THE 2019 HIDDEN METRICS OF EMAIL DELIVERABILITY

Industry Benchmarks for 7 Key Metrics

Return Path

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INTRODUCTION

Email marketing is still the leading marketing channel to reach customers, and its effectiveness is only improving. To take advantage of the opportunity of email, marketers need to be focused on the experience they are providing for their subscribers. By understanding, tracking, and improving email engagement, marketers will not only be able to boost their ROI, but it will also help them protect their email program.

Tracking engagement-based metrics (which measure how subscribers interact with your email program) is a critical step in evaluating the success of any email program. Mailbox providers like Microsoft, Gmail, and Yahoo track the positive and negative interactions subscribers have with your program to determine where to place your incoming messages—so marketers need to pay attention to these measures, as well. In fact, a recent study by Demand Metric, in partnership with Return Path, found that marketers who understand that subscriber engagement has a significant impact on filtering decisions are enjoying greater email marketing effectiveness.

While most marketers track metrics like open rates and click-through rates, mailbox providers actually use a different set of data to measure how their users (your subscribers) are interacting with your messages.

The most important engagement metrics for marketers are shown on the right. . . . .

These metrics may not be familiar to you, because they typically aren't included in reporting provided by your email service provider (ESP). Instead, these metrics are measured by mailbox providers—not ESPs—based on all the email they receive and the actions of their mailbox users. Each mailbox provider then uses this data in their own unique filtering calculations to determine where to place incoming messages.

In *The Hidden Metrics of Email Deliverability*, we detail these "missing metrics" that every marketer should be tracking, what they mean, and why they are important. We also provide industry-specific benchmarks so you can evaluate your email program against your competitors.

Messages marked as spam:
A negative signal that email is spam and does not belong in the inbox

Messages read:
A positive indicator that subscribers want to receive messages from a particular sender

Messages deleted before reading:
A negative indicator that your message wasn't relevant or desired

Messages replied to:
A positive indicator that a message is desired, and likely personal in nature

Messages forwarded:
A positive indicator that the recipient desired the message and that others may want it, too

Messages marked as "not spam:"
A very strong signal to mailbox providers that email should have been delivered to the inbox

SPAM PLACEMENT RATE

The spam placement rate is calculated as the number of emails delivered to the spam folder out of total emails sent. Your spam placement rate shows the percentage of emails that were identified as unsolicited bulk email, or spam, by the receiving mailbox provider's spam filtering system.

Factors: The same elements that block you from the inbox will land you in the spam folder. The reasons can be content based (content triggers that flag emails as spam), reputation based (sending patterns and behaviors), or engagement based (subscriber behaviors).

Significance: Spam placement rate is valuable in understanding how mailbox providers and their spam filters classify your emails. A low spam placement rate signifies you're a trusted sender, and your emails are desired. A sudden increase in spam placement could indicate an issue with a specific campaign, or your entire email program. High spam placement will also impact your other engagement metrics as few subscribers interact with the messages that land in their spam folder. To learn more about what prevents your emails from reaching the inbox, download our _Ultimate Guide to Email Deliverability_.

Observations: The spam placement average for all industries in 2018 was nine percent. Sectors like distribution and manufacturing (i.e., shipping) and banking and finance saw the lowest rates at four percent. Education/nonprofit/government had the highest spam placement at 19 percent, followed by social and dating at 16 percent.

Year Over Year Change: Overall spam placement saw a large decrease at five percentage points, with the majority of industries experiencing a decrease in their spam placement. Office supplies had the largest decrease at 10 percentage points, followed by food and drug and health and beauty at eight percentage points. Distribution and manufacturing was the only industry to have an increase in spam placement at one percentage point.

SPAM PLACEMENT RATE BY QUARTER

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018 AVG	2017 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	8%	7%	7%	6%	7%	13%	-7%
Automotive	13%	13%	12%	13%	13%	17%	-4%
Banking & Finance	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	6%	-1%
Business & Marketing	14%	14%	13%	14%	14%	15%	-2%
Computers & Electronics	6%	6%	5%	5%	6%	12%	-6%
Deals & Rewards	11%	9%	9%	11%	10%	14%	-4%
Distribution & Manufacturing	4%	4%	6%	3%	4%	4%	1%
Education/NonProfit/Government	18%	20%	20%	19%	19%	24%	-5%
Flowers & Gifts	12%	12%	10%	10%	11%	17%	-6%
Food & Drug	10%	6%	5%	5%	7%	15%	-8%
General Merchandise	5%	5%	8%	6%	6%	10%	-4%
Health & Beauty	10%	9%	8%	9%	9%	17%	-8%
Household & Home Improvement	7%	8%	7%	8%	8%	12%	-4%
Insurance	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	8%	-4%
Jobs	12%	12%	8%	8%	10%	10%	0%
Kids & Babies	7%	7%	6%	4%	6%	11%	-5%
Media & Entertainment	12%	13%	11%	10%	12%	17%	-5%
Office Supplies	9%	8%	7%	6%	8%	17%	-10%
Pets	15%	13%	8%	8%	11%	15%	-5%
Real Estate	10%	9%	7%	7%	8%	12%	-4%
Service	14%	9%	6%	10%	10%	14%	-4%
Social & Dating	16%	17%	15%	18%	16%	21%	-4%
Sporting Goods	12%	14%	10%	11%	12%	19%	-7%
Technology/Software/Internet	9%	10%	9%	10%	9%	14%	-5%
Telecommunication	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%	12%	-5%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	7%	8%	8%	9%	8%	12%	-4%
Travel	7%	7%	6%	6%	6%	11%	-5%
ALL	**10%**	**9%**	**9%**	**8%**	**9%**	**14%**	**-5%**

READ RATE

The read rate is calculated as the number of emails that are marked as "read" out all emails sent. Read rate is similar to open rate, but it is far more accurate because it accounts for all emails viewed, regardless of image rendering.

Factors: Various factors can have an impact on read rate. The quality of your subject lines and timing typically have the greatest influence, but deliverability issues can also be the culprit behind a sudden decline in emails being read.

Significance: Read rate allows you to distinguish successful campaigns that grab subscribers' interest, from the failed campaigns that are ignored. Read rate also has an effect on your deliverability, as poor engagement impacts how mailbox providers deliver your email. If your read rates are consistently low, mailbox providers will begin to view your email as unwanted and start delivering your messages to the spam folder.

Observations: Overall, the average read rate in 2018 was 24 percent. Distribution and manufacturing had the highest read rate for the third year in a row at 60 percent. Insurance companies followed in distant second place with a read rate of 43 percent. The education/nonprofit/government and business and marketing industries saw the least positive engagement with subscribers, with read rates of 16 and 17 percent, respectively.

Year Over Year Change: Overall read rates rose in 2018 by two percentage points, with each individual industry seeing an increase as well. Telecommunications saw the highest increase of five percentage points. The rest of the industries had increases between one and four percentage points.

READ RATE BY QUARTER

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018 AVG	2017 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	23%	23%	24%	24%	**24%**	21%	3%
Automotive	24%	25%	25%	24%	**25%**	22%	3%
Banking & Finance	37%	38%	38%	38%	**38%**	36%	2%
Business & Marketing	17%	17%	17%	17%	**17%**	15%	2%
Computers & Electronics	28%	28%	29%	27%	**28%**	26%	2%
Deals & Rewards	19%	19%	19%	18%	**19%**	17%	1%
Distribution & Manufacturing	61%	57%	59%	62%	**60%**	58%	2%
Education/NonProfit/Government	17%	16%	16%	17%	**16%**	16%	1%
Flowers & Gifts	22%	22%	23%	24%	**23%**	21%	2%
Food & Drug	22%	23%	23%	23%	**23%**	20%	3%
General Merchandise	28%	28%	28%	28%	**28%**	25%	3%
Health & Beauty	23%	23%	24%	24%	**23%**	20%	3%
Household & Home Improvement	25%	25%	25%	25%	**25%**	23%	2%
Insurance	44%	43%	43%	42%	**43%**	39%	4%
Jobs	24%	24%	25%	25%	**24%**	23%	1%
Kids & Babies	20%	20%	20%	21%	**20%**	19%	1%
Media & Entertainment	20%	21%	21%	22%	**21%**	19%	2%
Office Supplies	22%	23%	22%	23%	**22%**	21%	1%
Pets	23%	25%	27%	27%	**26%**	22%	4%
Real Estate	30%	29%	28%	29%	**29%**	28%	1%
Service	28%	30%	30%	28%	**29%**	28%	1%
Social & Dating	19%	19%	19%	19%	**19%**	17%	2%
Sporting Goods	24%	24%	25%	25%	**25%**	22%	3%
Technology/Software/Internet	24%	22%	22%	23%	**23%**	21%	2%
Telecommunication	38%	38%	39%	40%	**39%**	33%	5%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	22%	22%	22%	21%	**22%**	19%	3%
Travel	26%	26%	26%	26%	**26%**	25%	1%
ALL	**23%**	**24%**	**24%**	**24%**	**24%**	**22%**	**2%**

DELETED BEFORE READING RATE

Another term for this would be the "ignore rate." As the name indicates, the deleted before reading rate measures how often a recipient deletes email without reading it, calculated as the total number of unread emails deleted out of total emails sent.

Factors: An unread email sent to the trash may signal a disengaged subscriber. A high deleted before reading rate is a sign of a failed campaign. But a consistently high deleted without reading rate can be an indication of permission issues or a lack of satisfaction with your overall email marketing program.

Significance: From a mailbox provider's perspective, the read rate is an important metric indicating how desirable subscribers find your messages which can impact your inbox deliverability. A high deleted before reading rate, therefore, indicates lack of interest in your messages, and can result in future emails being filtered to the spam folder.

Observations: The average deleted before reading rate in 2018 was 16 percent. Matching its lead in reads, distribution and manufacturing was the least ignored sector with a deleted before reading rate of nine percent. On the opposite end of the spectrum, emails from the pet industry were the most ignored with a deleted before reading rate of 20 percent.

Year Over Year Change: The increase in read rate was accompanied by an increase in actively ignoring emails, as the overall deleted before reading rate rose by four percent. Like reads, each vertical saw an increase in deleted before reading, with pets having the largest increase at six percentage points. The remaining industries had increases between three and five percentage points.

DELETED BEFORE READING RATE BY QUARTER

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018 AVG	2017 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	19%	18%	17%	16%	**17%**	13%	4%
Automotive	16%	15%	14%	13%	**15%**	11%	4%
Banking & Finance	15%	14%	14%	13%	**14%**	11%	3%
Business & Marketing	17%	17%	16%	15%	**16%**	11%	5%
Computers & Electronics	18%	17%	16%	15%	**16%**	12%	4%
Deals & Rewards	17%	16%	15%	14%	**15%**	12%	3%
Distribution & Manufacturing	10%	10%	8%	8%	**9%**	6%	3%
Education/NonProfit/Government	17%	16%	15%	14%	**15%**	10%	5%
Flowers & Gifts	21%	19%	18%	18%	**19%**	14%	5%
Food & Drug	20%	19%	17%	16%	**18%**	13%	5%
General Merchandise	18%	17%	16%	15%	**16%**	12%	4%
Health & Beauty	18%	17%	16%	15%	**16%**	12%	4%
Household & Home Improvement	21%	20%	19%	18%	**19%**	15%	4%
Insurance	14%	13%	12%	12%	**13%**	9%	3%
Jobs	17%	16%	15%	14%	**16%**	11%	4%
Kids & Babies	18%	17%	16%	15%	**17%**	13%	3%
Media & Entertainment	18%	17%	16%	16%	**16%**	11%	5%
Office Supplies	21%	19%	18%	17%	**19%**	14%	4%
Pets	22%	20%	20%	18%	**20%**	14%	6%
Real Estate	16%	15%	14%	14%	**15%**	11%	4%
Service	15%	15%	14%	14%	**14%**	10%	5%
Social & Dating	15%	14%	13%	13%	**14%**	9%	5%
Sporting Goods	20%	19%	18%	17%	**19%**	13%	5%
Technology/Software/Internet	14%	14%	13%	12%	**13%**	9%	4%
Telecommunication	15%	14%	12%	11%	**13%**	10%	3%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	19%	18%	17%	15%	**17%**	13%	5%
Travel	19%	18%	17%	16%	**18%**	13%	4%
ALL	**18%**	**17%**	**16%**	**15%**	**16%**	**12%**	**4%**

REPLY RATE

The reply rate is calculated as the number of replies to your email out of the total of email sent.

Factors: A high reply rate could mean one of two things: an engaged subscriber list or subscribers trying to unsubscribe. Truthfully, there's isn't a target "reply rate" that your email marketing program should try to achieve. Having a low—or no—reply rate won't necessarily hurt your deliverability, but having a high reply rate can help.

Significance: A reply to an email message is a very strong positive signal of engagement showing mailbox providers that a message was likely desired, and improves the sender's chance of being delivered to the inbox for any future campaigns sent to a particular subscriber. We don't suggest email marketers try anything gimmicky to increase their reply rate. Instead switch from your "noreply@" from: address to one that's managed.

Observations: Reply rates for commercial emails are unsurprisingly quite low, with an average of 0.06 percent in 2018. Service based sectors saw higher reply rates last year with telecommunications and insurance having the highest reply rates of over one percent. Deals and rewards, education/nonprofit/government, and toys/hobbies/crafts had the least replies at a rate of 0.01 percent.

Year Over Year Change: The overall reply rate decreased by almost half from last year's average of 0.11 percent. The majority of industries saw a decrease in replies. The largest decrease in replies was in the telecommunication sector with a decrease of more than one full percentage point, but the industry was still able to maintain its lead in reply rates. The pet industry had the only increase in replies at 0.03 percent. Toys/hobbies/crafts and social and dating saw no change in average replies.

REPLY RATE BY QUARTER

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018 AVG	2017 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.05%	-0.03%
Automotive	0.10%	0.09%	0.09%	0.09%	0.09%	0.14%	-0.05%
Banking & Finance	0.17%	0.15%	0.15%	0.14%	0.15%	0.27%	-0.12%
Business & Marketing	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.03%	0.04%	-0.01%
Computers & Electronics	0.11%	0.09%	0.10%	0.08%	0.09%	0.16%	-0.07%
Deals & Rewards	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	-0.01%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.34%	0.24%	0.25%	0.22%	0.25%	0.51%	-0.25%
Education/NonProfit/Government	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.05%	-0.03%
Flowers & Gifts	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.05%	0.04%	0.09%	-0.05%
Food & Drug	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.05%	-0.02%
General Merchandise	0.10%	0.08%	0.09%	0.08%	0.09%	0.11%	-0.02%
Health & Beauty	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.05%	-0.02%
Household & Home Improvement	0.05%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.09%	-0.05%
Insurance	1.17%	1.12%	1.11%	0.82%	1.03%	1.93%	-0.89%
Jobs	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.04%	-0.01%
Kids & Babies	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	-0.01%
Media & Entertainment	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	0.04%	0.03%	0.06%	-0.03%
Office Supplies	0.06%	0.06%	0.06%	0.05%	0.06%	0.14%	-0.08%
Pets	0.05%	0.05%	0.06%	0.06%	0.05%	0.03%	0.03%
Real Estate	0.24%	0.16%	0.16%	0.13%	0.17%	0.31%	-0.14%
Service	0.22%	0.21%	0.20%	0.18%	0.20%	0.68%	-0.48%
Social & Dating	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.00%
Sporting Goods	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.07%	-0.02%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.13%	0.11%	0.10%	0.10%	0.11%	0.31%	-0.20%
Telecommunication	1.28%	1.08%	1.03%	0.99%	1.09%	2.16%	-1.07%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	0.00%
Travel	0.15%	0.13%	0.13%	0.11%	0.13%	0.22%	-0.09%
ALL	**0.07%**	**0.05%**	**0.06%**	**0.05%**	**0.06%**	**0.11%**	**-0.05%**

FORWARD RATE

The forward rate is calculated as the number of your emails that are forwarded on to others out of total emails sent.

Factors: Forwards are generated when subscribers find an email interesting enough that they want to pass it on to others.

Significance: A high forward rate shows strong subscriber engagement and indicates the content you're sending is relevant to not only your subscribers, but also their networks.

Observations: Like replies, forwards are rare for commercial emails with account based sectors seeing higher rates. The overall average for forwards in 2018 was 0.02 percent. Along with their high reply rates, telecommunications and insurance along with distribution and manufacturing had the highest forward rates at 0.13 percent. Deals and rewards and social and dating had the lowest with an average of zero forwards.

Year Over Year Change: The overall average forward rate saw no change from last year, and the majority of verticals also saw no change. Along with its increase in replies, the pet industry had the only increase in forwards at 0.01 percentage points. Insurance had the largest decrease in forwards at 0.04 percentage points.

FORWARD RATE BY QUARTER

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018 AVG	2017 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Automotive	0.02%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	**0.03%**	0.02%	0.00%
Banking & Finance	0.05%	0.05%	0.04%	0.04%	**0.04%**	0.05%	-0.01%
Business & Marketing	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Computers & Electronics	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	**0.03%**	0.03%	0.00%
Deals & Rewards	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	**0.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.15%	0.13%	0.13%	0.12%	**0.13%**	0.15%	-0.02%
Education/NonProfit/Government	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Flowers & Gifts	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Food & Drug	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	**0.02%**	0.02%	0.00%
General Merchandise	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	**0.04%**	0.03%	0.00%
Health & Beauty	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Household & Home Improvement	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	**0.02%**	0.02%	0.00%
Insurance	0.14%	0.14%	0.13%	0.10%	**0.13%**	0.16%	-0.04%
Jobs	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Kids & Babies	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Media & Entertainment	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	**0.02%**	0.01%	0.00%
Office Supplies	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	**0.02%**	0.02%	0.00%
Pets	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	**0.02%**	0.01%	0.01%
Real Estate	0.05%	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	**0.04%**	0.06%	-0.02%
Service	0.08%	0.08%	0.08%	0.08%	**0.08%**	0.08%	0.00%
Social & Dating	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	**0.00%**	0.00%	0.00%
Sporting Goods	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	**0.02%**	0.01%	0.00%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	**0.02%**	0.03%	0.00%
Telecommunication	0.15%	0.13%	0.13%	0.12%	**0.13%**	0.15%	-0.01%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	**0.01%**	0.01%	0.00%
Travel	0.08%	0.08%	0.08%	0.06%	**0.07%**	0.07%	0.00%
ALL	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.00%**

COMPLAINT RATE

The complaint rate is the rate at which subscribers report your messages as spam. It is calculated as the number of "report spam/junk" complaints out of emails sent.

Factors: There are various reasons why a subscriber would mark your messages as spam throughout the different stages of an email relationship. For more information about why complaints occur, download the *Marketer's Guide to Subscriber Complaints*.

Significance: Spam complaints are a direct signal from subscribers to mailbox providers that your content is unwanted. As such, mailbox providers heavily factor spam complaints into their filtering decisions.

Observations: The average overall complaint rate in 2018 was 0.39 percent, well over mailbox providers' recommendation of 0.2 percent. Business and marketing had the most complaints with an average of 1.4 percent, followed by jobs and office supplies at 0.77 and 0.73 percent, respectively. General merchandise, distribution and manufacturing, and toys/hobbies/crafts where the only industries that achieved averages below the recommended 0.2 percent.

Year Over Year Change: Complaints more than doubled from last year's average of 0.17 percent. The majority of industries had a rise in complaints, with business and marketing having the largest increase at 0.98 percentage points. The office supply industry was the only vertical to see a decrease in complaints from last year, although it was slight at just 0.03 percentage points.

COMPLAINT RATE BY QUARTER

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018 AVG	2017 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	0.37%	0.31%	0.19%	0.13%	**0.24%**	0.14%	0.10%
Automotive	0.95%	0.74%	0.52%	0.43%	**0.65%**	0.27%	0.39%
Banking & Finance	0.45%	0.42%	0.12%	0.09%	**0.26%**	0.09%	0.17%
Business & Marketing	2.10%	2.33%	0.74%	0.22%	**1.40%**	0.42%	0.98%
Computers & Electronics	0.32%	0.24%	0.16%	0.18%	**0.22%**	0.11%	0.11%
Deals & Rewards	1.12%	0.70%	0.16%	0.11%	**0.49%**	0.15%	0.34%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.51%	0.13%	0.09%	0.06%	**0.17%**	0.08%	0.08%
Education/NonProfit/Government	0.72%	1.17%	0.45%	0.32%	**0.65%**	0.23%	0.42%
Flowers & Gifts	0.52%	0.55%	0.54%	0.88%	**0.63%**	0.42%	0.22%
Food & Drug	0.58%	0.41%	0.25%	0.25%	**0.37%**	0.19%	0.17%
General Merchandise	0.17%	0.15%	0.12%	0.08%	**0.12%**	0.08%	0.05%
Health & Beauty	0.51%	0.53%	0.38%	0.28%	**0.41%**	0.23%	0.18%
Household & Home Improvement	0.41%	0.31%	0.21%	0.21%	**0.27%**	0.12%	0.15%
Insurance	0.54%	0.62%	0.13%	0.15%	**0.33%**	0.18%	0.15%
Jobs	1.56%	1.27%	0.15%	0.08%	**0.77%**	0.34%	0.43%
Kids & Babies	0.55%	0.62%	0.21%	0.13%	**0.36%**	0.17%	0.19%
Media & Entertainment	0.67%	0.63%	0.46%	0.40%	**0.54%**	0.24%	0.30%
Office Supplies	1.39%	0.93%	0.64%	0.13%	**0.73%**	0.76%	-0.03%
Pets	0.46%	0.27%	0.28%	0.22%	**0.30%**	0.10%	0.20%
Real Estate	0.31%	0.39%	0.11%	0.09%	**0.23%**	0.05%	0.18%
Service	0.63%	0.50%	0.30%	0.31%	**0.43%**	0.14%	0.29%
Social & Dating	0.52%	0.52%	0.21%	0.20%	**0.36%**	0.15%	0.21%
Sporting Goods	0.68%	0.42%	0.47%	0.39%	**0.48%**	0.31%	0.16%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.57%	0.52%	0.33%	0.31%	**0.43%**	0.15%	0.28%
Telecommunication	0.51%	0.31%	0.17%	0.15%	**0.28%**	0.25%	0.03%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.27%	0.23%	0.13%	0.16%	**0.19%**	0.10%	0.09%
Travel	0.31%	0.26%	0.15%	0.16%	**0.21%**	0.10%	0.12%
ALL	**0.65%**	**0.54%**	**0.24%**	**0.18%**	**0.39%**	**0.17%**	**0.21%**

"THIS IS NOT SPAM" RATE

The "this is not spam" rate is calculated as the number of times a subscriber marks your message "not spam" or "not junk" out of the number of emails delivered to the spam folder. Another term for this would be the rescue rate as these messages are rescued from the spam folder by subscribers.

Factors: There are a number of reasons for a low "this is not spam" rate. Only email that lands in the spam folder can generate a "this not spam" vote; therefore, a low "this is not spam" rate may not be a problem at all and could indicate that few of your emails are being sent to the spam folder. But if you have a high percentage of mail being sent to spam and your "this is not spam" rate is still low, the causes could be a lack of permission, lack of awareness, or simply a lack of interest from your subscribers.

Significance: The "this is not spam" metric is a strong and positive indicator to mailbox providers that your emails are desired and may indicate a false positive with the spam filter. A "this is not spam" selection shows mailbox providers that subscribers are actively searching for your messages, enough to go into the spam folder and "rescue" them.

Observations: The overall "this is not spam" rate for 2018 was 0.02 percent. Distribution and manufacturing and telecommunications were rescued from the spam folder the most at 0.08 and 0.05 percent, respectively. Education/nonprofit/government, kids and babies, and real estate saw the least rescues with a "this is not spam" rates of 0.01 percent.

Year Over Year Change: 2018 saw a steep drop in "this is not spam" rescues at 1.75 percentage points. This might largely be a result of the decreased overall spam placement, which was five percentage points lower than the previous year's results. Every vertical saw a decrease in "this is not spam" rates with general merchandise seeing the largest decrease of 3.17 percentage points, followed by flowers and gifts at 2.59 percentage points.

"THIS IS NOT SPAM" RATE BY QUARTER

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2018 AVG	2017 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	1.91%	-1.90%
Automotive	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.03%	0.04%	1.46%	-1.42%
Banking & Finance	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.03%	0.04%	0.89%	-0.86%
Business & Marketing	0.02%	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	1.32%	-1.29%
Computers & Electronics	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	2.09%	-2.06%
Deals & Rewards	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	1.47%	-1.46%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.09%	0.08%	0.07%	0.07%	0.08%	0.81%	-0.73%
Education/NonProfit/Government	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	2.19%	-2.17%
Flowers & Gifts	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	2.61%	-2.59%
Food & Drug	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	1.40%	-1.38%
General Merchandise	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	3.20%	-3.17%
Health & Beauty	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	2.52%	-2.50%
Household & Home Improvement	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	1.53%	-1.51%
Insurance	0.07%	0.05%	0.04%	0.04%	0.05%	0.88%	-0.84%
Jobs	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.87%	-0.85%
Kids & Babies	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	1.15%	-1.14%
Media & Entertainment	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	1.58%	-1.56%
Office Supplies	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	2.26%	-2.24%
Pets	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	1.94%	-1.92%
Real Estate	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.70%	-0.69%
Service	0.04%	0.05%	0.03%	0.04%	0.04%	0.53%	-0.49%
Social & Dating	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	1.53%	-1.51%
Sporting Goods	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	2.52%	-2.50%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	1.28%	-1.26%
Telecommunication	0.05%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.05%	1.62%	-1.57%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	1.76%	-1.74%
Travel	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	1.69%	-1.66%
ALL	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**	**1.77%**	**-1.75%**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Marketers were more successful at reaching the inbox in 2018, with overall spam placement decreasing by five percentage points. One large contributor to this is likely the new data protection laws that were put into effect (GDPR). This new standard requires marketers to clean up their lists to send only to subscribers they have clear permission to mail to. While this led many marketers to remove large portions of their list, the upside is a clearer, more active subscriber file to market to.

An offshoot of these cleaner lists is a more active list; however, this increase in engagement was both positive and negative in nature. While overall read rates rose by two percentage points and all industries saw increases of various sizes, deleted before reading and complaint rates also increased.

As subscribers increase their activity in the inbox, is more important than ever for marketers to pay attention to subscriber activity. To take advantage of this, marketers should try the following tactics:

Keep track of your metrics

Track how your subscribers interact with each message and adjust your content accordingly. Are they complaining more for certain campaigns, or when you increase send frequency? Are your subject lines enticing subscribers to open or are they actively placing your content in the trash? In a recent study we found that on average, marketers lose 34 percent of new subscribers within the first month of their subscription. By keeping a close eye on subscriber activity, marketers can identify early signs of disengagement and work towards re-engaging these valuable subscribers.

Segment your lists to more effectively engage your subscribers

Take full advantage of your engagement data to build segments. By analyzing how subscribers interact with each campaign, you can identify their preferences and group them together with those who took similar actions. By breaking your list into segments you can build more targeted content and provide a more personalized experience for your subscribers—and hopefully boost engagement and ROI.

Don't wait till subscriber disengages to try to win them back

In our recent study on the subscriber lifecycle, we found that the average marketer continues sending mail for a full 259 days after a subscriber last engages with their program. Rather than waiting eight months, try sending a winback campaign or some other enticement to re-engage while subscribers can still remember why they enjoyed your email program. In fact, winback emails have an average read rate of 20 percent, which means you can potentially reactivate one out of every five disengaged subscribers.

METHODOLOGY

Return Path conducted this study using global consumer data consisting of over 17,000 commercial senders, 2 million consumer panelists, and over 6.9 billion commercial email messages sent to Microsoft, Gmail, Yahoo, and AOL users between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2018.

Consumer data is information captured from monitored email accounts controlled by real subscribers to sample user initiated and engagement based filtering decisions by mailbox providers. Consumer data can uncover behavior based factors and thresholds that influence inbox placement at large mailbox providers, and can't be identified by non-interactive seeds.

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Contact us to discover what your hidden email metrics are saying about you.

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