



Ad Femme Increases Open and Click Rates by Improving Inbox Placement Rates

By Focusing on Authentication and Whitelisting, the Networking Portal Strengthens Email Marketing Success

Industry: Membership Organization/Education

The Problem

Ad Femme, a networking portal for women in advertising, came to Return Path looking for answers as to why its emails were getting blocked or put into the junk folder. Because all of the email sent is to a small membership base who requested the email communications – and the emails are information vs. sales-oriented – they were surprised at the delivery issues and were looking for ways to fix them.

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“We’re often getting complaints from members that they are not receiving our emails,” says Lindsay Mure, Ad Femme founder and president. “We have an engaged audience who notices when their emails aren’t there, so I want to do everything we can to make sure they are getting the information we’ve promised them.”

To find out what was causing Ad Femme’s delivery issues, Return Path conducted a deliverability assessment, providing detailed information on email reputation, delivery rates by ISP, creative issues, mailing infrastructure and other best practices. Ad Femme also used Return Path’s Sender Score deliverability monitoring tools, which track delivery issues pre- and post-campaign, including providing a look at how campaigns render in the primary email readers and how emails fare against server-level filters.

Findings

Through the assessment process, Return Path found that Ad Femme’s delivery rates appeared pretty solid at nearly 90 percent (for the month of December) – which is well above the industry average. The Return Path team discovered two primary areas that Ad Femme could focus on to see those delivery rates go up even more: authentication and whitelisting – both personal and at the server-level. We also encouraged them to continue to monitor their sender reputation, especially given that they share IP addresses through their email service provider, Constant Contact.

Solution: Authentication

In reviewing Ad Femme’s mailing infrastructure, Return Path found that they did not have established authentication records for DomainKeys and SPF, two of the leading authentication protocols in use by receivers. The lack of authentication was likely a primary cause for the 10 percent of email bulked or missing during December. The primary ISPs filtering Ad Femme emails were Gmail and those affiliated with Yahoo (SBC, Yahoo, BT Internet, Rogers and Yahoo European domains) – all of which use DomainKeys authentication status as a determining factor for filtering. Return Path showed Ad Femme how to set up authentication through Constant Contact, and on the two subsequent campaigns sent, inbox placement rates spiked to 100 percent.





Solution: Whitelisting

Return Path's delivery monitoring showed that 6.2 percent of Ad Femme's email was getting placed in the bulk folder. Through its Spam Filter Tester, Return Path could see that Ad Femme was experiencing delivery failures at IronPort, one of the leading gateway filters used by corporations. Because of this, any domain using IronPort (and there are more than 123,000) would likely block email from Ad Femme at the server level.

One way to combat this is to have subscribers add the Ad Femme domain to their address book, creating personal whitelist status at most domains. This would also help delivery for cases in which subscribers use higher security settings. For example, if a subscriber has their Outlook settings set to "high," additional blocking would occur at the inbox level. This kind of filtering does not always get reported in monitoring statistics, which could explain why Ad Femme's numbers look good despite knowing that subscribers complain about delivery failures.

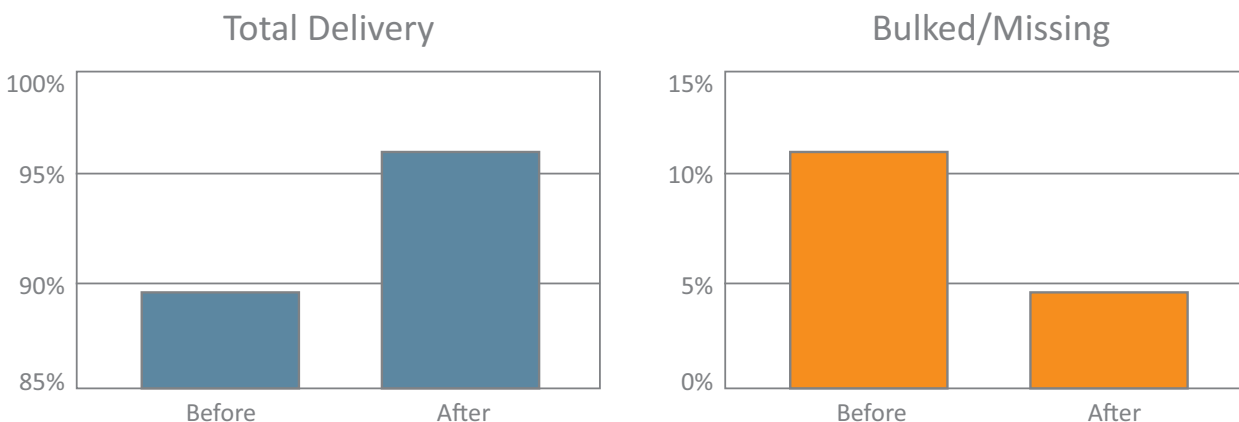
"Many business users set their settings higher than the defaults, which leads to increased filtering," says Carmi Jones, email delivery consultant for Return Path. "Any email sender who has business domains on their file, like Ad Femme does, needs to be cognizant of settings and take extra steps to be whitelisted by its members."

Solution: Reputation

Early on in the review process, Return Path looked up the reputation data for Ad Femme's domains. Because most of Ad Femme's email is sent through Constant Contact and because Ad Femme does not use a dedicated IP address, reputation data was indicative of every company mailing from the shared IP pool. Fortunately for Ad Femme, Constant Contact does a good job of managing sender reputation, and Sender Scores were upward of an acceptable 70. While the shared IP situation is something that Ad Femme needs to watch carefully, it is not currently causing problems for their inbox delivery rates.

Results & Impact

Since the assessment was completed, Ad Femme set up authentication and has sent two campaigns tracked through Return Path's Mailbox Monitor. The result? 100 percent inbox placement at all Yahoo! affiliated US, European and Canadian ISPs, and at Gmail – all of which were partially bulking Ad Femme's email previously. Total delivery across all seeds monitored since the Tune-Up monitoring period increased from slightly less than 90 percent to 95.4 percent and bulked/missing decreased from 10 percent to 4.6 percent.





“Since the delivery rates rose, we’ve seen a 5 percent increase in open and click rates for our newsletters,” says Mure. “That increase leads to higher ad conversions – and happier Ad Femme sponsors.”

Ad Femme’s email program provides an excellent example of how deliverability management is an ongoing process requiring more than simple monitoring. By looking at the underlying email infrastructure, gateway filters and reputation factors, Return Path was able to recommend several fixes that would improve delivery rates for Ad Femme, limiting subscriber complaints and increasing response rates. Between personal whitelisting efforts and the addition of authentication protocols to its email program, Ad Femme will be on its way to continued delivery success. Continued use of Return Path’s delivery tools will help Ad Femme track improvements, check campaigns prior to sending for creative and filtering issues and recognize new problems as well.

Would you like help increasing your email delivery rates? Find out how Return Path’s Sender Score can improve your email performance. Email rpinfo@returnpath.net or call 866-362-4577 for more information.

