



E-mail Marketing 20 Words That Kill

Small Business Success on the Web
Small Business Development Center at Stony Brook University
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20 WORDS THAT KILL -- AT LEAST WHEN IT COMES TO SPAM FILTERS

Spam, spam, spam. It's terrible not only for those of us on the receiving end, but for those of us who *send* e-mail.

This deluge of irritating junk has unfortunately interfered with legitimate e-mail newsletter publishers, because we're caught in the anti-spam crossfire. If you publish any type of e-mail publication, there's a likely chance that your newsletter is *not* reaching a portion of your readers. Why? Their Internet Service Provider (ISP) or e-mail program uses a spam filter.

These software programs search for words and phrases that are typical of spam and assign each incoming e-mail a "score." If your e-mail has too many of these words and phrases, you receive a high score, and your e-mail may be blocked or literally labeled as "JUNK".

TOP 20 "KILLER" WORDS OR PHRASES YOU MAY BE USING

While there are other words that will cost you more "points" than the ones below do (e.g. sexual phrases), here are the most common "trigger" words and phrases that your business may be using in your e-mail newsletter:

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| 1. amazing | 11. guarantee |
| 2. cancel at any time | 12. increase sales |
| 3. check or money order | 13. order now |
| 4. click here | 14. promise you |
| 5. congratulations | 15. risk free |
| 6. dear friend | 16. special promotion |
| 7. e-mail marketing | 17. this is not spam |
| 8. for only (\$) | 18. to be removed |
| 9. free (including toll-free) | 19. unsubscribe |
| 10. great offer | 20. winner |

WHAT'S A PUBLISHER TO DO?

You have two choices when it comes to beating the filters. One is to avoid using these words and phrases altogether. You will probably find that hard to do. For example, in a recent issue of my e-mail newsletter, I discussed how to use your newsletter to increase



business. Unfortunately the word "increase" cost me a fat 1.4 points in SpamAssassin, one of the most popular filter programs.

Your second choice is to disguise these words and phrases in clever ways by inserting keyboard symbols within them and/or replacing a letter in them with a symbol. The trick is not to make it too cryptic — you want your readers to be able to understand what you're saying. For example, in my e-mail newsletter, I use "free", instead of free.

While some spam filters pick up on this trick and penalize you for doing it by adding onto your score, I've found this tactic "costs" you much less than using the words and phrases themselves. It's not a perfect solution, but it's working for now.

TEST BEFORE YOU SEND

It's a great idea to test how your e-mail newsletter stacks up before you send it out. The good news is you can do this for **FREE**.

Lyris' Content Checker <<http://www.lyris.com/contentchecker>> tells you how your e-mail newsletter ranks in Spam Assassin. All you do is copy your newsletter text and paste it into the box on their site. They'll run your free report and e-mail a copy to you. It usually arrives within minutes.

The report will tell you exactly which words are costing you points. Usually you should only be concerned if your score is over 5 points. If so, you can either delete those words or disguise them, as I mentioned above. Be creative!