

A White Paper

## **Your Checklist for Choosing An ESP**

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# Your Checklist for Choosing An ESP

Generally speaking, it's good to have options. But occasionally, having too many alternatives can be a curse, not a blessing. When searching for an Email Service Provider (ESP), there's no shortage of choices, but selecting the right ESP from a staggering array of candidates can be a daunting task. Here is a list of criteria you may want to start with when deciding who to choose an online Email Service Provider.

## Self-examination

- What are the volume and frequency of campaigns?
- Do you require creative design?
- What is your budget?
- What metrics do you require?
- Do you need a dedicated Account Manager?

## Vetting out The Candidates

- Get a final list of candidates
- Call references
- How long have they been in business?
- Who is their target market?
- What is their client businesses
- Have they received reviews?
- Type their names into Google Groups and see how many abuse complaints they have.

## Service Level

- Do you need a full service agency that will do it all for you?
- Do you need self-service where you have access to an online tool and you do all of the work?

## Trial Offers

- Can you try before you buy to test deliverability as well as user functionality?

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## Price

- Is there a set up fee?
- Are there monthly recurring charges or is it a pay-per-use model?
- Are there full service charges?
- Do you have to pay minimums?
- Can you pay by credit card?
- Is there a contract needed?

## Customer Service

- What methods of communication does the ESP provide? Email, phone support, live chat?
- Is there a dedicated Account Manager?
- How long does it take customer service to respond to your inquiries or complaints?

## Q & A

- Is there a Q & A procedure for testing email on various browsers, computers, operating systems and email readers to guarantee your email will render properly in the greatest possible number of environments.

## Features

### Email Creation Options

- Are there email templates/layouts and if so what do they look like?
- Can I have a template that reflects my brand/looks like my website?
- Is there a text-only email feature?
- Can you use your own HTML code?
- Are there HTML tools so I can detect broken links?
- Is there automatic link tracking that provides click-through reporting.
- Is a "Spam Check" feature available? One that scans email content and generate reports on words or phrases that might prevent your message from passing through a spam filter.

# Your Checklist for Choosing An ESP

## Delivery

- List Check: Is there a scan for improperly formatted email addresses and “spam catcher” addresses is triggered to keep your list clean and your bounces low?
- ISP Relations: What is the company doing with regards to ISP relations?
- Is there an ISP relations group/person on board?
- Are they a member of the Email Service Provider Coalition (ESPC)?
- Are they CAN-SPAM compliant?
- Do they require your users to follow CAN-SPAM and if so how?
- Do they support SPF or Domain Keys?

## Reporting

- Do they track total number sent, that is total number of emails sent, after accounting for de-duplication, unsubscribes and bounces?
- Opens – how many people that get HTML email opened?
- Clicks – how many recipients clicked on a link?
- Bounces – How do they calculate bounces?
- Unsubscribes – Do they manage the unsubscribe process and if so how?
- What types of charts and reports are available?
- Do they track domain performance (i.e. aol.com, yahoo.com etc.) and opens, clicks, bounces and unsubscribes on them?
- Do they have charts that will compare campaign performance?
- Do they have charts that give response curve over time?
- Can I download any of my data at any time?
- Do they offer a non-responder download, that is recipients who failed to click or open a message.

## List Management

- Is there an easy way to upload my list?
- What format does it have to be in?
- Do they de-duplicate my email addresses so I don't send them more than one email in a campaign?
- Do they offer a list-building tool than can put on my site to collect email addresses?
- Can I have custom fields and if so, how many?
- Do they offer a confirmation email after someone signs up using the form?
- What do they do to protect my lists? Are their servers in a secure location?
- Will I have 24/7 access to my lists?

The search for an ESP that can maximize the effectiveness of your email campaigns without breaking the budget. In a world of options it pays – in the short term and the long run – to make the right choice. Getting answers to the previous questions will help you find the best match for your business.