List-Unsubscribe header

offer recipients a simple way to unsubscribe from your newsletter in order to prevent complaints

1 What is the List-Unsubscribe header

The List-Unsubscribe header is a simple way to offer the recipients an alternative way to easily unsubscribe – with a single click – from a newsletter, if the provider or email-client uses the given information. It's an additional option to the normal unsubscribe-link, mostly offered at the end of every newsletter.

The information is hidden in the email header and does not affect the content of the email. The provider or email-client can process that information to offer the recipients an unsubscribe-link in its own interface.

2 How does the header work

The List-Unsubscribe header is described in RFC 2369 (for more details please see https://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2369.txt). The header field contains either a Web-URL, an email address or both. Since different providers and email clients use that one or the other, we recommend to use both. A List-Unsubscribe header could look like this:

List-Unsubscribe: <http://www.host.com/list.cgi?cmd=unsub&lst=list>,
                     <mailto:list-request@host.com?subject=unsubscribe>

The most important characteristic of these links is, that they don't require any user interaction by the recipients, so that the unsubscribe is processed by just clicking the link.

For example Gmail uses the List-Unsubscribe header to offer the recipient an unsubscribe-link right beside the name of the sender.
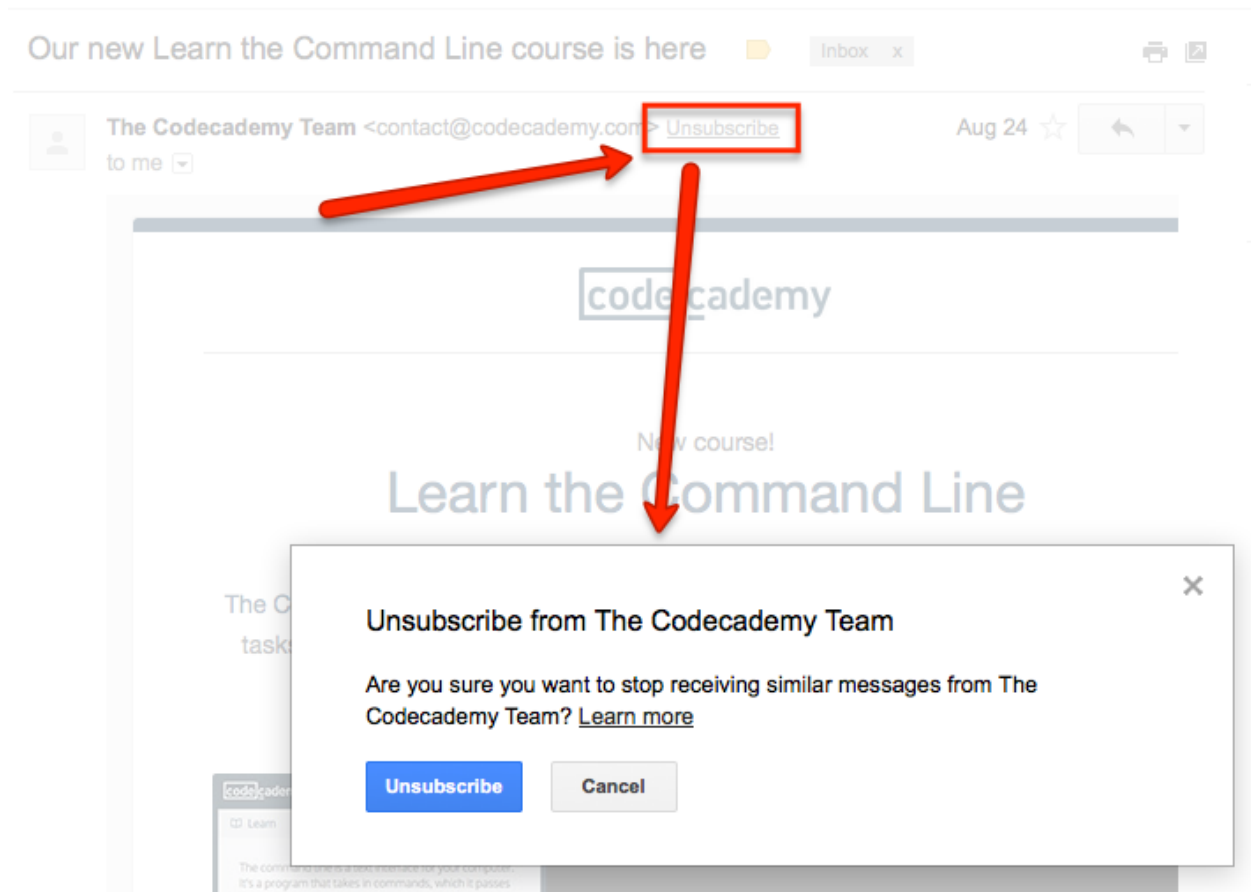
3 Benefits for the recipients

For the recipients it's convenient to find the unsubscribe option always at the same position in the providers' or email clients' interface without having to read, or at least scroll down and skim over the text to find the unsubscribe link within the emails content.

4 Benefits for the brands

The List-Unsubscribe header may lead to more unsubscribes. But that's not a bad thing at all. The recipients will not unsubscribe because it's easy to do so. Instead they unsubscribe because the content of the newsletter is not relevant for them. If the recipients don't find an unsubscribe link in the content of the email, or if the unsubscribe

process is too complicated, it's most likely that they get frustrated and complain about the newsletter. Tagging a newsletter as spam is just a simple click away, conveniently with one click on a button always at the same position in the interface of the providers webmail or the email-client. As a brand you don't want to lose subscribers, but an unsubscribe is still way better than a complaint or getting tagged as spam. An easy and convenient way to unsubscribe protects your reputation and in the end your deliverability.

5 Conclusion: It's good for senders and recipients

The List-Unsubscribe header is technically rather easy to implement but has clear benefits for senders and recipients as well. More and more providers implement the feature to process the header in their webmail interface, so the benefit of this header will rise even more in the future. To sum it up:

- ◆ Providers use the header to improve the user experience for their customers

- ◆ Recipients get an easy and convenient option to unsubscribe from newsletters

- ◆ Brands can protect their reputation, and therefore the delivery rates, because the easy unsubscribe option reduces complaints

Following the mission of the Certified Senders Alliance to increase the quality in commercial emailing, the List-Unsubscribe header is also part of the required "Admission Criteria" which can be found in the document section on the website of the Certified Senders Alliance.