



Managing the E-mail Blast Nightmare!

A Practical Approach to Managing the Bounce-back List

A White Paper for GoldMine Users

The following is a discussion on the 'e-mail blast', an effective way to communicate quickly to a target audience. E-mail 'blasting' can be a practical marketing tool that supports the rest of your marketing initiatives within a planned marketing campaign. Launching an e-mail campaign without a structured follow-up process in place can create antagonism on the part of your sales and IT staff when an overwhelming return in the form of 'bounce-backs' occurs. Undelivered and returned e-mails will inevitably be sent to you by SMTP servers when it turns out that even your best customer lists contain a number of incorrect e-mail addresses. Planning ahead with a trained staff armed with the proper tools will result in more sales activities and increased revenue. Fortunately, as a GoldMine user you already own a good portion of the technology required in the E-mail Rules Set function contained in the GoldMine E-Mail Center.

The case for E-mail Marketing

Today, e-mail is clearly the most cost efficient quick business communication methodology we have. Even with the high incidence of SPAM, most business people check their e-mail regularly because they use it to save time from 'telephone tag'. Internal company e-mail has become the norm for many businesses to keep abreast of daily assignments. You have the highest potential that your unsolicited e-mail will be read than any other form of personal business communication. E-mails are particularly effective in penetrating through to the higher level manager who is normally 'protected' by a gatekeeper such as a receptionist, an office manager or a personal secretary from incoming unsolicited phone calls or 'junk mail'.

It is also true that an e-mail address is considered a personal item by many and using it comes with the real need to be responsible for the potential reactions that the receiver may have from sending an unsolicited e-mail communication to them. There is probably always some risk that sending such a communication may generate a negative effect.

Success comes from creating a thoughtful communication that focuses quickly on your call to action. Managing a "mass" communication e-mail blast campaign needs to be carefully planned. One can literally send thousands of e-mails in one day. So, there better be a system in place to handle the responses, including the inevitable 'un-deliverable' and the remove requests.

E-mail marketing is a powerful and positive tool when handled with responsibility.

For due diligence sake, we point to the need to have some planned e-mail templates for addressing inquiries for additional information, and the staff to resource responsible and positive handling of business responses. We assume that any sales manager realizes that the power of this communication tool carries with it the need to have a follow-up system in place to handle the responses from your call to action contained in the e-mail.



The primary subject of this white paper is the need to address the residual 'trash' results of e-mailing from any list of names whether it be your customer list or prospect list or a list purchased from a third party source. Yes, even the contact list that you use every day to run your business is going to contain a percentage of invalid e-mail addresses. The fact is that e-mail is so personal and in many cases transitory, that even when you are dealing with current clients, a number of e-mail addresses in your customer database will not be up to date. Businesses change their e-mail addresses as they evolve. An e-mail address to someone that was fine two months ago, may fail when you send them an e-mail, today. This is not an issue when sending e-mails one on one. When sending an 'e-mail blast', the 'bounce-back' becomes an entirely different matter.

Overcome the unwanted 'pit' of e-mail marketing

SPAM or unwanted e-mail has fast become an overwhelming creeping menace that is invading the wonderful world of e-mail. What several years ago was a new avenue of communication to grab the personal attention of the reader, has now become for many, a 'pit' of unwanted e-mail, or SPAM.

Nevertheless, e-mail is still an opportunity, when handled in an intelligent manner, to get your message on the table, in front of your reader's eyes in a very personal way. Most of us receive and send personal e-mails, whether the subject be business or of a personal nature. In creating these e-mails we should maintain a healthy respect for the fact that the reader is using their valuable time to read, absorb and respond. The businessman who uses e-mail well, has an opportunity for positive results to keep the motion going. That is the daunting goal of any business e-mail: *keep the motion going*.

Use a professional E-mail Return List Manager.

The best way to handle returns from even the smaller e-mail blast is to implement the use of a professional E-mail Return List Manager. Such a utility is employed to collect the returns, to manage finding the e-mail address source that was used to generate them and then to automate, tasks you will want to complete to address updating the source list in a manner that supports your business operations. The least that you want to do is to 'flag' the offending record so that it is not reused. Using the bad address, again, is not a very cost effective use of your business resources. One also must have in place, a formal verifiable means of handling requests for removal. Repeat offenses to someone who has requested that you remove them from such marketing campaigns may, in some cases, actually cross the line into the 'outside of the law' territory none of us want or need. What becomes even more complex is the request from someone with whom you will continue to utilize the e-mail address for one on one communications to remove them from any marketing (e-mail blast) campaign. The simplest way to address the many variations on the central theme of list management is to use a professional E-mail Return List Manager.

1. The most effective generic manner to handle the basic issue of un-deliverable e-mails is to retrieve the bounce-back, link it to the record and take an action to resolve the issue.



2. The most effective generic manner to handle the 'remove' request is to retrieve the reply, link it to the record and take an action to resolve the issue.

Of course, both of these cases can be accomplished by manually retrieving the return e-mail and searching for the record in GoldMine, linking the return, for history purposes to inform which e-mail address is bad (if it was undeliverable) and taking the appropriate action you have determined for going forward. For some businesses, the best way is to archive the return, flag the record, and keep the instance in an archival database to prove that you have managed it in a responsible manner for satisfying regulatory agency requirements.

Do not allow this discussion of the issues to be handled to intimidate you from using this powerful communication tool. Read on, and we will provide you with our discovery of a cost effective, elegant little utility that addresses the situation so that you are on the positive side of the equation.

As far as e-mail marketing is concerned; go for it. A focused e-mail blast is a money making machine when used correctly and responsibly.

BounceLinker[®] and GoldMine[®], the E-mail Marketing Team

The most important of all of the reasons that FrontRange, the publishers of GoldMine, have resisted employing MS Outlook as the primary e-mail client of the application is the E-mail Rule functions contained in the GoldMine E-Mail Center. We know a number of GoldMine users who integrate MS Outlook to GoldMine, but use the GoldMine E-Mail Center for their e-mail blasts. GoldMine is half of the equation for handling returns from such a campaign.

The other tool is an inexpensive utility, called BounceLinker that has been introduced to the GoldMine user community only recently. We predict that BounceLinker will become one of the hottest new third party add-ons ever to be introduced to the GoldMine community of users.

Here is what BounceLinker does, and it does it quite well. You use GoldMine's E-mail Rules to identify the returns from your e-mail campaign whether they be un-deliverables or requests to remove from your list. Using these rules, GoldMine will place all of these e-mails into one of two added folders in your GoldMine E-Mail Center, either the BounceBacks folder or Remove-Unsubscribe folder. You then log onto BounceLinker and have it do the remainder of the handling work for you. This utility, well configured, will address anywhere from 80-95% of all of these returns automatically, doing as much or as little as you have instructed it to do. It requires no special physical environment, just a decent workstation that is already configured to work with GoldMine.

We have not found anything we would have wanted to do that BounceLinker does not do, automatically, to manage links, to file a historical record, to change a field, to schedule an activity, and more. Simply put, this utility will implement all of the activities covered in the following paragraphs on handling bounce-backs.



Handling the invalid e-mail address

Bounce-backs are somewhat ambivalent in what is the best thing to do. You will inevitably have many variations on the central theme of addressing these returns quickly and efficiently without impacting heavily on your office or IT staff. Here are some of the most important options.

1. Manage preventing re-use of invalid e-mail addresses
 - a. One option is to delete the e-mail address, but this may not be the best thing to do at first. Many SMTP servers will notify you that the e-mail was undeliverable and that they are continuing to attempt to deliver. This may go on for up to five days. If you delete the e-mail address when you receive the first return, you may not be able to find the contact record when you receive another notice on the same e-mail
 - b. You can change a field. We like to use the word 'Bad' in a field. Our clients have used everything from the Fax Number extension to the e-mail merge code. In seven years of management consulting and designing user-defined field, etc. we have never encountered the word 'Bad' as an option for anything else, so when we encounter that word in any of our customer systems, we know it refers to the e-mail address.
2. Link the return to the contact record and label this historic record with the offending e-mail address. Filing the e-mail return to the contact record is fine, but unless you read the return, you will not know which address was bad relative to a contact record with multiple e-mail addresses attached. Labeling the 'reference' field with the bad e-mail address resolves that issue.
3. Add this contact name to a list of call-backs for someone to phone the contact and obtain an updated e-mail address. Unless you used a just purchased a blind e-mail list for your blast, you will probably want to do this.
4. You might want to actually *schedule a call* for a GoldMine user (which can be a user name entered into GoldMine just for this purpose) for managing the call-backs. This way you can use the GoldMine Activity List and breeze through the call-backs in optimum time.

Handling Remove and Unsubscribe Requests

When someone requests that you remove them from your e-mail blasts, you are under some legal obligations. There are now some Federal summary laws covering e-mail blasts and your obligations. Fortunately, we do not know of any unreasonable issues in advance of doing the e-mail blasts. How you obtained the e-mail address is not the point. Where the legislatures have involved themselves is to address the on-going future. So, as long as you include a reference note to the fact that there is some association or 'connecting' reason for having e-mailed the receiver in the first place, and handle in a formal way their request to remove them from your list, you are within the intent of current laws covering SPAM.

Your obligation is to take some form of action upon receiving a remove or unsubscribe request that will, in fact, remove them from your active marketing list. You are also under obligation to prove that you have done so, in the rarest of possible cases that you may actually be examined or audited for this compliance. Unless you are in a business such as a federally subsidized health care or education program, or a financial services firm that is under a regulatory agency, having a formal system in place will suffice. If you are one of these regulated organizations, you may have a more stringent requirement to archive proof



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of your compliance. Either way, the combination of GoldMine and BounceLinker has all of this built-in.

First of all, when you are working in GoldMine, manually, all you need do is 'flag' the contact record to remove it from any future e-mail blasts, with the evidence of a changed field indicating that fact. When using BounceLinker, the utility does this for you automatically. BounceLinker will handle about 100 such requests in 2 minutes on a slow server, so saved time is an additional primary factor to data management accuracy. A few minutes more was used to resolve the several returns where, due to the exception of the return format, BounceLinker did not find the Contact Record. We found these in a folder, 'Not Found'. Next time, we will have added the 'string' configuration that will find those formats as well, so BounceLinker will not miss them again.

Our experience of manually handling returns that included linking and changing a field, resulted in an average productivity of about 25 e-mails per hour. That comes to almost four hours for the same 100 records.

Not the least of the enhancements included in BounceLinker is an optional function to add a track (automated process or AP) that uses an e-mail template to notify the user that they have been removed. Acknowledging the removal in a polite fashion is so unusual, that you will, for sure, gain any available positive reaction from the contact. Especially in cases where you have sent an e-mail blast to your customer list, this extra personal touch will go far to assure that you will continue to have a good positive relationship with your customer in the future.

Our positive experience with BounceLinker

Again and again, our experience with BounceLinker is a renewal of faith on the part of our customers that there are software products on the market that actually pay for themselves in the short term. With the software vendor's new 'pay as you go' business model now in place, we do not know of any other software that so obviously provides immediate tangible benefits from using it.

There is no way that the experience of managing a needed set of tasks in about 15 minutes instead of four hours is not immediately impressive.

April, 2003 – Clayton Pitts

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