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Spring cleaning for your email list(s)

By: Rick Cohen

Spring is in the air. Many of us are doing some spring cleaning at home, but when was the last time your nonprofit did some technological spring cleaning? Just as we purge our closets of styles (or sizes!) we haven't worn in years, it may be time to start purging email list(s) of subscribers who haven't interacted with your organization in years.

First, let's make clear that this isn't a recommendation to completely delete a person from your organization's database. It's important to keep whatever history you may have, in case there is a new opportunity to re-engage that reader someday. This spring cleaning exercise may even turn into that opportunity.

There are many reasons why some people may not be opening your emails:

- Some of the email addresses may no longer be in use, especially if someone subscribed with a work email, rather than a personal one.
- Your messages may be landing in a spam folder.
- Or, they might be opening your messages, but the platform they're using doesn't trigger the tracking. In some cases, individuals may have clicked a link without opening the email!

To start tidying up, you'll need to identify subscribers who haven't opened your messages in a few months. Be sure you're using a long enough time period. You don't want to remove someone just because they may not have opened last month's newsletter or this month's. Use six months as a minimum; twelve months is even better. Here's how to identify those subscribers in [Constant Contact](#), [Mailchimp](#), and [Vertical Response](#), three of the most commonly used platforms.

Before deactivating any subscriptions, reach out one or two more times. Try to find a fun way to re-engage subscribers. HubSpot shares [ten examples of re-engagement messages](#) that you can use to inspire people to open your message.

After a re-engagement message or two, run the search again for inactive subscribers. Take a close look to see if any of those people merit individual outreach. Such targeted outreach can be particularly beneficial if group messages are being caught in their spam filter. Individual outreach can help get your messages back into their inbox and prevent you from inadvertently cutting off someone who is otherwise very invested in your organization's mission.

You're now ready for the final step of unsubscribing the email addresses that remain inactive. This spring cleaning will reduce the size of your email list (something that may save your organization some money, depending on the pricing structure for your email platform) and it will likely improve your open and click-through rates.

Moving forward, you can clean up your email lists much like you do spring cleaning at home: do a big clean-up (at least) once a year, but the big push is always easier if you occasionally add a few ongoing efforts to keep your list(s) tidy – and re-engage your readers before they have lapsed for too long. A quick check every three months or so can help keep your organization's mission front-of-mind and your messages in the right place so potential supporters and volunteers can help advance your organization's work.

People like to launch their home spring cleaning efforts in different ways and sequences, such as starting at the top floor or in the garage. For those of you who have approaches you would recommend work well (or poorly), please [send us your suggestions and insights](#).