

FOUNDERS OF TASKULU AND SCIPUBPLUS ADOPT KUMOMTA TO BUILD AHASEND INTO ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S FASTEST-GROWING ESPS

AhaSend is an independent email services provider that is quickly establishing itself as the go-to ESP for the start-up community centered around the Southern European / Middle Eastern region. Founder Farhad Hedayatirfad came to the email business through a somewhat circuitous path, having founded several companies previously, beginning with a software development shop he set up while still at university. After graduation, Hedayatirfad set out on several more ambitious projects, the first of which was Taskulu, a successful project and team management app and platform that today is based in Lisbon, Portugal. In subsequent years, he went on to found LobaCard, a prepaid travel card optimized for tourists looking to avoid high foreign transaction and conversion fees, and helped his partner launch SciPub+, an AI-powered academic writing tool.

The Challenge – Bulk Emails and ESPs

All three of these companies are successful, growing concerns, yet Hedayatirfad, had an “Aha!” moment for yet another new startup. With his years of building customer service-oriented organizations through assiduous customer engagement tactics, he had learned some hard lessons along the way. Namely, building effective email operations takes a lot of work, and can get cost-prohibitive in a hurry—especially so when you need to send high volumes of transactional messages.

“Over the years we tried several different ESPs and delivery platforms, but we’d run into issues with every one of them,” relates Hedayatirfad. “We were pretty much just sending transactional emails, with maybe one or two marketing emails and product updates a year—but fully 95% of our email volume was transactional.” To support services like project management and prepaid cards for travelers, it’s essential that transactional emails get through to the customer to support purchases, order confirmations, password resets—all of the automated processes essential to running a business.

But with the mail platforms Hedayatirfad and his teams were using, they constantly had to confront deliverability issues. “It was a steep climb learning about IP warmups, spam filters, SPF, DKIM and all that,” he explains. Not only that, but ESPs commonly mix marketing emails and transactional

emails. For pretty much any business, advertising products and services will always be important. But in the email context, mixing in commercial messages with transactional messages—email receipts, password resets, etc.—often causes confusion in customers who may ignore what would otherwise be important records for them to have, and can also slow delivery times and raise other deliverability issues.

For LobaCard and Taskulu, Hedayatirfad and his teams had tried working with platforms such as Postal, Postfix, ZoneMTA and others—all of which presented unique shortcomings, ranging from poor API support to lack of documentation. Seeking out alternatives, they tested out several of the large commercial ESPs, which did deliver improved performance to an extent, but presented other issues. Costs began to build up thanks to the number of businesses for which they were sending bulk emails.

Additionally, as the team discovered, the external sending infrastructure left them at the mercy of the providers, which they found offered prices that were far too high, with not much support on the back end. Most ESPs put their clients in brackets or charge them per number of recipients in their contact list. This means that, if the number of emails you send exceeds your intended limit and moves you up into the higher bracket, you will end

About KumoMTA

KumoMTA is the open-source email platform specifically designed for today’s high-volume senders. Among its key attributes:

- The software is free to use, review, and modify as the user sees fit—no license fees.
- Provides industry-leading performance—capable of saturating physical hardware—while ensuring that messages are safely queued to prevent loss or double-sending.
- Delivers full real-time integration capabilities for configuration, message manipulation, and routing via its built-in policy engine and data source access.
- Fully integrates into your DevOps environment, with rich selection of APIs, webhooks, AMQP, containers, and native support for both SOCKS5 and HAProxy forward proxies.
- Backed by a 24/7 response SLA available directly from the team that built it.

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up paying more than you wanted to. Even if the increase in volume is barely noticeable, ESPs can and will charge their subscribers potentially twice as much, thanks to bracket breaches.

In assessing his options, Hedayatirfad considered the positive and negative aspects of working with ESPs. “Mandrill was the one that I was most happy with, but it got too expensive for us,” relates Hedayatirfad. Turning to SendGrid, one of the world’s largest senders, the team quickly found that deliverability could be problematic because of the nature of their sending volumes. “At that time, our

traffic was right around the place where they required dedicated IPs. So a little bit more expensive, but then our volumes weren’t quite high enough to fully warm up the dedicated IPs. So again, our messages were ending up going to spam or getting NDRs (Non-Delivery Reports). By the middle of 2023, after about five years of struggling with these issues, I started thinking: there’s got to be a better way. Maybe we can build something on our own...maybe we can build our entire email sending operations into a separate product.”

THE SOLUTION – TURNING TO KUMOMTA

In thinking about how to create an email offering that would solve all the problems typically encountered by startups that need to send high volume email, Hedayatirfad originally envisioned developing code around an open-source platform such as Postal or Postfix. That could be a way to keep costs as low as possible. But in contemplating the technical shortcomings he’d experienced, he decided something more technically advanced, yet still built on the open-source model would be the way to go. That’s how he came across KumoMTA.

“My first thought was to just write something around Postal,” Hedayatirfad explains. “But it didn’t work out for the reasons I already mentioned and I started looking into other MTAs. I looked at ZoneMTA and just plain old Postfix, but they all had their own issues.” As he quickly discovered, Postfix was not designed for larger scale sending and multitenancy, which made the ESP difficult to manage and configure while ZoneMTA was packed with features, but lacked documentation and didn’t perform well for his needs. Other options like PowerMTA were explored, but ultimately discarded as Hedayatirfad and his team looked for a system that would suit their needs, and soon enough, they found KumoMTA.

As an open-source email infrastructure solution, KumoMTA provided Hedayatirfad with an easy system to integrate into his site and useful webhooks to write automation around. KumoMTA not only reduced the amount of maintenance and administration work his team would need to handle, but provided much lower hardware and infrastructure costs compared to other solutions like Postal and Postfix.

In early 2024, Hedayatirfad first learned about Kumo and started reading up on it in late November 2023. In early 2024 he began the installation of Kumo with a little help from the Kumo team. “The initial installation I did on my own, or mostly” he states. “By early January I already had written the admin panel around Kumo with support for multi-tenancy and migrated all our emails from Postal to Kumo. Then spent the next three months building the user-facing dashboard and landing pages for the launch. I probably went 80% of the way on my own, but then there were things that I had questions about, so I reached out to Mike Hillyer and Wez Furlong at Kumo. Both were very welcoming, very helpful and supportive through the whole process. So any question I had, I asked and they helped as much as they could. A very cool and easy process.”

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THE RESULT - A NEW ESP FOR BLAZING FAST EMAIL

Now fully set up, AhaSend joined the competitive market of email service providers with a solid framework and competitive pricing to make themselves a viable competitor on the scene. With KumoMTA providing opportunities for automating services and adjusting the site’s code as needed, AhaSend is able to offer low cost plans for their customers where service users only need to pay for the emails they send, no more, no less.

With Kumo, there’s a lot of bells and whistles for configuring how much new users can send, monitoring what level of spam rate they’re sending at and lots of other features,” says Hedayatirfad. “So we’re able to give everyone, no matter what their email volume is, a shared IP. But we can manage it well because of how Kumo is structured. And we can easily keep the sending of transactional messages completely separate from marketing messages, so we can be sure that we can send and deliver emails as fast as technically possible.”

As far as keeping costs predictable and management stable as he builds out the AhaSend business, Hedayatirfad believes KumoMTA

will continue to pay dividends many years into the future. “The most obvious reason is that Kumo is open source and there’s no license fees. Less obvious, but something that becomes clear as soon as you start working with it is that Kumo, the way it’s built, it reduces the amount of maintenance and administration work I need to handle.”

Further, the Kumo’s outstanding performance means that AhaSend has very low hardware and infrastructure costs, compared to when Hedayatirfad and team were using solutions like Postal and Postfix. “Having worked with a lot of different sending platforms, I can say that Kumo is just fast,” he says. “I would add that with features like traffic shaping, automation and management for IP pools, and all the web hooks that they provide, Kumo allows us to write a lot of automation around it. Kumo is now part of AhaSend where I spend the least amount of time: it’s just doing what it’s supposed to do without any problems. Nice!”