

Guide to Email Marketing Metrics

How to Measure Effectiveness and Troubleshoot Problems in Your Email Program

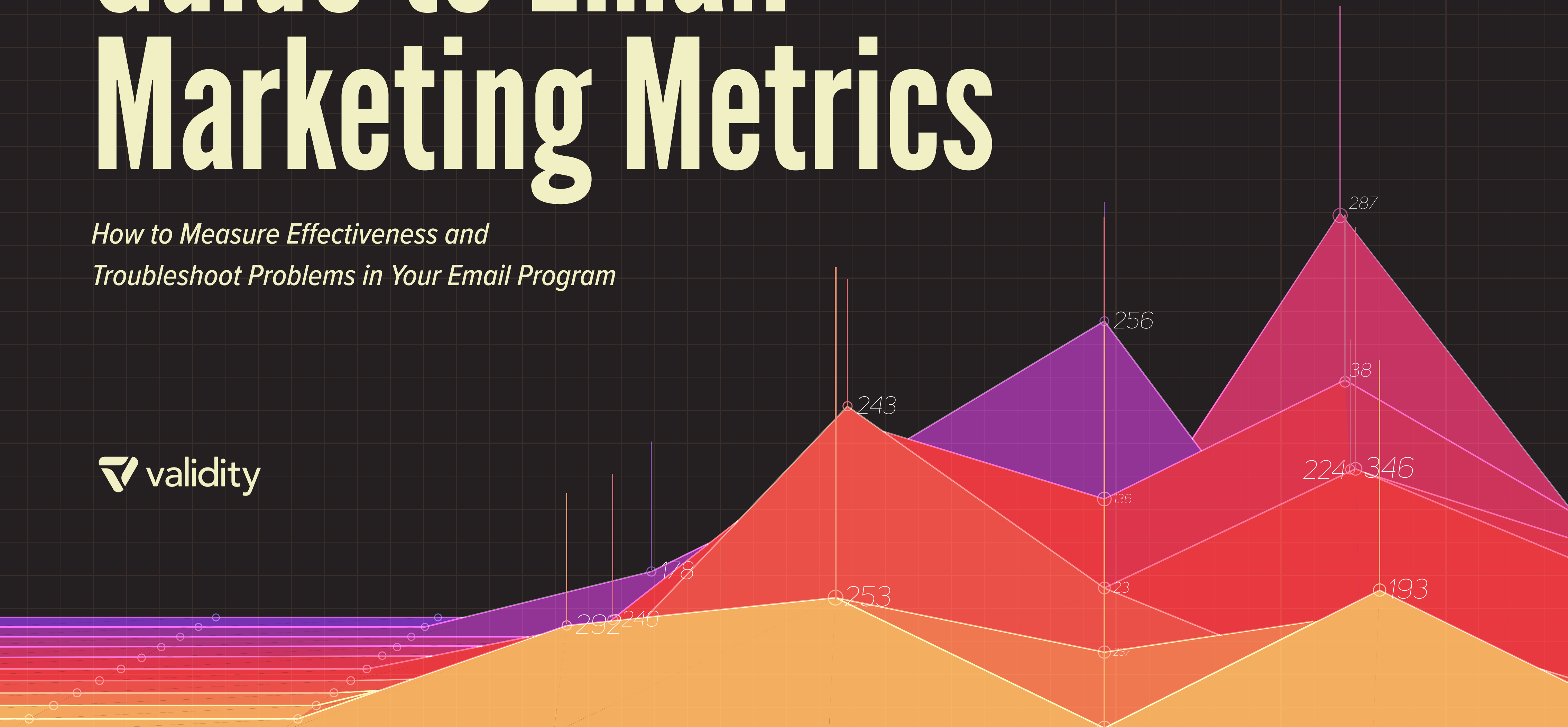


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INTRODUCTION

Metrics are the lifeblood of the modern email marketing program. Marketers recognize the importance of measuring every aspect of their email program to prove their effectiveness and demonstrate their impact on the bottom line. But which metrics are the most important? What if metrics could tell you more than just how many emails are being opened, how many links are being clicked, and how many sales result from those clicks?

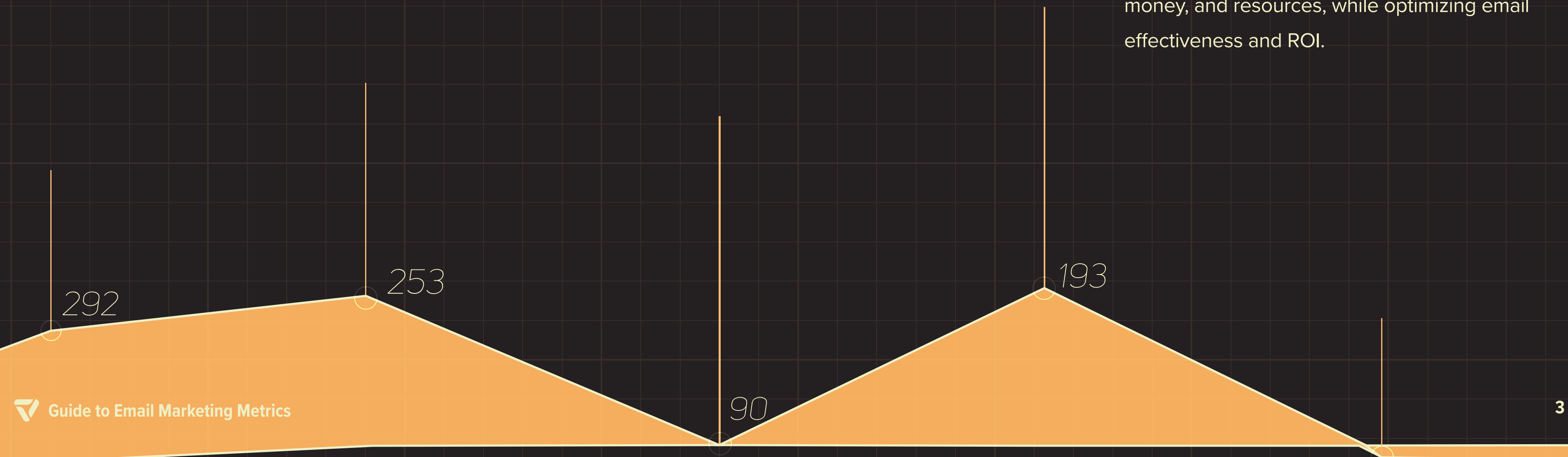
What if you could get insights like these?

- **How many subscribers are reporting your email as spam, as well as how many are checking the spam folder and reporting them as not spam.**
- **How many of your emails are deleted without being read, as opposed to just sitting unopened in the inbox.**
- **How often subscribers find your content interesting enough to forward on to their friends.**

Many marketers will look at this list as pure fantasy, but the truth is metrics like these are not only available, they're critical to gaining true insight into the health and success of your email marketing program.

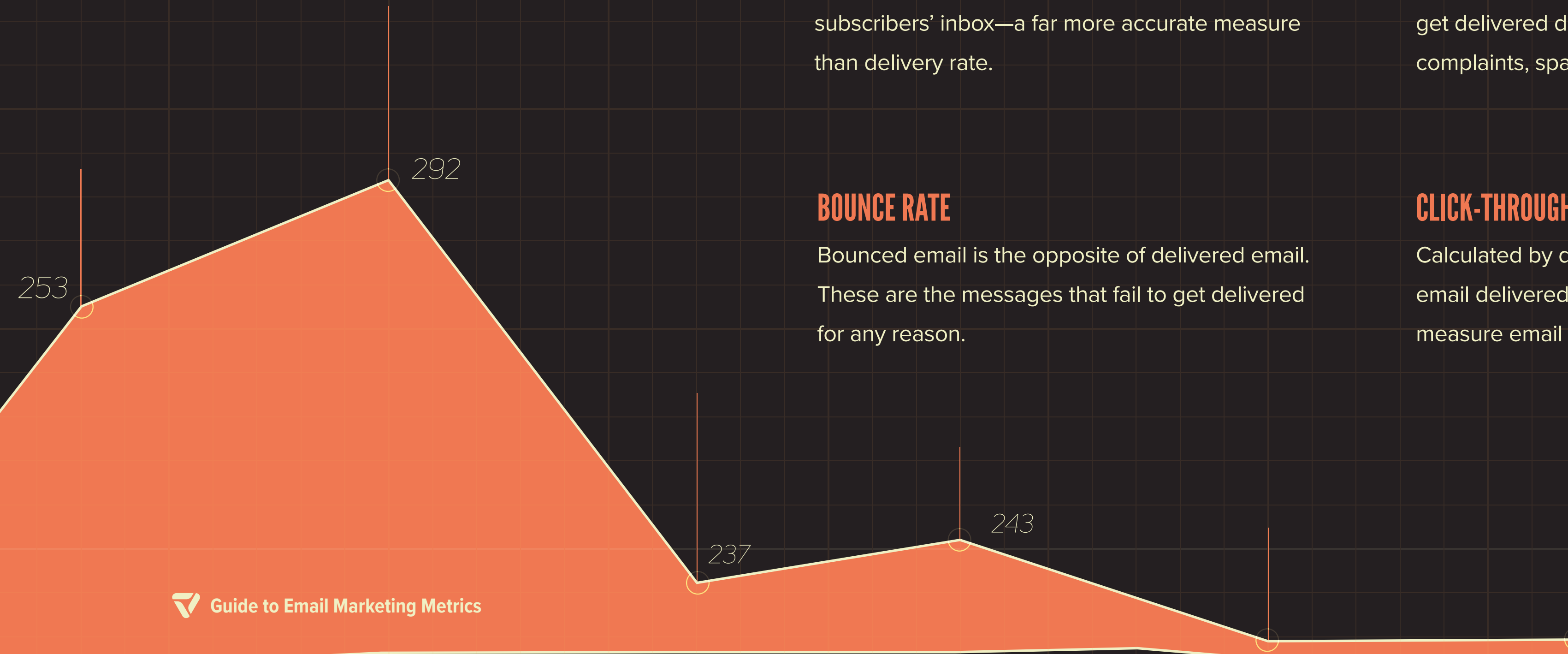
In this guide, we'll cover the metrics essential for any successful email program and show you how they can be used to troubleshoot many common problems.

Armed with these new insights, you'll be able to confidently make decisions that will save you time, money, and resources, while optimizing email effectiveness and ROI.



METRICS TO ENHANCE YOUR AWARENESS OF EMAIL PERFORMANCE

The following metrics provide simple insights into what's happening within your email program and may tip you off to potential problems.



DELIVERY RATE

Calculated by dividing the volume of emails delivered by the volume of emails sent. Note: “delivered” doesn’t necessarily mean your email hit the inbox—just that it wasn’t bounced or rejected.

INBOX PLACEMENT RATE

Inbox placement rate measures the percentage of sent email that actually lands in the subscribers’ inbox—a far more accurate measure than delivery rate.

BOUNCE RATE

Bounced email is the opposite of delivered email. These are the messages that fail to get delivered for any reason.

OPEN RATE

Calculated by dividing the number of emails opened by the number of emails delivered. An email will not register as “opened” unless images are displayed in the message, either through settings or active loading.

REJECTED RATE

Rejected email is a subset of bounced email, and includes only those messages that fail to get delivered due to reputation issues (e.g., complaints, spam traps, blocklisting).

CLICK-THROUGH RATE

Calculated by dividing clicks by the volume of email delivered. This metric is commonly used to measure email engagement.

METRICS THAT PROVIDE CLARITY AROUND EMAIL PERFORMANCE

The measures take the analysis of your email program to a deeper level and provide more sophisticated insights into deliverability and engagement. Some provide a more granular view of the aforementioned metrics, while others can help you uncover the “why” behind email performance issues.

HARD BOUNCE

Hard bounces are messages that are permanently rejected, typically due to issues with list quality (e.g., invalid email addresses or domains).

SOFT BOUNCE

Soft bounces are messages that are temporarily rejected, typically due to issues with the recipient’s mailbox or server (e.g., mailbox too full or server down).

READ RATE

Read rate is similar to open rate, but it is far more accurate because it accounts for all emails viewed, regardless of image rendering.

COMPLAINT RATE

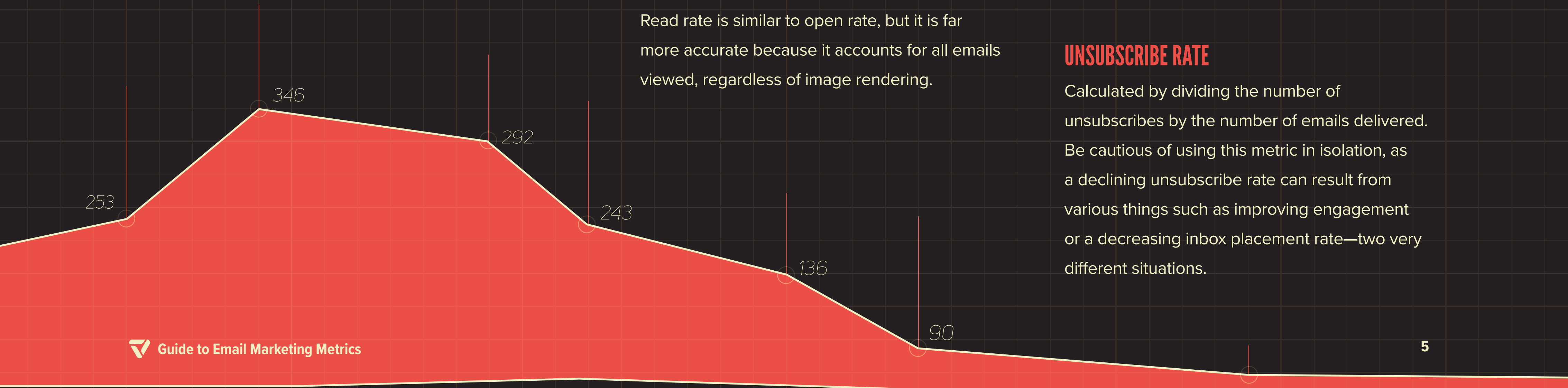
Calculated by dividing the number of spam complaints by the number of emails delivered. Complaints are a strong indicator of negative engagement. This metric is useful for identifying patterns and sources of complaints, but may be distorted by deliverability issues.

DELETED BEFORE READING RATE

Measures how often a recipient deletes email without reading it. This metric provides powerful insight into the difference between subscribers who do not want to read your email and those who may just check their email infrequently.

UNSUBSCRIBE RATE

Calculated by dividing the number of unsubscribes by the number of emails delivered. Be cautious of using this metric in isolation, as a declining unsubscribe rate can result from various things such as improving engagement or a decreasing inbox placement rate—two very different situations.



METRICS TO EVALUATE SUBSCRIBER CONNECTION

These metrics measure whether subscribers are engaged with your brand, as well as the depth of their engagement. Properly interpreted, these metrics can help you evaluate specific aspects of your email program, like the effectiveness of your content and design.

CLICK-TO-OPEN RATE

Measured by calculating the ratio of total clicks to total opens. Click-to-open is the best and most accurate of the click-based metrics, and provides valuable insight into the effectiveness of your email content and design.

“THIS IS NOT SPAM” RATE

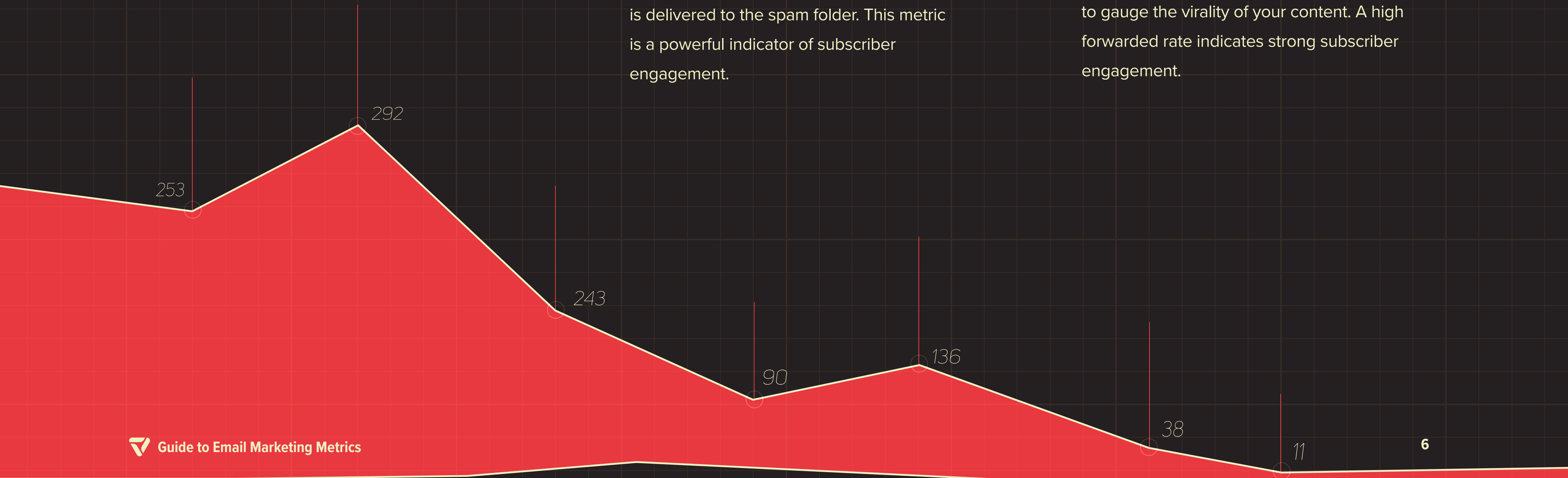
Measures how frequently recipients click on the “This is not spam” button after an email is delivered to the spam folder. This metric is a powerful indicator of subscriber engagement.

CONVERSION RATE

Calculated by dividing the number of conversions by the number of visits. Although a strong indicator of subscriber engagement, this metric typically speaks more to the quality of landing page or website content than email content.

FORWARDED RATE

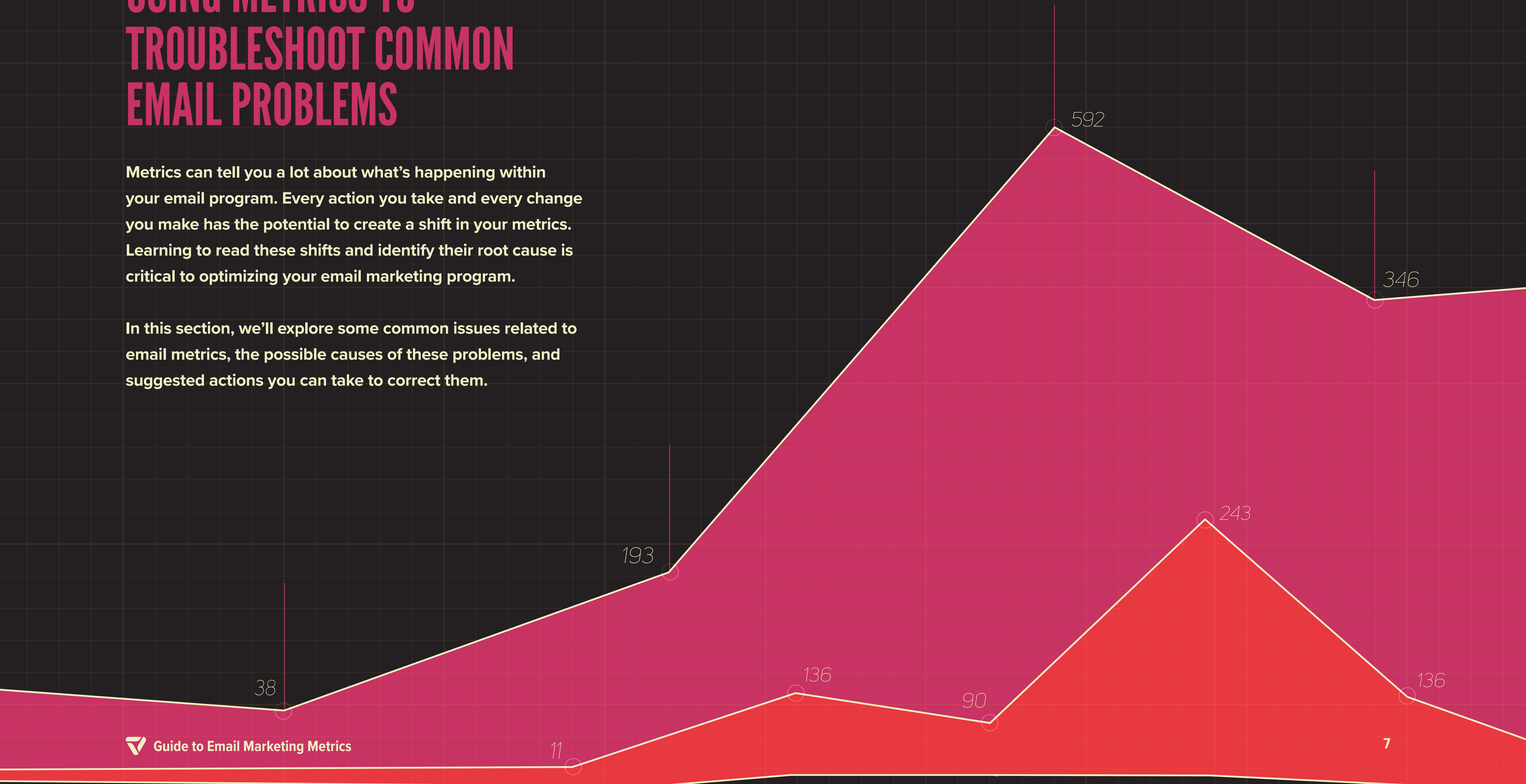
Measures how frequently subscribers forward your email on to others. This metric is useful to gauge the virality of your content. A high forwarded rate indicates strong subscriber engagement.



USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS

Metrics can tell you a lot about what's happening within your email program. Every action you take and every change you make has the potential to create a shift in your metrics. Learning to read these shifts and identify their root cause is critical to optimizing your email marketing program.

In this section, we'll explore some common issues related to email metrics, the possible causes of these problems, and suggested actions you can take to correct them.



I'm seeing an increase in rejected emails.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- A mailbox provider blocklisted your sending IP address. You can learn more about blocklists in our eBook, [Don't Block Me](#)
- Your IP address appeared on a third-party blocklist (e.g. Spamhaus)
- You are experiencing reputation issues due to complaints, spam traps, and/or unknown users

NEXT STEPS

A sudden increase in rejected email is often caused by a change in your sending practices, so think about what you might be doing differently.

- Have you switched hosting providers for your website or corporate domains? If so, are all the DNS (Domain Name Systems) entries for your email authentication present and correct?
- Have you rolled out a new template design as part of a rebranding exercise or a refresh of content? If you're going to go through this process, you should test new templates to ensure that your response rates don't drop. If subscribers no longer recognize the branding or language used in your emails they're more likely to complain, and that means bad news for your reputation.
- Have you introduced a new dataset into your list recently, maybe as part of an acquisition or an attempt to win back old subscribers? The quality of this data can affect your ability to get to the inbox, so factors such as data hygiene and subscriber engagement should be top of mind when making changes to your list.

USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT
COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS:

My emails are being filtered to the spam folder, causing my inbox placement rate to drop.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Subscribers are marking your email as spam
- You're missing feedback loops
- Spam keywords or email message structure are failing spam filter checks

NEXT STEPS

If subscribers don't recognize your brand or remember signing up for your email program, they're likely to mark your email as spam. A well-executed welcome message can bring subscribers into the fold, educate them about your brand, and reinforce the benefits of your email program.

A drop in subscriber engagement can also lead to an increase in complaints. Take action to re-engage subscribers before they become a problem. Only you can define what an inactive subscriber looks like for your business, but it's worthwhile to monitor this and develop a win-back program to re-engage subscribers before they complain.

Regardless of why subscribers are marking your email as spam, it's critical to make sure you're no longer sending them email. Not only will your email get filtered to the junk folder, but your reputation as a whole will suffer. The first step is to know about these complaints, so make sure that you're enrolled in all the available feedback loops. This will ensure that mailbox providers are notifying you of any complaints so that you can remove the subscribers from your list.

Finally, be aware of words and phrases such as "please read," "free sample," "great offer" and more that could trigger spam filters, and make sure you're not using these in your email copy.

USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT
COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS:

My open rate dropped suddenly.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Emails are not resonating with your audience
- Emails are being blocked by ISPs (or other deliverability problems)

NEXT STEPS

Just about any change to your email program can impact your open rate, so it's important to implement a well-defined testing methodology to track changes in subscriber behavior and ROI. Thoroughly test every aspect of your email program—including subject line, offer, design, and cadence—to avoid making unwelcome adjustments.

A sudden drop in open rate can also be an indicator of deliverability problems, which could have many different causes, such as:

- Blocklists
- Spam traps
- Spam complaints
- Mailing to unknown users
- Mailing to inactive users

To continue investigating potential reputation and deliverability issues, visit senderscore.org.

USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT
COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS:

**My open rate is high,
but my click-through
rate is low.**

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- The content of your emails is not relevant or compelling
- Offers or CTAs are not prominent

NEXT STEPS

Having a high open rate is a good thing. It means your subscribers are clearly interested in hearing from you and your subject lines are compelling enough to make them open your emails. However, once they get to the meat of your emails, something is going wrong.

First, make sure your email content delivers on the promises you made at the time of sign-up. Refine your email preference center to get a better idea of the content your subscribers want, and use that information to create highly targeted email content.

Next, take a closer look at your CTAs. Is your offer clear and prominently located? Is the click space sufficient and obvious? Can the important content still be seen when images are off? Make changes as needed to ensure your creative is enticing enough to prompt a response.

USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT
COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS:

**I'm seeing a rise
in opens and click-
throughs, but
conversions remain
flat.**

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Poorly designed website and/or landing page
- Email content doesn't clearly convey the details of the offer

NEXT STEPS

The layout of your website or landing page is just as important as that of your email. Inconsistent branding, design, or language can create a disconnect in the customer experience, leading subscribers to wonder if they've landed in the wrong place. Be aware that more and more people are engaging with email through mobile devices, so a mobile optimized landing page is absolutely critical.

Finally, be sure to include all the relevant details of the offer in your email content. This will ensure that subscribers find what they expect after clicking your CTA, and increase the likelihood of conversion.

USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT
COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS:

I'm seeing a high
number of hard
bounces (>10%).

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Poor list acquisition practices
- Mailing to an old or inactive list
- Emailing entire list too infrequently

NEXT STEPS

Check every point of acquisition to ensure that you're verifying subscriber email addresses. Remove or reject any domain that is misspelled or incomplete, as well as role accounts (e.g., sales@company.com). Consider asking subscribers to input their email address a second time to prevent "fat finger" mistakes.

Once data enters your list, send a welcome or confirmation email and remove any bounces immediately. Your welcome email should also offer an unsubscribe option, in case the incorrect email address was entered at the point of acquisition.

Finally, implement good list hygiene practices to ensure that you're regularly removing both bounces and inactive addresses. Send email to all of your subscribers no less than once per quarter to minimize the chances of hitting inactive users or recycled spam traps.

USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT
COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS:

**My subscriber
complaints have
suddenly increased.**

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Bad list acquisition source
- Missing feedback loops
- Poor or unexpected content
- Compromised email server

NEXT STEPS

A sudden uptake in complaints is a sure sign of trouble, but tracking down the source of your problem can take some effort. Here are a few suggestions:

- Take a look at all of your list acquisition sources to see whether any of them generate a disproportionate number of complaints. Take steps to clean up your list acquisition practices, or remove the bad source(s) altogether. Paid lists, affiliates, and peer-initiated web forms are common culprits.
- If subscribers don't recognize your brand or remember signing up for your email program, they're likely to mark your email as spam. A well-executed welcome message can bring subscribers into the fold, educate them about your brand, and reinforce the benefits of your email program. Refine your email preference center to get a better idea of the content your subscribers want, and use that information to create highly targeted email content.
- Make sure you're aware of complaints by enrolling in all available feedback loops. This will ensure mailbox providers are notifying you of any complaints so you can remove the subscribers from your list promptly.
- Audit your SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol) servers for open relays to prevent other parties from exploiting them and deploying email that is not yours.

USING METRICS TO TROUBLESHOOT
COMMON EMAIL PROBLEMS:

My sign-up rate is high, but so is my unsubscribe rate—especially after the initial email send.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Weak opt-in practices
- Poor or unexpected content
- Lack of welcome or confirmation email

NEXT STEPS

Give people a reason to sign up for your emails, and then deliver on the promises you make at sign-up. Refine your email preference center to get a better idea of the content your subscribers want, and use that information to create highly targeted email content.

Remember that first impressions count. Send a welcome or confirmation email shortly after sign-up to bring subscribers into the fold, educate them about your brand, and reinforce the benefits of your email program. This initial contact also represents the perfect opportunity to offer an incentive and get subscribers clicking and converting right away.

The timing of the welcome email is also important. It should arrive shortly after sign-up to ensure that subscribers recognize your brand and remember signing up for your email program.

**My response rates
(click-throughs and
conversions) are
stagnant, or even
declining.**

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- List fatigue or overmailing
- Emails are not relevant enough to your subscribers

NEXT STEPS

Different subscribers each have a different tolerance for email frequency. Take steps to evaluate the engagement of each subscriber and adjust your send frequency accordingly.

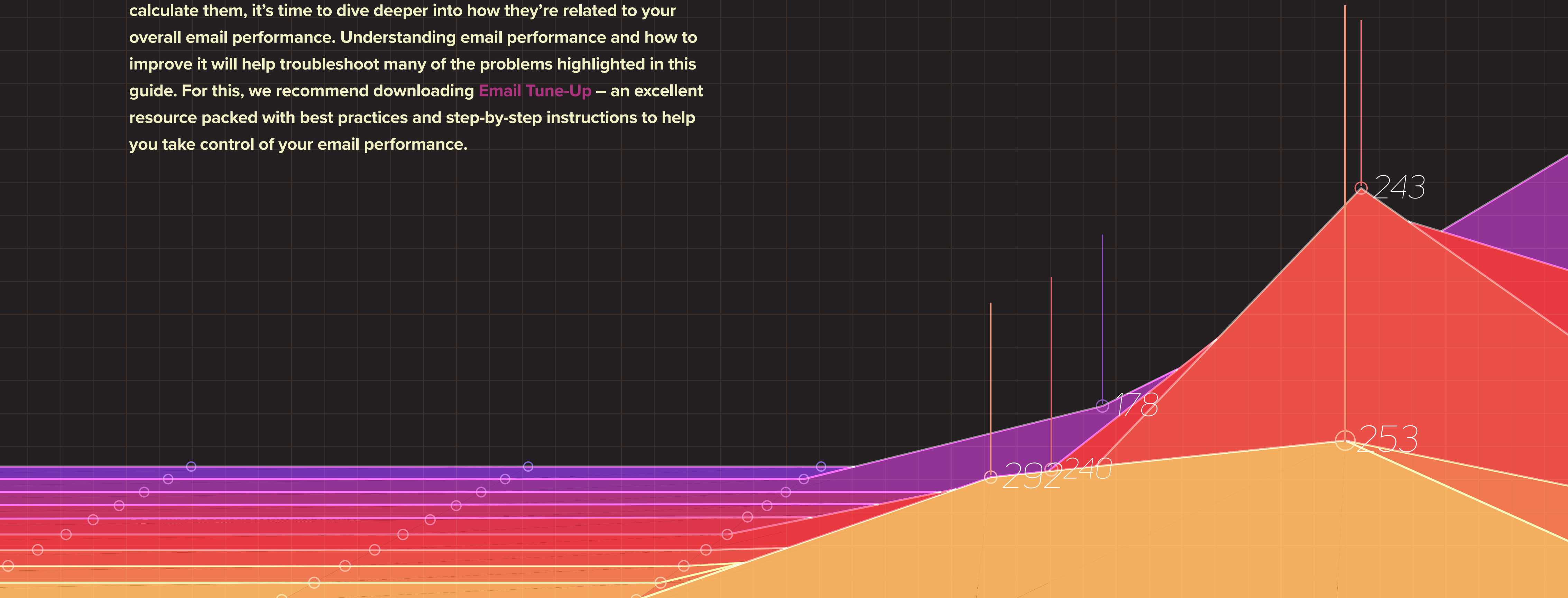
Win-back campaigns can also help to re-engage formerly active subscribers who have become inactive or unresponsive. This will enable you to not only drive incremental revenue and welcome them back into the fold, but also to determine which subscribers might need to be removed from your list.

Finally, be sure to pay attention to which content best resonates with your subscribers. Sending emails that your subscribers consider irrelevant will inevitably result in declining response rates.

CONCLUSION

Understanding how to track important metrics and troubleshoot common problems is the first step towards saving time, money, and resources, optimizing email effectiveness, and increasing ROI. Armed with the information in this guide, you should be able to start laying the foundation for a successful email marketing program.

Now that you've gained an understanding of these metrics and how to calculate them, it's time to dive deeper into how they're related to your overall email performance. Understanding email performance and how to improve it will help troubleshoot many of the problems highlighted in this guide. For this, we recommend downloading [Email Tune-Up](#) – an excellent resource packed with best practices and step-by-step instructions to help you take control of your email performance.





Businesses run better and grow faster with trustworthy data. Tens of thousands of organizations rely on Validity solutions – including Everest, DemandTools, BriteVerify, Trust Assessments, and GridBuddy Cloud – to target, contact, engage, and retain customers effectively. Marketing, sales, and customer success teams worldwide trust Validity solutions to help them create smarter campaigns, generate leads, drive response, and increase revenue. For more information visit validity.com and connect with us on LinkedIn and Twitter.

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