text alternative. This is referred to as MIME format.

16) White listing

Your supplier should take an active role in ensuring your emails will get delivered by 'white listing' your IP address with major ISP's.

17) Personalisation

This at the most basic level should be the ability to insert 'Dear First Name' into an email message.

18) Segmentation

The ability to send different messages to different segments will ensure that you achieve better open and click-thru rates as your messages will be more relevant.

19) A/B Split Testing

This is the ability to test and compare variables such as the subject line or content to samples of your list before delivering the best performing to the remainder of your list. This functionality will enable you to maximise your email campaign performance.

20) Reporting

As a minimum this should include:

- Statistics on total deliveries, bounces, unique opens, click-thru's and unsubscribes
- Time stamping of opens and click-thru's in order to report on recipients opening and clicking thru multiple times.
- Ability to download reports showing who opened, clicked, unsubscribed and which addresses bounced and why
- Breakdowns of the links in the email and how many times each one has been clicked upon.

21) Proven deployment of the solution

Many suppliers who are not specialists in email marketing will offer to design and develop a bespoke solution for you. This should be avoided at all costs. The wide range of solutions now available on the market means that there is a proven solution, at an affordable price with dedicated support and development teams available. A bespoke solution cannot be produced at a price that provides the same level of functionality, reliability and support. In addition these suppliers will not be able to help you with issues such as white listing.

These guidelines are a minimum you should look for to make running your campaigns smooth and getting good results from your campaigns.



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In-house software solutions

This is software in the traditional sense that is installed on a server within your own IT infrastructure. Of the solutions available in the marketplace most offer a web browser interface into the software. There are also a few additional suppliers that offer PC based solutions – these do not offer the same level of functionality in terms of tracking and reporting and generally use your existing business email for delivering the emails.

Pros

- Licence fee as opposed to a cost per email like hosted ASP solutions. This can be far more cost effective if you are sending high volumes of email.
- All data is stored in-house
- Dedicated server and IP address – you are not sharing servers with other organisations

Cons

- Cost is usually an upfront licence fee
- Requires some internal IT expertise and resources
- Some in-house solutions need to be plugged into your existing mail servers and databases causing huge delays and slowdowns to your existing business email

What to look out for

- Look for UK telephone and email support. Many in-house software suppliers only have a US office.
- Does the solution have its own send engine and database or does it require use of your existing systems?
- PC based solutions cannot offer the same reliability, delivery speed or reporting as a server based solution despite what their website may say
- Find out if the supplier offers any support for 'white listing' your IP address



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Hosted ASP Solutions

The vast majority of suppliers offer a hosted solution where you login via the Internet to manage your campaigns. All of your data is stored online and the supplier's server handles the delivery and tracking of the email campaigns.

Pros

- No software to install – access everything from your Internet browser
- Scalable pricing based upon how many emails you send
- No hardware or bandwidth requirements

Cons

- Shared server and IP address – can cause issues with deliverability if other users of that server are sending out junk
- Can be more expensive for higher volumes due to the cost per email
- Data is stored on external servers

What to look out for

- If the servers are based in the USA you might be breaking the Data Protection Act by placing personal data on these servers
- Check whether the email servers are blacklisted by Spamcop
- Find out if the solution is their own or whether they are reselling it – if they are reselling the solution this could cause delays in support issues.



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Fully outsourced bureau / managed services

If you are undertaking your first email marketing exercise this can be the most appropriate way to ensure you get everything right. It can also be the best solution to organisations that do not have the appropriate skills or time to set-up and manage email campaigns

Pros

- A managed service will fill skill gaps and overcome time constraints
- Suppliers are often able to provide additional advice and expertise on best practice

Cons

- Can be expensive in comparison to self-service solutions
- There can be delays as work gets passed between client and agency for approval

What to look out for

- Find out how much experience they have had working on email campaigns
- Do they have skills in data processing, creative and a reliable technology solution to deliver and track your email campaigns?



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The Maxemail Family of Email Marketing Solutions

Maxemail inHouse

A licenced software solution for in-house deployment. There are no 'per email' costs and therefore Maxemail inHouse can save you up to 90% per annum.

Further information:

http://www.emailcenteruk.com/maxemail_inhouse.htm

Maxemail onDemand

Maxemail onDemand is a hosted ASP solution. The solution is accessed purely from your Internet browser and enables marketers to take on-board a fully featured, scalable and robust solution with minimal upfront and ongoing costs.

Further information:

http://www.emailcenteruk.com/maxemail_ondemand.htm

Maxemail Agency

A specialist solution for marketing agencies. Each customer can be given their own area on Maxemail for their email marketing and provided with a login to view the latest tracking reports or to authorise campaigns. The user interface can also be customised with your own logos and branding.

Further information:

http://www.emailcenteruk.com/maxemail_agency.htm

Maxemail Managed

For marketers who would prefer to outsource the running of their email marketing campaigns we offer a full range of professional managed services from HTML email template design through to running viral marketing campaigns.

Further information:

<http://www.emailcenteruk.com/services.htm>



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