EMAIL

Deliverability Issues
and Best practices

This document outlines some of the most common questions people have when they get started emailing.

After reviewing this document please take a look at these studies by Return Path. RP is one of the most popular email metrics companies and is respected by ESP's (Email Service Providers, ex. gmail, yahoo, hotmail etc.) You will see the benchmarks for email delivery and how they apply to the market you are targeting. The second document will give you better insight into how esp's may consider the behavior of your subscribers as they engage with your emails.

1.　　**2017 Benchmark Report**
2.　　**2017 Metrics Report**

(Within the sections below you may see some repetitive advice with variations. The information will be relevant to the key point you may be looking for.)

What are bounces?

Soft vs. Hard Bounces

When an email is rejected by a subscriber's email server, it's called a bounce. There are different types of bounces that depend on the reason the email bounced. These details can be found in each message you send. It's a good idea to be sure your campaigns are reaching your subscribers, and that you're **abiding by spam laws.**

Hard Bounces

A hard bounce indicates a permanent reason an email cannot be delivered. In most cases, bounced email addresses are removed automatically and immediately from the active subscribers and placed in the blocked portion of your list. Blocked subscribers will be excluded from future campaign sends to this list. While there are many reasons an email address may hard bounce, below are some common reasons this could happen.

- The Recipient email address does not exist. (False email address)
- Domain name does not exist. (ex. Name@skdjdu%.com)
- Recipient email server has completely blocked delivery.
- Note:There are occasionally cases in which valid email addresses can hard bounce or a subscriber could mistakenly unsubscribe and will need to opt back in to your list.

Soft Bounces

Soft bounces typically indicate a temporary delivery issue to an address and are handled differently than hard bounces depending on the bounce type. When an email address soft bounces, it will immediately display as as a bounce in your sent message to the right side of the messages.If an email address continues to soft bounce in additional campaigns, the address will eventually be considered a hard bounce and will show as blocked in your list. We'll allow 5-7 soft bounces for an email address before converting a soft bounce into a hard bounce. While there are many reasons an email address may soft bounce, below are some common reasons this could happen.

- Mailbox is full (over quota).
- Recipient email server is down or offline.
- Email message is too large.

What is an Email Open Rate?

It is important to understand that the tracking of the Email Open Rate is not a perfect science. To track whether an email has been opened or not, a small one by one-pixel graphics (transparent, invisible picture), also known as a tracking pixel, is inserted into the email being sent by our system. Only when the graphics (image) is loaded (after getting downloaded from the server), the email is marked as open. Since the email open rate relies on the download of a graphic image, it isn't 100% accurate. There can be multiple issues with the tracking mechanism mentioned above:

- Many email service providers (ESPs), never load the graphics in an email. Without the graphics being loaded, even an opened email will not be marked as an open email (Gmail is a good example)
- Many users may only wish to receive their emails in text format only. In this case also, the graphics are never loaded, and although opened, the email will not be marked as an opened email.
- Users who use mobile, tablets or other such devices to read their emails, read only the text version of the email. This means the graphics never get a chance to be loaded in the email, and although the email is opened and read, it is not marked as an opened email.
- Some email reading applications let the recipient choose whether to allow open emails tracking as a personal setting. (Gmail is a good example)

Because of the reasons mentioned above, it is likely that the actual email open rates are on the higher side than the reported rate. If you have a low email open rate, then, there could be many reasons for a low email open rate. You need to check the email open rate against the benchmark for your particular industry. The email open rate varies based on the type of industry, the geographic location, type of ESP's (Email Service Provider), etc.

Reasons Why Your Open Rates may decline

If you have been sending emails for a while, and the open rate has declined initially and subsequently plateaued, that trend is normal. But in the case that your open rates have been way below the average and is continuously falling, there might be some inherent issues with your campaigns. See below>

This applies to new leads as well if you have low open rates on your first follow up or broadcast messages. You will see a greater open rate on your first follow ups. It is not unusual for open rates to decline after the first few emails if people realize that they may not be interested in your product at this time. However, continue to mail them your offer for 60-90 days. Subscribers may simply be missing your emails.

1. Your Subject Lines are not Effective

A Subject line is the "gatekeeper" to your emails and the first thing that the recipient sees in their inbox. A good subject line can dramatically increase the likelihood that your email will be opened. On the other hand, a boring subject line can significantly decrease your email open rate as it implies to the readers that your email is not worth opening.

A good email subject line has two components: firstly, it tells the recipient what the email contents are and secondly, it tells the recipient that the email is worth opening. The subject line should stand out and spark interest to the recipients, without looking like spam. It should be short, clear, concise and to the point. It should tell the recipient exactly what to expect in the email content and why the email is worth opening.

Try A/B testing your subject lines and other elements of your email as well. A/B testing a subject line for example is sending the same subject line with variations to smaller portions of your list to see which one works best. Once you determine the best one you mail it to the bulk of your list.

2. You used too many "Buzz" Words

Certain keywords (buzzwords) negatively affect the email open rate they should be avoided or used infrequently. Some examples are "free", "help", "reminder", "percentage off", etc. Spam traps may filter these depending on your engagement rate. (openers, clickers)

3. Personalize Your Email

Adding the recipient's name gives a personal touch to the email and the email does not look automatically generated. The more your subject feels directed specifically to the subscriber, the more they will open. When creating broadcast or follow up emails you can use the "Fields" or "Global Fields" section to add various options including the name of each subscriber. By using these fields our system will add the proper name for each subscriber when the mail is sent.

Statistics shows that personalized emails are 22.2% more likely to be opened.

4. Lack of Incentive for Your Recipient

You should give some incentive to the recipients to open the email. Add some urgency to the subject line, offer them something they value or something that is relevant to them so that they are incentivized enough to open the email.

5. Test your emails

Although there are general rules, still, the best way to know what resonates with your recipients is to test and test some more. Try multiple subject lines, check the statistics as to which ones have a higher open rate and analyze what you did differently with the subject line that actually clicked with the recipients. No audience is the same. So, test what works well with your audience.

6. Sense of Urgency

Using words like "**THIS WEEKEND**", "**LIMITED OFFER**", "**FIRST COME, FIRST SERVE**", etc. creates a sense of urgency with the recipients and it will be more likely that the email will be opened.

7. Negative Connotations early in your messages

Negative Connotation decreases the probability that the recipient will open the email if they are not expecting it. Avoid using negative wording as much as possible. Depending on your style and customer base, be yourself. If they expect negativity then it would be appropriate. Once they get to know you and they don't expect it from you...BOOM You will see an obvious increase in the open rate simply because it is unexpected. Don't do this to often, make sure your subject is relevant to the content!

8. You weren't specific

Reference the recipient's interests by campaign, status or past buying history. Use this information to make the subject line highly accurate and relevant to the recipients. For example if you have a free customer, encourage them to join a paid account. With a paid member encourage them to upgrade. If a person has paid already it may lead to confusion not to mention it is irrelevant.

9. Aggressive text or symbols

Using words in capitals, exclamation marks, etc. makes the subject line look aggressive, unfriendly, pushy and even spammy. Avoid using offensive subject lines. Avoid looking aggressive. This is a double edge sword because at times you will see better open rates with this style of email later in your email series. Test subjects to determine what your subscribers are most engaged with.

10. Use specific engaging content

When someone signs up for your emails, they have something concrete in their minds. They are looking for something which is useful for them. Upon receiving your emails, if their expectations are not satisfied, they will stop opening your emails the next time they receive them. If subscribers are not enjoying your content, they will stop reading your emails as well.

Focus on the content of the emails so that it will help in solving the recipient's problem or questions. The recipients will be more receptive to opening future mails from you.

11. Good but Irrelevant Content

Your content may be helpful and exciting, but it is not relevant to the recipient. This might happen if you have different types of subscribers in your email list. Sending the same email to all campaigns of subscribers tends to decrease the email open rate as the content may not appeal to the wide range of subscribers.

Try sending targeted emails to a smaller set of subscribers in your email list who will be more interested in the contents of your email. Build your campaigns according to the interest of the subscribers. This will not only increase the email open rate but will also decrease the "opt-outs".

12. You send emails too frequently

With very few exceptions (high-value content), the greater the volume of email sent to an individual, the lesser number of times they will open the email. In general, higher the email volume, the lower the level of engagement with the subscribers for an email campaign. If your email open rates are way below the industry average, and you send multiple emails, you may want to evaluate if you are sending too many emails to often.

When people first subscribe, set their expectations as to how frequently they should expect your emails. Avoid sending the same email or two emails a day to try to get people to open. This may not only frustrate a subscriber it may flag the ESP's.

13. Unsegmented Email List

If you send generic emails to all the subscribers on your email list, you may not engage with your subscribers specific interests and the email open rate will be on the lower side. The email content will not be relevant to many of the subscribers. Sending targeted emails to specific subscribers, segmented by campaign will engage them thoroughly and will increase the email open rate as the emails will be relevant to them.

Statistics shows that segmented campaigns perform 14.4% better in terms of email open rate as against not segmented campaigns.

14. Your recipients may no longer be interested in your emails

It may happen that initially, the subscribers were interested in your emails, but over the course of time, due to a change in their lifestyle, job changes, changes in priorities, they have become less interested in your emails. [This might also happen in case you have bought an email list and the subscribers have not explicitly given you their authorization to receive your emails.]

In these situations, the subscribers will not be interested or willing to open your emails. Moreover, subscribers will be more likely to mark your email as spam as opposed to just unsubscribing. Inactive emails will tend to bring your email open rates down due to lack of engagement.

Unclean and old email lists will contribute to low open rates, bounces, spam flags and can lead to marking of your emails as spam.

15. Emails get stuck in the spam filter

If your email gets delivered to the recipients spam folder, rather than the inbox, the recipient will not even get a chance to open the email. There are multiple reasons why an email gets filtered into the spam folder of the recipient. Some of the most frequent reasons are listed below.

16.Using keywords that trigger Spam alerts

Certain keywords in the subject line trigger the email as spam. Avoiding such words will land the emails in the recipient's inbox, increasing the probability for the recipients to open them. Avoid using keywords like "Free", both in the subject line as well as the email body. Instead, use words like "complimentary", "at no charge", etc. Some of the spam triggering keywords are as mentioned below:

Guarantee, 100% free, FREE, ALL CAPS, $$$, !!! or excess of any symbol, Attention!, Act Now!, Re:, FWD:, T e x t w I t h g a p s

17. Appearing deceptive in your email

Do not use words like "Re:" or "Fwd:" in your subject line. These used to be a good hack a few years back, but, not now!
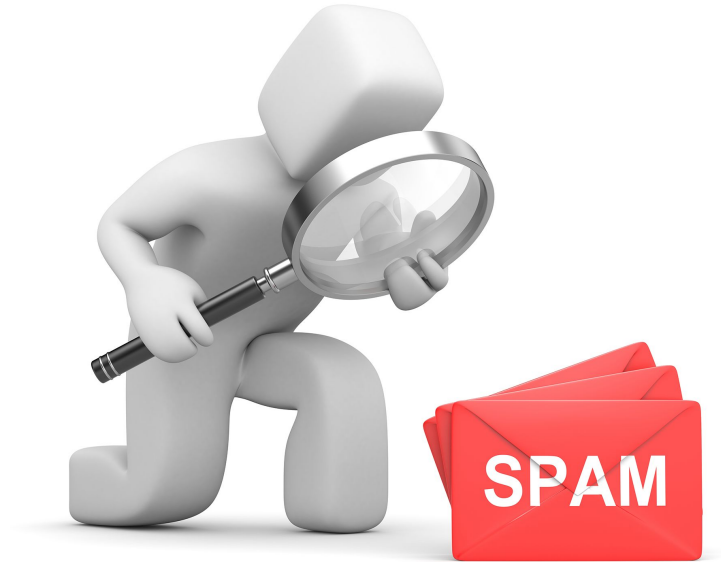
18. Complicated email body format

Do not cram too much information into the email body or use complicated email layouts that might impact email rendering in mobile devices. You can use an online tool or simply open a test email on your own mobile device. The more devices tested the better.

19. Text to Image Ratio

Do not cram images in the email body. Maintain the ideal 60-40 text to image ratio. Avoid having a single large image in the email body. Have as much text as possible, instead of pictures.

20. Too many Links

Avoid cramming too many links in the email body. Use text and link it with your editor.
Links may look unusual to the average person.

21. Don't use Links from Non-Credible Websites. (Critical)

Use links from credible websites. A link from a non-credible website may trigger email as spam or be rejected. This is critical because just one bad link can ruin your open rate and your sender reputation. If the URL you use has a negative spam listing the ESP's will most likely filter it.

22. Include Date and Time in Emails

Including a date and a time in your broadcast emails shows that your emails are recent. This can lead to more email open rates on future emails. People need to feel that the emails are current. This will also add to the urgency of limited time offers as a reference point.

23. Too many images

Avoid images in emails when getting started. This helps in avoiding spam triggers. Many Marketers use images but have well engaged lists which have opened multiple emails already. They have a good sender reputation already.

24. Grammatical Errors or Spelling Mistakes

Casual grammatical errors and spelling mistakes do not create a good impression to the recipients. They can trigger spam filters too. Try to avoid them as much as possible.

25. Include Your Physical Mailing Address in Email

Adding a physical mailing address gives credibility to the email, and thus, there are fewer chances of such emails triggering spam filters. This is also required by spam laws.

CAN-SPAM

Tell recipients where you're located. Your message must include your valid physical postal address. This can be your current street address, a post office box you've registered with the U.S. Postal Service, or a private mailbox you've registered with a commercial mail receiving agency established under Postal Service regulations.

26. Relying on Purchased or shared Email List

DON'T USE THEM

Subscribers from a purchased email list have not given their authorization to receive emails from you. They will unsubscribe from your emails and may also opt to report your emails as spam which can deteriorate your sender reputation. Purchased email list might be stale with lots of inactive users.

28. Frequent changes in the "from" name

Using a constant "from" name lends credibility to your emails and helps your subscribers remember and recognize your emails. Frequent changes in the "from" name will lose that credibility factor from the recipient as well as trigger spam filters.

29. Request that subscribers add your email address to their contacts list

Request that your subscribers add your email address in their address book or in their safe list in your first email in a follow up series. Your mail will almost always arrive in the in box because the email service providers view this as direct engagement.

30. You have Lost Subscribers Engagement

Keep subscribers engaged through providing value. When subscribers feel they will get value from opening your email they will engage. You may offer free advice or links to sites with free tools that are relevant to their interests. Some subscribers may be interested in your "story" as well, depending how engaged they are with you personally.

31."Unsubscribe" Button was hard to find

Provide an easily accessible "**unsubscribe**" button to the subscribers if they wish to opt out of your emails. This will help clean your email list of uninterested subscribers, this satisfies the CAN-SPAM act and lends credibility to your emails and avoids spam complaints. With our system we automatically add it for you.

32. Bounced Email Addresses

Removing email addresses which have bounced multiple times helps in cleaning your email list, increase the email open rate as well as enhance your reputation as an email sender with lower bounce rates. Our system automatically manages bounces for you, once they reach a threshold they will show as blocked in your list. At times you will see emails blocked on the first mail. This is a hard bounce which most likely was a false email address which is not uncommon when using single opt in.

34. Do not use "noreply@company.com" as your reply to mail

Try to avoid "reply to" email addresses such as "noreply@company.com". Use a genuine "reply to" email address in all your emails so that recipients can interact with you in case they wish to reply. The presence of a genuine "reply to" email address in your emails lends credibility to your campaign and helps your emails avoid spam triggers.

35. Respect "unsubscribe" requests if they make the request via your reply to email

This enhances your credibility as well as satisfies the CAN-SPAM act. Our system automatically manages these for you if your subscriber clicks the unsubscribe link in your outbound email. If you receive a request via your reply to address you need to block it within your members area. (Autoresponder> Subscribers> Block)

36. Use a recognized/genuine "from" name

Use a "from" name your recipients recognize and relate to you, your product or service. This will help them identify your emails and increase your email open rates. Your from name may be your personal name or brand name or whatever you wish to use. Just keep in mind that if you change it and your subscribers are familiar with it, they may not open future emails.

37. Double opt-in vs Single opt in subscribers

Double opt-in means that the subscriber will confirm that they want to receive emails from you by clicking a confirmation link within your first email after opting into your landing pages. This will increase your email open rate due to the high engagement of the subscriber and decreases the chances of your emails being reported as spam. This will increase your reputation as an email sender, improving deliverability of your emails. Double opt in eliminates the risk of "unknown users" emails that are false or incorrectly entered to keep your list more clean. People who have opted in to your pages but don't click the link to confirm will remain "pending" in your list.

Single opt in has its benefits as it is easier for subscribers to opt in to your offer without confirmation. This also removes the chances of your subscriber missing your opt in email due to not checking their mail or in the event that it is filtered to their spam box. Be sure you have your follow up series set up so they get their first email from you right away.

Tip ▸ *Encourage them to add you to their contacts list*

38. Stale/old List of Subscribers

If your subscriber's list is old or has very low engagement, it is time to clean up the inactive or outdated emails. Email open rates tend to decline gradually as people lose engagement, tend to switch jobs, their interests or lifestyle changes, etc. This means that the email list gradually becomes invalid. You need to weed out these emails so that the inactive recipients do not bring your email open rate down. If you have a big list that has low opens or engagement the email service providers will be less likely to inbox your emails.

39. Continue to add New Subscribers

If you are not attracting new subscribers regularly, the issue in the previous point is enhanced. With time, the old subscribers will become inactive or outdated, and the email open rate will decline. Gaining new subscribers takes continual effort to grow your list. The new subscribers may be more engaged and keep your reputation with Esp's strong.

40. Tracking Issues (If users open on mobile)

The tracking mechanism employed for marking an email as opened is far from being accurate. It depends on the loading of a tiny graphics pixel in the email body. In case the graphics are not loaded in the email body, the email will not be marked as an open email. There can be multiple reasons why the graphics image is not loaded in the email body.

The email client generally blocks the images by default. Also, the email clients in applications like mobile or tablet only receive the text version of the email. The plain-text version of the email does not support the tracking image download capabilities. The recipients may choose "not to download image" option.

Always request your subscribers to add your email address in their "address book" or in their "safe sender" list so that the graphic image can be downloaded automatically. Also, use "jpeg" images instead of "png" images as "png" images are not compatible with many email applications.

41. Time of Delivery

The time of delivery of the email can influence how many people open your email and thus can impact the email open rate. If you send your emails on a weekend, people are less likely to open them, at least not right away. On a Monday morning, people take time to catch up from the weekends.

Also, after business hours, people are less likely to open their emails. So the best bet to send your emails is on a Tuesday after 12 pm. This is different in many cases but a good place to start. The most important part is to be consistent with the times you email.

23% of all email opens occur during the first couple hours of delivery. After 24 hours of delivery, the chances of opening an email drops below 1%. Mondays- Fridays are the best days to send emails. Weekends and holidays are not, expect lower open rates.

42. Seasonal Factors (Holidays)

Seasonal factors too can have an effect on your email open rates. In the periods when the email volumes are high (like festivals, celebrations, important events), people might get choosy as to what to open in their crowded email inbox, the email open rate may decline.

In contrast, when the email volumes are too small (periods like the long holiday season, weekends), people do not bother to check their emails. In this case too, the email open rates go down.

43. You Stopped managing your email List

An email list that is not well maintained and managed suffer from lower email open rates, higher inactive users and lower subscriber engagement. If your email list contains old email addresses and inactive subscribers, email open rates will fall and bounce rates will increase. This can lead to:

- Subscribers receiving emails which are not relevant to them
- ISPs not delivering your emails because of reputation loss due to higher bounce rates and low engagement

ISPs look into multiple factors while sending your emails.

- Whom you are sending the emails
- How frequently you are sending the emails
- The bounce rate of your emails
- The number of complaints about your emails
- Your email open rate
- Your email click rate
- #1 is engagement

All these factors determine your reputation with ESP's and affect whether your emails will be delivered to the recipient's inbox or spam folder if it is delivered at all.

44. Gmail's Separate Tab for Promotional Emails

Gmail introduced a feature which filters promotional emails into a distinct separate tab. This can be a challenge with open rates if a person does not check this tab. The three tabs are titled "Primary", "Social" and "Promotional" tabs. Gmail tries to filter the emails and put them into the third tab, the "Promotional" tab. This separates the promotional marketing emails from reaching the "Primary" tab, the inbox which the recipient generally checks.

The unique feature of this new tab is that this tab is only visible in the browser view. It is not visible in mobile devices like smartphones, tablets, and mobiles. If a person is checking his or her promotional tab, that means they are genuinely interested in special offers and marketing messages and are more receptive to such emails.

The algorithms for each ESP are unique. They do not advise people on how they work or how they determine the way they fiter mail.

The #1 metric ESp's look at is engagement (adding the senders email to your their address book, opens, replies, clicks) The more active the Subscriber is with you the better your sender reputation.