



Custom Printing Company, Custom Direct Achieves an 18.4% Increase in Email Revenue By Clearing Up Email Identity Issues and Improving Inbox Placement Rates by 29%



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Industry: Custom Printing Services

Service Level: Return Path Platinum

Company Overview

Custom Direct Inc. and its subsidiaries are leading providers of customized printed products and security fraud protection services to small business and consumers. One of Custom Direct's three core businesses is manufacturing 10 brands of checks which are marketing through numerous check brand sites.

Challenge

Custom Direct relies on email to drive new and repeat business to their growing subscriber list of 1.7 million recipients. Email generates 18% of their total online revenue and so they wanted to explore ways to maximize that revenue by increasing response, particularly from their loyal customers.

However, from time to time, Custom Direct would experience email delivery problems that would cripple their response rates. For instance, in the fall of 2005 Custom Direct was blocked at AOL for several days and in 2007 they were blocked again causing a significant dip in revenue. They also suspected that they were being blocked by other ISPs, but didn't have a way to check delivery results to the Top-20 domains to which they mail.

Solution

Custom Direct turned to Return Path and signed up for Platinum level service. With Platinum they would gain full access to the deliverability monitoring suite plus a dedicated team of experts to proactively assist with deliverability issues.

When Custom Direct came to Return Path in June 2007, they discovered that almost 30% of their email was being delivered to the junk folder or went missing which was highlighted by their low Sender Score of 50. The reports provided by their email service provider only provided them with bounce data so they had no idea that only 70% of their email messages were reaching subscriber inboxes with each deployment. With two mailings per week, that translated into a huge revenue loss for Custom Direct. To help get Custom Direct's delivery on track, Return Path was able pinpoint two key areas that were negatively affecting their email delivery and email sending reputation.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Return Path discovered that Custom Direct's content was mistakenly flagged as spam by one of the leading spam filtering vendors that covers many of their key domains. As a result of the mistaken identity, Custom Direct's mail was inadvertently being blocked causing them to experience poor inbox placement by ISPs that used this filtering solution to mitigate spam. In order to fix the problem, Custom Direct had to prove that their email to be legitimate.





UNKNOWN IDENTITY

Adding to their problems, Return Path discovered that Hotmail and MSN were bulking 100% of Custom Direct's mail because of an authentication error with their Sender Policy Framework (SPF) records. Authentication allows ISPs to properly identify the sender of the mail. Because of this error, Hotmail and MSN did not recognize Custom Direct's mailstreams and therefore blocked it at the gateway. Since Hotmail and MSN make up a significant portion of their list, Custom Direct lost revenue by not reaching these customers' inboxes.

Results

First, Return Path worked with Custom Direct to ensure their mailstreams were easily identifiable to receivers by working with their email service provider to correct the authentication error that caused Hotmail and MSN to bulk their email. Moreover, Return Path continued to work with their ESP to implement best practices for improved long term deliverability.

"We not only achieved 99% delivery, but increased our email revenue by 18.4%."

Next, Return Path analyzed Custom Direct's Top 20 domains and negotiated the removal of other ISP blocks by proving their emails to be legitimate. This included working with the leading spam filtering vendors to better understand their technology and spam voting mechanisms. Together with the vendor, Return Path was able to explain and modify Custom Direct's mailing behavior to prevent their mail from being improperly identified as spam in the future.

Return Path continued to proactively monitor Custom Direct's mailstreams preventing delivery problems, mediating with ISPs and devising best practice strategies to grow their email program in ways that would maintain their good reputation while increasing revenue.

As a result of Return Path's counsel, Custom Direct's overall email delivery rates increased from 70% to 99% and 100% of their email was delivered to Hotmail and MSN. Moreover, this 29% lift in delivery resulted in an 18.4% increase in total sales derived from their email program after the first year of becoming a Return Path Platinum client.

Customer Feedback

"Before Return Path we thought the bounce reports provided by our ESP were sufficient to track our success. When we learned that 30% of our email was hitting the junk folder or going missing, we knew we had to take action fast. Not only were we missing out on tons of revenue, but our subscribers were not getting the mail they asked to receive.

Return Path was able to quickly identify our core problems and served as our staunch advocate to remove blocks at a variety of ISPs. Moreover, they taught us how to follow the email best practices that would get us delivered to the inbox and worked with our ESP to ensure we were covered from all angles. As a result, we not only achieved 99% delivery, but increased our email revenue by 18.4% in the first year. We've just renewed our contract in anticipation of two more successful years."

—Kate Winslow, Email Marketing Manager

Would you like help increasing your email response rates? Find out how Return Path can improve your overall email performance. Email rpinfo@returnpath.net or call 1-866-362-4577 for more information.

