The 12-Minute Email Marketing Checklist

5 Steps to Flawless Holiday Campaigns

Introduction

It's the most wonderful time of the year — and for so many businesses, it's also the most critical.

Did you know that around 30% of all retail sales occur between Black Friday and Christmas? Think about that: 30% of your business takes place in just 30 days.

Now, add a couple of weeks to that since Black Friday starts way before it used to. Deals begin as early as mid-November.

Across the world, marketers are getting ready for a time that can be make or break. So, what can you do today to prepare for the coming weeks? What marketing channels and tactics can your business benefit from the most?

Email campaigns? Social media and Google ads? Possible events? Direct mail? Email, email, and more email.

We may be biased when we say that email is it, but we're in good company. Almost 60% of marketers worldwide say it's their greatest source of revenue. Not surprising when you consider the average email ROI: $42 for every $1 spent.

What you'll learn from this checklist

As lucrative as email is, we know creating holiday email campaigns can be stressful. So, let's take a breath together. With this checklist, we'll help you get all your ducks in a row.

In 12 minutes, you'll know:

• how to come up with a compelling offer
• how to make sure your email list is in the best shape
• the right format for your emails
• how to plan your sending calendar
• and the simple things you can do to land in the inbox.

Let's dive in!

1   To determine your best offers, define your goal

Coming up with an attractive offer is at the core of your holiday email campaign. You can have perfect execution, but if your audience doesn't resonate with your offer, your efforts are in vain.

So, how do you create an offer that entices and converts?

Rule no. 1: define your goal.

This is a step many marketers and business owners overlook: what would you like to accomplish with your campaign?

Here are some of the objectives you could pursue:

- boost sales among existing customers
- convert lukewarm customers
- nurture new leads
- acquire new customers
- increase free-to-paid conversions

Rule no. 2: stay laser-focused on your goal.

With all the frenzy and excitement during these weeks, it's easy to fall off course and lose focus. But once your goal is clear, use it as an anchor to maximize your results.

Here are some campaign ideas you could steal, depending on your goal:

- early warm-up discounts
- increased discounts before, during, and after the holidays
- free shipping on orders above a certain price range
- free shipping on all products
- a discount + free shipping combo
- bonuses such as coupons and gift cards
- product samples

2 Check your email list quality

Once you've defined your goals and offers, it's time to think about how you'll accomplish them. First, you have to make sure your email series reaches your customers and prospects. The quality of your email data plays a vital role in your deliverability.

So, let's see how you can get your email list in shape ahead of the holidays.

Validate your contacts

Invalid emails, spam traps, abuse, disposable and catch-all emails — they lurk in every email list that hasn't been maintained. And the risks of emailing these types of contacts range from landing in spam to getting blacklisted and blocked by your email service provider.

For your holiday emails to reach the inbox, make sure you weed out these harmful addresses.

- Run your database through an email validator — it takes only minutes.
- Consider using ZeroBounce's A.I. scoring service to further validate catch-all emails.
- Add our email validation API to your signup and registration forms to check email addresses in real time.

Remove inactive subscribers

Your overall email engagement has a critical impact on your deliverability. And inactive subscribers only bring your engagement down.

It's wise to prune them out every six months — and especially before a holiday campaign. That way, you're targeting only people who care about your brand and what you have to offer.

3   Segment your email list

Email list segmentation allows you to refine your targeting, create more relevant content for specific groups, and be more effective.

Use filters to isolate subscribers who share common aspects, then tailor your content to them.

Here are some data filters you could use to segment your list:

- age and gender
- location
- free users and paying customers
- past shopping behavior
- levels of engagement with your company.

Tip: With ZeroBounce's Activity Data, you can also segment the most active subscribers on your list. Activity Data tells you which of your subscribers have either opened, clicked, forwarded or unsubscribed from an email in the past 30 to 365 days. With this data on hand, you can focus on your best prospects.

4 Decide the format of your emails

Now you have a clear offer, a solid email list, and a good understanding of how your audience behaves. You're doing great!

Time to think about your next step: the format of your emails. What's your series going to look like? Depending on your type of business, your emails can be:

- **HTML: rich in images showcasing your products and services**
- **plain-text: emails based on text — but with hyperlinks on specific anchors and calls-to-action.**

B2C companies, in particular, tend to use sleek, eye-catching visuals in their emails. If you decide to go this route, make sure your HTML email is coded correctly. Broken tags and design errors may cause email providers to mark your message as spam.

Apart from that, an in-depth HubSpot study showed that the more images an email contains, the more likely it is to miss the inbox. Email providers like Google see it as a commercial email and direct it to the Promotions folder.

That's not all: several tests — including one we recently ran — proved that plain-text emails are more effective. Consider split testing your campaign to see how these two types of emails perform.

5 Test your email deliverability

It's a big assumption that when you send an email, it's going to reach your audience. Did you know that 31 billion emails bounce every day? Also, around 16% of all emails end up in spam.

Sometimes, simply cleaning your list makes a big difference. But email technology has come a long way, and it's a shame not to use it to your benefit.

To increase your chances of reaching the inbox, consider testing your emails before the final send.

Our Deliverability Toolkit makes things a breeze:

- Use the mail server tester to make sure your email server is set up correctly.
- Try the inbox placement tester to see if your email will land in the inbox.
- Set up the real-time blacklist monitor to check your domain and IP.

Your email service provider tells you that your emails were "delivered." But were they delivered to the inbox or the junk folder? You don't know — and even if you did, it's too late to do anything once you hit Send.

By testing your deliverability beforehand, you get a chance to fix errors, adjust your content and give your holiday emails a real chance to be seen.

How many emails should you send?

Figuring out your sending schedule is another important aspect of your holiday campaign. Several factors will determine your plan, such as:

- Your regular sending volume and schedule
- The length of your campaign
- The engagement you observe during the campaign

Tip: If you haven't been emailing your list regularly, consider warming up your IPs. Consult our **email deliverability guide** to see what the sending limits are for popular providers.

Here are a few stats from Oracle to help you come up with a winning sending strategy:

- During the holidays, the best day to send an email is Thursday.
- Fridays usually see a dip in engagement.
- The days after important holidays are good days for sending campaigns. As competition drops, people are more likely to engage with your emails.

We tested this data in our own campaigns with successful results, so keep it in mind this holiday season. As for volume, during a campaign, we usually increase it from one email to up to five emails a week.

Before you go...

OK, almost ready! Let's go through a few final questions you should ask yourself before you click Send.

- Have all the people on my list opted in to get emails from me?

- Is my subject line compelling? Would I click to open this email?

- Have I added a preview text after the subject line?

- Would adding an emoji to the subject or preview text improve my clicks?

- Do my holiday email templates have a visible Unsubscribe link?

- Does my footer include my physical business address?

- Are all my links functional and do they have proper tracking?

- Have I tested my templates to ensure they render correctly on all devices?

- Do my images have ALT text?

- Have I run my copy through a spellchecker?

- Have I kept exclamation points and caps lock to a minimum?

- Do I have one single call-to-action or am I promoting too many things at once?

- Is my email engaging to read? What useless words can I cut?

- Am I sending it at the right time?

Placement Test Results

- ☐ Inbox
- ☑ Spam
- ☐ Missing
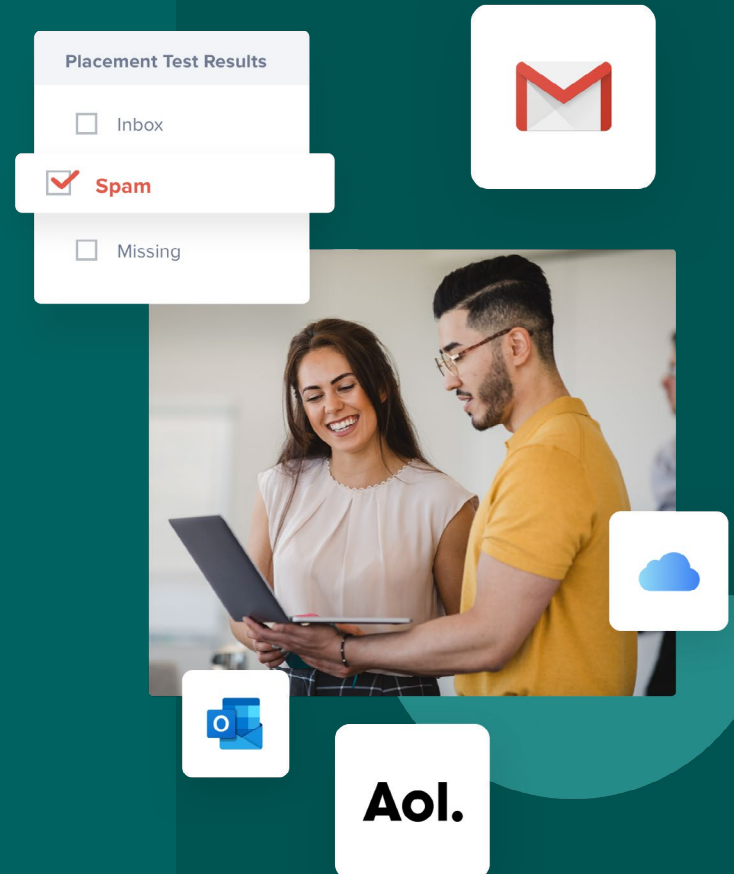
And now, it's game on! Follow this checklist and approach this holiday season with confidence and optimism.

Need to validate and score your list? Or give our deliverability tools or Activity Data a try? Reach out and talk to us. We'll help and guide you now so you can be in excellent shape this holiday season.

[Get in touch >]

Statistics sources we used in this document: WordStream, Wells Fargo, My Emma, HubSpot, Oracle