

Reactivation & Re-permissioning Best Practice Guide



Win back inactive customers and email
subscribers

Introduction

Email marketing reactivation strategies help to clean up companies' customer databases, reduce wasted emails and bring back potentially important customers, which can lead to increased conversion rates and revenue.

Although there will be a number of subscribers who are no longer interested in receiving your content and who will not be reengaged, it is crucial to establish which of your lapsed subscribers can be reactivated and which may eventually need to be removed from your list in order to get a true picture of the value of your subscriber list and the health of your database.

Email marketing re-permissioning strategies are the next stage on from this and aim to solicit a positive action to stay subscribed to receiving future emails, or for them to unsubscribe. After this kind of campaign has been sent out, you would remove those who do not give you permission to continue emailing from your database and future sends.

Studies have shown that as **many as 75%** (Marketing Sherpa) of the subscribers on a typical email file have not opened or clicked within the past 6 months, which can negatively impact response and deliverability rates

The number of people who take this action may be relatively small, particularly where this campaign follows on from a reactivation campaign already sent to people who are disengaged with your email marketing campaigns.

Email marketing re-engagement strategies are commonly put in place to reactivate inactive customers who have not visited your website (and taken a specific action, such as browsing or logging in to a membership site) or have not come back to make another purchase, in a period of time.

This is critical to do as the cost of acquiring new subscribers/customers is significantly higher than the cost of re-engaging lapsed subscribers, strategies to re-engage lapsed subscribers can generate attractive ROI.



Why Do Subscribers and Customers Stop Engaging?

Subscribers will disengage with your emails for many reasons including:

- Expectations of what they would receive and when were **not properly set on sign up**
- They received **too many emails** and felt overwhelmed
- They have started to use a **rival brand**
- They **no longer use that email** account (perhaps they have abandoned that account or moved jobs for example)
- They **don't find your content relevant** / interesting anymore
- They find your **content repetitive** and not adding value to them anymore
- Your emails are **not designed for engagement** on the device they commonly read on (mobile device for example)
- Due to **deliverability problems**, your emails are ending up in the spam folder and not being seen / are now in the inbox but you've lost the connection with the subscriber
- They prefer to receive information from **another source**

Mobile email will account for 22 to 77% of email opens, depending on your target audience, product and email type.

eMailmonday- "the Ultimate mobile email stats" (2018)

Although some subscribers may unsubscribe or register a complaint, many will just fall inactive.



Why Do Subscribers and Customers Stop Engaging?

When it comes to not taking action with your brand or purchasing again, this could also be down to:

TIP

Check your sign-up practices to ensure you have properly set expectations and gathered an explicit opt in so that subscribers know exactly what they will receive and WANT to receive it

- The subscriber's circumstances have changed
 - They're **no longer interested** in your products/services (but haven't unsubscribed)
 - They're **not currently interested** in your products/services (don't have a specific need now but may have in the future which is why they haven't taken the step to unsubscribe)
- Your **product purchase cycle is longer** – so there is longer in between purchases (e.g. booking a holiday may only be done once a year, or buying a bike every 5 years)
- They **may not know** about the different product categories your brand offers, outside of what they have already purchased from you



Email Marketing Re-Engagement Campaigns

When you see that a customer has been inactive with your brand for a period of time, it is prudent to consider implementing a campaign to encourage them back to make a purchase.

There are multiple campaigns you can implement around encouraging repeat purchases (e.g. from 1st to 2nd, 2nd to 3rd, or 3rd to 4th purchase for example), but here we are looking at those who have had a significant amount of time pass and not taken another action, whereas these types of campaigns will be automated before this point of perceived inactivity.

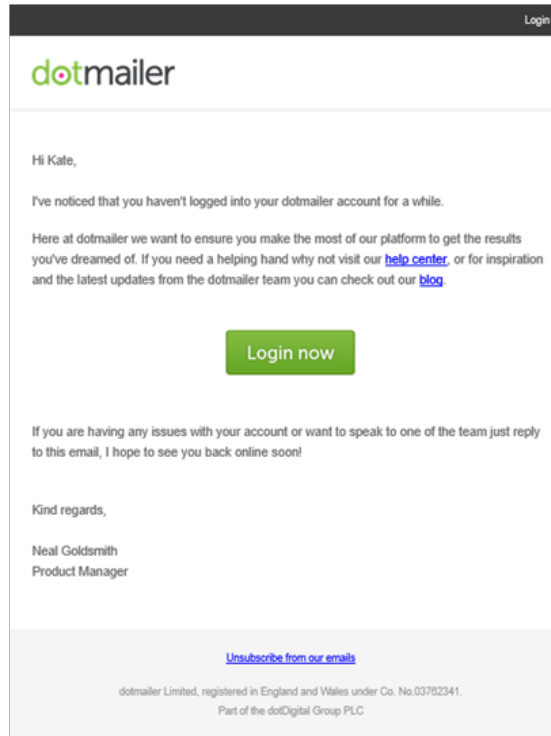
These re-engagement emails often feature a discount offer to come back to a retailer's site and make a purchase.

Example: Reactivation Email Not on The High Street

This email from Not on The High Street aims to reactivate the subscriber with a special offer to shop again as the primary messaging. However, they go one step further by also offering the inactive subscriber the chance to amend the types of messages they receive from the brand or unsubscribe all together. This type of approach allows them to stop inactivity faster by being upfront about the options. Plus, if the subscriber does choose to unsubscribe, NOTHS do a good job of adding clear links to their social media channels within the email to offer alternative ways to connect.



Email Marketing Re-Engagement Campaigns



This encouragement doesn't have to be associated directly to making another purchase – it could also be around not interacting with the brand at all (e.g. visiting the website), not logging in to an app, not taking advantage of a service they have already purchased from you or any other action you want to encourage your subscribers to take regularly.

Consider what the action is that you want to happen and how you can best encourage that. This may be through a simple reminder or may include an incentive of some description.

Example: Re-engagement Dotmailer

This email from Dotmailer is sent to customers who have not logged into the platform for a specific amount of time, to encourage them to come back and make the most of their account. The main call to action is to log in, but there is also secondary call to action located in the text that prompts people to visit the help centre or contact the team if you need help. They also encourage visiting the log for more inspiration.

As with an inactive email subscriber the timing that you choose to trigger this type of email will depend on your business and what a normal customer sales cycle is for you.



What should you expect

from an email marketing reactivation campaign?

According to Return Path's 'Email Win-Back Programs' report **45% of recipients who received win-back emails read subsequent messages.** And of that 45%, just **24% had read win-back emails.**

The average length of time between when people received a win-back email and when they read a subsequent message was **57 days** - almost two months.



This report shows that **immediately removing people from an email list who do not respond to win-back emails is not a good idea.**

You may be removing people who are still engaged with your brand or who respond to the message by shopping at a bricks-and-mortar location, or who may reengage in the future.

Therefore, a strategy must be put in place to reactive subscribers when they are showing signs of inactivity, but also give plenty of chances for them to re-engage before being finally removed from your sends.



Inactive Email Addresses and Deliverability

Due to previous deliverability issues and spam filtering, **subscribers may have missed some of your messages**, or they may not have had a need for your products / services to that point, however, simply by appearing in their inbox you were still front of mind even though they weren't actually opening your emails.

And, if you don't have deliverability issues, you may want to **consider if removing subscribers completely is the right move for your business** (or if a reduced frequency might be better for example), or if being on your list has a wider business impact as previously mentioned.

The main method mailbox providers such as Yahoo!, Gmail and Microsoft (Hotmail/Outlook) use to determine whether or not incoming email is spam is by monitoring how engaged recipients are with your messages (your engagement rates). For example, do they open and read or delete and ignore messages they receive from you?

Engagement rates are one of the **key elements of your Sender Reputation** and have a big impact on your deliverability and Inbox Placement Rates.

These metrics are either deemed as positive (e.g. opening and reading an email) or negative (e.g. registering a complaint or deleting an email without reading it).

It is important to note, that mailbox providers do not measure or take into account click rates or conversions as part of their filtering decisions as these are elements they do not track; although they are important to you as a marketer.

Mailbox providers will also look at **metrics around the user's entire account** and **not just their interaction** to your emails, such as whether or not they log into their account and how frequently.



IP segmentation

If you are using dedicated IPs to send your mailings, in order to reduce the impact of inactive subscribers on your general campaigns / transactional emails, **it is prudent to consider using IP segmentation.**

This means that higher risk data such as inactives, is sent from a separate IP(s) to your standard and transactional mailings and any negative engagement that is seen (lower open rates, higher bounces, spam trap hits and complaints) are **kept away from the Sender Reputation** built on your normal IP(s).

We recommend **triggering reactivation campaigns in real time** based on the individual subscriber's behaviour, however, if you are just getting started with implementing these campaigns, you may need to do a 'batch' reactivation to get started (or if you are unable to trigger these campaigns on an ongoing basis).

If this is the case, you should also **consider breaking your inactive data down into smaller chunks** and sending these out over a number of days/weeks (depending on the size) and **monitoring metrics such as complaint rate, unsubscribes, and unknown users** as you go, to determine the success of the campaign and allow you to make tweaks.

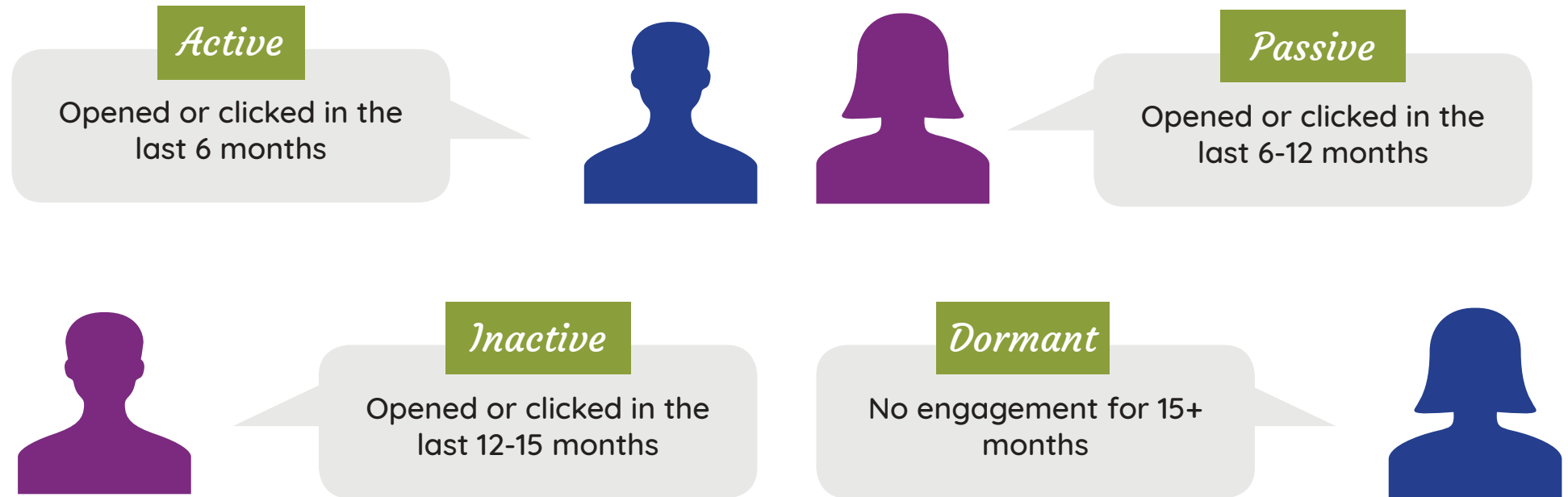


Defining Subscriber Inactivity

The way brands define inactivity will differ depending on the type of business model, send frequency and average repeat order times.

For example, a seasonal retailer may define an inactive subscriber as someone who has not opened an email in the last 2 years, whereas a company supplying monthly subscriptions may define this period as 6 months.

We recommend redefining email activity in 4 key stages:



Reactivation vs. Re-Permissioning

Reactivation

A reactivation campaign should span a period of a few months and target customers at the point at which they are starting to become inactive (Passive segment) with a series of messages to 'warm them up', as well as a specific set of messages following this to the Inactive segment of your database.

These emails should aim to stand out from your normal messaging and capture the attention of the subscriber.

They may include a special offer (particularly for those who have not purchased recently) or a prompt to update their preferences, or even to advertise your other channels such as social media, SMS or direct mail communications options.



Reactivation vs. Re-Permissioning

Re-permissioning

For those who have been unengaged the longest and fall into the 'Dormant' segment, you may **consider sending a final re-permissioning campaign.**

This strategy may be used particularly if you are seeing deliverability problems in particular and wish to remove inactive subscribers.

A re-permissioning campaign is a series of emails telling the subscriber that you will stop sending them emails if they do not click the specific link in the email to confirm they would like to stay on your list and continue to receive messages from you.

Once a re-permissioning series has been sent, if you don't get confirmation that they want to stay on your email list, remove these subscribers from your list; if you have been emailing them regularly, **there is no reason you should be sending to addresses that have not engaged with you in a long period of time.**

Before running a re-permissioning campaign we recommend **considering the wider business before removing subscribers** from your database – including looking at purchase data.

In some cases, just landing in the inbox, even if the email is not opened, could be prompting them subconsciously to make a purchase. **This is a lot more prominent for retailers with physical stores.**



Strategy Recommendations

Sending strategy

- Implement a **regular triggered campaign** that runs automatically to identify inactive subscribers on a daily basis, delivering a reactivation campaign to them at a relevant point in their lifecycle and relationship with the brand.
- When you do choose your final cut off point to remove subscribers and send a final re-permissioning campaign, be explicit in communicating next steps - it should be **clear at what point email activity will stop**.
- Whilst a subscriber is receiving reactivation campaigns, consider **reducing the frequency** of standard messaging.
- Return Path's 'Email Win-Back Programs' report showed it is important to **send a series of emails over time** and not just send 1 re-engagement email to give subscribers the maximum chance to engage with these emails and your standard campaigns in between.
- Once a contact strategy is in place, **test the time period** selected to determine if it is the correct time period to identify non-responders.
- To catch subscribers before they turn inactive, consider their engagement with the email programme from the point at which they join your email list. A subscriber who does not engage with your emails in the first couple of weeks after being added to the list may **benefit from a different send strategy** before they reach your defined 'Passive' segment for example.



Strategy Recommendations

- For those subscribers in the 'Passive' segment, **consider your 'warm up'** program before the main reactivation begins. Within this campaign, it can also be useful to consider additional options such as:
 - o **Treat non-openers differently** from non-clickers.
 - Non-openers are **much less engaged** and looking at subject lines is the first place to start testing changes. Another option to offer these subscribers a **reduced frequency option**.
 - Non-clickers are at least opening the messages. The goal of testing options for a re-engagement strategy here is to figure out **why they are opening and then not clicking**. Is it because they're interested in the subject line but then aren't interest in the product?
 - o **Consider sending a survey** to learn more about what they want from the program
 - o Send a **different template or a discount**
 - o **Promote the preference centre** (if available)
 - o **Send something different** – for example a newsletter (non-promotional)
- Consider adding a **"Welcome Back" email** for non-responders who have reactivated. Content should include text and images that showcase the variety of products available and benefits of using your brand. Tips for managing frequency and a link to the preference centre (if available) should be included.
- Don't just 'set it and forget it' – make sure you **review the content periodically**, make sure it's working, is still relevant and is tested regularly to ensure the optimum design, content and wording to encourage your desired action.



Strategy Recommendations

Creating Your Content

- Return Path's 'Email Win-Back Programs' report showed that reactivation emails with the words **"miss you"** in their subject lines achieved a **13% read rate**, and messages with the words **"come back"** in their subject lines achieved a **12.7% read rate**.

A study by Experian Marketing Services analysed reactivation subject lines and found that **13 of the top 25** with the highest transaction rates included 'we miss you'. They also found the best performing were those offering free shipping.

Subject line type 1: *'We miss you, and we want you to see what's new'*

Subject line type 2: *'We have a confession...and an offer you won't want to miss'*

- When creating your reactivation campaigns **consider using a shorter template** and **subject lines that differ** from your current emails to try and capture attention; they haven't engaged with your current campaigns, so you really need to do something that stands out!
 - o Consider experimenting with the **tone and sentiment** to determine whether your campaigns see a lift with a straight-forward approach or a more emotional appeal. For example, a softer approach usually takes a more emotive tone of voice such as 'we miss you' or 'It's not the same without you'
 - o **Create stand out subject lines** to capture their attention in the inbox



Strategy Recommendations

- As with all of your campaigns, it is important to **focus on one clear call to action** within your email design to avoid confusing your subscribers, which in itself will lead to inaction
- If possible, **use any existing additional data** (beyond last engagement) to **personalise the email** and increase the chance of reengagement
- **Remind subscribers of all the benefits** of receiving (and reading) your emails
- Don't be afraid to repeat yourself through a reactivation strategy. If your subscribers aren't opening and clicking, **you will need an increased frequency** to get the cut-through to make this strategy a success
- **Offer increased options for subscribers** to control the messaging you send them – this could be via a preference centre for example
 - o Find out which parts of your product offering/services subscribers are most interested in (e.g. product categories) – this will help you to **tailor your content and send strategy better** to suit their individual needs and become more engaging
 - o Consider offering subscribers a **chance to decrease the frequency** with which they receive your messages – either on a weekly/monthly basis, take a set time period break (e.g. don't receive emails for 1,2 or 3 months), or based around a date.



Strategy Recommendations

- **Build up your messaging** across your series – to the point where you may directly ask your subscriber why they are not engaging with your content and solicit feedback
 - o Understanding why subscribers stopped engaging can help inform future email program strategy and reduce subscriber inactivity – this can be done through an **in-email poll or short survey** on your unsubscribe page for example
- An **on-going testing strategy** should also be put in place to maximise the timing, content and offers given (if applicable) in these emails to increase your results. Remember, these are emails sent to inactive subscribers, so this is never going to be your highest performing campaign by a long shot, but it is still **important to ensure you are getting the best results possible.**



Analysing and measuring the success of your campaigns

Continuously analysing your reactivation, re-permissioning and re-engagement campaigns is **critical to ensure their ongoing success**.

Alongside your standard email marketing stats such as opens, clicks, conversions and unsubscribes, also consider the following metrics:

- **Decreasing spam complaints** – this is calculated when someone clicks the spam/junk button in their mailbox provider
- **Increasing deliverability statistics** – do you see less deliverability problems after removing inactive subscribers?
- **Increasing the number of active users on your list** – depending on the timeframe that you have chosen to define your active subscribers as, after conducting these types of campaigns, does this number increase compared to when you didn't have these in place?
- **Increasing email subscriber lifetime value** – when you are able to determine your active subscriber list, you can also calculate your email subscriber lifetime value and measure whether this increases as you increase the number of subscribers.

TIP

Whether you are reactivating subscribers or reengaging lapsed customers, if you have multiple sources of data coming into your list, check to see if one particular source is generating a higher number of these inactives than another; for example, competition entrants or affiliate marketing sources



Analysing and measuring the success of your campaigns

Your Email Subscriber Lifetime Value is a calculation of the projected revenue that an email subscriber will generate during their lifetime.

This helps you to work out **how much you can afford to spend** to acquire a new subscriber and **how much revenue** this will ultimately provide in return.

In this calculation, rather than taking the lifetime value of a customer to your business overall, we are specifically looking at it through an email marketing lense and the **lifetime of the email subscription**.

In order to calculate this value at a basic level, use the following data for the last 12 months:

- **Total email profits** (revenue minus costs – effectively your ROI)
- **Total number of active email addresses** on your (those who have not bounced/unsubscribed and are active with your email programme – i.e. have opened an email within a specific time frame)
- **Average lifetime of an email subscriber** – the time between when they subscribe and when they become inactive



Analysing and measuring the success of your campaigns

Put this data into the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Total Email Marketing Revenue}}{\text{Total no. of active email addresses}}$$

{This will give you the amount of profit each active subscriber will generate in a year}

Multiply this number by...

The average lifetime of an email subscriber to get your overall Email Subscriber Lifetime Value.

You could also work this out on an individual subscriber basis to help identify those who are most valuable to your business and treat them slightly differently from those with lower values.



Example Reactivation Strategy Layout

Passive segment

Send from standard IP(s)

Not opened /clicked on an email in the last 270 days
(9 months)

Warm up email #1
(9 months)

Warm up email #2
(2 weeks later)

Warm up email #3
(2 weeks later)

Inactive segment

Consider slightly reducing standard campaign frequency during this time

Not opened /clicked on an email in the last 365 days
(12 months)

Reactivation email #1
(12 months)

Reactivation email #2
(2 weeks later)

Reactivation email #3
(2 weeks later)

Dormant segment

Not opened /clicked on an email in the last 455 days
(15 months)

Re-Permission email #1
(15 months)

Re-Permission email #2
(1 weeks later)

Remove from future sends



Example Content Structure

Note: If a subscriber opens / clicks on an email, stop reactivation and continue standard mailings. To take your strategy to the next level and provide increased relevancy, don't forget to adjust content in the series based on previous purchase behaviour.

Warm Up Email 1:

- Newsletter style informational email

Warm Up Email 2

- Join us on social media call out

Example: Social Media Call Out Habitat

This email from habitat acknowledges that the subscriber hasn't recently been active with the emails they've been sending and offers an alternative way to connect with the brand – through their Facebook page.



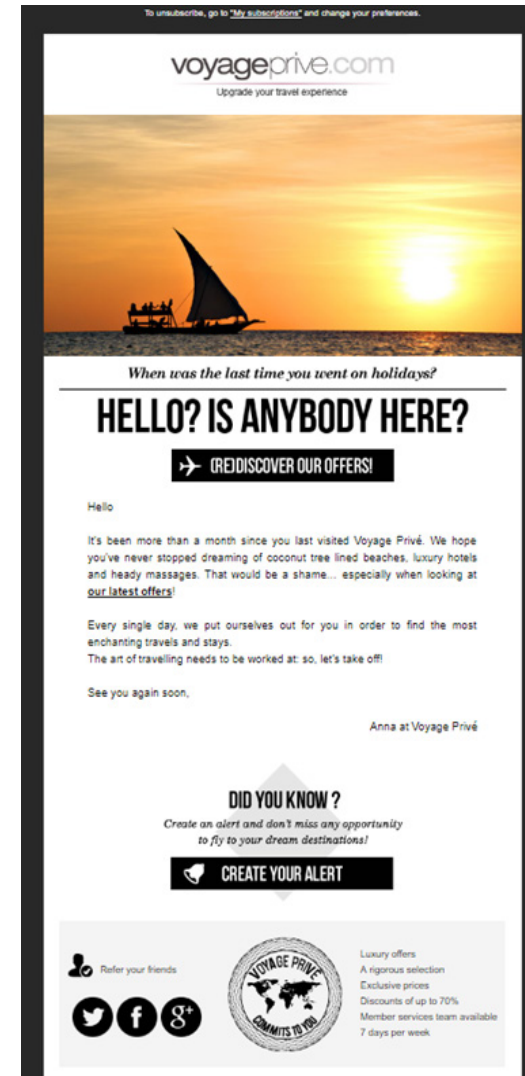
Example Content Structure

Warm Up Email 3:

- Survey / update your preferences (if available) – tell us what you want to receive/more about you to help us make the messages we send you more relevant and helpful

Example: Warm up Emails (website visit) Voyage Privee

This email from Voyage Privee encourages the subscriber to (re)discover their offers as well as a secondary CTA to create a specific alert on their dream destinations – creating the opportunity for more personalised email communications



Example Content Structure

Reactivation Email 1:

- If the subscriber has not purchased since the first purchase (when they subscribed), consider messaging such as: “It’s been [time] since you bought [product name] - we miss you” Giving a special offer.

Example: 1-year anniversary Reactivation Email Wayfair

The content of this email is themed around the 1-year anniversary of the subscriber making their first purchase and encourages a repeat purchase with a percentage off their next order. It is timely, based on the subscriber’s previous behaviour, reminds them of a time when they previously used the brand, and entices them to shop again, giving a limited time offer to increase the urgency to reactivate.

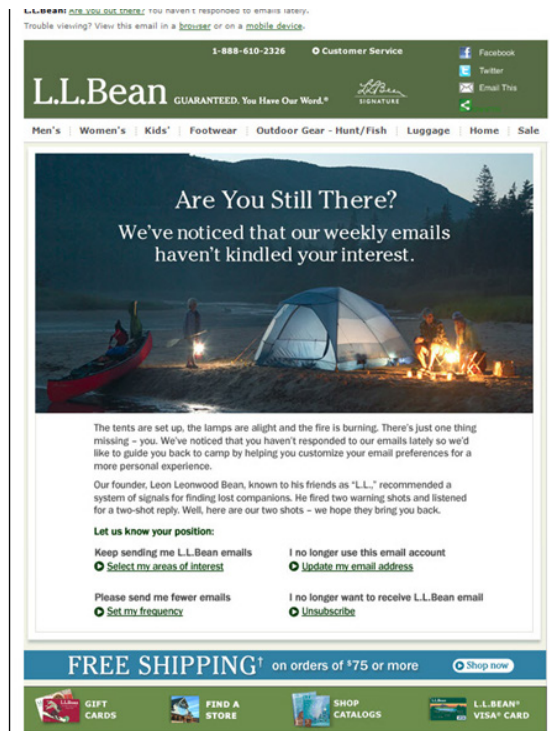


Example Content Structure

If the subscriber has made a repeat purchase in the last 12 months or is a regular purchaser, focus on email engagement and re-permissioning.

“Was it something we said?”

Alternative CTA: Click to unsubscribe



Example: Re-permissioning L.L.Bean

The subject line, pre-header, and headline of this email all clearly ask “Are you still there?” Outside of the main content block the email also offers a navigation menu at the top of the design to allow subscribers to explore the products offered further, pre-header that includes their main call to action link and a secondary content block with a special offer to encourage a purchase interaction.

The primary content of the email is on brand with the tone of voice and the ‘Are you still there’ message, prompting the subscriber to re-engage and update their preferences for a more personal experience – giving them a reason WHY they should act and change their options – something a lot of reactivation messages do not do. Four specific links are then offered that allow subscribers to amend their preference straight from the email itself – including an option to change their email address (again, an option that many companies often forget).

Example Content Structure

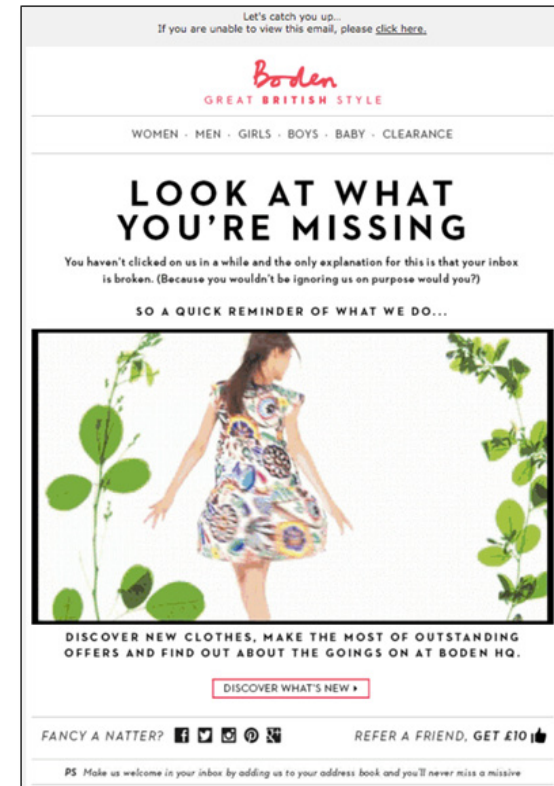
Reactivation Email 2:

- If the subscriber has not purchased since the first purchase (when they subscribed), consider messaging such as: “3 reasons you need [product]” ‘Here’s what you’re missing’
- Update your preferences (if available) “Tell us what you want [NAME]”

Alternative CTA: Click to unsubscribe

Example: Re-engagement – Boden

This email from Boden makes use of an eye-catching GIF as the main image to show customers what they’re missing.



Example Content Structure

Re-permission Email 1:

- “Do you still want to hear from us [NAME]?”

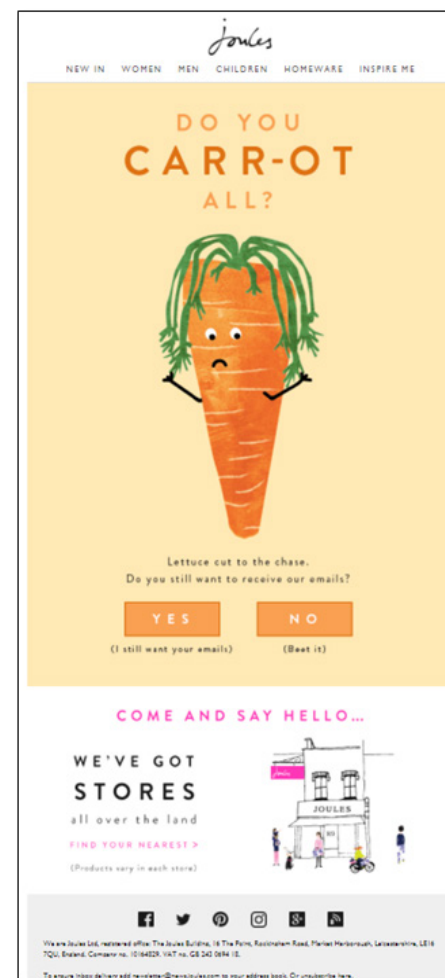
This email should focus around a stronger approach to the messaging, letting them know that you are going to stop emailing them if they don't let you know they want to stay subscribed.

- Update your preferences (if available)
- If the subscriber is someone who has made a recent purchase from you – remind them of this in the subject line and body content of the email

CTA: Click to stay subscribed

Example: Re-Permissioning – Joules

This email from Joules differs from that shown in example 2, which is part of a reactivation series, as it is a one-off individual re-permission email. Again, the email is perfectly in keeping with Joules' fun brand tone and offers 2 clear call to action options. When clicking on 'yes' the landing page follows the same fun tone and gives a bonus discount offer to encourage a further action and purchase.



Example Content Structure

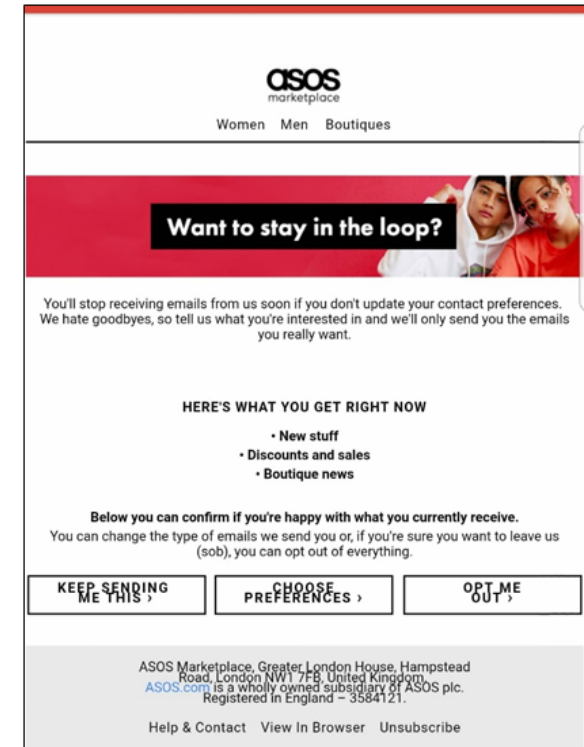
Re-permission Email 2:

- “Last chance to stay subscribed [NAME]” You won’t hear from us again after this message – unless you tell us you want to stay subscribed. Include key reasons to stay subscribed

CTA: Click to stay subscribed

Example: Re-Permissioning – ASOS

This email from ASOS focuses on gaining permission to keep sending the subscriber email communications. They list the key benefits of staying subscribed and offer 3 options to give the subscriber choice, right there in the email content; making the action easy to either stay subscribed, unsubscribe or to change their preferences.



Example Content Structure

Welcome Back Email:

- “Welcome back [NAME]!”

If a subscriber confirms during Re-Permissioning that they would like to continue receiving emails from you, send a welcome back email to confirm this action, the key benefits of continuing to receive these emails and leading them back to the website to update their preferences or make a booking. Tell them what's new with the brand and even consider surprising them with a discount off their next booking for example (for those who haven't made a purchase recently)

Example: Re-Permissioning – ASOS

This series of emails has the Joules brands personality and playfulness as the main theme of the design. The messages are short and to the point to try and capture the reader's attention and lead them through to re-engage. The subject lines are punchy and different from the standard messaging, making it clear its part of a different series of messages

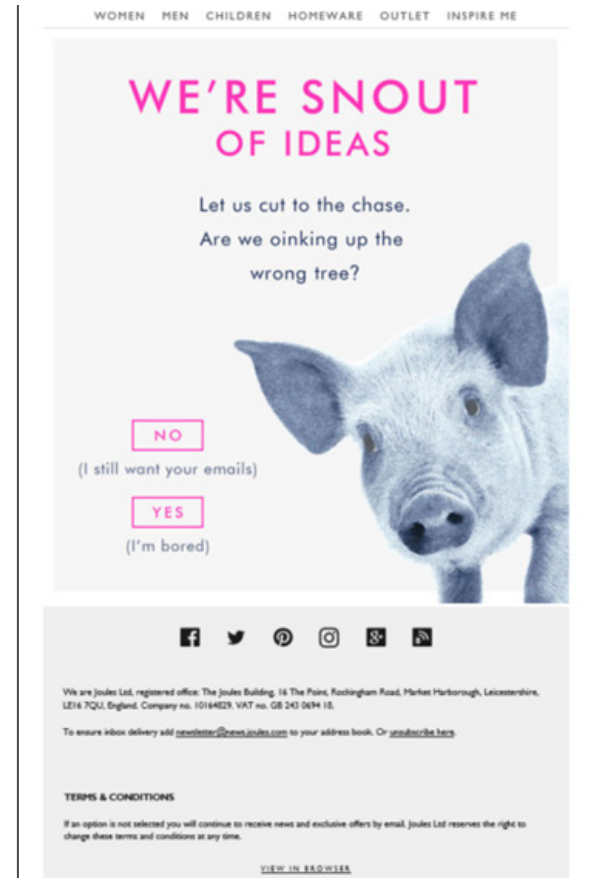
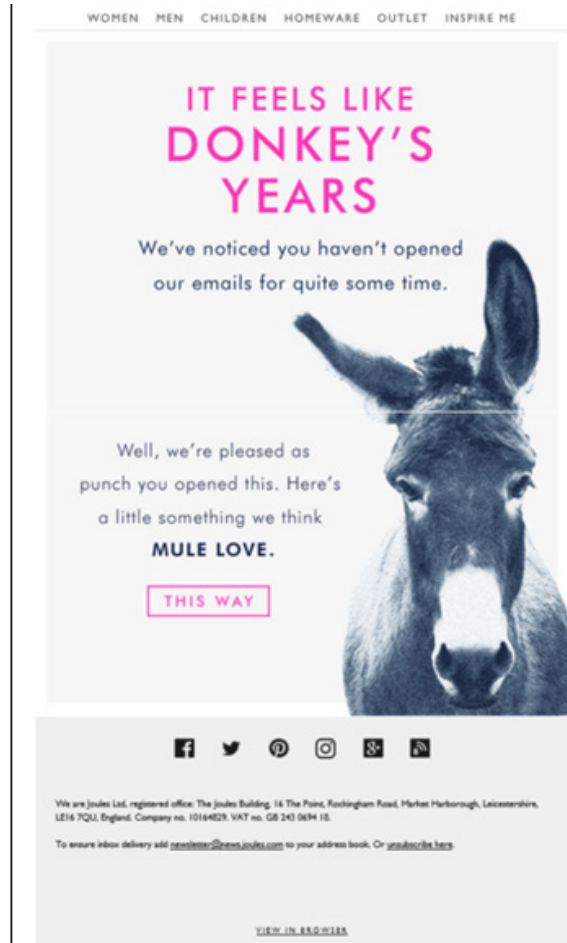
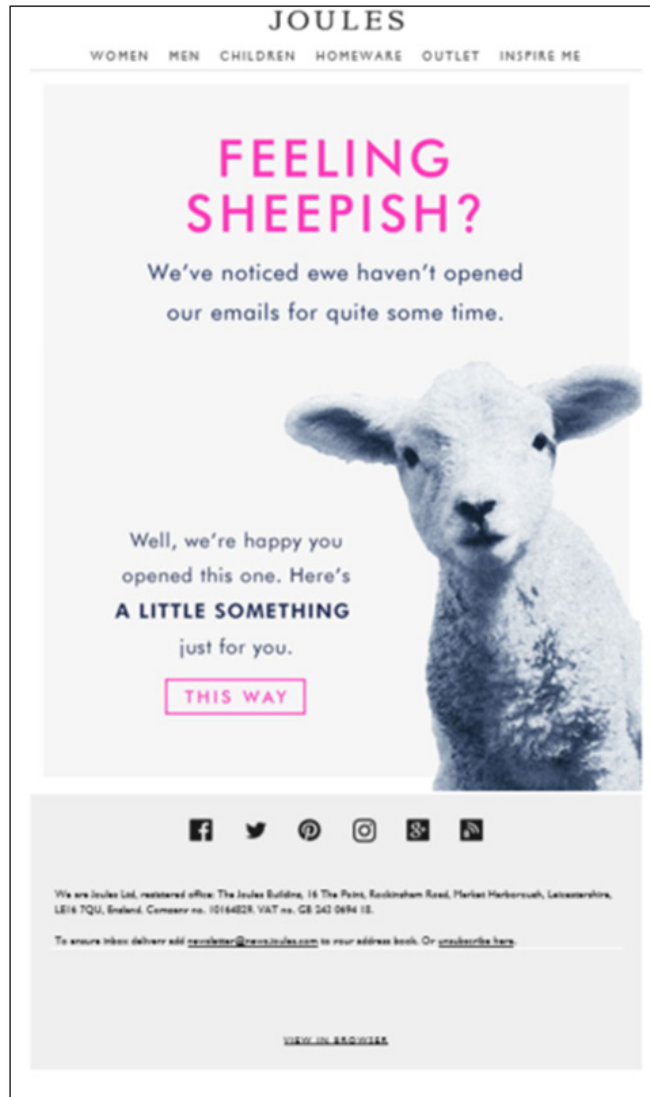
Email 1 - Hello Stranger

Email 2 - It's been a while

Email 3 - We don't know what to do



Example Content Structure



eFocus Marketing is a leading specialist email marketing agency.

The eFocus Marketing team provides a dedicated email marketing resource to ecommerce companies looking to optimise, automate and grow their email marketing programme.

From strategic consulting, to full service management and training, we address every aspect of an email programme to produce successful email marketing campaigns. If you want to boost your conversions, fix deliverability problems or increase response rates, you need to ensure you are communicating with subscribers at every stage of the email marketing lifecycle.

Our team of experts will work out the best options for your business and offer solutions in bite-size pieces so that you can focus on quick wins that will increase your success as well as longer term changes to become a better sender and increase your results.

eFocus Marketing can assist you in making the most of your campaigns through the following services:

- **Email Marketing Consultancy**
- **Implementation & Management**
- **Bespoke In-house Training**
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