

A White Paper  
**EMAIL SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Your Checklist for Choosing An ESP



Servant Keeper &  
VerticalResponse, Inc.

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## Your Checklist for Choosing An ESP

Generally speaking, it's good to have options. But occasionally, having too many alternatives can be a curse, not a blessing. When searching for an Email Service Provider (ESP), there's no shortage of choices, but selecting the right ESP from a staggering array of candidates can be a daunting task. Here is a list of criteria you may want to start with when deciding who to choose an online Email Service Provider.

### Self-examination

- What are the volume and frequency of campaigns?
- Do you require creative design?
- What is your budget?
- What metrics do you require?
- Do you need a dedicated Account Manager?

### Vetting out The Candidates

- Get a final list of candidates
- Call references
- How long have they been in business?
- Who is their target market?
- What is their client businesses
- Have they received reviews?
- Type their names into Google Groups and see how many abuse complaints they have.

### Service Level

- Do you need a full service agency that will do it all for you?
- Do you need self-service where you have access to an online tool and you do all of the work?

### Trial Offers

- Can you try before you buy to test deliverability as well as user functionality?

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### Price

- Is there a set up fee?
- Are there monthly recurring charges or is it a pay-per-use model?
- Are there full service charges?
- Do you have to pay minimums?
- Can you pay by credit card?
- Is there a contract needed?

### Customer Service

- What methods of communication does the ESP provide? Email, phone support, live chat?
- Is there a dedicated Account Manager?
- How long does it take customer service to respond to your inquiries or complaints?

### Q & A

- Is there a Q & A procedure for testing email on various browsers, computers, operating systems and email readers to guarantee your email will render properly in the greatest possible number of environments.

### Features

#### Email Creation Options

- Are there email templates/layouts and if so what do they look like?
- Can I have a template that reflects my brand/looks like my website?
- Is there a text-only email feature?
- Can you use your own HTML code?
- Are there HTML tools so I can detect broken links?
- Is there automatic link tracking that provides click-through reporting.
- Is a "Spam Check" feature available? One that scans email content and generate reports on words or phrases that might prevent your message from passing through a spam filter.



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### Delivery

List Check: Is there a scan for improperly formatted email addresses and "spam catcher" addresses is triggered to keep your list clean and your bounces low?

ISP Relations: What is the company doing with regards to ISP relations?

Is there an ISP relations group/person on board?

Are they a member of the Email Service Provider Coalition (ESPC)?

Are they CAN-SPAM compliant?

Do they require your users to follow CAN-SPAM and if so how?

Do they support SPF or Domain Keys?

### Reporting

Do they track total number sent, that is total number of emails sent, after accounting for de-duplication, unsubscribes and bounces?

Opens – how many people that get HTML email opened?

Clicks – how many recipients clicked on a link?

Bounces – How do they calculate bounces?

Unsubscribes – Do they manage the unsubscribe process and if so how?

What types of charts and reports are available?

Do they track domain performance (i.e. aol.com, yahoo.com etc.) and opens, clicks, bounces and unsubscribes on them?

Do they have charts that will compare campaign performance?

Do they have charts that give response curve over time?

Can I download any of my data at any time?

Do they offer a non-responder download, that is recipients who failed to click or open a message.

### List Management

Is there an easy way to upload my list?

What format does it have to be in?

Do they de-duplicate my email addresses so I don't send them more than one email in a campaign?

Do they offer a list-building tool than can put on my site to collect email addresses?

Can I have custom fields and if so, how many?

Do they offer a confirmation email after someone signs up using the form?

What do they do to protect my lists? Are their servers in a secure location?

Will I have 24/7 access to my lists?



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The search for an ESP that can maximize the effectiveness of your email campaigns without breaking the budget. In a world of options it pays – in the short term and the long run – to make the right choice. Getting answers to the previous questions will help you find the best match for your business.

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