

Re-engagement campaigns for inactive subscribers

You built a list. People signed up. Then they stopped opening, clicking, or buying. That silence is expensive—you paid to acquire those contacts, and now they are dead weight on your metrics. A re-engagement campaign for inactive subscribers is the surgical strike you run before you either revive the relationship or cut the cord. It is not a generic "we miss you" email. It is a structured, data-driven attempt to understand why someone went cold and give them a reason to come back. If they do not bite, you purge them. This keeps your sender reputation clean and your active list honest.

Why people ghost you and how to spot the pattern

Subscribers do not vanish for no reason. They get overwhelmed by frequency. Your content lost relevance. They bought what they needed and moved on. Or they signed up for a lead magnet and never intended to engage long-term. The mistake most brands make is treating all inactivity as identical. It is not.

Segment your dormant users by behavior. Someone who opened emails but stopped clicking for 90 days is different from someone who has not opened a single email in six months. The first group might need a format change. The second group might need a hard reset offer. The third group might be bots or dead addresses. Pull a list of subscribers with zero engagement over the last 120 days. Then check your analytics for last-purchase date, last-click date, and page visit recency. That data tells you who is worth chasing.

One B2B SaaS client found that 40% of their "inactive" list had actually changed jobs. The old email addresses were still valid, but the person was gone. A simple bounce-back check and a LinkedIn cross-reference saved them from wasting resources on dead leads.

Choosing the right reactivation mechanism: offer, content, or exit

You have three levers to pull. Pick one based on the segment.

Offer-based reactivation works for transactional subscribers—people who bought before and stopped. A discount, a free shipping code, or a "come back and get 20% off your next order" can work. But do not lead with a discount if the product is high-consideration or long-cycle. That trains people to wait for a deal. Instead, offer an exclusive piece of content or a consultation.

Content-based reactivation works for informational subscribers. Send them something that

proves you understand their current pain point. A case study about a company like theirs. A tool they did not know existed. A short video walkthrough of a feature they never tried. The goal is to remind them why they subscribed in the first place.

Exit-based reactivation is the nuclear option. Send a final email that says, "We will remove you from this list unless you click here to stay." It sounds aggressive, but it cleans your database. People who click are genuinely interested. People who do not click were never going to convert. One e-commerce brand ran this and saw a 12% click-through rate from a segment they had written off. The rest got deleted, and their deliverability improved within two weeks.

Rule of thumb: If a subscriber has not engaged with any touchpoint for 180 days, run a three-email re-engagement sequence. If they still do not respond, remove them. Do not keep dead contacts for vanity.

The three-email sequence that actually works

Do not send one email and call it a campaign. You need a sequence that builds a case for re-engagement.

- **Email 1: The awareness breaker.** Subject line should be direct: "Haven't seen you around" or "Did something change?" No hard sell. Ask a question. "Is this still relevant to you?" Link to a preference center where they can choose frequency or topics. This email is about permission and relevance.
- **Email 2: The value reminder.** Three days later. Show them something they missed. A new feature. A popular article. A customer success story. Do not ask for a purchase. Ask for a click. The metric here is not revenue—it is re-engagement rate. If they click, they enter a warm nurture flow.
- **Email 3: The ultimatum.** Seven days after email 2. "This is the last email you will get unless you confirm you want to stay." Clear call to action. No tricks. If they do not click, suppress them from future campaigns. Do not delete them from your database—keep them in a "dead" list for compliance and reactivation attempts once per year.

One travel agency tested this sequence against a single "we miss you" email. The sequence recovered 8% of dormant subscribers. The single email recovered 1.2%. Sequence wins.

Common mistakes that kill re-engagement campaigns

Most re-engagement campaigns fail because of three errors.

Error one: sending too early. If you flag someone as inactive after 30 days, you are overreacting. People go on vacation. People get busy. A 60- to 90-day inactivity window is more realistic for most B2C. For B2B, 120 days is safer because sales cycles are longer. Do not annoy people who are still in

consideration.

Error two: using the same offer for everyone. A 10% discount might work for a lapsed buyer, but it insults a subscriber who never bought in the first place. They need education, not a coupon. Segment by lifecycle stage before you write a single subject line.

Error three: ignoring deliverability signals. If your emails are landing in spam folders, your re-engagement campaign will not reach anyone. Check your domain reputation on [Google's Postmaster Tools](#) or [Google Search Console](#) for deliverability issues before you launch. If your bounce rate is above 5%, fix your list hygiene first.

A media publisher once sent a re-engagement campaign to 50,000 subscribers without checking for role-based emails (info@, admin@). Over 8,000 bounces. Their sender score tanked. They spent three months recovering.

How to measure success without lying to yourself

Do not measure re-engagement campaigns by open rate alone. Open rate on a re-engagement email is often inflated because the people who open are the ones who were already going to open. Real metrics are harder.

Track the percentage of the dormant segment that becomes active again within 30 days of the campaign. Define "active" as at least one click and one page visit. Then track whether those re-engaged subscribers generate any revenue or lead activity in the next 60 days. If they do not, you recovered a ghost. That is not a win.

Also track the purge rate. How many subscribers did you remove? A high purge rate is not failure. It is honesty. One e-commerce brand removed 22% of their list after a re-engagement campaign. Their next campaign saw a 15% increase in click-through rate and a 9% increase in conversion rate. Smaller list, better results.

Compare your reactivation cost per subscriber against your original customer acquisition cost. If it costs you \$2 to re-engage a subscriber and your original CAC was \$50, you are winning. If your reactivation cost is higher than your CAC, you are wasting money on people who were never profitable.

When to stop trying and just purge

Not every inactive subscriber is worth saving. Some people signed up for a one-time download and will never buy. Some people are using a temporary email address. Some people have changed interests. You cannot force relevance.

If a subscriber has been inactive for over 12 months and did not respond to a re-engagement sequence, suppress them. Do not keep them in your active list. They hurt your deliverability, skew

your analytics, and make your open rates look artificially low. Keep them in a separate "cold" database for annual reactivation attempts, but do not send them regular campaigns.

One rule I follow: if re-engagement costs more than the lifetime value of an average subscriber, stop. Calculate your average LTV. Divide by 10. That is your maximum reactivation spend per contact. If you exceed it, you are burning money.

Check your [Google Search Console](#) for any domain-level issues that might be causing deliverability problems before you blame your list. Sometimes the problem is technical, not behavioral.

Final takeaway: re-engagement is a filter, not a revival machine

Re-engagement campaigns work best when you treat them as a filtering mechanism. You are not trying to save everyone. You are trying to separate the salvageable from the dead weight. Run the sequence. Measure the recovery. Purge the rest. Your active list will be smaller, but it will be real. That is the only list that matters.