Benchmark Review

Benchmark is one of the most budget-friendly email marketing services, making it one of the best overall services on the market. This service has all the tools you'll need to attract a robust client base and ultimately improve your bottom line. Combining all the right features, an easy to use system, and a great price, Benchmark provides an amazing email marketing solution.

Benchmark Email Marketing has been a great service for quite some time, and continues to innovate and bring new features to their service. If this product had more campaign reporting and help/support options, we would have a hard time keeping it out of the top spot.

Feature Set: ■ ■ ■ ■

Benchmark has many valuable features to help you develop, deliver and track your bulk emails. It's easy to import an email you've designed from scratch or modify one of their pre-made templates to fit your marketing campaign. Benchmark has several impressive features to help design, send, and manage your email campaign.

The robust email list managing in Benchmark will help you easily handle your extensive list of contacts. You can import your list from text or MS Excel, or add them individually. Benchmark also helps you keep track of bounced (hard and soft) messages, unsubscribers, and other problematic addresses automatically.

Another great feature of the Benchmark system is their advanced email delivery. Benchmark Email plays by the rules to ensure that your messages are not spam, and are members of a couple of email delivery organizations (ESPC, Return Path) to further optimize your marketing message delivery.

Benchmark also includes several advanced features to help you further customize your message and take advantage of today's technology. These features include the ability to create and send surveys, image hosting (up to 500k for free), and customizable templates.

One impressive feature that we were unable to find anywhere else is the ability to send video emails. You can drag and drop video (tutorials, product tours) directly into your email.

Ease of Use: ■ ■ ■ ■

Benchmark's web service is very straightforward, and simple to use. The recently streamlined interface is intuitive to follow, and facilitates an easy email marketing campaign from start to finish.

Benchmark includes the ability to build your campaigns at your own pace, but also includes helpful tools and step-by-step instructions to help you get out a timely message. You can also create a campaign in advance, and schedule it to send exactly when you want it to.

Benchmark also makes it easier to send an error free message. With built-in spell checking and WYSIWIG editor, you can be sure that you're sending exactly what you want. You can even send yourself a test email to preview. Furthermore, Benchmark utilizes universal email formatting, so all your recipients will get an identical message, regardless of what email service they are using.

Email Campaign Creation: ■■■■

Benchmark makes creating an email marketing campaign quick and easy. Each part of the campaign, from inputting your mailing list to creating the email, is efficiently organized in tabs.

Once you've organized your list, creating your email is simple. Click on the option to create your message and the service will guide you through the necessary steps to complete your email. If you wish to edit a particular step, you can easily navigate to where you need to be. You have the option of creating a message with a pre-made template, or copy and paste their HTML code into their HTML editor.

We found Benchmark's templates were adequate and they provided a solid selection in various themes, including cards, newsletters, promotions, and even event invitations. We were a bit disappointed that Benchmark charges an additional $5 per month for 20 MB of storage for image hosting. But the incorporation of pictures is pretty easy with drag and drop functionality, simple resizing, and access from any internet-enabled computer.

Overall, the campaign creation was quite good, and includes advanced options to help you customize, organize, and optimize your email marketing.

Campaign Reporting: ■■■■

In Benchmark's reporting tab, you'll find all of the reports that are available with this service. The reports include an active campaign summary, click-throughs, contact statistics, email forwarding, surveys and email abuse reporting.

Still no conversion tracking from Benchmark, but they do now include the ability to compare your email messages. You can see how each campaign performed in relationship with others in a side-by-side (our favorite!) comparison.

The tracking and reporting section includes useful stats and records a number of figures to help you evaluate your campaigns. With useful graphs and reports, you can track your campaigns and easily give an account of your success.

Help/Support: ■■■■

Benchmark's support includes invaluable tutorials walking you through several steps of the setup process, a comprehensive FAQ, searchable knowledgebase, live chat, a glossary of terms and some additional articles about spamming and list building.

Benchmark includes a variety of help options to help you learn and use their system. But they also have several valuable resources to help you make the most of your email marketing. This includes tips, detailed how-to articles, and current marketing news and trends.

Summary:

If you are looking for a great email marketing service, Benchmark is at the top. This service has everything that you'll need to target your audience, create a compelling email, monitor results and boost your sales. With the recent design overhaul and even more innovative features, Benchmark continues to deliver a comprehensive (not to mention comprehendible) email marketing service at a quality price.

Campaigner Review

Campaigner from Protus IP Solutions is one of those email marketing services that guides you through creating a successful email marketing campaign with the step-by-step wizard. You can create a plain text email, an HTML email or use one of the pre-built templates provided.

Campaigner is a well-rounded service with many features and options to help you create, send and track your bulk emails. However, you can't add customizable demographic fields. Additionally, it seemed like our session was logged out about every half-hour.

Feature Set: ■■■■

Your Campaigner home page is attractively designed in a dashboard setting and summarizes all recent email activities including reports, dates sent and remaining emails left in your billing period.

Some features in Campaigner include: the ability to import your emailing list and HTML pages. You can also track the number of people who click your links and create customized reports that will provide the information you need to improve your marketing strategies. You can also customize your email alias and specify who your email message is from.

Campaigner has an image editing tool that allows you to flip, rotate, resize or crop image to help you ensure that the in your library meet the design dimensions in your campaign. No longer will you need to use other software to edit your image. This feature is also something you're not likely going to find with any of their competitors.

Ease of Use: ■■■■

Setting up your account is simple; the service imports your account information to your profile upon signup. After that, you can access or modify your account from the accounts section in the program.

Campaigner has a contact list wizard that guides you through the entire process of creating your emailing lists.

In conjunction with the wizard there are templates you can follow to create your emails and a demo and tour to introduce you to the program. The combination of these features makes Campaigner a breeze to use.

When it comes to making your campaign, the program is divided into easy-to-navigate steps. The whole process is very simple.

Email Campaign Creation: ■■■■

Campaigner includes 450+ professionally designed email templates to choose from or you can upload your own coded design into the program. You have the option to use an HTML editor that allows you to see your changes as you make them and gives you the option to analyze your email in HTML code view. There are many other features in this area that make this service worth checking out. They continue to add new bells and whistles to this part of their service, which makes them all the more interesting.

We enjoyed being able to create our templates in an easy to use, easy to understand template maker. This feature helped when we had to create a lengthy series of emails that were supposed to look alike. Rather than create each email individually, we generated an effective template that gave us the opportunity to plug in our content without breaking a sweat. If you enter your contact information, every email campaign you create will be populated with the details you provide. This feature eliminates the likelihood of you forgetting to include your contact information when you're creating a campaign.

Before you send out your email, you can preview what it will look like to its recipients. You can also view print versions of HTML and text emails, resize the preview window size in an inline screen and to preview the viewing area or simulate different email window sizes, indicate the email file size and show/hide images. You can make perfect emails with their complex email editor, which continues to improve and become better than it was before. Their email campaign creation is easier than ever now that it has been simplified into three easy steps.

You no longer have to enter all of your contacts from Gmail, Hotmail and Yahoo individually anymore. Instead, you can import them all and they will be uploaded into your contact list on Campaigner automatically.

Campaign Reporting: ■ ■ ■ ■
You can reach reports by clicking on a specific report on your homepage or the Reports tab.

The reports that are available with this service include emails sent, opened, forwarded, delivered, bounced and unsubscribed. You can all compare your reports between two different campaigns to determine which was more successful. All of these reports, including drill-down reports, can be saved directly to a file, which will give you an opportunity to take a closer look at the performance of email contacts or campaigns.

Campaigner allows you to report unsolicited email complaints to Protus IP Solutions and integrate with Google Analytics.

Help/Support: ■ ■ ■ ■
Setting up your account is very simple; the service imports your account information to your profile upon signup. After that, you can access or modify your account from the accounts section in the program.

Campaigner has a contact list wizard that guides you through the entire process of creating your emailing lists.

Summary:
We were surprised with how far Campaigner has come in the past few years. If their recent progression is any indication of their future growth, we believe this email marketing service is one you should keep your eyes on for years to come.

Constant Contact Review

Constant Contact has made great strides in the last few years. The top-ranked email marketing service has a comprehensive feature set, one of the best template designers we reviewed and solid help center and user community. We found Constant Contact's tours and guides especially helpful and the wizards made creating a new campaign a breeze.

One of the few things keeping Constant Contact from ranking higher is some of the reports they are missing and lack of free additional features like conversion tracking. Constant Contact from Constant Contact, Inc. is one of the great email marketing services. You can create your bulk emails through the service or import your email marketing campaigns from an HTML page.

The website isn't quite as easy to use and they don't offer as many reports as some of the other email marketing services that we reviewed.

Feature Set: ■■■■

To build your email contact list, first create an interest category, then you can populate it with your email list. This part of the list creation is very simple. You can either manually input all your contacts or import them.

With Constant Contact you can easily import your mailing list using Excel, Outlook, Outlook Express and a common comma separated values (.csv) file. Additionally, you can customize your demographics by filtering your contacts according to various attributes.

Constant Contact also has the ability to adjust aliases, or change who the email message is from in the "from" box of the email. For example, if you want to reflect that the President of the company is sending a personal message to all of their subscribers you can place their name in the "from" field without opening additional accounts.

You can manage, bounce and unsubscribe information to prevent emails getting to people who don't want them. Each individual's contact information can be accessed from any machine at anytime. See who received and opened your emails, monitor your list growth and attrition and view how past campaigns performed with the dynamic reports offered by this service.

Ease of Use: ■■■

Setting up your emailing list and other features is very simple to do. Just click on the appropriate tab and the program will walk you through the process. There are also some quick links so you can create your email campaign.

The design of Constant Contact is similar to that of the other products we reviewed. The navigation is at the top of the screen and consists of seven different tabs from which to choose. When you are editing your email a box appears that allows you to modify that specific section of the email.

Email Campaign Creation: ■ ■ ■ ■
You can effectively create an email using one of the templates or copy and paste your pre-made HTML source code into your email.

Constant Contact had the easiest template editor we reviewed. We found Constant Contact included a wide selection of professional looking templates that would suit most businesses. All selections of the template are clearly labeled and easily modified using the "edit" button. You can import your own images and text directly into the WYSIWYG. They also incorporate a drag and drop feature for each section of your message.

This bulk email service also includes the ability to add hyperlinks, images, contact details, Amazon and PayPal codes, and special characters. Advanced users can look at and manipulate web code; however, Constant Contact doesn't use standard HTML code to design their templates. Instead they use XHTML and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), another common web design language. If you have no idea how to use CSS we suggest sticking to the WYSIWYG editor.

Constant Contact doesn't provide the ability to create web forms in the strictest sense of the term; however, they do supply you with the tools to add a "join my mailing list" box to your website.

Campaign Reporting: ■ ■ ■
Constant Contact provides all the basic necessities you'd need to create a comprehensive report including bounces, bounced percent, complaints, opt-outs, click-throughs, click-through percent, forwards and more.

Missing reports include conversion tracking and email replies. In the future we would like to see Constant Contact really strengthen their reports section and eventually enable the user to integrate with Google Analytics.

Help/Support: ■ ■ ■ ■
Constant Contact includes a comprehensive support center that includes an extensive, searchable knowledgebase; a learning center with tutorials, live demos and scheduled webinars; and if all that doesn't answer your questions you can contact Constant Contact directly through email or phone. We found the tutorials particularly helpful.

Summary:
There are few services that will make creating an effective email campaign easier. You really can't go wrong using Constant Contact, the email designer is fun and easy-to-use, the wizards make the process painless and if you get stuck there is a plethora of tutorials and help available. However, we really want to see Constant Contact focus on more reporting features.

iContact Review

iContact's goal is to offer simple and easy-to-use, yet powerful email marketing software for modern growing businesses. The online solution from iContact manages to exceed their goal and is one of the best email marketing services available. iContact blows the competition out of the water with intuitive and elegant campaign creation, strong reporting functions and some impressive extras, including an online community.

iContact will help you completely manage an email campaign in three easy steps. Some unique features include the option to create surveys and an auto responder, so your customers will never feel neglected. Overall, iContact is the best in the business; however, we would like to see them take their reporting features further by including conversion tracking and integration with Google Analytics.

Feature Set: ■ ■ ■ ■

There are quite a few features that help make iContact so effective. One impressive feature within iContact email marketing is the survey ability. You can create, send, and manage results from custom surveys. This encourages two-way communication between you and your customers, and can be very beneficial in getting important feedback.

We also appreciated the auto responder, which sends out automatic messages at pre-determined intervals. Simply pre-schedule the messages, and the auto responder helps you send the series of message over time. The auto responder is great for staying in touch with your clients and keeping your brand in their minds.

We also particularly liked the SPAM test feature. Before sending your campaign iContact will scan your email's subject line and complete content to determine the likelihood your messages will end up in your clients' junk boxes. This SpamCheck technology helps you proactively avoid wasting precious resources and having your hard work end up unnoticed.

iContact also allows you to establish aliases and send emails based on established demographics or filters. For example, if you just want to send an email to those on your list between the ages of 25 and 35 you can separate these people from your list and send a personalized campaign to them (without establishing an additional list for 25 to 35-year-olds). You can manage and filter your list of message receivers on all sorts of criteria, including 13 standard fields, and any other custom fields you wish to segment by.

Ease of Use: ■ ■ ■ ■

Setting up this service is a cinch, and the interface is simple to navigate. All tabs are located clearly at the top of the screen. Just select your section and iContact's small setup wizards will efficiently direct you through each step of the process.

The entire process is straightforward and logical. iContact is great for beginners, but has enough cutting edge features to accommodate advanced users as well.

Email Campaign Creation: ■■■■
Creating an email campaign is simple with iContact's step-by-step process. First, select the "Create" tab. Then choose how you want to create your email or survey. You can use a web page, HTML type, plain text or utilize one of the pre-made templates. The whole process is user-friendly and you can preview your message after it is completed, and even save a draft to complete later.

Additionally, iContact included the largest list and best selection of templates we reviewed. With more than 300 template options you are guaranteed to have a professional looking email message even if you are completely unfamiliar with HTML code.

iContact will also let you create an email from an existing website on any server. You can customize the page by inserting images, hyperlinks, tables, lines and other basic formatting features.

Although iContact included one of the best email creation sections we reviewed they only included .5 MB (500 KB) of image hosting. This should be sufficient for a few logos and stock photographs, but .5 MB of space is used very quickly.

Campaign Reporting: ■■■■
All the reporting features in iContact are conveniently located under the "Tracking" tab and the summary of your emails is on the "welcome" button for quick access. iContact will report actual click-throughs, as well as messages sent, forwarded, bounced, delivered and unsubscribed emails.

The tracking and reporting features in iContact are thorough and certainly useful. You will be able to effectively monitor and report all sorts of statistics, complete with easy to read tables and charts. The data can easily be exported into other forms, and will help you track the effectiveness of your work and the success of your campaign.

Help/Support: ■■■■
iContact has some of the best and most comprehensive help options from the services we reviewed. Apart from the general knowledgebase, iContact includes video tutorials, live webinars and an extensive selection of articles and additional resources like a company blog and newsletter. Live support is available over the phone, through email, and even over live chat.

iContact also features an impressive community. This unique feature allows you get your content out to even more people. You can publish your blog posts or newsletters within the iContact community, and increase your potential viewers and subscribers.

Summary: ■■■■
Overall, iContact is an excellent email marketing service. If you're interested in creating a simple and effective email campaign with surveys, auto responders and more this is the service for you. In addition, there are tons of additional help features to get your campaign off to a great start. With a complete lineup of tools, easy to use interface, and several innovative features, iContact is the best email marketing service we've seen.

Pinpointe Review

Pinpointe is an email marketing service that's a bit different than the rest; they have broken away from the bulk email crowd and focus on business to business (B2B) marketing. The main difference is that Pinpointe was created for a high level of opt-in and subscription as opposed to unsolicited or spam type email campaigns. Many, if not most of the tools are the same as what bulk email services offer, except they offer numerous customization options and high touch client list options.

Their email creator can help you create gorgeous, full HTML emails quickly and it can send them as HTML or text type files to accommodate everyone on your lists. We found importing lists to be quick and painless and liked the fact that we could add custom fields and could track things like links clicked, forwards and much more.

Agencies and large corporations can sign up for one of their multi-user enterprise and agency versions. This plan allows users to send 250,000 to 10 million messages per month and support 250 user logins, dedicated IP addresses, dedicated/custom URL and a "whitelabel interface."

Feature Set: ■■■■

Pinpointe is a bit different than most email marketing services out there. This service is designed for B2B (Business to Business) contact instead of B2C (Business to Consumer). This is not the type of email marketing services you would use if you were trying to remind previous customers of your annual doorbuster sale, which usually requires a high level of opt-in and straightforward strategies. Many other services are intended for more bulk email type functions. Since this service is not designed for B2C you can create unique "on behalf of" as an exclusive sender or reply. In that way you can have the replies go to a specific email address rather than back to the account holder's email address.

In terms of contacts and lists, you can easily import contacts from an Excel, Outlook or CSV file or add contacts one-by-one. You can easily group your contacts or sort them by industry, state or region, postal code, activity and more. You can also add custom fields and save additional information to a client such as a note or memo. Of course it also includes the necessary basics such as automatic unsubscribers and duplicate removal.

The following features are included with all of their plans for free: surveys, email previewer, SPAM checker. Behavioral targeting is another helpful feature because it allows you to engineer your campaigns towards the behaviors of your recipients. This helps increase response rates and the likelihood that the end result of your campaign is going to be success.

Ease of Use: ■■■■

We found this service incredibly easy to use, you can easily create (or import) a contact list, design and send out your first email campaign in very little time. The WYSIWYG editor is powerful and does all of the work for you; for example, you can easily resize the images without worrying about exact pixel information. We found the service so easy to use that we only had to consult the help pages for advanced features like Google Analytics integration and email client testing. They offer free training, which is of definite assistance to those of us who aren't skilled in the world of email marketing and want to learn the ins-and-outs at no cost to us.

Email Campaign Creation: ■■■■

Pinpointe has a great, easy to use email editor and logical steps to follow to create a campaign. First you simply name your new campaign and then choose the format and template. You can also choose to not select a template and import your own information. Then you begin editing the email to suit your needs. You can add your own images, sound clips, links, contact information and much more. You can also add custom fields such as unsubscribe links, dates, IP addresses and email confirmation links and more. It has three views, edit, source and preview. After creating and saving the email it is added to the campaign list, from there you can view, send, copy or delete the email campaign.

In terms of the specific tools we were looking for, Pinpointe has nearly every feature. This service can help you create forms, supports email footers, can create plain text and HTML versions and much more. It also has free image hosting with an unlimited amount of storage. They also offer a wide variety of easily editable templates and you can paste in content directly from Microsoft Word, FrontPage or any other HTML editor such as DreamWeaver.

If you want something that's more powerful than basic autoresponders, you can go with "Drip Marketing" campaigns. These campaigns allow you to trigger unlimited sequences of "drip marketing emails" that are sent using behavioral targeting. For instance, emails can be geared towards whether a recipient clicked on specific links or opened certain emails.

Campaign Reporting: ■■■■

Pinpointe offers a variety of report options and even supports behavior targeting based on report information. The basic reports it includes are open, link, bounce, unsubscribe and forwarding statistics. But it also offers auto responder statistics and you can even set your own "triggers" to collect specific information for reporting such as when a link is clicked and an action performed. You can also view statistics for specific groups or even look at the actions of a single contact. All statistics can be exported instantly as an Excel compatible file. Furthermore, the service creates easy to understand charts/graphs and the service is compatible with Google Analytics. The only thing we did not see was conversion tracking, but this information could be obtained by link clicking information combined with Google Analytic tools.

Help/Support: ■■■■

Pinpointe provides volumes of useful information online and with the service through FAQs, a blog, webinars, White Papers and more. They also make an effort to conduct an online, step-by-step, personal tutorial for all their new clients.

You can contact them by email form online, or request a scheduled callback over the phone. At the moment they do not have chat support, but expect to add it soon. They report to respond to email inquiries within 4 hours.

New users can take advantage of the free live, online training session. All you have to do to get one of these sessions is contact Pinpointe's customer service team and they will set you up.

Summary:

We really enjoyed creating email campaigns with Pinpointe, their email editor is extremely easy to use and does not require an ounce of coding knowledge. We also liked how easy it was to view statistics and edit campaigns. Pinpointe offered just about everything we were looking for, and is a great option for organizing, implementing, and tracking a professional email marketing campaign, especially business-to-business.