Best Practices in Email Marketing

10 Reasons Why StrongMail Should Be on Your ESP Shortlist

Get the information you need to make an informed decision about your next email marketing partner.

StrongMail

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On average, companies switch email service providers (ESPs) every two years, and the top reasons are pretty consistent: lack of features, data integration challenges, deliverability problems and cost. The problem is that once companies switch, they often encounter the same issues with the new provider – and that's because all of the tier-one ESPs offer nearly identical products, services and usage models.

StrongMail offers a different approach. From how it delivers its technology to its pricing model and breadth of services, StrongMail provides email marketers with a new model for maximizing the performance of their email programs.

There are 10 main reasons that are driving leading brands like Intercontinental Hotels Group, Viacom and Zappos to rely on StrongMail. This whitepaper expounds on the reasons provided below to give you valuable information for choosing your next email marketing partner.

1. **Deliverability:** With our powerful combination of high-deliverability technology and expert services, StrongMail enables its clients to realize some of the highest deliverability rates in the industry.

2. **Integration:** StrongMail's unique approach to connecting and leveraging customer data eliminates typical ESP challenges around data integration, synchronization and latency.

3. **Cost:** Instead of charging costly CPMs, StrongMail's unique ownership pricing provides companies with the lowest total cost of ownership of any tier-one marketing solution. The more email you send, the greater your ROI.

4. **Control:** StrongMail provides marketers with a dedicated email marketing solution, which means no latency or queues, superior data security and accurate reporting.

5. **Performance, Scalability and Reliability:** StrongMail's patented technology maximizes performance and reliability while offering infinite scalability to accommodate the growth of your email programs.

6. **Social Media Integration:** Going beyond simple sharing, StrongMail is a full-service social media partner, helping companies implement impactful programs with clear objectives and trackable results.

7. **Transactional:** StrongMail's innovative transactional email platform enables business users to create and manage dynamic, fully branded transactional email templates that drive revenue through relevant cross- and up-sell offers.

8. **Centralization:** StrongMail's integration capabilities make it an ideal solution for centralizing all email streams, which is essential for maintaining consistent communications and streamlining processes.

9. **Expert Strategy, Creative and Production Services:** StrongMail offers its clients a full array of services to help ensure their success, from high-level strategy to tactical execution.

10. **The StrongMail Difference:** Instead of forcing companies to consume our products and services in a set manner, we give them ultimate control and flexibility to leverage them in a way that's right for their business.

INTRODUCTION

If you're currently in the market for a new email service provider, you're probably having difficulty gauging the difference between the vendors on your short list, and with good reason: all of the top-tier email service providers offer nearly identical products, services and usage models.

StrongMail is different, and that difference provides tangible value to the businesses we serve, including companies like Charles Schwab, Wal-Mart, Zappos, Viacom, Travelocity, Intercontinental Hotels Group and more than 500 others. But despite our large, high-profile client list, you probably won't find us in email vendor evaluations from analysts like Forrester Research, because, as we said, "we're different." However, that's exactly why leading brands choose StrongMail, and why StrongMail should be on your shortlist.

This white paper will present the top ten reasons why you should consider StrongMail as your next email service provider. Whether you're looking to take your email programs to the next level, address deliverability challenges, achieve better ROI or simply get better service, you should be talking to StrongMail. Read on to find out how StrongMail can help.

Email deliverability remains one of the industry's top challenges. Every email that goes undelivered is a missed opportunity to make a sale, provide service or deepen a customer relationship. And with 20 percent of permission-based email not making it to the inbox on average, delivery issues continue to erode businesses' bottom lines.

StrongMail understands that deliverability is mission-critical to your program goals. Our customers leverage the powerful combination of high-deliverability technology and expert services to realize some of the highest deliverability rates in the industry. With StrongMail, you get:

Patented Delivery Technology – StrongMail was built from the ground up to address the delivery challenges created by high-volume mailings. Our patented technology enables companies to send relevant, dynamic messages quickly and reliably. Email is automatically throttled based on a receiving ISP's delivery parameters, which are continually updated via our industry-leading Live Updates service.

Sender Reputation Ownership – StrongMail offers dedicated email solutions, which means there's no sharing of your sender reputation. With StrongMail, you own your IP addresses, instead of renting them from an ESP and potentially sharing them with other clients. ISPs rely heavily on sender reputation to determine whether or not to filter incoming mail, so owning your email reputation is critical for ensuring long-term deliverability.

Smart Bounce Management – Removing bad addresses from your list is essential for maintaining list hygiene and a good sender reputation. However, every ISP has their own way of classifying bounces, resulting in a deluge of inconsistent and hard-to-understand failure messages. StrongMail's unique Smart Bounce Management technology normalizes all the data to provide clear categories for each failure type, along with actionable advice for addressing each failure.

Email Authentication – Authenticating your email via the established protocols (Sender-ID, Domain Keys, DKIM, SPF, etc.) is the first step in achieving solid deliverability, and StrongMail makes it easy to implement and manage. Because our deliverability experts are involved with shaping new and existing protocols, we have unique insight for keeping our solutions current with industry changes.

Real-Time Reporting – Finding out that a campaign was blocked at Hotmail isn't as helpful after the send is complete. StrongMail's real-time reporting enables early identification of problems so that they can be addressed in real time. Quickly see delivery rates across your top ISPs and pause mailings to address problems as they occur. Know why your email went undelivered, as well as recommendations for correcting problems.

Deliverability Services – Given the often confusing and changing nature of deliverability challenges, it's important to have a partner that has the expertise to help you get your messages delivered. StrongMail has a team of deliverability experts that work with our clients every day to optimize campaigns, share best practices and resolve issues with ISPs. By letting StrongMail handle your deliverability, you can focus your efforts on driving more revenue from your programs.

> *"StrongMail's bounce management reporting is a significant step forward for us and something we've been hoping to have for a long time. It makes bounce management and deliverability monitoring much easier. With the advanced level of information now at our finger tips, we can take immediate action on the known culprits, keeping our list clean and allowing us more time to focus on what is important – the best possible consumer experience."*
>
> *Jennifer Mueller*
> *Global CRM Technology Manager*

[1] Return Path Email Deliverability Report, February 2010

REASON 2 INTEGRATION

> *"Delivering highly personalized and targeted messages that are both expected and valued by our guests is a top priority for IHG. In addition to providing us with real-time access to response data, StrongMail's platform offers us more integration capabilities to segment our lists based on individual customer preferences, behaviors and events."*
>
> **Kevin Hickey**
> *Global Manager, Lifecycle & Email Marketing*
> *InterContinental Hotels Group*

Personalizing messages with relevant content and offers is an essential email marketing best practice, but many marketers struggle to fully leverage customer data in their email campaigns. With most ESPs, the process of bringing your data into the email system is often a multi-step and manual process that creates latency and synchronization challenges. The net result is that marketers often forego this complicated process, which reduces the effectiveness of their campaigns.

StrongMail overcomes these challenges with its unique approach to connecting and leveraging customer data, which offers the following benefits:

Direct Connection – StrongMail offers a direct connection with all customer databases and business systems. This direct connection not only makes your customer data easily and immediately accessible, it also means fewer connections and opportunities for data loss.

Real-Time Data – Because StrongMail automatically pulls relevant data directly from customer databases at the time of mailing, marketers can rest assured that their customers are receiving messages and offers based on their most recent purchases and interactions with their brand.

Extensive APIs – An extensive set of APIs makes it easy to integrate StrongMail's campaign management solution with existing workflows, businesses processes and applications (CRM systems, databases, e-commerce engines, etc.). Tapping into these systems not only drives greater performance from your campaigns, it extends the life and ROI of your existing solutions.

Pre-Built Integration – In addition to its APIs, StrongMail also offers pre-built integrations with popular business applications, such as Unica, SAP, Teradata, Salesforce. com, Omniture, Coremetrics and others. Take advantage of proven connections to dynamically generate content based on real-time customer behaviors, preferences and demographics.

REASON 3 COST

With traditional ESPs, many marketers find that their costs tend to spiral out of control as they increase their number of campaigns, integrate with social channels or grow their email list. At the heart of this problem is the CPM (cost per thousand) pricing model, which essentially means the more email you send, the more you pay. Often times, the money set aside for strategy and optimization is siphoned off to pay for the increased volume. This unfortunate sacrifice is at the direct of expense of email program revenue and ROI.

StrongMail takes a different approach that rewards marketers with increased ROI as email volumes grow. We offer our customers the lowest total cost of ownership of any tier-one marketing solution through:

No CPM Fees – StrongMail offers our products via a unique ownership pricing model, which means you buy the system for a one-time fee instead of paying ongoing CPM fees. With this model, marketers can make decisions about email volume and frequency based on best practices and strategy instead of cost considerations.

No Hidden Fees – The simplicity of StrongMail's pricing model means there is no place for extraneous fees to hide. Instead of surprising its customers with unexpected expenses, StrongMail presents the costs of running its solutions in a clear, straightforward manner at the onset of the relationship. StrongMail's license model also helps marketers stay in budget by ensuring consistent costs month after month. Rather than projecting costs based on planned campaigns, marketers can focus on optimizing them for maximum effect.

Fast ROI – StrongMail's unique pricing model enables marketers to "own" their email marketing, instead of leasing a SaaS solution year after year. Not only does your ROI increase dramatically with every passing year, it is also accelerated by the more email you send. Many of our enterprise customers see positive ROI in the first six months, resulting in hundreds of thousands – and even millions – of dollars of savings within 12 - 24 months.

> *"Switching to StrongMail has enabled us to cost-effectively grow our email marketing programs while also improving deliverability and providing our customers with more relevant messages. Using StrongMail's data integration capabilities and dynamic content engine, we have streamlined the management of our email programs and increased our level of segmentation and targeting."*
>
> **Suzanne Weschke**
> *eCommerce Marketing Director*
> *Rawlings Gear*

REASON 4 CONTROL

Because most ESPs offer their solution via a one-to-many, software-as-a-service model, marketers are inherently competing for system resources with hundreds, or even thousands, of other clients. This arrangement can have a big impact on your ability to act quickly and drive the most ROI from your email programs. To be effective, you need to deliver campaigns when they make sense for your business, not when your system happens to be available.

StrongMail provides marketers with a dedicated email marketing solution. Whether deployed on-premise or on-demand, you're accessing a system that is only accessible by your organization. As a result, you have all the systems resources at your disposal, giving you ultimate control over the timing of your campaigns.

No Queues or Send Latency – When it comes to sending the right message to the right person at the right time, you shouldn't overlook the importance of that last element. Delivering your messages during the window that has proven to be most effective with your target audience is critical for getting them to open and act on your message. With StrongMail's dedicated, high-performance technology, there is no waiting in a queue. Our customers are successfully delivering millions of highly dynamic messages within a matter of minutes – not hours or days.

Security – Having a dedicated system also helps keep your data safe. With StrongMail, there's no need to shuffle data back and forth with a third party. Instead, you keep control over your customer data at all times. With consumer concern over data privacy and security at an all-time high, the ability to control customer information is becoming increasingly important.

Accurate Reporting – You can't analyze and optimize your email campaigns if you don't have access to reliable data on relevant performance metrics. The lack of industry standards for key metrics such as delivered, opens and clicks, means that you need the ability to review and potentially adjust how these metrics are calculated. StrongMail understands that there is no one-size-fits-all reporting schema that will serve all business, which is why we allow you to create custom reports to fit your unique needs.

> *"With our prior system, it would take us anywhere from four days to a week to get an email ready to go out, and now, with StrongMail, we can do it in two hours. StrongMail has freed up time we didn't have before, so we can now focus more time on strategy and developing more effective campaigns to drive revenue."*
>
> **Jennifer Land**
> Director of E-commerce
> Franklin Covey Products

REASON 5 PERFORMANCE, SCALABILITY AND RELIABILITY

According to a recent study by Email Data Source, there is a direct correlation between email volume and revenue; therefore, it is critical that marketers rely on a high-performance email system to ensure timely delivery. Any down time or delays in delivery can result in a missed business opportunity.

StrongMail's patented email delivery and management technology was developed to maximize performance, reliability and deliverability. Infinitely scalable, StrongMail can easily accommodate the growth of your email programs, both in terms of volume and sophistication. Having a dedicated solution also means that your performance is never compromised by competing resources.

Scalability – As you incorporate more advanced email marketing strategies into your programs and grow your subscriber list, you need to make sure your email solution can keep pace. StrongMail's comprehensive email marketing solution is specifically designed to meet the needs of demanding, enterprise-level marketers. With its array of advanced features and proven technology that easily scales with increased volume, you don't have to worry about outgrowing your system.

Near Real-Time Delivery – Inbox arrival time has an equal impact on relevancy as the content it contains. Whether you're timing messages for when the recipient is most likely to see and act on it, or you need to get millions of emails delivered 10 minutes before a big sale, StrongMail's proprietary Burst Technology makes it all possible. By providing marketers with near real-time delivery, StrongMail enables marketers to leverage the timing of their campaigns in a more strategic and profitable way.

Reliability – The strategy, creative and design that you invest into your email campaigns is only effective if your messages get delivered. A reliable email marketing solution is always available and ready to successfully deploy your campaigns. Many of the world's biggest brands rely on StrongMail's patented technology to ensure reliable and consistent delivery of their marketing and transactional messages. Lost or delayed messages go beyond a missed marketing opportunity; they can also generate customer service calls and damage your brand.

> *"StrongMail's ability to get our sales event emails to members in near-real time is a huge benefit and competitive advantage for our business. With StrongMail, we're actually providing a better experience for our members [than we were with our prior ESP] while lowering our email costs."*
>
> **Kevin Diamond**
> *CTO*
> *HauteLook*

REASON 6 SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION

> *"StrongMail Influencer has enabled Mint.com to better leverage social media to significantly increase conversions and expand our reach. StrongMail's approach of tapping social motivators to drive sharing behavior was unique in the marketplace, and its easy integration with our existing email program and comprehensive testing and tracking made it the logical choice for us."*
>
> **Donna Wells**
> *Chief Marketing Officer*
> *Mint.com*

The explosion of Twitter, Facebook and other social networks have made social media a hot topic among online marketers, however they often don't know how or where to start. A number of email marketing firms have come out with social media solutions, but they are usually limited to adding sharing links and Facebook badges to email templates. This is a shortsighted approach that doesn't properly leverage the dynamics or potential of the channel.

StrongMail was the first top-tier email provider to embrace social media with the acquisition of social marketing firm PopularMedia in June 2009. Going beyond simple sharing, StrongMail is a full-service social media partner, helping companies implement impactful programs with a clear objective and trackable results.

Integrated Solutions – Adding share links to an email template is not social media integration. StrongMail's social media marketing products are fully integrated into its email marketing solutions. From one interface, you can launch targeted social email programs to acquire new customers, increase customer loyalty and boost retention. More importantly, you can easily view cross-channel performance and conversion metrics.

Beyond Simple Sharing – In addition to its social sharing tools, StrongMail's social media marketing solutions include a referral marketing platform and social media campaign management application. With StrongMail, you can listen to conversations, identify your biggest brand influencers and motivate them to share your brand with their networks. StrongMail's social media experts also mean that you don't have to go it alone. Lastly, StrongMail offers its social media tools as standalone solutions, which gives you the flexibility to use them with other online channels.

REASON 7 TRANSACTIONAL

Transactional emails are some of the most critical messages for establishing and maintaining profitable customer relationships. When a customer registers on your site or makes a purchase, the resulting confirmation email is your opportunity to set expectations for the value that you will provide moving forward. Sending a plain-text email is not making the best first impression.

StrongMail offers companies an industry-leading transactional email platform that can integrate directly with the e-commerce, CRM and reservations systems that generate these critical communications. With StrongMail, business users can create and manage dynamic, fully branded transactional email templates – without involving IT. StrongMail also puts the marketer in control to monitor deliverability and track performance of personalized cross- and up-sell offers.

Branding & Personalization – Generic, text-based transactional emails are in direct conflict to the highly branded and dynamic website experience that generates them. StrongMail eliminates any technical hurdles from transforming transactional messaging into personalized and properly branded messages that reinforce your brand identity and drive revenue through the insertion of relevant offers based on customer behaviors and preferences.

Real-time Visibility & Tracking – Transactional email enjoys substantially higher open and click-through rates than traditional promotional messages, but many systems prevent marketers from tracking this data. Without proper tracking, you are unable to address deliverability problems or optimize content for maximum engagement. StrongMail gives you real-time visibility into the performance of event-triggered and email marketing campaigns from one interface, as well as the tools to improve them.

Reliability & Stability – When a confirmation email goes undelivered, you risk hurting your brand, as well as the expense of the consumer contacting you via a more costly channel. StrongMail's enterprise-grade delivery technology provides you with the reliability you need to ensure consistent delivery of your transactional email streams. Selecting StrongMail to power your transactional email doesn't require switching existing email marketing providers; however, using StrongMail for both your marketing and transactional email introduces new levels of control and tracking.

> *"With the help of StrongMail's email technology, we expect to drive $750,000 from our transactional email program by delivering relevant cross- and up-sell messages in our operational email."*
>
> **Shera Shrago**
> *Senior Manager of*
> *Interactive Marketing*
> *FootSmart.com*

Every email stream between you and your customer is an opportunity to build your brand, enhance the customer experience, drive revenue and collect valuable data for targeting. Email centralization gives marketers one view into all email streams, which is essential for controlling and coordinating the key factors in a holistic customer communication strategy, including segmentation of data, customer communication preferences, and managing multiple brands or classes of mail.

StrongMail's ability to directly connect with each back-end system generating email makes it an ideal solution for email centralization. With StrongMail, email marketers can ensure that all email communications reflect best practices for delivery, frequency and relevancy. This control is critical to prevent customer burnout from too many messages sent to a single consumer from multiple departments. Plus, centralizing on one solution dramatically streamlines processes and introduces efficiencies for strengthening customer relationships and profitability.

Single View of the Customer – Only by consolidating email response data for all email streams through centralization can marketers gain a true single view of the customer that enables them to better target their customers and understand the performance of their campaigns. With StrongMail, marketers can quickly review the performance of all customer emails – from opens and clicks to deliverability – and then optimize their programs accordingly.

Process Controls – When you have multiple departments sending customer emails, there are multiple chances for errors that can severely damage both your brand and sender reputation. With StrongMail, you can carefully manage email frequency, as well as ensure that best practices are being followed in terms of list hygiene, authentication, unsubscribe processing, etc. Not only does this facilitate a better customer experience, it provides control for adhering to CAN-SPAM.

Operational Efficiencies – Maintaining multiple email systems can be expensive in terms of their inherent costs and the physical resources required for managing them. StrongMail enables companies to dramatically reduce their email costs by consolidating all of their email streams on one system. In addition to saving money via streamlined processes and operational efficiencies, StrongMail enables marketers to increase revenue by adding relevant offers into transactional email streams.

"Apart from improving our email systems, by using StrongMail as a fully-integrated foundation, we now have a platform in which we can very quickly grow new email initiatives."

Andrew Hossom
Vice President of Marketing
Fox Sports Interactive

REASON 9 EXPERT STRATEGY, CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION SERVICES

Email marketing best practices are continually changing and being refined, which is why agency services are an essential tool for helping you stay ahead of the curve. Leveraging on-demand expertise and guidance that are suited for both your business and your market is essential for differentiating your brand from the competition and driving higher conversions.

StrongMail is more than just a provider of innovative technology for email and social media; we also offer our clients a full array of services to help ensure their success. Whether you need strategic direction to revamp a program, creative help to optimize an existing template or extra production resources to get your campaign out the door, StrongMail's Strategic Services team is a vital extension of your marketing team. As a provider of services and technology, StrongMail also has insight into how the interplay of both can maximize the potential of your programs.

Strategic Services – StrongMail works closely with its clients to help them optimize key programs, develop new ones and engage in strategic testing and measurement. With StrongMail, you get a strategic partner with in-depth expertise in developing engaging, repeatable programs that drive measurable results. Whether you are looking to improve targeting, implement a preference center or launch a new lifecycle campaign, StrongMail is ready to provide any level of assistance to make your email objectives a reality.

Creative Services – Creative isn't just a reflection on your brand, it also plays a critical role in getting your customers to act on your message. StrongMail has experience developing compelling creative for companies across a wide variety of industries. More importantly, StrongMail leverages cohesive testing strategies to ensure that any new creative treatments are delivering the best results for the company's business.

Production & Management Services - A lack of internal resources should never be an excuse for missing a market opportunity. Available on a long-term or project basis, StrongMail's Production Services range from coding HTML to configuring a new program. For even more support, StrongMail offers full-service campaign distribution and management, including program performance monitoring and optimization.

> *"By leveraging StrongMail Influencer and the expertise of StrongMail Strategic Services team, we were able to develop a referral program that generated new Rewards members at 3 times the rate of our previous efforts."*
>
> **Ed Macri**
> *VP of Advertising & Business Intelligence*
> *CSN Stores*

REASON 10 THE STRONGMAIL DIFFERENCE

> *"You shouldn't have to continually change your ESP as your needs change, but that's what the majority of companies do. StrongMail believes there is a better way. By providing our customers with flexible technology, comprehensive services and cost-effective pricing, StrongMail is shaking up the status quo. Join hundreds of leading companies, including two of the top three global retailers, and find out how StrongMail can push you ahead of your competitors."*
>
> **Sam Cece**
> CEO
> StrongMail

You'd be hard pressed to find a marketer who didn't position their company as being different from the competition, but at StrongMail, "different" actually means something.

StrongMail has taken a completely different approach to helping companies maximize their investment in email marketing. Instead of forcing companies to consume our products and services in a set manner, we give them ultimate control and flexibility to leverage them in a way that's right for their business.

StrongMail is truly a different kind of company, as evidenced by how we deliver our technology and services. Of course being different isn't always better, but it is for the hundreds of global brands that rely on our solutions. Choosing StrongMail means taking advantage of the following benefits:

Flexibility – Whether deployed on-premise, off-site or on-demand, StrongMail gives you the ability to consume all of our solutions in the way that's right for your business today, and the flexibility to seamlessly switch deployment models to meet your needs tomorrow.

No CPMs – When you're charged by the email, the growth of your programs negatively affect your return on investment. By not charging CPM fees, StrongMail's pricing model offers the opposite effect – the more email your send, the greater your ROI.

Dedicated Technology – With StrongMail technology, you are always accessing a dedicated solution. It doesn't matter how you leverage our technology, our full resources are always available to get your campaigns delivered quickly and reliably.

Full Services – With its comprehensive array of strategic, deliverability and technical services, StrongMail's resident experts are ready to provide as much assistance as you require to get the most out of your email and social media programs.

Emerging Channels – As evidenced by the innovation and leadership position StrongMail has taken in the social media marketing arena, we are committed to providing our customers with the cutting-edge tools necessary to take advantage of new and emerging online channels.

CONCLUSION

There are plenty of reasons why StrongMail should be on your ESP shortlist, not the least of which is the number of leading brands who have already evaluated, deployed and generated results from our solutions. If you would like to learn how StrongMail can improve your email marketing results while reducing your costs, please contact Net Atlantic at **877-263-8285** or visit **www.netatlantic.com**.

StrongMail

ABOUT STRONGMAIL SYSTEMS

StrongMail Systems provides businesses with commercial-grade, on-premise solutions for marketing and transactional email. StrongMail integrates its proven email delivery, tracking and campaign management software on high-performance servers that are optimized for maximum deliverability.

In addition to providing superior control, security and integration capabilities, StrongMail's in-house approach offers companies a more powerful and cost-effective alternative to homegrown or outsourced solutions. Hundreds of companies worldwide rely on StrongMail's solutions to power their mission-critical customer communications.

A Silicon Valley company, StrongMail is headquartered in Redwood City, CA, and is funded by Sequoia Capital, Evercore Partners, Globespan Capital Partners and DAG Ventures.

www.strongmail.com

Net Atlantic

ABOUT NET ATLANTIC

Established in 1995, Net Atlantic was one of the first email service providers and Web site hosting companies. Net Atlantic's goal is to help businesses and non-profit organizations succeed online with effective email marketing services and Internet tools.

To learn more about Net Atlantic, please visit **www.netatlantic.com**.

Contact Net Atlantic today.
877-263-8285
sales@netatlantic.com

Net Atlantic, Inc.
10 Federal Street, Suite 26
Salem, MA 01970
P 978-219-1910
F 978-744-0037

www.netatlantic.com