

# Tricks of the Trade

**A**re your e-mail recipients only seeing half of your subject line? Is your e-newsletter being flagged as spam? Here's a handy guide to some of my favorite online sites and utilities that should help you in your e-mail and online marketing efforts. And, the good news is they're all free.

➤ **E-mail trend reporting.** To benchmark your results against others in your industry, head to DoubleClick ([www.doubleclick.com](http://www.doubleclick.com)) and check out its Knowledge Central area. It presents quarterly trend analysis on e-mail including bouncebacks, opens and click-through metrics by industry, along with overall conversion and purchase trends. You also will find primary research and information on ad banner trends.

➤ **Subject line and from line tune-up.** Marketers find longer subject lines are more effective because they give room to tell a more compelling story. But many e-mail clients (the software a recipient uses to view e-mails) dramatically limit the display. For example, AOL 8.0 only will display 15 to 16 characters of your from line and 51 characters of your subject line. Deployment vendor E-mail Labs ([http://www.e-maillabs.com/from\\_subject\\_line\\_tool.html](http://www.e-maillabs.com/from_subject_line_tool.html)) has a free tool that allows you to preview how your subject and from lines will display in many of the most popular e-mail clients.

➤ **HTML tester.** Studies have found that anywhere between 20 percent to 40 percent of e-mails don't render properly. Poor HTML coding can result in display problems and a bad user experience. Of course, this has an impact on response rates and may tarnish your brand. It also can affect your delivery rates, since some content filters check header information as well as the HTML code.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has developed guidelines and

standards for the Web. Its site ([www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org)) is a hub for information. There is a separate site (<http://validator.w3.org>) that allows you to check HTML and XHTML documents for conformance to W3C recommendations and other standards.

➤ **Simplify your links.** Text messages can present a problem when you want recipients to link deep within your site. URLs can be quite long and the display may even break a link into two lines. Recipients may need to cut and paste the link components to get to your site.

There are free services that will take your long URL and create a smaller URL that will not break in e-mail messages and will never expire. The services work through link redirects; the user clicks on the short link and is immediately redirected to the appropriate page. You can find one such service at [www.tinyurl.com](http://www.tinyurl.com).

➤ **Writing for comprehension.** Make sure your e-mails are easy to comprehend, your copy is written in the active voice, and your sentences average between 10 and 12 words.

A tool available in Microsoft Word will give you a snapshot of all this, and more. To find and install it, select "tools," from your drop down menu, then choose "spelling and grammar," "options," and check the box next to "show readability statistics." After you spell check a document, you'll automatically receive a readability report.

➤ **Receive spam complaints.** Many ISPs encourage members to use their "report as spam" capability instead of the opt-out links in e-mail messages. When this happens, you may not be aware that these recipients have complained. To make certain you're fully aware of any such complaints, the Internet Engineering Task Force rec-

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## Tips to optimize your e-mail and online efforts

ommends you first make sure your abuse and postmaster addresses are valid and can receive e-mail. Any Web site should have these types of working e-mail addresses where people can report e-mail abuse problems associated with that site. Then, register these addresses with [www.abuse.net](http://www.abuse.net), a clearinghouse that compiles a master database of reporting addresses for users throughout the Web to use.

A few ISPs will allow you to register and receive copies of all spam complaints. For AOL, visit <http://postmaster.info.aol.com/tools/fbl.html>. Visit [www.unitedonline.net/postmaster/whitelisted.html](http://www.unitedonline.net/postmaster/whitelisted.html) to be whitelisted with Juno and NetZero.

➤ **Spam-proof your messages.**

One of the more popular antis spam applications available today is the SpamAssassin spam identification tool. It includes several hundred filters and allows mail administrators (at some ISPs and in corporations) to customize their threshold for spam.

Depending on how your newsletter is written, your opt-in e-mail may be inadvertently flagged as spam. There are free utilities that will check your message before you send it by scanning for certain "triggers," including certain phrases, formatting and aggressive writing styles. Reports will tell you if your message triggered any red flags that might block it. You then can make recommended changes, and mail with the confidence that your message meets industry standards.

You can test your messages for spam filter triggers by going to [www.lyris.com/contentchecker](http://www.lyris.com/contentchecker) or <http://spamcheck.sitesell.com>, provided by e-mail software companies Lyris and Sitesell, respectively.

➤ **Reverse DNS lookup.**

A very large percentage of domains have domain name system (DNS) problems. Go to [www.dnsstuff.com](http://www.dnsstuff.com); the site will help you find those problems and fix them. Also, the Mail Test tool will help find mail delivery problems for your domain.

➤ **Competitive analysis.** This tip goes beyond e-mail, but it's one of my favorite online utilities. Alexa ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)) provides an interesting set of online reports you can use to compare and contrast your site with the competition. Enter a URL and you'll get a report of the traffic rank for that site, the number of pages viewed by the average visitor, and a listing of what other sites' visitors are likely to access.

How does it collect this information? Millions of people have downloaded the Alexa toolbar. Alexa then monitors Web usage for all toolbar users and generates reports.

It's amazing how many resources are available on the Web. I hope you'll take advantage of some of these useful tools and utilities. ♦

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