Why you should never buy an email list

You're ready to start marketing your real estate business using email. You may even have a shiny new CRM or email marketing platform set up. Congratulations! There's just one problem: your contact list is pretty sparse.

But look! There is an entire industry around providing you with a list of emails, and all you need is your credit card. You simply buy a list and you instantly have a database full of leads, ready to convert into clients.

Not. So. Fast.

Just because 'you can' doesn't mean you should

The sheer ease with which you can purchase a list might imbue the practice with the air of legitimacy. You can even rent a list so you never actually see the contacts you email until they choose to engage with you. The truth is, it's common practice. But that doesn't make it right.

But if everyone else is doing it, why can't you?

First, consider the source. Email lists that are for sale are very rarely of any quality to speak of. They are often harvested, stolen, or even the result of a data breach. Lists are sold to make a quick buck and re-sold many times to anyone and everyone — you definitely won't be the only one emailing that list.

As a result, your rate of which people open and then click your emails will be extremely low, so any benefit you might get will be minimal. Plus, you don't know these contacts. How do you know if they're even the right target for you?

And you can do more extensive damage than you even realize. Michael Messig, CTO of the email marketing platform ActivePipe, explained why it isn't your personal reputation, but your domain, or your URL, that can take the hardest hit with an ill-gotten list.

"The reputation of your domain is the most important thing in email marketing. It is very hard to measure how good your reputation is, and so email providers, such as Gmail and Outlook, have different rules that dictate whether your email is above the board or junk," he explained.

One barometer used by all email providers is the deliverability of your email — how many of your emails successfully reach an inbox with the provider versus how many are sent to invalid email addresses. This is called a bounced email. Often lists that are purchased include outdated emails that aren't valid anymore or have long been abandoned by their owners. The mailboxes can be full or the account deactivated. And that causes the email to bounce.

“Poor deliverability and high bounce rates and can harm the reputation of your domain,” Messig continued. “And once your domain is flagged as spamming, it can be very hard to reverse and get your emails back into inboxes.” That means all email going through your domain is shut down, even your everyday work email.

Build your email list with people who want to hear from you

Who will be more valuable to your real estate business: the person whom you’ve never even met or the person who asked to be contacted by you?

That second person opted-in: he or she voluntarily provided an email address. But why? What’s in it for them? Chances are, they opted in because you offered value in the form of information, education, even entertainment. That’s why you need to establish trust and build a relationship with content. People will enter into an exchange with you: their contact information for your content.

From there, you have rich information on your contact by what content they responded to. And you can learn more from their behavior as they interact with your emails. And that behavior will further inform the relationship, providing signals of intent to buy or sell and do business with you.

So how does ActivePipe help users stay on the right side of the law when it comes to email marketing?

First, it starts with understanding the CAN-SPAM Act. This is the law that sets the rules for sending commercial email in the United States. Email marketers must ensure they are not using deceptive subject lines or misleading content. ActivePipe provides all the necessary tools for list management, and they ensure opt-out compliance by including unsubscribe links in all emails that are sent with a simple opt-out process.

“ActivePipe helps meet the CAN-SPAM act by creating templates that abide by the act, including unsubscribe links and other information that can’t be accidentally removed,” said Messig. “ActivePipe monitors the reputation of your domain and partners with a number of email validation and deliverability leaders to ensure your email has the best chances of reaching the inbox.”

So by all means, consider email marketing one of the most powerful tools in your marketing arsenal. But wear a white hat, market to people who want to hear from you, and you’ll be on the road to success!

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