

## Email Deliverability Consultants and Solutions – Getting Emails Back into the Inbox with Audits, Monitoring, Reputation Building and Block Removal Assistance



**Chris Arrendale - Chief  
Executive Officer  
Inbox Pros**

**CEOCFO:** *Mr. Arrendale, your site proclaims that Inbox Pros is your outsourced email deliverability team. How so?*

**Mr. Arrendale:** We work with brands and marketers of all shapes and sizes to help understand and investigate why emails are going into the junk folder and work with them to get their emails back into the inbox. Our services range from deliverability audits, daily monitoring, ongoing reporting, and remediation efforts. Inbox Pros watches and monitors deliverability for our clients so that they can focus on other marketing efforts.

**CEOCFO:** *What are some of the standard faults or the problems in typical emails?*

**Mr. Arrendale:** One thing that we see quite a bit with clients is that they are sending to email addresses or lists that may be older or outdated. They are not doing proper segmentation. They are not sending the right message to the right buyer at the right time. Therefore, we work with them on building the segments to figure out why emails may be going to junk for the older addresses or maybe the engaged people are not receiving the message because the older unengaged segment is causing the problem. We work with them on setting up their IPs and domains they are using to send out their marketing campaigns. Sometimes people may not understand that they are on a shared IP when they need to be on a dedicated IP and vice versa. That is because the shared IP may be hurting their reputation, but with a dedicated IP, they will be responsible for their own reputation.

**CEOCFO:** *Does it surprise you that people today do not understand that there is so much more intricacy to email then there once was or than the promise of it was?*

**Mr. Arrendale:** It does! There are many more marketers out there that are using great tools and great strategies. However, I still find that people do not give a lot of thought to email. It is a very inexpensive channel that does not get as much love as something like SEM or PPC will get. I feel that many people moving to marketing automation look at it as a “set it and forget it,” which it is not. Email marketing programs always need to be tweaked and reviewed for optimal performance. That is because email is constantly changing - buyers change, brands change, and ISP filters change. What was so easy to get into Gmail and Yahoo’s inbox, five, eight or ten years ago, is much more difficult due to the amount of emails that are coming into their networks. They deal with millions and millions of pure spam emails every day and the marketing emails may get lost in the shuffle. That is because they are either sending to unengaged people, there are problems with content or maybe the proper DNS records are not in place. There are so many things and so much thought that has to go into these marketing emails behind the scenes that people do not understand or they forget about.

**CEOCFO:** *How do you work with your clients?*

**Mr. Arrendale:** Initially, we will start with what we call a deliverability audit. That really focuses on the entire system of their email marketing program. We are looking at things like content, infrastructure, reputation, DNS records, and so much more. We also look at inbox placement tests and content to really figure out where they are having problems and make additional recommendations to help improve and get their emails back into the inbox. We also implement the changes and recommendations that we have made. Therefore, we update the DNS records; maybe migrate the client to a dedicated IP, work with them on their content, build out additional list segmentations, doing IP warming plans. There is a lot of that that goes into it. Then we work with them on an ongoing basis as it relates to weekly, monthly or quarterly reporting, and doing check-ins. If they have questions about wanting to expand and bring on a new line of business, we will strategize with them on that as well.

**CEOCFO: *What is the business model? Is someone signing up for a year or is there an initial engagement and then they can come back?***

**Mr. Arrendale:** Yes. It is an initial engagement with no required contracts or annual agreement. It is almost like a mechanic trying to figure out what is wrong with your car. We get underneath the hood to figure out the problems. We get to know the brand. We get to know the client. Then most clients will want us to do ongoing monitoring for them. We are checking IP and domain reputation, blacklists, and bounces on an ongoing basis. We will also create reports for them and their management. Therefore, most of our clients have an ongoing, longer-term relationship.

**CEOCFO: *Are people turning to you initially because they are looking for depth or strategy or do many people come in just saying, "Help me fix my email," and then stick around and realize that you take it to a much deeper level?***

**Mr. Arrendale:** I would say it is fifty/fifty. We do get a lot of marketers that come to us and say, "We are on a blacklist, help us, our emails are going into the junk folder at Gmail, help us, we are migrating to a new IP address and we need help;" that sort of thing. Then the other half comes to us and says, "We have been referred to you because we do want to really dig deep into figuring out what we can do to improve open rates and what we can do to improve click rates."

**"We work with brands and marketers of all shapes and sizes to help understand and investigate why emails are going into the junk folder and work with them to get their emails back into the inbox."- Chris Arrendale**

**CEOCFO: *Style and trends change often. How do you stay ahead of the game?***

**Mr. Arrendale:** We definitely do a lot of ongoing research and education centered on email marketing, ISP relations, email sending platforms, privacy, and compliance. We are always testing with internal resources and tools that we have as well as working with clients that want to continue to do testing; not just AB testing on content or creative or lists, but testing on what works best with smaller lists and smaller segments and maybe splitting up the days of the week and times that they are sending the emails. However, as far as the creative goes, we definitely do a lot of work with clients on testing out different types of creative to see what works best. Is plain text best? Is an informal letter best? Are images good or bad for email? One issue that we run into quite a bit is that clients will say, "Our open rate went up, but our click rate has gone down." Therefore, the issue becomes; okay we got the email into the inbox, the buyer or the recipient has opened it. What do we need to do to get the clicks up? That focuses more on the actual content inside the message. Is it relevant? Is it personalized? Is it something that people want to click on? Is it a download that they really want? Then it really gets in the weeds of, "Let us focus on what works best for your audience."

**CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach? What have you learned over time?***

**Mr. Arrendale:** Permission is very important. Getting that permission, keeping that permission, sending relevant emails; all of that is very important. I would say that the focus has shifted a lot towards security and privacy as they relate to deliverability. If your brand has been compromised or if there are malicious links that may be used and phishing emails that point back to your brand, that is going to affect your inbox placement at all the major ISPs as well as any sort of filtering that is happening on the B2B side. I still find that many people today will tell me that they have an email address that they use for "junk or marketing" email. They give people that email when they do not want to actually open it, which is still, in my opinion, the wrong way to go about it. You should have a unified inbox that does have your receipts, your travel itinerary, your Best Buy circular; all of that. That way, again as a recipient you see everything at once, but then you can remove yourself or take action if you want to against those brands that you no longer want to receive emails from.

**CEOCFO: *There are many differences depending on the email address, with so many different hosts offering different ways of addressing email for the recipients. How do you get down to the level of these individual hosts where they do some quirky things?***

**Mr. Arrendale:** To even make it more complex there is filtering that is happening before it even hits the mail server and additional filtering when it hits the mail server and the additional filtering when it goes into a Microsoft Outlook client. Therefore, there are multiple layers of filtering. I kind of equate this to Dante's Inferno and the multiple layers an email has to go through to make it to the inbox. You are going through reputation filtering, authentication filtering, content filtering, to really get to the mail server to then understand it to get to Outlook. Therefore, you are right; there are definitely many complexities as it relates to that. That is because we have to go through multiple stages to figure out where the problem. Okay, all the DNS records are in place, content passes fine, but the link that is in the email happens to be a shared link that is on a black list that the filter is looking at or that mail server is looking at. That is where my team and I will actually break down the HTML and look at all the links, where all the images are hosted, where all the landing pages are going; because if one link is a problem that could mean the difference of inbox verses junk or even being blocked. There are

many complexities that we have to break down; not only within content, not only within DNS, not only looking at the reputation providers that are out there, but also figuring out, "What mail server is this? Is it Microsoft Exchange? Is it Google Apps? That is because anyone who runs a mail server can add whatever sort of filtering they want and then change the definitions or change the scores on these definitions. For instance, if you are using SpamAssassin and a default may be one point, but it is important to you, you are going to maybe change that to two points or three points and not allow anything into the network that is over 1 point. Therefore, everything that you do is being criticized and being scored. The actual mail server administrator can say, "Do not allow anything in my network over X points," but yet you have done all of these things to try and make it into the inbox, but you are not getting there because of all of these issues that he or she is looking at.

**CEOCFO: Are you able to use some technology to do these assessments or is much of it experience and knowing where to look and how to unearth these hidden problems?**

**Mr. Arrendale:** That is a great question! We definitely utilize a lot of tools. One of the primary tools we use is a product called 250ok ([www.250ok.com](http://www.250ok.com)). 250ok does blacklist monitoring, inbox placement tests, spam trap monitoring, DMARC reporting, and more. We also utilize the email service provider or marketing automation provider that the client is using to get access to bounce log details, open and click details, and to download the content and review the HTML. We also use some other tools that are out there. In everything that we do, I always tell clients, "There is never enough data. The more data and reports, the better." Even if clients think that the data is useless, it is helpful in some way. We dig deep to answer questions like -

-Is there a particular ISP or domain where clients are unsubscribing more than the others?

-Is there an ISP where people are complaining?

-Are the complaint rates higher than the others?

-Is your welcome series generating more complaints than your newsletter?

-Are your one to one communications having problems because the domain that you are using there is also the domain that you are using for sending out bulk marketing email?

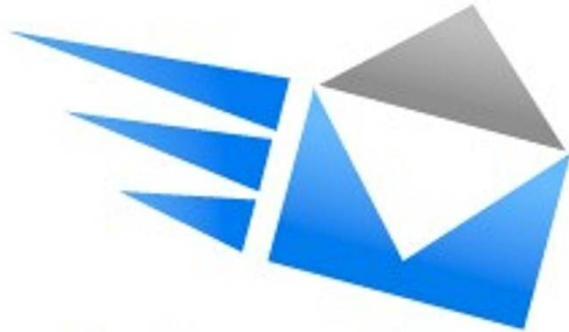
All of that is very important, especially in the day and age of, not just IP reputation, but domain reputation. The sending domain that you are using is very important to establish a reputation for the brand, but many clients will use their corporate domain that they use to send out one to one emails for their marketing emails, for their bulk emails, for their transactional emails. The problem is that the reputation is being established and being changed based upon what is happening across all those different mail streams. Therefore, there is some strategy that goes into setting up separate or sub domains that are actually brand specific without affecting the others. Of course there are DNS tools that we use; definitely a lot of data tools that are important to what we use. I kind of equate Inbox Pros to a private investigator. We are the ones who are on a crime scene taking photos and investigating to figure out what actually happened.

**CEOCFO: How do companies find you? What do they key in to find Inbox Pros when doing an online search?**

**Mr. Arrendale:** We get a lot of referrals from current clients, agencies, and partners we have worked with, as well as from email service providers. Some people will search for email deliverability consultants, deliverability consultant or email deliverability. We also do a lot of speaking, writing, blogging, and tweeting. We try to get a lot of thought leadership around email deliverability, privacy, and compliance out there. It is important to stay active in the email community; therefore we are involved with a lot of local, national, and international groups that focus on email, digital, creative and deliverability. Therefore, we work with many different companies to not only help get our name out there, but to help them understand why email deliverability is important.

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Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



# Inbox Pros

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