



The Magnificent 7 List Rental Essentials

By Rich Eldert

I deal with email list rentals everyday and I've seen it all. I've seen great lists do great things for great clients. And, I've seen less than e-savvy firms send subpar messaging and blame me for their poor results. When I talk with prospective clients I tell them they need three things to make their email campaign work:

- A clean list from a reputable broker (me!!!)
- A list of people who want what you're selling (smart list definition)
- A message that will inspire your recipients to act (great creative)

I can name any number of agencies who produce great creative, including our in-house creative team, but I thought it would be more helpful to focus this post on what to look for in a list rental. So, here's a checklist that I call my **Magnificent 7 List Rental Essentials**:

1. **Use only opt-in mailing lists.** This not only complies with privacy laws but reduces the number of negative responses. Confirm this with your broker.
2. **Ask who's on the list.** A reputable broker or owner can tell you about the list and the people on it. For example: Where did the names come from, what kind of permissions did people give and what have these people responded to or purchased in the past few months?
3. **Ask about HTML.** Make sure your vendor can handle "rich media" and ask for the percentage of recipients who can view HTML.
4. **Ask about tracking responses.** A good vendor should be able to split the list and track not only responses to different messages but pass-along emails, click-through rates and URL information.
5. **Ask about list hygiene.** Your list should have no duplicate names and as few inaccuracies as humanly possible. Ask when the list was last used and how many times it's been used in the past few months. Also, be sure to ask how many bounce-backs it takes before a name is purged and when the list was last cleaned.
6. **Get a Service Level Agreement (SLA).** Any reputable vendor should be able to guarantee valid names and timely delivery – and many offer money-back guarantees. The last thing you want is end up labeled a spammer because of a poor list or a vendor guilty of shady practices.
7. **If a price sounds low the list quality probably is too.** In other words, if you're quoted a price below market value be wary of low quality that will probably yield low response rates.

One of the odd parts of renting a list is that you will never actually see the names and addresses you've paid for. Your broker/vendor will send your messages and track the responses, detailing response and click-through rates.

All of this boils down to one essential do-or-die market-place reality: a trustworthy, reputable, service-oriented broker can make or break your campaign. Your broker should be able to create or steer you to the ideal list to meet your marketing goals. Ask for references, talk to colleagues and consult with partners. You are risking time and money – and ultimately your reputation and bottom-line – on this list broker. They should be able to answer your questions and provide you with a great list that will help you get great results.