

Case Study: Cabela's

Major outdoor retailer re-
covers significant number
of subscriber emails



Situation

Cabela's[®], the World's Foremost Outfitter[®], had amassed a large number of suspected "bad" email addresses. The retailer wanted to confirm that these emails were truly invalid, so that it could ensure that all opt-in subscribers wishing to receive Cabela's communications were included in weekly email marketing campaigns.

Solution

Cabela's decided to purchase an email cleansing service from Experian QAS to identify any potentially valid email addresses in the suspected bad email address population.

Results

Cabela's was able to realize a return on the investment in the email batch cleansing service within two weeks. A sizable portion of the suspected bad emails was recovered, tested by the marketing team and then added back into the retailer's marketing database, meaning that Cabela's is now able to contact as many subscribers as possible through email.

"We reached ROI on the project in far less than two weeks. The data test had given us an estimate of what to expect from the cleansing – but the results far exceeded expectations. This was 100% worth our time and money."

- Dean Wynkoop, Manager,
Data Management

Introduction

Cabela's is a multi-channel retailer with roots in the direct catalog business. With 29 destination stores across the United States, as well as the largest ecommerce site for outdoor gear, the retailer offers a unique shopping experience that can entertain a family for an entire day.

Outdoor enthusiasts turn to Cabela's for superior clothing, equipment and merchandise for fishing, hunting, camping and other outdoor activities. Cabela's customers are passionate about the outdoors – and passionate about the retailer. Many choose to subscribe to Cabela's communications.

A Common Problem

As all online retailers – and marketers – know, dealing with bad email addresses is a widespread challenge in today's email-centric atmosphere. Retailers often do not have a system in place for recording, tracking and analyzing bounced emails, meaning that a potentially significant number of subscribers do not receive regular communications, special offers, and other emails.

Cabela's faced this challenge head-on. The retailer collects email addresses through various channels, including in-store, online and through the call center. Cabela's ecommerce site uses

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standard front-end email validation to confirm form and syntax only, and other channels do not check emails at the point of entry.

Cabela's had monitored email bounces for years, separating out any bounced addresses from the general marketing population. In attempting to minimize email spam, Cabela's did not distinguish between hard and soft bounces – all were treated similarly.

It is important to note that while both hard and soft bounces signify that an email has not reached its intended recipient, there are big differences between the two types. Hard bounces are in fact "bad" emails: emails that have invalid domains, user names, or other errors that cause an email to be undeliverable or rejected by the recipient domain.

Soft bounces, in contrast, signify that a single email has not been delivered, not that all future emails will fail. Soft bounces happen when a recipient's inbox is full, when the recipient's server is busy, or under certain other conditions. Emails that have soft bounced may not be "bad" – and therefore could be an important asset to a marketer's database.

Over a 10-year period of collecting email addresses, Cabela's pool of bad emails had grown considerably. Cabela's direct marketing team wondered if any portion of the

suspected bad addresses was in fact valid – but the retailer had not come across a suitable way to identify the true bad emails.

The Fast and Easy Solution

Cabela's entered into discussions with Experian QAS, and quickly discovered a solution to the bad email problem: a batch cleansing of suspected invalid emails. QAS offers an email batch cleansing service, which checks email addresses for several different types of errors. At any point in the process, if an email fails a certain check, it will be deemed "invalid."

First, the email syntax is examined. Next, the email address is tested to ensure that the user name format is compliant with the particular email domain. Then the email address is compared to an internal database of known bad email addresses. Finally, a request is sent to the email service provider to determine whether the user actually exists (only certain domains allow this last check).

After a quick data test on a sample of bad email addresses, Cabela's purchased a batch cleansing of the email database. According to Dean Wynkoop, manager of data management for the retailer, the project was fairly low-effort from Cabela's perspective. "The cleansing process was easy for us – we just sent the file off to QAS. Our biggest effort was working with our IT group to create

a new process to 'unflag' certain bounced emails."

Cabela's soon received the processed file back from Experian QAS. A significant portion of the email addresses were designated as valid, so Wynkoop's team updated their marketing database with the new data.

Measuring the Impact

Cabela's began testing the recovered email addresses through email marketing communications. Two weeks later, Wynkoop was more than satisfied with the results. "We reached ROI on the project in far less than two weeks. The data test had given us an estimate of what to expect from the cleansing – but the results far exceeded my expectations. This was 100% worth our time and money."

Armed with greater confidence in the quality of its email data, Cabela's can ensure that as many subscribers as possible are able to receive its weekly marketing communications, maximizing return from these campaigns.

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