

The Motley Fool Case Study

The Motley Fool centralizes email, achieves 99% deliverability and cuts production time and IT resources



"With email generating 30% of our revenue, it was too core to our business to outsource. StrongMail has enabled us to centralize all of our email on one platform, which has improved our deliverability, control and efficiency."

Greg Martz
Director of Marketing Operations
The Motley Fool



The Motley Fool
Alexandria, VA
www.fool.com

Industry
Media/Publishing

Employees
175

Return on Investment
> Higher conversion rates
> Doubled newsletters without adding staff
> Reduced IT resource requirements
> Cut production time by 20%

Key Benefits
> Complete control from concept to delivery
> Improved and expedited email delivery
> Fully integrated and centralized platform for US and UK operations
> 100% real-time visibility into mailings
> Increased scalability
> Data security with no offsite replication
> Low maintenance, fully supported solution

Products & Services
> StrongMail® Email Integration Server
> Strong Delivery Tools

Integrated Business Assets
> Microsoft SQL Server
> Custom Marketing Application

Gaining Control and Efficiencies by Centralizing Email

Since 1993, The Motley Fool has helped millions of people grow their wealth and achieve financial independence across a wide variety of online and offline media channels, including: its award-winning website; several market-beating investment newsletters; eight best-selling Simon & Schuster and self-published books; a nationally syndicated weekly newspaper column carried by more than 200 publications; and the company's award-winning UK subsidiary, Fool UK.

Email is core to The Motley Fool's business, as it drives 30+ percent of the company's revenues. Indeed, email is the primary marketing channel for customer acquisition and a strong driver of partner advertising. In addition to traditional transactional and acquisition marketing emails, The Motley Fool sends out electronic versions of its premium investing and personal finance newsletters to hundreds of thousands of individual subscribers. In terms of volume, The Motley Fool sends out more than 80 million emails a month across its US and UK divisions.

Visitors and subscribers to The Motley Fool have been growing steadily, and in 2005, the company began to outgrow its legacy in-house email solution. Lacking the performance to deliver high email volumes was just part of the problem; The Motley Fool also wanted better tools to optimize their campaigns, engage in best practices and centralize their US and UK division email on one platform.

High-Level Project Goals

- > Centralize email across US and UK business units
- > Enhance performance to handle higher email volumes
- > Increase email deliverability rates and visibility
- > Improve bounce management and list hygiene
- > Integrate email with backend systems
- > Gain scalability to meet future need
- > Maximize data security

Why StrongMail?

Given the importance of email for driving revenue, The Motley Fool made a strategic decision to invest in an in-house email platform that enabled them to retain control of their email and send it efficiently and reliably.

“We started looking at best-of-breed ESP vendors, but we soon realized that, with our requirements for security, control and confidence in sending, a hosted model wasn’t going to work for us,” said Greg Martz, Director of Marketing Operations at The Motley Fool. “StrongMail has allowed us to deliver our US and UK email from one platform, giving us complete control from concept to delivery.”

Centralizing on One Platform

Prior to StrongMail, The Motley Fool had no efficient way to control and coordinate their email initiatives across their US and UK divisions. As the UK division began to grow, they didn’t have a centralized solution for managing key aspects of email deliverability – including bounce processing and list hygiene. By centralizing all marketing and transactional email for both divisions on the StrongMail platform, The Motley Fool is able to easily control and manage critical success factors across business units.

“Implementing StrongMail has been a full-fledged success company wide,” said Martz. “StrongMail has been an excellent partner in supporting our strategy to keep email in-house, which, for us, trumps working with a global ESP. With StrongMail, we have the control to avoid replicating data, worrying about security or conforming to an external schedule.”

As a rack-ready appliance, with a robust and comprehensive set of APIs, StrongMail made it easy for The Motley Fool to install the solution into its US data center. The Motley Fool maintains the system locally while extending StrongMail’s capabilities to their US and UK divisions via its intuitive, web-based user interface. Standardizing its outbound email on StrongMail’s commercially supported, low-maintenance solution has enabled The Motley Fool to significantly reduce IT resources dedicated to email management.

“StrongMail’s fully integrated email platform has streamlined our email operations with an extremely efficient and centralized workflow and process,” said Martz. “StrongMail has become an essential, reliable and core component of our overall email strategy.”

Having a centralized platform also enables The Motley Fool to optimize the customer experience. Marketing management can coordinate mailings across email types and divisions, as well as enforce branding guidelines to ensure that each customer communication reflects the spirit and image of the company. The Motley Fool has also integrated StrongMail’s mailing logs with its internal data sources, which allows the information to be leveraged across the organization.

Confidence in Email Delivery

One of the core drivers for replacing its homegrown, unsupported technology with StrongMail was to gain full confidence in their ability to deliver, manage and generate results with email. The Motley Fool’s custom solution lacked the visibility they needed to understand and analyze the complete path of their email from sending to the inbox. With StrongMail, they gained that visibility, plus access to real-time data and diagnostics.

“Email marketing is so critical to the business, that we didn’t want to leave anything to chance,” said Martz. “We’ve worked very hard to develop a winning marketing strategy, but if the last leg to the consumer doesn’t happen, it’s worthless. StrongMail gives us the confidence to get our email delivered quickly, reliably and without fail. Without StrongMail, our marketing team would have to focus on deliverability and not their ultimate goal – maximizing revenue.”

By employing StrongMail’s proven email delivery, integration and campaign management technology, The Motley Fool has gained a core competence in email that is critical to ensuring the success and growth of its marketing programs. Built from the ground up to handle the complexities introduced by spam and high-volume sending, StrongMail provides

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The Motley Fool with superior reliability for sending, and the tools to proactively address delivery problems as they occur.

Plus, they now own their sender reputation, instead of outsourcing that critical component of deliverability to an ESP.

"Thanks to StrongMail, we now have full confidence in email delivery – and it's not just me, the entire executive team shares that confidence," said Martz.

Maximizing Deliverability with Real-time Visibility and Actionable Data

Gaining better visibility into its mailings — from tracking and performance to delivery — was another key driver for replacing its custom solution. StrongMail's in-depth reporting and smart bounce management has empowered The Motley Fool with a wealth of actionable data. Having an effective bounce management system to maintain list hygiene is of particular importance to The Motley Fool, as its single opt-in policy for adding new records has the potential to capture a sizeable amount of invalid addresses. Prior to StrongMail, The Motley Fool didn't have an accurate way to measure deliverability, so one of the first things that they did was to take advantage of StrongMail's Smart Bounce Management technology to clean their lists.

"We've used StrongMail to deal with invalid, unknown and bad addresses, which has resulted in the removal of 750,000 records from our house file," said Martz. "We're adding about 100,000 new records a month, so our list size has largely stayed the same, but we have a better sense of how well our campaigns are doing because we're sending to a valid and active list."

By using StrongMail to keep its lists clean and track performance, The Motley Fool has dramatically increased its delivery rates.

"StrongMail's Smart Bounce Management is key," said Martz. "Our file is much cleaner now, which has enabled us to improve our deliverability rate from about 85 percent to consistently between 98 and 99 percent."

The Motley Fool helps maximize campaign performance with automated delivery alerts that notify them of significant blocks or other delivery problems in real time. If they identify a high bounce rate at Yahoo! or AOL, for example, they can pause the mailing, identify the cause and address any problems.

"Direct marketing is all about the numbers, and if you don't know or are guessing, more than likely then you're not maximizing results," said Martz. "By keeping email in house with StrongMail, we have direct access to that data, without having to wait on a limited number of reports provided by an ESP."

Superior Performance Expedites Delivery and Ensures Scalability

StrongMail's high performance email platform provides The Motley Fool with the performance they need to get their email delivered promptly and reliably, while offering superior scalability to accommodate future growth. The company was able to double its sending speeds, even while implementing deliverability technologies that impact performance, such as email authentication and Goodmail certification.

"The Motley Fool has built a sizeable list that grows by about 100,000 records each month," said Martz. "StrongMail gives us the horsepower to promptly deliver email and the scalability to easily add additional servers as needed. With their performance capabilities, we can send our emails twice as fast for maximum relevancy, while still taking advantage of SPF, DKIM and Goodmail to help get our messages to the inbox."

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About StrongMail Systems, Inc.

StrongMail's online marketing solutions for email and social media enable businesses to reach, engage and influence their target audience using the most powerful channels available to marketers today.

StrongMail gives email marketers the control and support they need to improve campaign performance, boost deliverability and lower costs, while also leveraging the power of social media to extend the reach of their campaigns and brand to new audiences. Combining an easy-to-use email marketing application, high-performance delivery system, viral-marketing tool, social media integration, and a wide range of deliverability, strategic and supporting services, StrongMail makes it possible for companies with all levels of resources and expertise to take advantage of its proven solutions.

Headquartered in Redwood City, CA, StrongMail's clients include global leaders across virtually every industry.

To learn more about StrongMail, please visit www.strongmail.com.

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Operational Efficiencies Cut Costs and Production Time

StrongMail has enabled The Motley Fool to streamline email operations with numerous operation efficiencies. Now, their marketing team can do more and be more effective with fewer resources.

"Using StrongMail, we've cut production time, from creative to send time, by 20 percent," said Martz. "We've also increased the number and types of emails we send almost two-fold, and we haven't had to add any production staff, and that's largely due to StrongMail."

StrongMail's in-house approach also enables The Motley Fool to increase its email volumes without incurring additional sending fees.

"StrongMail gives The Motley Fool efficiency of scale, with no added costs to increase volume," said Martz. "Productivity is a top concern at The Motley Fool, and it's no more evident than in email marketing. StrongMail was a smart investment, and it's paid healthy dividends down the road."

As a fully supported technology solution, StrongMail requires far less IT resources than The Motley Fool's previous custom solution. In addition to being a low-maintenance solution, StrongMail is constantly updated with the latest bounce codes and throttling rates, which eliminates the need for IT to keep up with those requirements.

Future Plans

Over the next 12 months, The Motley Fool is planning to take advantage of StrongMail's dynamic content engine and token functionality to further personalize its newsletters with relevant messages. Using StrongMail, The Motley Fool will be able to create one template for each newsletter that is customized for each user through the dynamic insertion of relevant content blocks based on their specific preferences and past behavior.

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