

## Case Study: The Elijah List

### Connecting the Community

When Michael Wilhelm started to see his email delivery statistics begin to decline for his hundreds of thousands of subscribers, one question needed answering: Was this temporary or a long-term trend?

As the administrator for The Elijah List, Michael is responsible for sending daily Christian news and sponsored content to two large groups of email subscribers. The organization's total sending activity yields more than 50 million emails per month. That means even a small dip in deliverability can greatly affect revenue, while on the positive side, it doesn't take long to see a trend develop.

The Elijah List has been connecting Christian readers for two decades. Its readership base is dedicated and as opted-in as subscribers can be. Its content is relevant, consistent, and well-written, and the sponsors are top advertisers of Christian services and products including books and CDs.

This means, as Michael knew, there was no reason the Breaking Daily News nor the Encouraging Words advertising programs should suffer a delivery problem. It had to do with his Email Service Provider.

### Why the ESP Matters

The choice of an Email Service Provider (ESP) can have a tremendous effect on an organization's ability to send content with a high probability for reaching the inbox. Even doing everything perfectly, a service provider with a limited set of server IP addresses can create enormous problems. To protect those servers, ESPs often seek to protect those addresses by 'throttling' a large batch send into smaller batches. This can negatively affect the reader's experience, driving down engagement metrics.



The Elijah List hosted its campaigns with an ESP that followed a strategy of limiting its sending server IPs, creating a number of big problems, such as:

- Mailings could take up to three hours, so the morning send was barely over before the afternoon send would begin
- The mailings were never throttled in order, so some recipients would get their emails less than a half-hour apart, while others would get one at the beginning of the day and one at the end
- If the shared server hosted another email sender with a bad reputation or invalid email addresses, The Elijah List's mailings would suffer low deliverability
- If the shared server was blacklisted by any Internet Service Provider (ISP) such as AOL, their mailings to those customers might not be received at all

In addition, Michael found that the customer service provided by his ESP was spotty, with slow response times and limited technical assistance. Dealing with blacklists, normally a critical function of the provider's support department, was sometimes given a low or nonexistent priority. As a sender with a tight schedule of large volume mailings, Michael had no time to deal with blacklist monitors individually.

It was time to explore alternatives.

## Reliance on a Previous Relationship

The Elijah List had previously worked with Net Atlantic as its Email Service Provider, when their sending needs and budget were different. Net Atlantic had provided consistent service over the years, with a focus on providing the technical knowledge, a rich understanding of each customer's concerns and needs, and support staff who were willing to seek a variety of solutions to helping raise deliverability and avoid blacklists.



With the problems presented by his existing ESP, Michael knew that Net Atlantic would be determined to meeting the needs of The Elijah List and address those issues directly. The biggest hurdle was the ramp-up time for his large mailings. For Net Atlantic, the company knew The Elijah List's strong content would favor a high deliverability rate, and achieve Michael's goals quickly. The requirements were:

- Ramp up email sending rapidly for The Elijah List's two daily mailings
- Provide detailed and dedicated support and technology assistance
- Avoid batching and throttling to complete the mailings within minutes
- Provide data analysis of content to raise deliverability rates
- Directly work with blacklist monitors and immediately address server IP issues

When Michael provided the content, the staff at Net Atlantic were able to provide feedback based on its knowledge of deliverability factors, including subject line text and message formatting. The two lists, each with a few hundred thousand subscribers, with nearly a third of subscribers overlapping, were uploaded into a bank of sending servers.

Net Atlantic hosts a larger number of servers than many other providers, giving the company a great deal of flexibility for message sending rates and deliverability. Due to this factor, as well as strong collaboration between the company and The Elijah List, the ramp-up time took only one week.

By the end of the first week, The Elijah List saw its delivery rates and sending times beating the metrics it had received from the other provider. Instead of taking nearly three hours, the sending time for its lists took less than 30 minutes. This means the experience for readers is more consistent, raising engagement, and improving revenue from its advertising format.

When sending advertising-supported newsletters, the percentage of readers who respond to a more consistent mailing schedule can be business-critical. Combined with higher deliverability, lower blacklisting rates and a quicker response to blacklists, mailing consistency is a powerful driver of success.

Working with Net Atlantic, Michael was finally able to see The Elijah List's two mailings perform the way they should. The provider's dedication, attention to detail, technical knowledge, server flexibility, and support response were all a factor in driving continued success for The Elijah List.