

The American Red Cross Makes an Impact with Return Path's Email Optimization Solutions

For the American Red Cross, no crisis is too small. It responds to more than 70,000 disasters each year, providing emergency assistance and disaster relief to individuals, families, and entire communities in times of crisis. Their aid services, education programs, and blood donation efforts impact millions. Thousands of volunteers and donors are at the foundation of this organization and Eric Livingston, Senior Manager of Marketing Operations at the American Red Cross, relies on email every day to grow the relationship and communicate with this crucial group.

"Email is critical to the success of American Red Cross," said Eric. "Not only is it vital for our fundraising efforts, but we rely on it to send emergency notifications. If our emails don't reach the inbox, we can't keep our subscribers updated on current issues and topics, so maintaining a good sender reputation and high inbox placement is important to us."

Overcoming Challenges with New Service Provider

When the Red Cross transitioned to a new email service provider (ESP), they saw a major spike in spam filtering at some of the nation's largest mailbox providers, including complete blocking at Gmail, which holds 20% of its most active subscribers. Knowing this could have serious implications for the Red Cross' fundraising efforts, Eric reached out to Return Path's professional services team to help him identify and correct the problem.

"They delivered a comprehensive audit and report that helped us understand what was happening and what we could do to fix our deliverability," said Eric.

The Return Path professional services team discovered the new IP address and domain name that accompanied the ESP transition was a major culprit of the increased filtering. Mailbox providers frequently correlate new or unestablished IP addresses with spam senders. As they dug deeper into the Red Cross' sending practices, Return Path realized that the Red Cross was also sending high volumes of mail to inactive subscribers and spam traps. Both parties worked to develop a plan that focused on using subscriber engagement to increase the reputation of their new sending IP address and improve deliverability.

"Using Return Path's data, we targeted our most engaged subscribers and significantly cleaned our mailing list," said Eric. "Focusing on this active audience produced immediate results. Our spam complaints went down; we encountered fewer spam traps, and we saw our Sender Score rise to nearly 100%."

Connecting with Donors

His team came up with a sophisticated segmentation strategy built off of Return Path data that allows them to send messages customized to the receiver's region, interest, and donor status. They pay particular attention to nurturing new donors who will likely donate again with the right messaging.

"It's all about staying top-of-mind and relevant to our audience," said Eric. "If we're not in their inbox, then we're not on their mind. That hurts fundraising efforts and our ability to help our communities."

Segmenting his list also helps improve the frequency and audience he can send to when he conducts testing.

“We review what worked for us in the past and what didn’t,” said Eric. “Then we figure out the best formula for us to use going forward. Monitoring the data we get from Return Path, I get a better picture of the risks and results when we test new things.”

Optimizing for Success

Eric consults the Return Path team on any changes to his regular sending, like when he launches a re-engagement campaign to inactive subscribers or when he increases his sending volume around the holidays. Return Path’s guidance and recommendations ensure optimal delivery, every time.

Today, the Red Cross sends more than 4 million messages a month and receives an inbox placement rate of more than 96%, with spam placement at less than 1%.

With their sender reputation, they’ve been accepted into Return Path’s Certification program — an industry leading whitelist filled with best-in-class senders. Belonging to this list signals to mailbox providers that you are a safe and reputable sender, and it will help ensure inbox placement for the Red Cross’ disaster notifications and fundraising efforts.

Author’s Note: This article originally appeared on ReturnPath.com