



## How to Encourage Personal Whitelisting

Email subscribers have quite a bit of control over what gets filtered and what gets delivered to their inbox. Through the use of personal spam filtering software, many people are able to choose which email to allow into the inbox. This feature is also built into the functionality of many popular email services, including AOL, MSN/Hotmail and Yahoo! In essence, email recipients can create their own personal whitelist of companies and publishers they want to hear from.

In the last few years, end users of email have become savvier about these features, which is good for email marketers. However, reminding your subscribers to use this feature for your email – particularly at the point of subscription – is an important component in the battle for inbox placement. We recommend a six-step process to encourage whitelisting.

1. **Promote whitelisting at sign-up** by providing specific instructions. We recommend a free tool called CleanMyMailbox (<http://www.cleanmymailbox.com/whitelist.html>) to automatically generate instructions you can put on your website.
2. **Include whitelisting instructions in the welcome message** you send to new subscribers. This can be a simple call to action to whitelist which then links back to the page on your site with specific instructions.
3. **Send a one-time email to existing list members**, similar to the welcome message, that encourages them to whitelist you and includes instructions. It's a good idea to repeat this exercise for your full list once or twice a year.
4. **Add whitelisting instructions to the text link you include at the top of your HTML emails.** Including a link to the web version of your email is important if the recipient's email reader does not allow graphics, either for some emails or only for select ones. This space can easily promote address book inclusion, too. The copy should read something like, "Make sure you always get these emails by adding our company to your address book – [learn how now](#). If you cannot view this email message, [see it on the web](#)." That browser page should include a call to action to whitelist and instructions on doing so, since this will often help to prevent problems with graphics in future emails, too. You should include this information in every email you send.
5. **Use a consistent "From" address.** Getting subscribers to whitelist is going to be a useless exercise if you change your "from" address.
6. **Persuade your AOL customers to reply to one of your messages.** If a recipient on AOL 9.0 replies to your message, you are automatically added to the whitelist for graphics and links (though not, unfortunately, for delivery).

An important point to keep in mind is that personal whitelisting does not guarantee deliverability. If your IP address is on the ISP's blacklist, or if your email scores high on the filters' spam scale, your email will not be allowed through, no matter how many address books you're in. Keeping up your existing practices around reputation and deliverability monitoring are crucial components in keeping your inbox placement high.