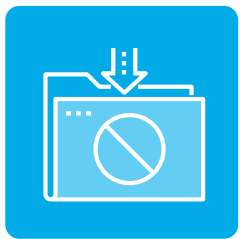# The Hidden Metrics of Email Deliverability

2016 Industry Benchmarks for 7 Key Measurements

Return Path

Table of Contents

Introduction

All marketers know that reaching the inbox requires a strong sending reputation, to let mailbox providers know they are a legitimate sender. However as email volume continues to increase and updates like IPv6 make it more difficult for mailbox providers to make reputation-based filtering decisions, being "safe" is not enough. Mailbox providers have enhanced their acceptance criteria, requiring marketers to prove not only that their program is legitimate, but also that their messages are desired by subscribers.

Engagement-based metrics have become a critical element to the success of any email program. Mailbox providers like Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, and AOL track the positive and negative interactions subscribers have with your program to determine where to place your incoming messages.

They look at some of the following data points:

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

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

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

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

Messages marked as "not spam:" Subscribers marking messages in the spam folder as "not spam" is a very strong signal to mailbox providers that email should have been delivered to the inbox

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

These metrics may be unfamiliar to you, as you likely haven't seen them in your email service provider's dashboard. That's because these "missing metrics" are measured by mailbox providers—not ESPs—based on all the email they receive and how their subscribers interact with them. Until recently, marketers had no way to access these metrics or use them to improve email performance.

In our second annual report, we detail the "missing metrics" that every marketer should be tracking; what they mean, why they are important, and industry-specific benchmarks so you can evaluate your email program against your competitors.

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 your emails that likely go unseen by subscribers.

To learn more about what prevents your emails from reaching the inbox, download *The Ultimate Guide to Email Deliverability*.
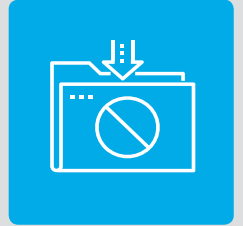
Factors. The same elements that block you from the inbox will land you in the spam folder. The reasons can be content based (content triggers that flag emails as spam), reputation based (sending patterns and behaviors), or engagement based (subscriber behaviors).

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.

2016 Observations. Sectors like automotive, education/nonprofit/government, social & dating, and telecommunications all saw average spam placement rates above 20 percent—well above the overall average spam rate of 13 percent. Distribution & manufacturing, kids & babies, travel, and utilities all achieved an average spam placement rate below 10 percent for the year. Two sectors—banking & finance and general merchandise—managed to keep their spam placement rate below 10 percent throughout the year.

Year Over Year Change. Overall spam placement rose by one percent from last year. However this slight increase across the board conceals the varying shifts in spam placement on an industry level. Insurance, which had a high spam placement in 2015, was able to improve its deliverability and achieve a 15 percent decrease in spam placement.

The sporting goods industry saw the highest increase (eight percent) in spam placement. Apparel, office supplies, and pets, which last year were able to keep spam placement below 10 percent every quarter, saw the second highest increase in spam placement with an additional seven percent of mail landing in the spam folder.
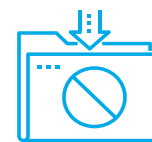
Spam Placement Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016 AVG	2015 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	9%	12%	12%	15%	13%	6%	7%
Automotive	27%	32%	22%	18%	24%	29%	-5%
Banking & Finance	6%	6%	5%	6%	6%	8%	-2%
Business & Marketing	15%	17%	17%	19%	17%	22%	-5%
Computers & Electronics	9%	10%	10%	12%	10%	9%	1%
Deals & Rewards	15%	14%	11%	13%	13%	10%	3%
Distribution & Manufacturing	13%	7%	5%	4%	6%	11%	-5%
Education/NonProfit/Government	17%	21%	20%	22%	20%	16%	4%
Flowers & Gifts	11%	14%	14%	19%	15%	9%	6%
Food & Drug	11%	12%	10%	13%	12%	11%	1%
General Merchandise	8%	9%	7%	7%	8%	7%	1%
Health & Beauty	12%	15%	13%	17%	15%	9%	6%
Household & Home Improvement	7%	10%	10%	12%	10%	5%	5%
Insurance	18%	12%	9%	9%	11%	26%	-15%
Jobs	13%	13%	10%	11%	12%	16%	-4%
Kids & Babies	7%	11%	8%	11%	9%	5%	4%
Media & Entertainment	14%	16%	15%	17%	16%	13%	3%
Office Supplies	7%	9%	10%	19%	13%	6%	7%
Pets	7%	10%	10%	13%	11%	4%	7%
Real Estate	11%	11%	10%	13%	11%	10%	1%
Service	9%	8%	8%	18%	12%	9%	3%
Social & Dating	16%	20%	20%	22%	20%	20%	0%
Sporting Goods	13%	16%	16%	18%	16%	8%	8%
Technology/Software/Internet	12%	14%	13%	16%	14%	22%	-8%
Telecommunication	27%	15%	17%	27%	22%	24%	-2%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	9%	12%	10%	11%	11%	6%	5%
Travel	7%	8%	8%	10%	8%	6%	2%
Utilities	7%	14%	3%	3%	7%	2%	5%
ALL	12%	13%	12%	12%	13%	12%	1%

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 differentiate 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 influences 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.

2016 Observations. Not surprisingly, distribution & manufacturing (i.e., UPS, Fedex, etc.) sparked the the highest read rate (58 percent) followed closely by utilities (57 percent). Industries where customer accounts are common (banking & finance, insurance, service, and telecommunications) all achieved average read rates over 30 percent. Business & marketing, deals & rewards, education/nonprofit/government, media & entertainment, and social & dating all had read rates below 20 percent.

Year Over Year Change. Subscribers were very engaged with their email in 2016. Overall, read rates rose by 8 percent and each industry saw an increase in read rates compared to 2015. Owing to its impressively high read rate, distribution & manufacturing also earned the largest increase in read rate (+26 percent). Banking & finance, insurance, and service—which obtained some of the highest read rates in both 2015 and 2016—all managed to improve read rate between 12 and 16 percent.

Read Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016 AVG	2015 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	21%	22%	23%	21%	22%	16%	6%
Automotive	21%	19%	21%	22%	21%	15%	6%
Banking & Finance	35%	37%	40%	37%	37%	24%	13%
Business & Marketing	14%	15%	16%	16%	15%	9%	6%
Computers & Electronics	26%	27%	29%	25%	27%	18%	9%
Deals & Rewards	17%	18%	19%	17%	18%	12%	6%
Distribution & Manufacturing	50%	56%	59%	60%	58%	32%	26%
Education/NonProfit/Government	15%	16%	18%	17%	17%	11%	6%
Flowers & Gifts	22%	22%	23%	21%	22%	17%	5%
Food & Drug	19%	21%	22%	21%	21%	14%	7%
General Merchandise	25%	25%	27%	26%	26%	16%	10%
Health & Beauty	19%	20%	22%	20%	20%	14%	6%
Household & Home Improvement	26%	26%	26%	24%	25%	17%	8%
Insurance	36%	39%	40%	37%	38%	24%	14%
Jobs	22%	23%	25%	24%	24%	12%	12%
Kids & Babies	20%	21%	22%	20%	21%	16%	5%
Media & Entertainment	17%	18%	20%	19%	19%	12%	7%
Office Supplies	25%	25%	26%	23%	24%	18%	6%
Pets	21%	23%	23%	22%	22%	16%	6%
Real Estate	32%	32%	31%	28%	31%	15%	16%
Service	32%	33%	34%	29%	32%	20%	12%
Social & Dating	16%	16%	17%	17%	17%	9%	8%
Sporting Goods	24%	24%	24%	22%	23%	18%	5%
Technology/Software/Internet	21%	20%	22%	21%	21%	11%	10%
Telecommunication	30%	35%	34%	28%	32%	26%	6%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	19%	20%	21%	20%	20%	14%	6%
Travel	25%	26%	27%	25%	26%	15%	11%
Utilities	48%	51%	64%	63%	57%	47%	10%
ALL	21%	22%	23%	23%	22%	14%	8%

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 disinterested subscriber. A high deleted before reading rate is a sign of a failed campaign. But a consistently high deleted without reading rate may be an indication of permission issues or a lack of satisfaction with your overall email marketing program.

Significance. From a marketing perspective, an open or read is the first step in getting the desired action from a subscriber. From the mailbox provider perspective, the read rate is an important metric to determine your "inbox desirability," which can impact your inbox deliverability. A high deleted before reading rate, therefore, can indicate low desire for your emails, and can result in future emails being filtered to the spam folder.

2016 Observations. Along with its high read rate, distribution & manufacturing and utilities also had the lowest delete before reading rates (7 percent and 8 percent, respectively). Social & dating, which received one of the lowest read rates, also had one of the lowest deleted before reading rates, possibly indicating that subscribers passively ignore messages from this industry. Flowers & gifts, household & home improvement, office supplies, and pets saw the highest deleted before reading rate (16 percent).

Year Over Year Change. Not only did subscribers positively engage with their email by reading more, they also increased their negative engagement by actively deleting unwanted and unread emails. On average, subscribers deleted four percent more unopened email than in 2015. Every industry was impacted, with increases in delete before reading rates ranging from two to five percent.

Deleted Before Reading Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016 AVG	2015 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	13%	14%	14%	13%	14%	10%	4%
Automotive	10%	10%	12%	12%	11%	9%	2%
Banking & Finance	10%	11%	11%	11%	11%	7%	4%
Business & Marketing	9%	10%	11%	11%	11%	8%	3%
Computers & Electronics	13%	13%	14%	13%	13%	10%	3%
Deals & Rewards	13%	13%	14%	13%	13%	9%	4%
Distribution & Manufacturing	6%	7%	7%	7%	7%	5%	2%
Education/NonProfit/Government	10%	10%	11%	11%	11%	8%	3%
Flowers & Gifts	16%	16%	16%	15%	16%	13%	3%
Food & Drug	13%	14%	15%	14%	14%	10%	4%
General Merchandise	13%	13%	14%	13%	13%	10%	3%
Health & Beauty	13%	13%	13%	13%	13%	10%	3%
Household & Home Improvement	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	11%	5%
Insurance	8%	9%	10%	10%	10%	6%	4%
Jobs	10%	11%	12%	12%	11%	7%	4%
Kids & Babies	14%	15%	16%	15%	15%	11%	4%
Media & Entertainment	10%	11%	12%	12%	11%	8%	3%
Office Supplies	16%	17%	17%	14%	16%	14%	2%
Pets	16%	17%	17%	16%	16%	13%	3%
Real Estate	11%	12%	13%	12%	12%	7%	5%
Service	10%	11%	11%	9%	10%	8%	2%
Social & Dating	8%	8%	9%	9%	9%	5%	4%
Sporting Goods	15%	15%	15%	14%	14%	12%	2%
Technology/Software/Internet	8%	9%	10%	9%	9%	6%	3%
Telecommunication	8%	9%	9%	8%	9%	6%	3%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	12%	13%	14%	13%	13%	9%	4%
Travel	14%	14%	15%	14%	14%	10%	4%
Utilities	13%	9%	7%	3%	8%	6%	2%
ALL	**12%**	**13%**	**13%**	**13%**	**13%**	**9%**	**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.

2016 Observations. Understandably, the account based industries—insurance, service, telecommunications, and utilities—saw the highest reply rates. Deals & rewards, kids & babies, pets, social & dating, and toys/hobbies/crafts, had the lowest reply rate.

Year Over Year Change. On average, the reply rate more than doubled from the previous year. Industries either maintained or increased their reply rate from 2015, with insurance and utilities seeing the greatest increase (over one percent).

Reply Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016 AVG	2015 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	0.08%	0.07%	0.07%	0.06%	0.07%	0.03%	0.04%
Automotive	0.16%	0.12%	0.15%	0.14%	0.14%	0.08%	0.06%
Banking & Finance	0.37%	0.37%	0.34%	0.30%	0.34%	0.15%	0.19%
Business & Marketing	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.02%	0.02%
Computers & Electronics	0.22%	0.20%	0.20%	0.15%	0.18%	0.09%	0.09%
Deals & Rewards	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.56%	0.54%	0.56%	0.45%	0.51%	0.27%	0.24%
Education/NonProfit/Government	0.06%	0.05%	0.06%	0.05%	0.05%	0.02%	0.03%
Flowers & Gifts	0.14%	0.11%	0.11%	0.08%	0.10%	0.07%	0.03%
Food & Drug	0.07%	0.06%	0.07%	0.06%	0.07%	0.03%	0.04%
General Merchandise	0.13%	0.12%	0.13%	0.11%	0.12%	0.05%	0.07%
Health & Beauty	0.07%	0.06%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.02%	0.03%
Household & Home Improvement	0.13%	0.11%	0.10%	0.09%	0.10%	0.06%	0.04%
Insurance	2.26%	2.14%	2.03%	1.67%	1.97%	0.92%	1.05%
Jobs	0.05%	0.05%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.02%	0.03%
Kids & Babies	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.01%	0.02%
Media & Entertainment	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.02%	0.05%
Office Supplies	0.26%	0.20%	0.18%	0.14%	0.18%	0.10%	0.08%
Pets	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.01%	0.02%
Real Estate	0.75%	0.51%	0.41%	0.32%	0.45%	0.09%	0.36%
Service	1.11%	0.97%	0.91%	0.67%	0.87%	0.57%	0.30%
Social & Dating	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.01%	0.02%
Sporting Goods	0.09%	0.07%	0.08%	0.05%	0.07%	0.05%	0.02%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.39%	0.29%	0.30%	0.28%	0.31%	0.11%	0.20%
Telecommunication	2.63%	2.64%	2.04%	1.55%	2.10%	1.49%	0.61%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%
Travel	0.26%	0.24%	0.24%	0.21%	0.23%	0.06%	0.17%
Utilities	0.72%	1.08%	0.95%	3.85%	1.54%	0.52%	1.02%
ALL	0.15%	0.13%	0.13%	0.11%	0.13%	0.05%	0.08%

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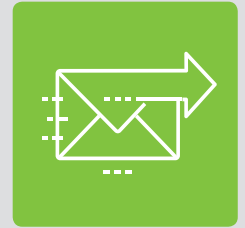
Forward rate is calculated as the number of your emails that are forwarded on to others out of total emails sent.

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.

2016 Observations. Email forwards were rare in 2016 with an overall average of 0.3 percent. Managing to rise well above the average, distribution & manufacturing, insurance, telecommunications, and utilities had the highest forward rates. These industries rely on email for important things like invoices and announcements that often need to be shared with others.

Year Over Year Change. The average forward rate for all industries increased slightly in 2016. The majority of industries saw little or no change in their forward rate from the previous year. The exceptions were telecommunications and utilities which had significantly large decreases in forwards.

Forward Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016 AVG	2015 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Automotive	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.04%	-0.01%
Banking & Finance	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.06%	0.06%	0.07%	-0.01%
Business & Marketing	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%	0.01%
Computers & Electronics	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.03%	0.04%	0.03%	0.01%
Deals & Rewards	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.19%	0.20%	0.21%	0.15%	0.18%	0.17%	0.01%
Education/NonProfit/Government	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Flowers & Gifts	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	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%	0.01%
Health & Beauty	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Household & Home Improvement	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.00%
Insurance	0.20%	0.21%	0.19%	0.14%	0.18%	0.20%	-0.02%
Jobs	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Kids & Babies	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.00%
Media & Entertainment	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%
Office Supplies	0.05%	0.04%	0.04%	0.03%	0.04%	0.04%	0.00%
Pets	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Real Estate	0.15%	0.10%	0.08%	0.06%	0.09%	0.05%	0.04%
Service	0.11%	0.11%	0.10%	0.06%	0.09%	0.10%	-0.01%
Social & Dating	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%	0.01%
Sporting Goods	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.00%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.01%
Telecommunication	0.21%	0.21%	0.16%	0.11%	0.16%	0.29%	-0.13%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Travel	0.10%	0.10%	0.09%	0.07%	0.09%	0.09%	0.00%
Utilities	0.54%	0.62%	0.14%	0.00%	0.33%	0.47%	-0.14%
ALL	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.01%

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.
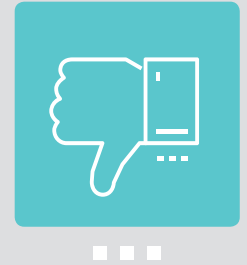
Factors. There are various reasons why a subscriber would mark your messages as spam. The key to finding out why complaints happen is uncovering where they occur. For more information about why subscribers complain at different stages of an email relationship, download *A Marketer's Guide to Subscriber 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. In 2015, the complaint rate had a significant impact on deliverability as 21 percent of deliverability issues were caused by high spam complaints.

2016 Observations. Flowers & gifts, health & beauty, and office supplies had the highest complaint rates (over 0.38 percent)—double the average complaint rate of 0.19 percent.

Year Over Year Change. Total complaints increased slightly this year. However, when looking by industry, there are a variety of increases and decreases. Telecommunications and distribution & manufacturing achieved significant decreases in their complaint rate compared to 2015. Deviating from its strong performance in other metrics, utilities—along with flowers & gifts and office supplies—had the highest increase in complaints at over 0.15 percent.

Complaint Rate by Quarter
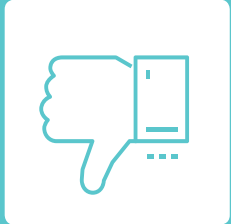
	INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016 AVG	2015 AVG	YOY CHANGE
	Apparel & Accessories	0.27%	0.12%	0.10%	0.12%	0.14%	0.18%	-0.04%
	Automotive	0.38%	0.21%	0.13%	0.30%	0.24%	0.23%	0.01%
	Banking & Finance	0.24%	0.09%	0.06%	0.09%	0.11%	0.21%	-0.10%
	Business & Marketing	0.36%	0.32%	0.31%	0.30%	0.32%	0.24%	0.08%
	Computers & Electronics	0.25%	0.14%	0.10%	0.14%	0.14%	0.19%	-0.05%
	Deals & Rewards	0.13%	0.14%	0.05%	0.11%	0.10%	0.11%	-0.01%
	Distribution & Manufacturing	1.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.11%	0.19%	0.64%	-0.45%
	Education/NonProfit/Government	0.53%	0.22%	0.20%	0.29%	0.30%	0.29%	0.01%
	Flowers & Gifts	0.49%	0.26%	0.30%	0.53%	0.41%	0.24%	0.17%
	Food & Drug	0.81%	0.18%	0.11%	0.20%	0.27%	0.35%	-0.08%
	General Merchandise	0.14%	0.09%	0.05%	0.07%	0.08%	0.05%	0.03%
	Health & Beauty	0.72%	0.51%	0.29%	0.27%	0.40%	0.28%	0.12%
	Household & Home Improvement	0.27%	0.09%	0.08%	0.11%	0.12%	0.15%	-0.03%
	Insurance	0.24%	0.11%	0.09%	0.18%	0.15%	0.13%	0.02%
	Jobs	0.29%	0.46%	0.21%	0.17%	0.27%	0.16%	0.11%
	Kids & Babies	0.20%	0.11%	0.10%	0.11%	0.12%	0.20%	-0.08%
	Media & Entertainment	0.49%	0.40%	0.32%	0.32%	0.37%	0.25%	0.12%
	Office Supplies	0.26%	0.18%	0.23%	0.62%	0.38%	0.20%	0.18%
	Pets	0.09%	0.06%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.09%	-0.02%
	Real Estate	0.07%	0.07%	0.03%	0.09%	0.07%	0.15%	-0.08%
	Service	0.25%	0.12%	0.10%	0.12%	0.13%	0.23%	-0.10%
	Social & Dating	0.32%	0.16%	0.11%	0.22%	0.19%	0.05%	0.14%
	Sporting Goods	0.61%	0.27%	0.25%	0.28%	0.31%	0.28%	0.03%
	Technology/Software/Internet	0.28%	0.15%	0.11%	0.18%	0.17%	0.17%	0.00%
	Telecommunication	0.26%	0.29%	0.20%	0.16%	0.22%	0.98%	-0.76%
	Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.36%	0.41%	0.17%	0.14%	0.24%	0.31%	-0.07%
	Travel	0.17%	0.10%	0.06%	0.11%	0.10%	0.10%	0.00%
	Utilities	0.36%	0.15%	0.00%	0.19%	0.16%	0.00%	0.16%
	ALL	0.33%	0.21%	0.14%	0.17%	0.19%	0.18%	0.01%

"This is Not Spam" Rate

The "this is not spam" rate is calculated as the number of times a subscriber marks your message "this is not spam" or "not junk" out of the number of emails delivered to the spam folder.

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. More importantly, it could indicate a false positive with the spam filter.

2016 Observations. Despite their high complaint rate, education/nonprofit/government, flowers & gifts, health & beauty, and sporting goods had the highest average "this is not spam" rates. On the other hand, banking & finance, real estate, and service, which held low complaint rates, also had low "this is not spam" rates.

Year Over Year Change. The "this is not spam" rates increased for each industry in 2016. Along with their lead in "this is not spam" rate, education/nonprofit/government, flowers & gifts, health & beauty, and sporting goods also had the highest percent increase in "this is not spam" rate over the previous year.
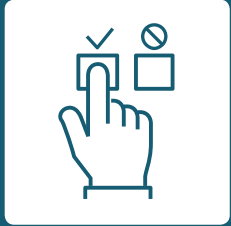
"This is Not Spam" Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016 AVG	2015 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	1.02%	0.67%	0.63%	2.03%	1.17%	0.03%	1.14%
Automotive	0.67%	0.39%	0.42%	1.63%	0.82%	0.02%	0.80%
Banking & Finance	0.51%	0.34%	0.29%	0.92%	0.53%	0.03%	0.50%
Business & Marketing	0.67%	0.57%	0.53%	1.48%	0.82%	0.04%	0.78%
Computers & Electronics	0.85%	0.63%	0.75%	1.81%	1.13%	0.03%	1.10%
Deals & Rewards	1.27%	0.93%	0.55%	1.67%	1.12%	0.04%	1.08%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.60%	0.46%	0.33%	0.82%	0.58%	0.05%	0.53%
Education/NonProfit/Government	1.29%	1.07%	0.97%	2.62%	1.53%	0.04%	1.49%
Flowers & Gifts	1.22%	0.83%	0.70%	2.61%	1.53%	0.04%	1.49%
Food & Drug	0.65%	0.42%	0.42%	1.43%	0.78%	0.02%	0.76%
General Merchandise	0.74%	1.02%	0.44%	1.31%	0.92%	0.02%	0.90%
Health & Beauty	2.16%	1.44%	0.90%	2.42%	1.72%	0.03%	1.69%
Household & Home Improvement	0.88%	0.50%	0.48%	1.72%	0.97%	0.03%	0.94%
Insurance	0.73%	0.44%	0.41%	1.13%	0.71%	0.10%	0.61%
Jobs	0.54%	0.42%	0.36%	1.12%	0.63%	0.03%	0.60%
Kids & Babies	0.93%	0.55%	0.54%	1.57%	0.96%	0.02%	0.94%
Media & Entertainment	0.94%	0.73%	0.63%	1.85%	1.07%	0.03%	1.04%
Office Supplies	1.04%	0.64%	0.59%	2.44%	1.40%	0.03%	1.37%
Pets	1.05%	0.62%	0.68%	2.25%	1.31%	0.03%	1.28%
Real Estate	0.45%	0.26%	0.25%	0.82%	0.47%	0.03%	0.44%
Service	0.48%	0.29%	0.23%	0.65%	0.42%	0.03%	0.39%
Social & Dating	0.99%	0.83%	0.75%	1.83%	1.12%	0.04%	1.08%
Sporting Goods	1.09%	0.66%	0.70%	3.41%	1.89%	0.04%	1.85%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.72%	0.61%	0.54%	1.59%	0.90%	0.03%	0.87%
Telecommunication	0.73%	0.63%	0.49%	1.21%	0.80%	0.05%	0.75%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.79%	0.55%	0.61%	1.90%	1.06%	0.03%	1.03%
Travel	1.04%	0.64%	0.60%	1.90%	1.09%	0.02%	1.07%
Utilities	0.00%	0.15%	0.54%	2.12%	0.65%	0.00%	0.65%
ALL	0.93%	0.72%	0.56%	1.72%	1.04%	0.03%	1.01%

Key Takeaways

2016 saw a significant increase in both positive and negative subscriber engagement. The various changes in spam placement compared to last year are a reflection of this increase in engagement and its impact on mailbox providers' filtering decisions.

Marketers aiming to land in their subscribers' inboxes need to look beyond reputation and standard deliverability metrics, and begin considering subscriber engagement as a leading factor in email performance. Below are a few ideas to help marketers spark positive subscriber engagement and eliminate sources of negative engagement.

Test different campaign elements
The great thing about email is you can test every single element of your program. Anything from a subject line to the send time can be tested on a small sample size before being deployed to the rest of your list (or segment). Learn how to perform an email test and get some great ideas on what to test in our All About A/B Testing guide.

Create subscriber segments
Not all subscribers are alike and they shouldn't be treated like they are. Rather than creating one campaign designed to make the majority of your subscribers happy, separate your subscribers into different segments and create unique campaigns for each group.

Clean your list
By continuing to send to unengaged subscribers, you are hurting your email performance. Not only are these subscribers deflating your performance metrics by undermining the positive engagement you do receive, they also run the risk of being inactive subscribers, spam traps, or unknown users, which will impact your reputation. Make sure you monitor these unengaged subscribers and remove them from your list after 60 days of inactivity, or run your list through a list hygiene service.

Methodology

Return Path conducted this study using global consumer data consisting of over 17,000 commercial senders, 2.5 million consumer panelists, and over 5 billion commercial email messages sent to Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, and AOL users between January 1 and December 31, 2016.

Consumer data is defined as 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.

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

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