

Delivering on a Reputation for Fun

ARCAMAX PUBLISHING TURNS TO LEADSPEND'S REAL-TIME EMAIL VALIDATION FOR CRITICAL DEFENSE AGAINST ROI KILLERS

In email marketing, a healthy sender reputation with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) is absolutely essential. Find yourself with a low sender reputation—too many hard bounces is just one way to get there—and your email deliverability could suffer. That means lost business.

Even a company with a rock-solid reputation like ArcaMax Publishing, a leading provider of “family-friendly news and fun on the Internet” since 1999 (an eon in online history), must remain vigilant against creeping rates of hard bounces, and the spam filters they trigger.

ArcaMax distributes hundreds of syndicated features, from comics to advice columns to daily news, to 1.5 million email subscribers each day. With revenue earned through advertising, all publications are completely free for readers. “If somebody wants to get a syndicated feature like Beetle Bailey online, we’re their source,” ArcaMax CEO Scott Wolf explains proudly.

But only the comic that arrives in the inbox has a chance to brighten a reader’s day (and an advertiser’s metrics). In an ever-evolving online landscape littered with new spam traps and other filters, traditional permissions and other best practices may not be enough to safeguard lists, maintain a healthy sender reputation, and pass the scrutiny of the ISPs.

That’s why, last year, ArcaMax took on a new partner in the fight. “LeadSpend broke through—they’ve got just the right tools in their kit to help identify the bad addresses, the ones that can add up and become real ROI killers,” Wolf says.



A HIGHER STANDARD

At first, Wolf didn’t think his company needed LeadSpend’s real-time email-verification service. “We have always gone to great lengths to make sure our newsletters go to those people who want them,” he says.

To cut down on misspelled, nonfunctioning, or machine-generated addresses, ArcaMax has long employed a double-opt-in approach that’s rare in the industry: any interested reader who signs up must also confirm the subscription through a link emailed by the publisher.

“By doing this, we’ve already run a level of filtering, ensuring the people on the list really intended to subscribe,” Wolf explains. “So on the front end, we avoid a lot of the issues that some other emailers have to fight later on.”

However, that still left one problem. Even the confirmation email itself, if sent to an invalid address, can count against email publishers who are trying to do the right thing with double opt-in. A bump of just a percentage point or two in the hard bounce rate could mean as much as a 30-40 percent decrease in the overall inbox placement rate. As a result, many customers who *do* want ArcaMax emails might never receive them.

“And the more bad emails we send, the worse our domain or IP address may look to the ISPs,” Wolf says. “If we wanted to keep growing ArcaMax, getting more subscribers, we had to do a better job of weeding those out.”



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THE LEADSPEND DIFFERENCE

In 2012, LeadSpend founder and CEO Craig Swerdloff persuaded Wolf to take his email validation service for a test drive. In the very first month, ArcaMax was able to pinpoint that two-to-five percent of new subscription requests from certain sources contained email addresses that were not valid or not deliverable for one reason or another.

LeadSpend’s discovery gave ArcaMax a new perspective on its data. Wolf asserts, “We came to the conclusion that bad confirmation traffic was a bigger problem than we might have realized.”

Besides the detection of the bad confirmation traffic, other unique features of the LeadSpend solution stood out to Wolf, too: A proprietary process for checking Yahoo! addresses, real-time validation, and the LeadSpend team’s deep industry expertise.

“They’ve worked in email for a long time, and they all understand the business,” points out Wolf. “We’re responsible citizens at ArcaMax, and if we can work with LeadSpend and use a service that helps us remove additional bad traffic from our mail stream, I know that’s the right decision.”

In the most recent month of their partnership, ArcaMax reported that LeadSpend validated 700,000 new addresses and flagged 30,000

bad ones before confirmation emails could go out. On a per-day average, that’s 1,000 invalid, reputation-damaging emails that ArcaMax didn’t send, thanks to LeadSpend’s safeguards.

INSURANCE AGAINST ‘ROI KILLERS’

As ISPs develop more sophisticated defenses in their ongoing battle with spammers, getting caught in the crossfire is only more of a hazard for legitimate senders like ArcaMax—and Wolf sees LeadSpend’s service as an invaluable insurance policy.



Wolf says with conviction, “It’s a guiding principle of our business that we have to do a good job for both our readers and our advertisers. LeadSpend helps us do exactly that.”

“Getting blocked by a major ISP, getting spam traps on your list, getting terminally assigned to the spam filter—all of those are ROI killers,” Wolf laments. “So preventing that, protecting and improving your deliverability, is an incredibly worthwhile investment.”

So to others who might share his earlier skepticism, “I would say they should certainly do what we did with LeadSpend, even if they’ve got double opt-in validation like us,” he explains. “And if they’re single opt-in, I’d say they’re crazy not to do this!”

With LeadSpend’s data insights, Wolf feels ArcaMax has the tools needed to maximize deliverability—and he can concentrate on engaging readers. “Having experts you can count on is very valuable, and it’s great not to worry about those deliverability issues all the time,” he points out. “I can focus on building the business with new subscribers and sending Beetle Bailey each day.”

FAST FACTS

1. ARCAMAX HAS PUBLISHED FAMILY-FRIENDLY NEWS AND FUN ONLINE SINCE 1999.
2. ARCAMAX PROTECTS ITS READERS AND ITS REPUTATION WITH A DOUBLE OPT-IN SUBSCRIPTION SYSTEM.
3. LEADSPEND’S DATA INSIGHTS IDENTIFIED EMAIL SOURCES WITH UNDELIVERABLE RATES OF 2-5%, ENABLING LEADSPEND TO TAKE ACTION. 
4. LEADSPEND’S REAL-TIME VALIDATION HAS HELPED ARCAMAX PREVENT 1,000 CONFIRMATION EMAILS TO INVALID ADDRESSES EVERY DAY. 

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