



Conquer Your Email Deliverability Woes

15 Foolproof Tips to Improve
Email Deliverability

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In 1789, Benjamin Franklin said, 'In this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes'. On the same lines, if there's one thing that's certain for email marketers, that's email delivery issues.

No matter how good you're as an e-mail marketer, your email message can still get blocked. Every year, between 14% and 20% of email marketing messages never make it to the inbox. Out of this many messages are wrongly filtered by ISPs as spam.

In this scenario, most marketers are anxious to battle out the email delivery issues. Unfortunately there's no single path to achieve high mail delivery. The answer lies in whole bunch of issues – both creative and technical factors.

Keeping this in mind, we've dedicated this exclusive guide on tips, strategies and best practices to improve email deliverability. Whether you own a small, mid-size, or Fortune 500 company, these good practices will definitely bump up your email delivery rates to a significant level.



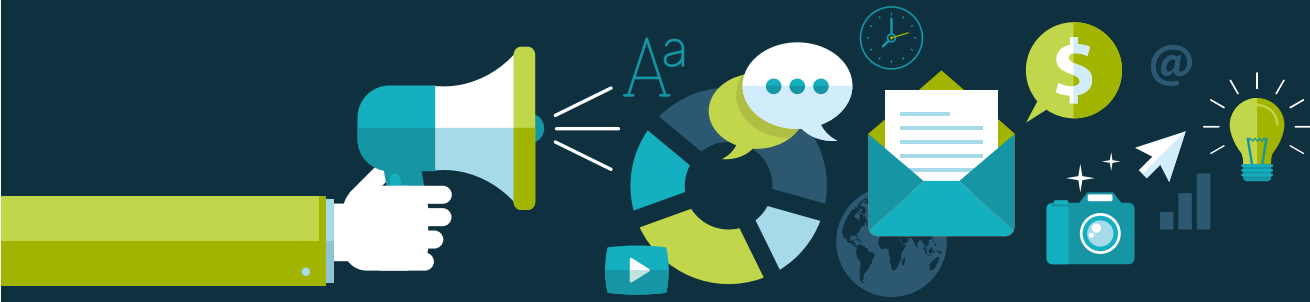


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Introduction

As customers become more demanding with time, email marketers are banking on new ways of customer engagement strategies.

In the business space, B2B and B2C marketers continue to send emails - lots of them.

Smartphones and tablets continue to explode in the market. All these new devices has changed the way users read emails and search information. This has thrown many challenges to online marketers.

Here are a few tips to improve performance and increase ROI. These are key features/factors you as a marketer need to consider:

- ▶ "Email" continue to evolve as a key channel for online marketing
- ▶ Marketers continue to focus on delivering value to users
- ▶ Email delivery still continue as a major challenge for online marketers
- ▶ "Batch & Blast" results go down even further

Despite the popularity of Email marketing, most marketers don't follow the accepted web design standards. This often creates a bad rap with sharp eyed ISPs. Add to that the sneaky nature of spam filters keeping legitimate marketers on their toes.

Before we explore on the heavy-weight issues, let's uncover the basic issues of email deliverability.

Email deliverability encompasses not just the creative, or the structural format of the email, but also the technical factors that it faces after you hit the send button. No matter how good your creative skills are, there are other technical factors governing the inbox.

Let's start with email bounces.

A failed email delivery is commonly called a bounce. Two types of bounces:

Bounce Basics

Soft Bounce

A "soft" bounce is typically due to a temporary error at the recipient's mail server. These failures can be set off after sorting this transient problem.

For ex: soft bounces happen when

- ▶ the recipient's mailbox is full
- ▶ the recipient mail server is too busy
- ▶ the recipient is on vacation (out of office)
- ▶ the recipient's server is down or overloaded
- ▶ the email message is too large for the inbox

Hard Bounce

A "hard" bounce is generally results when the recipient's address is invalid (permanently undeliverable). It happens as a result of a permanent problem. Remove these addresses ASAP from your email database.

For ex: it happens when

- ▶ the recipient address doesn't exist
- ▶ the email it's not a valid user
- ▶ the email address is wrong (result of typos)
- ▶ the recipient mail server blocked your server, etc.

Bounce Handling:

No one can ensure full delivery of emails to all recipients. There could be soft bounce when the recipients' inbox is full or a hard bounce when the email address is no longer valid. More than that, sometimes servers interpret bounces differently. Soft bounce on one server may be tagged as a hard bounce by another server.

Before you come to a conclusion about bounce handling, have a discussion with your ESP, how many times and at what interval to retry soft bounces.

This should be determined on the basis of business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketing. Moreover, it depends on the composition of your list.

Decoding the Bounces

Typically, each bounce message comes with vital clues. This information contains the reason of bounce. Decoding this information helps you to know the reason for non-delivery of your email. When bounce happens, you get a reply with the header address: MAILER-DAEMON.

The main information of Non-Delivery Report/Receipt (NDR) includes:

- ▶ The date and time of the bounce
- ▶ The server name that bounced it
- ▶ The reason of bounce (e.g. user unknown or mailbox full)
- ▶ The headers of the bounced message, and Portion or all full content of the bounced message



Types of Hard and Soft Bounces

Here's a rundown of different bounces you might see in your Bounce Activity Report.

Bounce Type	Description	Description
AR	Auto Reply	An automatic response from the recipient. Examples: "Out of Office", "Vacation Message"
BN	BOUNCE WITH NO EMAIL ADDRESS	When it could not resolve the original email recipient email address
CR	Challenge -Response Message	In response to suspected spam.
SB	Soft Bounce – General	Temporarily unable to deliver your message to the recipient email address. Example: "Connection timed out."
GB	GENERAL BOUNCE	When the bounce reason is not clear. Probably soft bounce. Example: "Subject: Undeliverable mail"
HB	Hard Bounce	Bounce of a permanent nature
MB	Mail Block	Indicates that the recipient's email server is blocking email from your email server.
MBKS	Mail Block - Known Spammer	Strong reason to block the message – Known spammer
MBSD	Mail Block - Spam Detected	Message content looks like coming from a spammer.
MBAD	Mail Block - Attachment Detected	Email blocked due to mail attachment. Example: "552 Disapproved attachment"
MBRD	Mail Block - Relay Denied	Recipient's email server is blocking email from your email server.
NB	Non Bounce	Bounce format not recognizable

SBDF	Soft Bounce - DNS Failure	Temporarily unable to deliver your message because of a DNS problem.
SBMF	Soft Bounce - Mailbox Full	Temporarily unable to deliver the message because the recipient's email box is full. Example: "Mailbox over quota"
SBMS	Soft Bounce - Message Size Too Large	Non delivery as the message size is too large.
TB	Transient Bounce	Email server temporarily cannot deliver your message, but it is still trying.

Bounce Code List – Quick Reference Sheet

Here is a list of reply codes in numerical order to find the reason of bounce. Compare the codes in your failed inbox with the list.

Soft bounce codes: Most soft bounce rejections start with 4xx codes. The soft bounce error codes are in the range of 400-499.

Hard bounce codes: Most hard bounce rejections start with 5xx codes. The hard bounce error codes are in the range of 500-599.

Bounce Code – Behind These Codes

200 - Nonstandard success response
 211 - System status, or system help reply
 214 - Help message
 220 - <domain> Service ready
 221 - <domain> Service closing transmission channel
 250 - Requested mail action okay, completed
 251 - User not local; will forward to <forward-path>
 354 - Start mail input; end with <CRLF>.<CRLF>
 421 - <domain> Service not available, closing transmission channel
 441 - Intermittent network connection. The server not responding
 450 - Requested mail action not taken: Domain not found

451 - Requested action aborted: local error in processing
 452 - Requested action not taken: insufficient system storage
 500 - Recipient address rejected
 501 - Syntax error in parameters or arguments
 502 - Command not implemented
 503 - Bad sequence of commands
 504 - Command parameter not implemented
 514 - Two objects with the same address
 515 - Destination mailbox address invalid.
 521 - <domain> does not accept mail
 530 - Access denied (Sendmail-specific)
 535 - SMTP Authentication unsuccessful/Bad username or password on your account
 542 - Bad connection.
 550 - User unknown; abcdefghijk@hotmail.com
 551 - User not local; please try <forward-path>
 552 - Requested mail action aborted: exceeded storage allocation
 553 - Requested action not taken: mailbox name not allowed
 554 - Sender address rejected: Access denied

15 Tips to Improve Email Deliverability

It takes some know-how to keep your email marketing on the safe lines. Here are 15 quick tips to improve email deliverability.

Remove Inactive Subscribers

Too many inactive users in your sender file weighs down the email delivery rates. Moreover inactive subscribers are more likely to mark your email as spam. High percentage of dormant email contacts in your address list increases the cost of list management.

Send Relevant Newsletter

On an average an user receives over 50 emails a day. Most online readers are finicky about what they read. Keep this in mind, to send relevant and valuable content to your subscribers. Sending off topic messages to your subscriber base triggers users to opt-out or make them disinterested in your mailing.

Follow Consistent Timing

Users and ISPs love when you follow a regular schedule to send the emails. Haphazard sending patterns are tell-tale signs of spam email senders. Follow same timing to send emails to your subscribers. This consistency in sending emails makes you a responsible email marketer.

Use Consistent 'From' Information

Maintain the same 'from' name and address on all your communications. In case you change the address, make sure that all your subscribers add the new address to their address book. Change the address only when it's unavoidable. Chances of losing subscribers are high when you choose a new email identity.

Send Emails in Short Bursts

Give spacing between each email campaign. Don't follow bulk email blasting. Some ISPs have set up limits on the number of emails you can send at a time. Stage the email broadcasting over a period of time or give proper breaks between each batch.

Know Your Audience

Before you create personalized e-newsletter or send a related offer, create the right content for your audience.

Learn more about the subscribers; what topics they love to hear from you. Use your signup forms to collect information on what they like, what they are, where they live and what are their interests.

Place Unsubscribe Link either at the Bottom or at the Top

Place unsubscribe link on the visible part in the email header or footer. Does it increase unsubscribe? No, it reduces the number of users hitting on junk button. Impatient users hit on the next best button to move away from you. It's better to manage unsubscribe than sort complaints.

Minimize Rendering Issues

Since there is no universal standard on email message rendering, it's good to adopt the popular rendering practices. If you've more users with one email client, then it's advisable to segment similar users. For example segment subscribers from Outlook, AOL, Yahoo, Hotmail, Gmail, etc into separate silos. You can design email template based on rendering features of each email client.

Static IP Address

With the onslaught of spam, most mail servers check the incoming IP address (dynamic or static) before accepting the message. Sending message from a static message gives more credibility to the sender, while using dynamic IP address increases the chance of falling in spam folder.

White List Reminder

Remind your subscribers in the welcome email and at regular intervals to add your email address to their address book. If subscribers add you to the address list, then it's safe passage for your email list to their inbox.

Get Authenticated

There are many email authentications in the market. Few popular authentication systems are Sender ID, Domain keys, or Microsoft's Sender ID wizard, etc. Choose the most suitable authentication service for your business

Get on White Lists

This is no easy task. Better relation with ISPs can help you to improve email deliverability.

Remove Bounces

Don't sit on email bounces hoping that one day the user will open it. Remove them from your main email list or keep it in a separate email file.

Get Off Black Lists

It is advisable to check if your email server is blacklisted.

Join Feedback Loops

This allows you to see who is marking your email as spam. Use this information to remove them from your mailing list. Few ISPs provide easy access to join the feedback loop. For other ISP's, you need to contact them to get this information.

Getting Serious with Bounces - Prevention is Better than Cure

Falling into spam traps indicate poor quality of your list. Most Internet service providers (ISPs) use spam trap addresses to trap potential spammers. Our company's studies have shown that many legitimate business mailers have fallen into such traps and it has badly affected the email deliverability. Just one accidental mailing can affect your deliverability.

Consider these strategies on your email contacts:

- ▶ Use older or non-responsive email contacts cautiously. Use win-back email to get them interested in your email communication
- ▶ Use separate IP address or use the service of thirty-party senders to mail older email contacts. Follow up the activity
- ▶ Use other spam track verification services to weed out spam addresses (SpamCop, Project Honeypot, and blacklists).
- ▶ Analyze spam trap hits between things like data source and age of the address.

HTML Email Template – Best Practices

HTML design can be a headache to most marketing. Making the ideal one for marketers is never an easy task. Here's a litany of dos and don'ts governing HTML designs.

- ▶ Don't use thick table borders
- ▶ Avoid nesting too many tables within each other
- ▶ Make sure the title tag doesn't contain the word "Untitled."
- ▶ Avoid using animated GIFs
- ▶ Avoid defining the content type as "TEXT/HTML" in all caps
- ▶ Avoid hitting the spacebar to position your content
- ▶ Use tables as much as possible rather than using line or paragraph breaks
- ▶ Don't have a low ratio of text to image area
- ▶ Avoid using background images. Microsoft Outlook does not support it
- ▶ Include alternative text for all images in an HTML email
- ▶ Always include the width and height in the image tag
- ▶ Avoid the use of scripts, such as JavaScript
- ▶ Avoid incorporating tracking ID numbers as much as possible.
- ▶ Do specify a character set
- ▶ Use a white background, not a colored background
- ▶ Do not use "invisible" text
- ▶ Avoid red or blue textual colors — spammers' colors of choice



Behavioral Factors in Email Deliverability

Right Words: Just like the old expression, "clothes maketh the man", the right choice of words is important to your email message. Cloth the email message with the right message, right words.

Bad html code: An ISP may consider your email to be harmful if it contains wrong HTML codes, dead links or too many scripts

Low text-to-image ratio: Your text to image ratio is too low - add more paragraph style text to improve your score.

Too many spam complaints: ISPs take spam complaints seriously. Too many complaints from subscribers, can affect your reputation with the ISP. It can bring down deliverability rates.

Bad opt-in practices: How it has been gathered? Give importance to quality than quantity. Fewer happy and engaged subscribers lead to higher delivery rates.

Poor database hygiene: Are you doing any validation procedures to update the email database? Updating email database is as important as list acquisition.

Hard bounces & subscribes: Take them off your list.

Old list: On an average 3% of email address goes bad in a month. Just imagine the impact in one year. Either use a fresh list or do thorough data cleansing to screen out invalid data.

Bad Sender / domain reputation: Good Domain reputation would essentially give you the freedom to add new IPs, or you could move IPs. Factors like low complaints, clean list or well configured infrastructure add to your domain reputation.

Technical Factors in Deliverability

These are technical factors that most online marketers and in-house marketing systems struggle to deal with.

- ▶ Blacklisted IP address or domain
- ▶ Bad server configuration
- ▶ Domain keys are not implemented
- ▶ No SPF or Sender ID record

Finally – Preferred Best Practices to Increase Email Delivery

- ▶ Implement data hygiene
- ▶ Send from dedicated IP addresses
- ▶ Slow down your sending speed
- ▶ Change the format. Add text format along with HTML
- ▶ Find the main source of most deliverability issues
- ▶ User complaints – Resolve complaints
- ▶ Remove any suspected spam trap addresses from your mailing list
- ▶ Improve sending infrastructure
- ▶ Sending consistency – Timing & frequency of sending the emails
- ▶ Spend ample time on working on the email content and the subject line. Remember, a subject line ideally should not have more than 5 words.

Summary - The Future of Deliverability

These are exciting times for online marketers – it's riddled with all kinds of challenges and lot of "a-ha" moment.

Like most things, email ecosystem is no different. There is no one-size-fits-all way to email deliverability. So start with a basic plan, apply it, and adapt and change with the times. Keep your list clean and responsive by updating it regularly. Make sure you have people dedicated to attend to all major to minor issues. If you can't handle all these, find a suitable email service provider to take care of your campaigns.

Finally, exercising good judgment and common sense should be enough to keep your email message free and clear of digital potholes.

About Span Global Services

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Span Global Services helps you take a complete dive into the most advanced data intelligence and premium data-driven services for technology companies. It provides specialized consultancy and solutions for businesses attempting to gain greater popularity in their niches. Over the decade, we have been delivering end-to-end data solutions for technology firms as well as IT-integrated marketing processes to clients from different business verticals.

As a high-tech savvy solutions provider in B2B markets, you gain customized services from Span using the latest business models through online, search, and innovative data strategies. With nearly a decade's expertise in data-driven services, our business intelligence enables you to utilize intellectual online data strategies along with data-driven insights, market reports, and IT support services.

By using our advanced IT-integrated strategies, data-centric solutions, and gamut of Data-Driven Marketing services, you can boost technology business growth as desired. We have catered Data-Driven Services for diverse industries including Information Technology, Automobile, Finance, Healthcare, Real Estate, Marketing & Advertising, Manufacturing, and Media & Publishing.

