

Tiny Course Empire Podcast Episode 107: What email marketers need to know about Google and Yahoo! email changes

*PLEASE NOTE: This is a machine transcription. Some punctuation and spelling weirdness are to be expected.*

Oh boy. Google and Yahoo have caused quite a stir in the email marketing community, and as per usual, there's a lot of confusion. There's a lot of people using scare tactics to sell expensive solutions, and there's a lot of other people who want you to believe that this is the end of email marketing. Let's see if we can figure out what's really going on. This is episode 107 of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast and today I am going to do my best to demystify the upcoming email requirements that you've been hearing about for a few weeks.

I did some digging and I'm going to break those changes down into bite sized bits that hopefully won't sound quite so scary.

Hey, it's Cindy, and thanks for spending a few minutes of your day with me. You'll find the show notes and all of the recommended resources, and there's going to be quite a few of them that you're going to want to check out. Those will be at [TinyCourseEmpire.com/107](https://TinyCourseEmpire.com/107).

While you're there, be sure to hit the subscribe button. New episodes drop every Thursday morning and next week we're going to lighten up a little bit. We're going to be talking about some of the strategies that I use to be a better and more prolific content creator.

If you think of yourself as a perfectionist, if you keep telling yourself that you're going to start blogging or you're going to launch that podcast, or if you've got an email list that hasn't heard from you in a few weeks, then I've got some tips that are going to help. But that is next week. This week is all about Google and Yahoo's new email requirements so let's dive in. First of all, what the heck is this all even about? Well, a few months ago, Google and Yahoo announced that starting in 2024 they were going to require senders of bulk email in other words, email marketers like us to follow some new rules if they want their emails to be delivered to Gmail and Yahoo addresses.

Basically what they're saying is that you need to do three things in order to get those commercial email messages your email marketing messages delivered. The first thing you need to do is authenticate your email you need to prove that you are who you say you are. You also need to give your subscribers an easy way to

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unsubscribe, and you need to keep your spam rates below a certain threshold. So let's talk about what each one of these requirements means. But first, I want to make it really clear who these rules are for. This is about commercial emails. This is not about you emailing your Aunt Betty or, you know, emailing a group email to your book club right? This is for people who are sending commercial emails from services like Convertkit or Active Campaign or Mailer Lite or MailChimp or whatever email platform you use to send commercial emails to your email subscribers.

According to Google, these rules only impact you if you send more than 5000 emails in any one day. Yahoo, as far as I know, does not make that distinction they are saying these rules are for everyone, regardless of how many emails you are sending. And this is emails that you are sending to personal Gmail accounts and personal Yahoo accounts only. Yesterday, on our Six-Figure Systems Q and A call, I mistakenly said that this includes Google Workspace accounts as well, but that is not the case. This is email that you are sending to personal Gmail accounts only and to personal Yahoo accounts only. Will other providers jump on the bandwagon my guess is they probably will.

But even if they don't, even if AOL never says yes, you need to follow these rules even if MSN never says that even if Comcast never says that, Gmail and Yahoo are a huge portion of your subscribers in fact, I did a quick look at my Convert Kit account and I did a search for all of my Gmail subscribers and all of my Yahoo subscribers. And I have 5,468 subscribers who use either a Gmail or a Yahoo account and that is out of a total of 7,694 subscribers. So 71 % of the people who subscribe to my email list are using either Gmail or Yahoo as their email platform so it's a big deal it's not something that we can just ignore.

Now there are, before we dig into what the authentication and the one click unsubscribe and the spam rate rules are, there are a couple of terms that you should know. The first one is receiving mail server. This is the mail system that your subscribers use to receive their emails so this is Gmail, it's Yahoo, it's Hotmail, it's AOL. It's that server that first gets the email delivery and then forwards it on to your subscriber. You can think about it like the post office, right? If you send a paper letter, it goes first to the post office and then it gets delivered to the home of your receiver and receiving mail server is the same thing it's the post office for email so these receiving mail servers are run by companies like Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, etcetera.

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The sending mail server is the computer or the server that sends your emails so if you are using Convertkit to send bulk email this is convertkit servers they maintain these big servers that are all sending out all of the bulk email. The third word that you need to understand is spoofing. This is when someone sends an email and it appears to be from someone else. If you have ever received a spam email that says it is from you, that's spoofing and unfortunately it's really easy to do i can send an email and I can claim it is from anybody and that really is at the heart of what Gmail and Yahoo are trying to do they are trying to prevent spoofing because it is very dangerous.

It's what phishing emails are based on it's the tool that phishing emails use and if you are not familiar with that term, I guess maybe I should define that phishing spelled with APH is an email that is attempting to get confidential information from you by pretending to be something or someone else. And that relies on spoofing so this is what Gmail and Yahoo are trying to prevent. So I said there were three things that you need to do to keep on the good side of these new changes coming up.

And the first thing is to authenticate your email. And the way you authenticate your email well, let's say let's first of all define what that means. Authenticating your email means that you are saying to Gmail or Yahoo or Hotmail or whoever you are saying to that receiving email sender to the post office, if you will, that I am who I say I am, I'm sending email as cindy bidar that email from cindy bidar dot com and I am Cindy Bidar and that email is authenticated that's what we are trying to prove to the receiving email, servers that you are who you say you are, and that you have permission to be sending email from that server.

So the first tool that we use to do that, the first thing that the receiving email servers are looking for, is called an SPF record. Spf stands for Sender Policy Framework and an SPF record identifies the sending mail servers that are allowed to send email on behalf of your domain. So remember I said that the sending email server might be Convertkit or it might be Active Campaign or it might be Mail or Light whatever email platform you're using is sending bulk email on your behalf and they are saying this email is from you.

So Convertkit is sending out emails and saying they're from me and it is the Sender Policy Framework or the SPF record that connects those two things that tells Google and Yahoo and other email receiving servers that Convertkit is allowed to send email and say it's from me i have given them permission. That's what the SPF

record shows. This has always been a best practice. This has always been something you should do if you are sending large volumes of commercial email.

But now Google and Yahoo are saying this is no longer just a best practice, This is no longer just a recommendation. This is required or we will not deliver your email. The second way that they authenticate your email that they prove or that they believe that the email that you are sending is really from you is with a DKIM record DKIM stands for Domain Keys Identified Mail and this is a record that stores a little bit of code that the receiving mail server uses to verify a message's signature. So this helps prevent spammers from spoofing your email address remember we talked about what spoofing is a minute ago? This is the record that prevents people from spoofing your email address actually, that's I missed.

I misstated that you can't prevent someone from spoofing your email, but what you can do is prevent those emails from being delivered and that's what the DKIM record does. Again, this has always been a best practice, but it will now be required. The third piece of information that the email receiver server is looking for is called AD Mark record. This stands for Domain Based Message Authentication, Reporting and Conformance. I don't know why these things have such long names the name makes less sense than D Mark does, but basically what this is it is instructions for the receiving email server.

It tells it what to do with messages that it can't authenticate. So this is my sending server saying, you know what if you get an email and it says it's from me and you can't authenticate it? You can't, you know, prove that it's really for me it doesn't match the SPF record it doesn't match the DKIM record. Just throw it away, put it in the trash, don't deliver it, whatever. That's the instruction that the receiving email server is supposed to follow and this is actually a new requirement this has never really been listed as a best practice or recommendation.

It is a new thing that Google and Yahoo are requiring you to have on your email server. So I mentioned that these are all records i keep throwing that word around and you might be wondering, well what what does that even mean what's a record? These are bits of information that you put in ADNS record. Dns stands for Domain Name System and it's DNS records that act as I've seen it described as the phone book of the Internet.

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Every website has ADNS record that tells the Internet at large what server that website is hosted on. So if you go to cindybitar.com the world all of the computers in the world, all of the all of your Internet service providers don't necessarily know where to look for Cindybarcom there's millions and millions, maybe even billions of web hosts, web servers in the world. How do they know which computer holds the files for my site how do they know where to look for that site well, they look in the DNS record to find that information.

So the DNS record says, oh, it's at this IP address, that's where to go to see that website and then your computer is routed to that IP address so you can get to my website. So that's basically what ADNS record is and there are, there's lots of different information that you can put in ADNS record, including things like SPF, DKIM and Demark. So that's where Google and Yahoo are going to look for this information they're going to go to your DNS records and they're going to see if you have a Sender Policy Framework and what it says.

They're going to see if you have a domain, keys identified Mail and what it says, they're going to see if you have a Demark record and what it says. So they're looking at those DNS records and the way that you set records is with your web host. And this is, it's really kind of a nerdy thing it's kind of a geeky thing if you are not comfortable screwing around in your DNS records because you really can break things so you know you have to know what you're doing you have to be confident in your own abilities and if you are not comfortable doing that, then I'm going to recommend that you contact your website host and ask them to either do it for you or recommend someone that you can hire to do this for you because it really is kind of a geeky thing that can be easily, that can be easily messed up and we don't want that to happen so and when you're talking about setting these SPF records and DK, I am records and I'm going to talk more in a minute about where to get help with this stuff but you are going to do that in your web hosting account.

So that's the first part, That's the authentication part that's telling Google and Yahoo that you are who you say you are that this email that says that it's coming from you really is from you that you gave convert kit or active campaign or MailChimp permission to send email on your behalf. And if they can't match those records up, if they can't prove who you say you are, then this is what they should do with that incoming email. That's what that authentication piece is all about that is the most important piece.

And again, these were previously best practices now they are required. The second piece that Google and Yahoo are requiring is this one click unsubscribe. So we all have an unsubscribe link in our emails hopefully you that's a requirement it's been a requirement for as long as I've been email marketing. There's that you've always had to have an unsubscribe link in any commercial email that you send. Now what's changing is that this has to be a one click unsubscribe. It cannot link to a landing page it must truly be a one click unsubscribe.

It's really unclear to me and to a lot of people I'm seeing a lot of questions on Google site about whether or not you can ask people to confirm that they want to unsubscribe. Whether or not you can ask them why they're unsubscribing a lot of times you'll see that when you unsubscribe from an email you'll see you know a little survey a little you know maybe four or five options survey where the sending service will ask you why are you unsubscribing.

It's really unclear if that is still compliant with this rule or if it is not compliant with this rule. What I did read on Google's Bulk Sender Guidelines and I'm going to link to that in the in the show notes. What I did read was that you cannot link to a landing page so in other words, you can't link to a landing page where you ask a bunch of questions or where you maybe make them fill out their email address again, things like that. It must truly be a one click unsubscribe and this is your email platforms job to manage this so you are probably already doing this or you're doing something that's really close, right you've already got an unsubscribe link in your emails.

We all have that that's a requirement. I cannot send emails from Convertkit. I could not send emails from Active Campaign without having that unsubscribe link they wouldn't allow it so you're already you already have an unsubscribe link and like I said, it is your email platform 's job to manage this one click piece. And we're going to talk about when that is required as well, because it's not like right now you don't have to have this right now, but keep an eye on that I'm sure that as the deadline gets closer for this, we're going to hear more about this and it's going to be clarified a bit because right now, like I said, it really is a bit confusing.

Ok, then the third piece of the puzzle is spam complaints you have to keep your spam complaints under a certain level, and I think we all know what spam is, right? Spam is any email that we did not agree to receive it is the email that I get from that marketer who keeps changing email platforms after I've unsubscribed, and

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they keep emailing me and emailing me even though I've unsubscribed multiple times. That is spam. The new rules state that you must maintain an average spam complaint rate below 0.1%, that's one out of a thousand messages, and that you must never go above 0.3% or three out of a thousand messages.

So if you send 10,000 thousand emails if you have ten thousand people on your email list and you send ten, thousand, emails that means that your spam percentage is expected to be less than 10 spam complaints. Now what's important to know here is that they are counting human reported spam. Some email platforms will report spam just automatically, and they'll just decide one day that your email is spam and they will report a lot of spam. That is not what Google and Yahoo are looking at here they are looking at actual humans who clicked the spam button in their email client and said your email is spam so they're not looking at bot reporting, they're not looking at any automated reporting, they're not looking at any of that they're looking at human reported spam and you can actually see how much human reported spam you are getting if you go to postmaster tool no postmaster dot google dot.

Com and I'm going to put the link to this in the show notes. If you have Google Analytics or Google Webmaster Tools, whatever they're calling up these days, they keep changing the name. If you basically have Google Webmaster Tools hooked up on your domain, then you can use Postmaster tools at postmaster. Dot google dot com to see your user reported spam rate. So this is not the same as the spam reporting that you might see in your email platform right it's not the same as the number that maybe Convertkit or Active Campaign is reporting.

Google is looking at only the user reported spam complaints and the best way to know what that number is for you is to use Google's postmaster tools and again, I'm going to link to that in the show notes now what's really important for you to understand is that all of these changes are not taking place at once they're not, you know, there's no. There's no big cut off date there's no, you know, this is the line in the sand they're rolling this out over time so let's talk about the dates that you need to know.

And I got these dates from Google, so this is what Google is saying again, Yahoo might be doing something a little bit differently, but in my experience, Yahoo is a tiny percentage of the emails that I'm sending out. Google is the much larger percentage remember I talked about those five thousand four hundred where's my

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number five thousand four hundred and sixty eight out of seven thousand six hundred and ninety four are either Yahoo or Gmail addresses. If I look at just Gmail, it's like four thousand nine hundred so very small percentage is actually Yahoo so all that to say, I don't know that these dates are applicable to Yahoo addresses as well because this is something I heard from Google.

So the dates that you need to know. Starting in February, Google will start reporting temporary error codes for potentially undeliverable emails. In other words, emails that don't meet these new requirements for your SPF records, your DKIM records, your D mark records, and your one click unsubscribe records. Google is going to start reporting back to you or to your email platform that these emails may not be delivered, but these are temporary error codes they're still going to deliver the email. It's just a kind of a warning it's kind of like, hey, a heads up, these emails in the future will not be delivered if you don't fix these things.

Ok so that's happening in February. Then in April, they're going to start not delivering a small percentage of those emails they're still going to report these errors to you and they're also going to stop delivering some of those emails and the phrase that the Google email person used was a small percentage they didn't say what percentage, just a small percentage of non compliant email will not be delivered starting in April and then in June is when they're going to start enforcing the one click unsubscribe rule.

This date I get the impression has been pushed back multiple times. So it's kind of fluid right now and I'm sure we will learn more about what this exactly means my guess is it's kind of fluid because it's a bit confusing for people. So in June, as of right now, that rule will go into effect where you must have the one click unsubscribe option and again that is up to your email, platform that is up to Convertkit to maintain, that's up to active campaign whatever email sending platform you are using, that's on them.

You just have to have the link in your email and you probably already do, all right, that's a lot so how do you get help with this i told you that you know adding these DNS records can be a little geeky it can you know has the potential to really mess up your server if you do it wrong if you put the wrong information in there has the potential to prevent your emails from being delivered. So how do you get help with this if you are sending bulk email if you are an email, marketer i want you to start



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with your email marketing platform.

That is your best source of information. They are well aware of these changes and it is their business to stay compliant, right? They need to stay in business they need to keep you paying them. They need to make sure that your emails are getting delivered. So it is in their best interest to make sure that you are compliant so start with them. Reach out to their support, read their support documents, read the instructions.

They all have instructions for how to how to put these records on your server. They all have instructions for where to find this information, how to install it, all of that stuff. If you can't get help from your email marketing platform or if they give you the information and you and you're having trouble getting your DNS records set up, then go to your hosting account is also well aware of this information whether you host with Liquid, web or mom webs or site ground or you know whoever you are hosting your website with, they are all well aware of these new upcoming rules they're well aware of these changes and it's their job to help you implement these SPF records, DKIM records, and D mark records on your server so they can help you there they are your second source of support.

I also want to encourage you to read Google's sender guidelines that's going to answer a lot of the questions that you have. And it's a little, some of them are a little nerdy, so you can find a lot of information in there and some of it is probably not going to be super clear but keep an eye on it because that is the one true source of information. Some final thoughts about these changes that are coming up i know like I said at the beginning, there's a lot of people that are maybe crying wolf about this or I guess maybe Chicken Little is a little more apt analogy you know, the sky is falling the sky is falling.

There's a lot of people out there who are really worried about this and what I want you to really understand, what I want you to really know is that Google and Yahoo are not out to get you. They are not trying to kill legitimate email marketing. What they are doing is putting tighter restrictions on bulk sending so that they can more easily identify the actual spammers so that your legitimate email doesn't get accidentally dumped into the spam folder or simply not delivered at all.

This is not a bad change this is something that we as good email marketing citizens should actually be happy about. Yes, it's a little painful to set up, but in the end it is

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a good positive change and personally I'm pretty happy with it. Now I'd like to hear from you. Click over to [tiny course empire dot com forward slash one zero 07](http://tinycourseempire.com/107) and let me know what questions or concerns you have about this new change i'll do my best to find the resources you need to answer your questions.

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