

# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

## SESSION 154

### AVOIDING THE SPAM FILTER

WITH SPENCER BROOKS

**BETH:** Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky. Welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am on with Spencer Brooks. Spencer is the founder of Brooks Digital, and we got into a really, really interesting conversation around email, and I realized that email hasn't been something that we've talked about extensively on here, and I know that it's so important. It's still such a valuable tool and getting your emails through to people so that they open them is really an important thing to talk about. Spencer is the guy to do it. Spencer, thank you so much for joining me today.

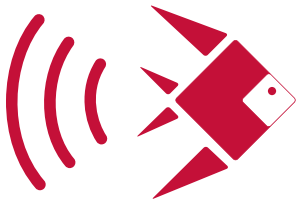
**SPENCER:** Beth, it's great to be talking with you.

**BETH:** I really love talking about all aspects of digital and I find so many times people want to talk about SEO or they want to talk about social media and it's really easy to forget email as a valuable tool. How did you get into focusing a little bit on this?

**SPENCER:** Sure, well my background is actually in website development, but I found that a lot of people needed help with their email and so I would kind of be going through, designing emails and helping them send their campaigns. That work just naturally tied into what I did. I found that people actually had a lot of problems with their email. So I learned as much as I could about it to help them and I ended up amassing a lot of knowledge around it.

**BETH:** That's exactly what happens. It's not like there's Email University. It's such a great opportunity to be able to bring people on that have worked on these projects across different clients, across different things and seeing the problems that come up, seeing the questions that people have so we can get them out there and address them for people. I always like to start this off with a focus on





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participation and why it matters in the work that you do. How are you seeing participation matter for your clients? Where do email and participation intersect?

**SPENCER:** I think with email, fortunately it's fairly easy to make that tie-in, but I think participation means with email that people are opening your emails, they're clicking, they're replying, they're donating and really just taking some sort of action after they receive them, but of course to participate with those emails, they kind of have to receive them first.

**BETH:** Exactly!

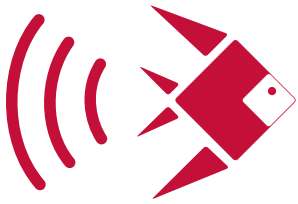
**SPENCER:** So we want to make sure they get those emails out of that spam folder and into their inbox.

**BETH:** I am curious because one of the things about email is it is a different channel than going to your website and maybe clicking a donate button there or seeing something on social and participation there. When you look at those three different digital online channels, what can email do that the other ones don't?

**SPENCER:** Yeah, well I think compared to, I'll start with social media. That has a lot of, there's just a lot of noise in social media. So if you look at a Twitter feed and you look at someone's email inbox, their email inbox is a lot less cluttered. So if you get an email compared to Twitter and Facebook, it's gonna show up a lot clearer and people are gonna take notice of that more. Compared to a website, you can reach people proactively through email, but you have to wait for people to come to your website. So email has a lot less noise than social media, but you can be proactive about reaching people and control how you interact with them versus waiting for them to come to you.

**BETH:** I think it's easy to forget how huge that is because everyone is always talking about all the different social medias and you need to be on YouTube and you need to be here and you need to be somewhere else. It's so easy to get caught up in looking forward at the new things. Some of the advantages of





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the older things, it's easy to get lost, but that idea of being able to be proactive and to control how and when you communicate with them is so important, but also when they actually see it. When it comes to your website and it comes to social media, you put stuff out there and it's really more of a one to many communication, whereas email is like a one to one communication that you can be fairly sure, if your email is getting through that they're at least gonna see it.

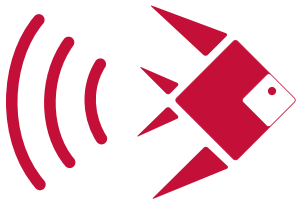
**SPENCER:** Yeah, absolutely and it's such a huge thing. People forget it, you're right, but I think there's a certain relationship you can form with someone over email that is a lot harder to do. Like you mentioned, the one to many. It's a one-to-one, you can personalize it to people, you can get an idea of who they are. Even something as simple as saying, "Hi, Spencer," or "Hi, Beth," and using their name. You can't really do that with your website or with social media, and I think that's just a nice relationship building tool that's unique to email.

**BETH:** That's so true. Like little tiny things like that really can make a difference with it. What kind of things are nonprofits doing with email right now?

**SPENCER:** Well, I mean, I think the big one is of course fundraising. It's a growing fundraising channel and there are a lot of studies that are showing that's just increasing, but there's also different ways that nonprofits are using email to get people involved, say with like advocacy work, signing a petition or letting them know about events or just providing them with information or different things related to their mission.

**BETH:** Yeah, and you know, it's funny. We've been seeing working really well for people lately is a blended social media and email campaign. That's working great for Giving Tuesday and for all kinds of other things that people are doing. We're also seeing people doing good things with a blended print/email, for say a direct mail fundraising campaign to send out a print mailing and then also support it with email. Having that email back channel going to reinforce, and back in the day, back in the old days when it was all just mail, when you would make say a





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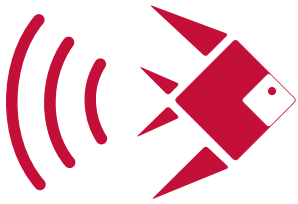
postcard and mail it out and then mail the exact same postcard out again a week or couple of weeks later, we call that a bumper mailing. You know that repetition of seeing things that email is such a great tool to provide that level of repetition needed to get familiar and get people to take action without adding a ton of costs.

**SPENCER:** Yeah, and it's interesting like how those different channels like social and email and even your website, they can feed off of each other. Like you can do something on your website and you might feature an email or take the results from something on social media and share it with people on email and actually follow up and say, "Hey, you missed this on social media, but here's what happened. Maybe you should get involved next time and see what happened."

**BETH:** You know that's such a great point. When I use the word integrated communications, a lot of people either roll their eyes or it just becomes obtuse, like what does that even mean in a communication, but it can mean something as simple as putting the same messages out on all the different tools or graphically or visually making everything match, but I like your bit of interpretation on it. That you can do one specific campaign on one type of media and then take the results of that or some aspect of it and put it into a different channel and then use that channel to get people back to the first channel. You can use all these different things to connect them to each other.

**SPENCER:** Yeah, in fact I did that the other day. Even with Twitter chat and so I was participating actually in a Twitter chat kind of around email metrics and these things and then there's a couple of really good points that people made. So I was able to take and distill that information down and then send it out to all my email subscribers and say, "Hey, maybe you couldn't be here for the hour that this Twitter chat went on for, but here's the top three highlights that we talked about." That's just a way of kind of, you're already doing the work, right on social media campaign so you might as well use it to increase your engagement and to build relationships on other channels and it kind of works multiplicatively if you can





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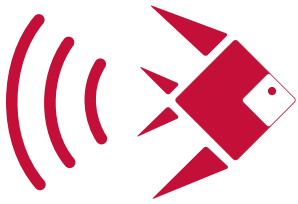
thing about it that way, each channel you can sort of bounce things off of each other and use that to sort of amplify your impact that way.

**BETH:** I love that, multiplicatively. That's a word we don't use enough. I feel like the other conversation we're having a lot is beginning to separate the layer of the actual content that you're putting out from the distribution mechanism and that email used to be, when you think of email, you think about like, "Oh, I've got an email newsletter," which is really a content. I'm thinking about the content and stories I'm putting out, but email is really just a distribution mechanism and you need a strategy around what you're putting into that channel to distribute. Just the fact that you have an email newsletter and the point is to fill it with words isn't enough, but that there may be content that you're creating in another channel that can be re-purposed or realigned. We often call that modular content, you know, that can be flipped around or turned into a different medium. It might be print and you might turn it into a slide share or a video or something different.

**SPENCER:** Yeah, that's a really great point, I think, because the best people or the people who have email really figured out have a very good idea of what they want to do with it, and it's not just email for the sake of sending an email or keeping in touch. It's very purposeful and so they might be publishing things on their website or they might be doing things elsewhere, and email is just a way of starting a conversation with someone and in driving them to maybe even something else that you're doing. So it's just a way to reach people and it doesn't have to be self-contained. If you are doing it in a self-contained way, then you're probably missing a huge opportunity.

**BETH:** The thing about email though is people say they hate email. They hate cleaning out their email boxes, they hate opening their email in the morning. So I think, unlike social, or like lots of different mechanisms there's this sort of negativity around the feeling of email, like the work burden or just opening email and junk email that they're getting that used to only be applied to opening up their actual mailbox. Now people feel that about their email box. How do we start





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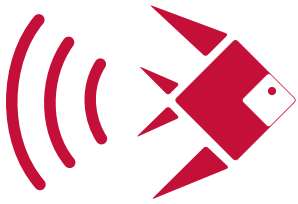
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to adjust the people's value of email and make sure that they're sending good things that people want to receive when there's a lot of this sort of negative feeling about email in general?

**SPENCER:** That's a great point. I personally am a vicious subscriber of things that aren't really valuable to me. I know this better than anyone and I think, I actually used the word there. It needs to be invaluable to the person who is receiving it and I think, and I want to say that again because I think it's really important. That email isn't about you, it's about them and so I'm gonna unsubscribe from an email that I open and it's just talking about them because I don't really care and it's a waste of my time. So if it's not offering something of value to me, like why should I care? I mean, it sounds harsh, but I think that's what's running through my mind when I see email. It's like why should I care? Give me a reason to care. So I think as a nonprofit if you're writing emails that are very focused on the recipient and offering value to them, that can look a lot of different ways, but even sending them an invitation to attend an event, sending them information to help them. Maybe if you're a health-focused nonprofit and you work with patients, you're sending them information on how to manage their chronic disease or something like that, but that's very valuable. If it's just about you and how highly rated your nonprofit is or how low your operating costs were this year or whatever, it's like I don't really care that much and that's the kind of stuff that might get those unsubscribes or are not getting to people who are not really opening or clicking your emails.

**BETH:** You know and anybody that's a regular listener to the podcast will hear a theme in what you're saying is this constant idea that we're talking about, that your job is to facilitate their dreams and you've got to apply that to everything that you do. Every time you touch them, every time you communicate, you've got to be thinking about what they want to hear and nobody cares that Mary got a promotion or that something inside. They care about how things affect them or affect the interest that they have, and that applies to every type of communication that you do. So every little piece of things that you put into your email newsletter, it's not about filling up the newsletter. It's about how do you





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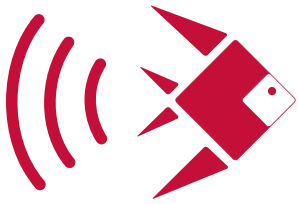
delight and amaze these people that are listening with stories and content that help them see their role in your work.

**SPENCER:** Yeah, yeah. I think it's getting harder and harder is the thing. Email used to be this, you'd open every email you got. There's more and more noise and it's kind of moving towards social media. Not quite, I don't think it's ever gonna be that noisy.

**BETH:** People read their email with their finger over the delete key. I mean, that's how they read it and it's no different than how when you come home, you take whatever is in your mailbox. I mean I take everything out of my mailbox and then walk over to my recycle bin and it has to be really good for me to not put it right into the recycling bin. It's the same thing. It's like your subject line is equivalent to the teaser that's on the outside of an envelope or to something that when you get an envelope in the mail you know right away. If it's from the IRS, you're not throwing it out. You may not open the envelope, but you know that that's important. If it looks like a bill, you know that's important. What can you do when you're trying to deliver and get email people, what can you do to make people put it, even if they don't read it right away, to put it into the "this is important" pile? So the first step to that is actually getting into the part of their inbox where they actually see it and I know Google and Gmail have made a lot of changes and people are constantly fighting spam. So let's talk about this sendability and how do you make sure that your emails; obviously we're gonna table the idea of like clearly you all are sending good and valuable content. Let's talk about the actual practical tech side of getting email through so that people see it. So what are the things that make something go into a spam folder or a junk folder in the first place?

**SPENCER:** Yeah, well I think, let me back up and try and briefly describe a few ways that email gets filtered out of spam because I think there's a lot of misconceptions and things people just don't know about, but I think it helps





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frame our conversation a little bit. So what most people are familiar with is the spam folder in Gmail or Outlook or something like that and so that's one way. Like your email inbox will see that maybe someone sent an email from a suspicious source. It might be an unknown server or it might have keywords in the email that might cause it to be flagged as spam or something like that. I can delve into some of those details later. I don't want to get too far down into the weed center, but it just basically scans the email and puts it in that spam folder. So that's one way that emails get flagged as spam, but there's a whole other level of spam that happens even before email even reaches Gmail or Outlook or anything like that. It actually happens when email is received by the email server and what that is, it's sort of like the gatekeeper. Like if I send an email to you and say you have a Gmail address, Gmail is gonna receive it, but before it actually decides to deliver it to Beth's inbox, it's gonna say, "OK, is this sent by someone I can trust?" "Does this look really spammy?" And if that's the case, it will never even appear in your inbox. It won't even have a chance to appear in your spam folder. It will just disappear without a trace. This has probably happened to a lot of people that maybe you signed up for a service and it says, "Hey, check your email for a confirmation email," and it just never arrives and it's not in your spam folder. Chances are it just never arrived there because it just got filtered out even before it hit your inbox. So there's two levels there that are happening and I think that's an important thing to break out first, but it's sort of a long intro into some of the ways that email can get flagged as spam. I'll just briefly outline a few of those and then we can talk about them some more, but in general, emails can get flagged as spam if you're sending from an email server, which could be if you're sending emails hosted on your website, like your website server could ...

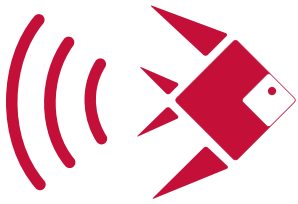
**BETH:** Can you clarify and give some examples to make sure people understand what that means.

**SPENCER:** Sure, and I know this is technical stuff so I don't want to get ...

**BETH:** That's what my job is. My job is anything that might be too technical might







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be clarified so that anybody can utilize the information.

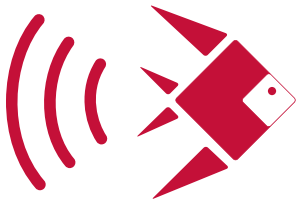
**SPENCER:** Definitely. I'll back it up a little. I'll take it up to a higher level. When you send an email, it comes from a server, and that's just like your return address on an envelope, and so if your return address is known for sending a lot of junk mail to people, then you might get flagged as spam, if that makes sense. So sending an email from in this case a web server that has been sending out other spam emails, that can get you flagged as spam. Like I mentioned, if there's certain key words in your email, like you're using the word "free" a lot or if you happen to be a Nigerian prince or things like that, but I think a lot of it has to do with on kind of the technical level, like the actual technology that you're using to send has a lot to do with whether your emails will actually get delivered or not.

**BETH:** OK, so what technologies should and shouldn't people be using?

**SPENCER:** That's a great question. So you should be sending email through a service that is designed to send bulk email. When I send bulk email, I'm talking about services like MailChimp is an example where they're designed to send email newsletters, as opposed to Outlook or Gmail, which is designed to send mostly one-to-one kind of emails. Like you send an email to Mary, and Mary sends you an email back, but you don't use Outlook or Gmail or you shouldn't be using it to send your email newsletters or to send the same email to like 100 people. That will get you in trouble pretty fast. So you should be using software or a service provider that is actually designed to send bulk emails. That can be your database or your software if you have one of those or a service like MailChimp or Constant Contact will do the trick, too.

**BETH:** Exactly. So it may come from like a Salesforce or even some people in the nonprofit world they may have one of the Blackbaud services that includes an email aspect to it. So a lot of people have these things, but it is easy sometimes if you're a smaller nonprofit or you're just kind of trying to do something on the fly to say, "I'm just gonna bcc all these people," and send it out through Outlook. So





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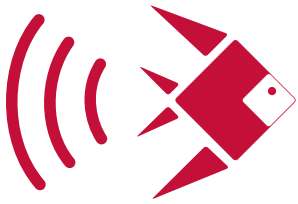
what happens? Why is that a bad idea?

**SPENCER:** That's a great question. So in the short term, nothing bad happens and that's the most insidious part of the whole thing is that you can do that for awhile and it's not really gonna matter, but what happens is over time if you're bcc-ing 100 people or 1,000 people they have no way to unsubscribe. They can't get you to stop, aside from maybe literally replying to you and saying, "Stop sending me these emails." So their only course of action is to mark it as spam and they'll click the spam button in their email folder, and you've probably done this and I've certainly done this, is like I don't know what this email is about. I can't unsubscribe. This is spam. Every time someone hits that button, it lowers your reputation as a sender, and so most people don't know this, but you have a reputation online as an email sender. Just like you have a reputation in your life and every time someone clicks that spam button, your reputation goes down a little bit and the lower reputation you have, the less likely your emails are to show up in someone's inbox.

**BETH:** The thing that I think is easy to not realize in something like this is that's when you're sending something to 100 people, but when you're using that same email service, the same Outlook account and you're trying to send something to your boss or a donor or like a regular one-to-one email, the same reputation follows you.

**SPENCER:** Exactly, and actually where you can really get in trouble here is if you're sending out bulk email to people, sending out to maybe 100 or 1,000 people, chances are you're sending it from your same email address or it might be say info@whatever.org. It's your same website domain name, but that's often times what has the reputation is your nonprofit's name and so if you're sending out a bunch of unsolicited or and when I say unsolicited, if people haven't opted in to receive that or they can't unsubscribe, then it's kind of a no-no. So if you're sending out a lot of those kind of emails and people aren't marking them as spam, then what can happen and I've seen this happen is then you try to send an





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email to a donor or boss that gets marked as spam because it's your reputation that's tied to your name. So it affects everybody.

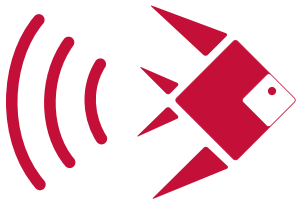
**BETH:** Exactly, and I think the important thing, is I'm sure there are people that are listening to this going, "Well, duh, Beth. Like, no kidding. We all know this," but the thing is you guys might know it because a lot of the listeners to this podcast are people that work in development or communications and have to deal with this all the time, but there may be people in your organization that don't know it. If they're emailing and doing this from the same domain name, the same email address, like the back half of it, as you are, they could be out there building this negative reputation for your name and you are thinking, "Why can't I get my emails through the donor?"

**SPENCER:** Yeah, and I worked with someone who exactly that happened. There was someone else in the organization who was sending out hundreds of copy/paste emails to people. I think it was either development or it could have been recruiting volunteers, whatever it might be and that really came back to bite the organization and when your executive director can't send emails out to really important people, that's a big problem.

**BETH:** He'd get really upset. So here's a question. If that's happening and say that there's somebody in an organization that's doing this, but you, like you're the communications director and you're using Constant Contact, but you're still using Constant Contact with Mary@organization.org. Like will it also affect emails that are going out through Constant Contact that are still using that same domain name?

**SPENCER:** Often times, yes. It's not exclusively that way, but a lot of times it will get traced back to the actual domain name that you're sending from. So you could be sending through Constant Contact and that's definitely gonna help you because Constant Contact has their own reputation, which is very good, and they work hard to maintain it.





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**BETH:** Right, and then those are going through their servers.

**SPENCER:** Yes, so that's a big plus, but if it gets tied to your name, if your name has a bad reputation, then that can absolutely affect you and what's more, it will make Constant Contact pretty mad at you because they've done a lot of work to ensure they've got a good reputation and it's often times one or two strikes and you're out, especially with them. So you can not only have your emails go to spam, but you might make Constant Contact mad at you and then they might kick you off. So it's a lot worse than you might imagine.

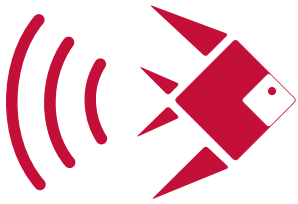
**BETH:** Right. So let's talk about it. How do you fix this? There's a term called the blacklist. I'm not sure if anybody knows this term. Let's talk about what a blacklist means, what the problem of it is and then how to fix it if you end up on one.

**SPENCER:** Yeah, a blacklist is kind of the email version of ...

**BETH:** Solitary confinement?

**SPENCER:** Yeah, it is. It's sort of like solitary confinement. It's like a most wanted list, and if you're on it or you're kind of already in jail, if you can imagine it that way, but it's a list. It's just a list of people and that could be names, like domain names, like whatever.org is on the blacklist. They're a bad sender or it could be a specific server. You know, maybe it's a server your nonprofit is paying for and if you're on that list, then every time an email is received, chances are the server that receives that email or person who receives that email, it's gonna get checked. The blacklist is gonna be checked and if your name is on it, then your email is probably going into the spam folder, or it's not gonna arrive. My personal experience, I'd say that if you're on a blacklist, it's about 25 percent of your emails are just never gonna get delivered. That's what I was seeing and that includes one-to-one emails, not just actual bulk emails. So any email that you send out, it can almost be a coin flip whether it's received, so it's a pretty bad deal. So if you're on a blacklist, you can get off of it by cleaning up your email sending





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practices, and we can talk about that and also cleaning up your list. Those are kind of the two big ways and there's a lot to unpack with that. That's at the high level what you need to do.

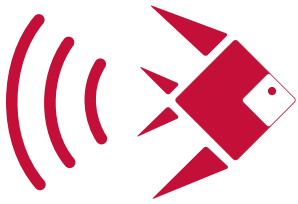
**BETH:** Let's start out by talking about cleaning out your list, and what's important about that because I know, you know everybody works so hard and sometimes pays money to get names onto their list and it's this long process of getting names onto your list and so those names all feel really valuable to people and people can be reluctant to remove names from that list. Let's talk about the pros and cons of that.

**SPENCER:** Yeah, it's hard. It's a really hard thing and you're right. People have spent a lot of time building their email list and to be frank, probably rather than keep sending to inactive people or people who haven't opened in years instead of deleting them, but the thing is, your inactive members and the people who aren't opening your list, they're contributing to not only lowering your stats, they're taking down your open rates, your click rates. They're reducing the performance of your email campaigns and those numbers are sort of tied to whether your emails actually get delivered.

**BETH:** I think that's a shock for people. People don't realize if you have 10,000 names on your email list, but only 500 people are opening them, Constant Contact or MailChimp or whoever is sending it, it's going through their databases and they're paying attention. Like they're tracking that and if your stuff, it's sort of like Facebook. If your posts on Facebook aren't getting opened, they're not gonna show, they're gonna reduce the number of times that they show your posts to your fans if your fans aren't interested in your stuff. Email is exactly the same way. It's hard for people to remember that.

**SPENCER:** It makes a lot of sense when you think about it. I mean, if you have such a low, if your stats are really low, that's gonna look suspicious. It's like why does no one care about their emails. It's kind of a good sniff test, canary in a





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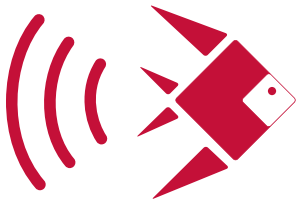
coal mine. So if you go through and bite the bullet and go ahead and clean out your list of people who say haven't opened your emails in a year or something like that, not only are you gonna increase your stats and improve your chances of getting into someone's inbox, but in the process you might even save money because you're not paying for the people to sit on your list that aren't actually doing anything. So it's kind of a win, win, win.

**BETH:** Right, and what about things like how email services handle unsubscribes and names that are actually no longer getting through?

**SPENCER:** That's another really important point to consider because that's what an email service is really doing, and that's a big value that they provide is maintaining your list, having a healthy list and when I say healthy list, that means having good practices around managing your list, is what's gonna keep you out of the spam folder. So a service like Constant Contact is going to put that unsubscribe link in the footer of each of your emails and when someone clicks that link, they're gonna handle automatically getting them off your list, so you never have to worry about whether the system is working. It's just there if you send an email to someone and their email address doesn't exist because they quit their job or something, it's going to process that and say, "Hey, this person, either their email doesn't exist so you probably shouldn't keep sending to them." It's gonna take them off the list. It's gonna take people off the list when people mark your email as spam because you definitely don't want to keep sending to people who marked your emails as spam. It's gonna do a lot of stuff.

**BETH:** But I think it's important that we should also let people know that what you mean by take it off the list, it means that the system will no longer send to those emails in theory, but a lot of times people may not realize that those systems, some of them keep those emails in the system and so you might often be paying for emails that aren't deliverable. You could have a bunch of unsubscribes sitting there, but they're still in your list or you can have a bunch of





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

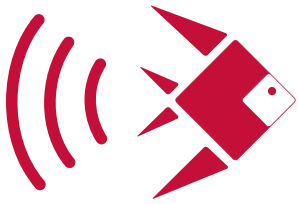
bounces sitting there that will be in an undeliverable list and the system, AWeber is like this. Unless you go in and manually remove them from your list, they're still there, but other systems will remove them and then the opposite things happen. If your email account isn't connected to your actual database, you could end up with names that have asked to be removed in Constant Contact, but you still have those emails in your Donor Perfect or your Blackbaud database and you need to make sure that you're referencing those two things back and forth or actually technically connecting them or you could accidentally end up putting that person back on that list, which then just actually hurts your actual relationship with the person.

**SPENCER:** The devil's in the details.

**BETH:** I know, and that's the thing that's so frustrating about email. It's this big mass like, "Hey, I'm gonna grab a bunch of names and send them all at once. It's gonna save me a whole bunch of time," but I think the things that you're bringing up are definitely showing that it's these tiny little tweaks and this maintenance that you have to do in order to make sure it does remain a good tool for you.

**SPENCER:** It is absolutely important to understand at least in a limited capacity, to understand at least how a system is maintaining your list. You don't have to understand the nitty-gritty details, but you sort of have to go down your checklist and say, "Does this system handle unsubscribes and the way that I use it with my process, am I continuing to send to these people?" and kind of understanding how does this all fit together and again, you don't have to understand all the technical details about it, but just going through and asking the question, "Well, once we hit unsubscribe, what happens? What happens in my email system? Where do they go? Does that get synced all the way back to Salesforce or Blackbaud?" and seeing that process end to end to make sure that you're not accidentally continuing to send to people that have said, "No, I don't want to receive stuff from you."





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

**BETH:** Right, and as we come here closing to the end, I just want to talk about the thing people really do like to ask about and talk about all the time. The whole open rates and click-through rates because I think it's a good thing to talk about. How much does that affect your deliverability and your ranking with say a Constant Contact or some email provider? Do they pay attention to how many people are opening your emails and how many people are clicking through them as much as we do?

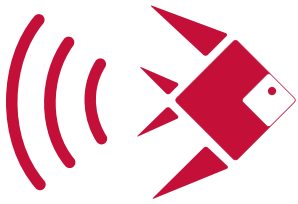
**SPENCER:** Well, I think to a certain point we care a lot more the day to day fluctuations, but I think they're looking at outliers. Are you abnormally low in your opening and click rates or are a lot of people marking your email as spam? That's what they're gonna really be looking at. So in terms of actually getting in trouble with them. However, in terms of getting your email in people's inbox, it's gonna be related. So you bring those stats up, then your emails are gonna have a better chance at getting in someone's inbox. So that's where you come in. That's where you have to care about that because if you want to get more emails into people's inboxes where they can participate with them, then you need to be invested in improving those stats. Not just trying to stay out of trouble with your email provider or keep yourself off the blacklist.

**BETH:** I think that's really why I wanted to have you come on today, so that we could really have this conversation about how it's all connected, that everything from the content that you're putting out there and how much people like it and want to read it and click on it, is actually connected to whether anybody gets to see your content and gets the chance to like it and connect it, that the words and the value that you're putting out there, making sure that it's good for the people is just as important as whether you're deleting and cleaning out some scribes. It's the whole continuum. Every little piece of it is a weighted factor in success of your email campaigns.

**SPENCER:** Yeah, and really to your point as well, if your website content isn't good or if your content that you're linking in your emails isn't good, then people aren't







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WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

going to be opening or clicking them as much, and then suddenly maybe your emails stop getting delivered as much. Really it's fascinating how the ecosystem works, and it's all connected.

**BETH:** Yeah, and that's really so interesting.

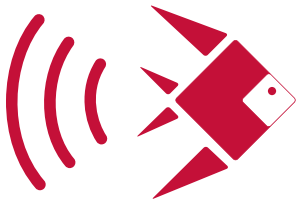
**SPENCER:** It's getting tougher to be good at email marketing, but I think what nonprofits do, they have a little bit of an advantage here. There's a long history of direct mail and it's not as different as you would think. I'm not a direct mail expert. I don't sit around doing that all day. I work on the computer and do websites and sit in email land, but there's a story history there and nonprofits are good at that, and they've developed a skill set and I think there's a lot of things they could look at how they've operated in the past with the direct mail campaigns, and say, "OK, how can we apply our successes in the past with these physical channels to digital?"

**BETH:** Absolutely. Spencer, if somebody really wanted to improve their open rates and make sure they were getting the most of their emails through into people's hands and creating this valuable content, of all the things we've talked about, what's one great tip that you can leave somebody with? Is there one thing that you could say, "If you do nothing else, do this first."

**SPENCER:** Absolutely. Go clean out your email list. Go through and delete, as hard as it might be, delete the people who haven't opened your emails in a long time, the people who might be pending, they might be on the unsubscribe list, but they're not there. Excuse me, that you haven't actually gotten them out of your system yet, but go through and clean out your email list, and you're gonna see a big rise in your open and click rates and also deliverability of your emails as well.

**BETH:** I think that's a huge tip, but it's a huge tip for lots of reasons. One is you're gonna get all those direct results from it, but I often have seen, we've done this with clients and we had a client that had 46,000 in their database, and we looked





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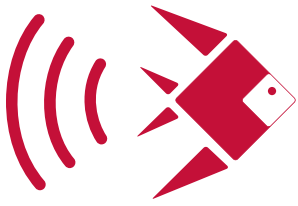
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

at how long it had been since a lot of those people had given, and we actually cut it down to 4,600. So reduced it by a factor of 10 because they realized that of all of these names that they were physically mailing to and emailing to, only like a few hundred of them were giving. We cleaned it all out and actually increased the amount that they gave by 10 percent that year. Part of that was when we got rid of all the hangers on, all of the well maybe they'll give to us, you can clarify your message. You can look at who is left and really focus in on what you're saying to people that you know really care about you and you stop talking in these giant wide generalisms in an effort to kind of wrap your arms around the whole world. When you can be specific and perfect for the people that say, "Yes, I'm active and I want there," you can write to make them happy and when you do, they give more money. It's often shocking to people that when you cut down, you rise up. The second thing I would say is when you have a giant email list and now you have a small one, it also encourages you to go out and get more people because it's sort of upsetting and daunting to be like, "Oh my gosh, we only have 1,000 people left, and we used to have 6,000." It inspires you to kind of take more action and rebuild that list, which is just overall good for your organization.

**SPENCER:** That's a great point. I think a lot of people get caught up in the vanity numbers. The big numbers of the email list and that doesn't really help. I mean that's a good example that you gave. You cut the email list by a factor of 10 and increased giving by 10 percent. That should show you right there that you don't need a big email list, and that big number isn't always directly correlated to the results that you get. I think it's pretty surprising.

**BETH:** I know, and I think it's so surprising for people. I always try and make sure that we're sharing that. Thank you so much. This is always such an interesting discussion to have. I really appreciate you sharing your knowledge with both me and our whole nonprofit community. If people needed some help with this or had any more questions for you, where can they get in touch with you?





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WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

**SPENCER:** Sure. Well, you can send me an email and that's [Spencer@Brooks.Digital](mailto:Spencer@Brooks.Digital) or if you prefer, you can just go to our website as well, which is [Brooks.Digital](http://Brooks.Digital), and you can sign up for email updates or keep in touch that way.

**BETH:** That's a great way to look at good email best practices is to look at somebody who is an expert in it. I definitely recommend you going and taking a look. We'll have all of Spencer's contact information on the show notes page. Thank you so much for joining me today. Thanks everyone for listening. We will see you next time.

