WHAT THE HECK IS MAIL PRIVACY PROTECTION?

validity

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WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MAIL PRIVACY PROTECTION?

Probably not much yet, but you'll know plenty soon.

Mail Privacy Protection, or MPP, is a feature Apple has introduced with iOS 15. Users of iOS 15 can choose to turn on MPP to block online tracking. MPP disallows tracking pixels to collect information, depriving senders of the ability to know when recipients open an email. It also prevents senders from identifying a recipient's IP address, prohibiting online activity tracking, location identification, and insights into recipient read time.

This seems... not good. But are you ready to feel worse?

No, of course, but please prepare yourself.

In short, **MPP shuts down marketers' ability to understand how their recipients behave after opening an email from the Apple Mail app, regardless of which mailbox provider (MBP) they use.** Without this information, there's limited insight into the effectiveness of an email and how to tailor the consumer experience after the fact.

When a user opts in to MPP, Apple will preload message content before giving it to the user. Yes, even when the recipient does not actually open the email. This means exactly what you hope it doesn't mean: Your open rates are about to skew, and skew hard.

But it's important to keep in mind what Apple has introduced with MPP is not entirely new. Major MBPs like Gmail and Yahoo have implemented similar approaches in the past. Apple's announcement is another step in a longer journey towards greater focus on consumer privacy, and we will get through it together.

So, take deep breaths. You can do this, because we have the information and solutions you need to turn this situation into a win for you and a loss for no one, because your subscribers will still feel protected (and they will be).

HOW THE HECK DOES THIS WORK?

This is a great question, and the best part of the answer is: It's nothing groundbreaking.

In fact, when things like iPhone or iPad mail apps fetch your mail for you, this process might already happen.

This is exactly why lots of marketers already put less weight on their open rates. Factors like image caching, prefetching, link testing by filters, and bot sign-ups have created heavily skewed reporting, causing open rates to become an increasingly flawed metric. It's not an exact science, and there are many things going on behind the scenes that are out of senders' hands.

Anyway, back to the technical-ish side of things. Your email service provider (ESP) sends your mail to the MBP. When a user opens the Apple Mail app, it downloads mail from the MBP onto the user's device. Then all the images are cached, which now means copies of them will be put on the Apple Privacy Cache. This is where the privacy magic happens.

Once it's on the Privacy Cache, it will be assigned an IP address identifying not the exact location of the user, but a broad potential location. According to our testing of the tech, subscribers need to be connected to WiFi with the Apple Mail app running in the background.

What is caching? Well, it's a conversation, really. Apple will ask the MBP for the images within the

email. Is a tracking pixel considered an image? Yes. This is where it goes left for email marketers. ESPs then believe the email was opened by user request via Apple Mail, rather than Apple Mail prefetching.

Let's say the email is, in fact, opened. This request for the email doesn't go to the ESP, who would typically then be able to report an open. It instead goes to the Apple Privacy Cache. After all, the ESP thinks it's already "open," whether or not the user ultimately asks for it from the Cache.

This is really important, so listen up, please. We've said it before, but it bears repeating.

This will affect anyone who opts in to MPP and uses Apple Mail to receive email on their devices. If your subscriber has a Gmail mailbox but views all their email on their phone using the Apple Mail app, they'll be subject to this process. So it's not good enough to try to segregate recipients by MBP. In fact, it might even be pointless in this context.

Data from Validity's Everest platform shows Apple represents only ~2% of the global MBP market share. However, when it comes to email client usage, Apple Mail dominates with ~40% of global market share (this percentage can vary significantly by country and sector).

WHAT THE HECK DOES THIS MEAN FOR RECIPIENTS?

While there are obvious downsides for marketers, MPP might also wreak unanticipated havoc on Apple Mail users.

How can someone remove a subscriber from a list because the recipient is ignoring every email, if it looks like they're not ignoring anything at all?

Apple isn't doing itself any favors with this plan. Now there could be an influx of unwanted mail because senders can't determine who is truly unengaged. For all they know, Apple Mail users are opening all their email. They think they're killing it!

They're not killing it. They're being fooled by skewed open rates, and Apple Mail users might start reporting spam at a higher rate than ever. This is a negative signal to MBPs. So now, not only are recipients getting more unwanted mail, but senders are being dinged by complaints from subscribers they hadn't realize they'd annoyed.

Following the trail of opens to guide decisions is a dead-end street. While that is extremely frustrating, you can focus on more reliable metrics.

WHAT THE HECK DOES THIS DO TO EMAIL MARKETING?

It will definitely do some things to your typical email metrics analysis.

Most of this will focus on conclusions you draw from opens, so while this is a list of common things open rates inform, you might have other uses for the data, as well.

First and foremost, if you're using any kind of automated email marketing campaigns, like nurture or re-engagement campaigns, and you're using opens as a trigger, you need to evaluate different approaches. With MPP, there's no way to confirm an open was from an interested reader. This means if you have a plan for those who open and those who don't, those groups won't have reliable segmentation anymore.

If you're using open rates to test the performance of subject lines to improve performance, these tests will be rendered unreliable. Remember, many Apple opens could be false. Segmentation will work the same way, with open rates being too flimsy to make decisions about content preferences for grouping or targeting.

Send Time Optimization (STO) functionality, which relies on open data to determine the optimal time to send a message, now becomes inaccurate. There's no surefire way to know when an email was opened (if it was opened at all) because Apple will be pre-screening for their Mail app users. If it is truly opened, it could be hours after the reported open time.

The impact of MPP isn't restricted to measuring open rates. It will also affect marketers' ability to collect other valuable information at the recipient level, including device and location information. Plus, live content and other fancy cool stuff available in email these days will be broken by MPP. This type of functionality relies on the email content populating when the email is opened—not on the time the email was sent. Countdown timers could be outdated, local weather could be inaccurate, preferred store locations could go kaput... you get the picture.

There's a lot of great stuff happening in email right now—things like artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality, and accelerated mobile pages (AMP). This is certainly a curveball for marketers trying to stay on the leading edge. However, don't let this rain on your email marketing parade. Grab an umbrella and get out there.

HOW THE HECK DO I RESPOND?

It's time to choose your own adventure: Do you look at this as an opportunity or a disaster?

You seem glass half-full, so we'll give you the right tools to make this work in your favor. We also love adventures, so collect some things and we can embark together.

Here is what you need to know:

- The average amount of subscribers using Apple Mail to check their email

- Your average open rates for Apple Mail users

With this information, you can start to strategize what this means for you now and in the future.

Device-specific performance

This is a great time to be using an advanced email success platform like Everest. It's important to understand how many of your recipients are using any given device to read their mail.

Hypothetically, 90% of your subscribers might use mail clients outside of Apple Mail to read their emails. Congratulations! The impact MPP will have on your performance metrics will be minimal. But that's unlikely.

What's more likely is a large portion of your recipients are opening email on their iPhone or their iPad. If 40% of your mail is read via the Apple Mail app, you may see a sharp skewing of your results. Get your best guess on the situation based on historic device usage to ballpark how severe MPP's impact might be.

Open rate benchmarking

This is really important. To measure MPP's influence on your open rates, gather a solid history of average open rates for Apple Mail users. This is the only way you can track changes spurred by MPP.

If you typically saw a 20% open rate for Apple Mail users but your email metrics tool is reporting 80% opens after MPP's rollout... Danger, Will Robinson. That's not right.

If you have a sense of a true open rate average for your lists, an exponential growth in those rates can be somewhat ballparked down to a reasonable performance indicator. You can also use this data to create a quick and easy segmentation rule, as those subscribers who show exponential growth in open rates can be identified as Apple Mail users. HOWEVER, we'll say it again: The open rate as a lone measurement of engagement will not be reliable, so make decisions with it at your own risk.

WHAT THE HECK DO I DO NOW?

PANIC! Just joking. There's no need to panic now.

You understand how MPP works, why it's here, and what the effect on your email marketing performance might be. You need to set up analysis systems designed to look at performance holistically.

Open rates are, and always were, a piece of a much larger puzzle. By using a more in-depth reporting tool than what your ESP provides, such as Everest, you can put all the pieces together to have one beautiful portrait of your email performance. Magnifique.

Consider different engagement and intent indicators. How many clicks does an email get? Those can't be prefetched and cached! How often are your emails moved to the trash or manually moved into spam? Are certain MBPs automatically filtering your mail into spam?

Insights into your inbox placement rates and sender reputation can help measure engagement and inform decision making. Since MBPs consider subscriber engagement (whether positive or negative) when making spam filtering decisions, these valuable insights can serve as a proxy for measuring increased or reduced open activity and are critical to evaluating campaign success.

Regular list validation becomes even more critical in an MPP world. Many senders rely on open rate data to inform their inactive strategies. Now, you can no longer rely on this information to make decisions to suppress inactive email addresses. Instead, you must put more focus on regular validation of the email addresses you're sending to so you can identify addresses that are no longer working. If you don't, you're likely to see a hit to your reputation and inbox placement.

MPP means there is now a need to focus on acquiring "zero-party data." This is data customers intentionally and proactively share. If subscribers genuinely value their privacy, but also want to receive relevant and personalized messages, they will provide the information to brands they like and trust. With zero-party data, you can continue to have access to valuable subscriber data that you lose with MPP, and can use this data to deliver the relevant and personalized communications that your subscribers expect.

Feel like Sherlock Holmes yet?

Using **Validity's Everest** gives you a 360-view into all the email performance signals available to you. You'll be able to look beyond open rates to get a more complete view of campaign performance. Proactively monitor your inbox placement rates and sender reputation as a proxy for open rates. Clean your lists using our Validation tool to confirm your addresses belong to real people, and then use clicks to determine who isn't clicking (and perhaps not even opening, though your reports may tell you otherwise), and sunset them from your lists.

Everest also organizes your engagement data so you can easily segment Apple Mail users from other platform segments to make more actionable decisions from your data. Don't rule out data collected from the Apple Privacy Proxy entirely. Even though it does not provide a reliable opens metric, it still provides value in other ways. Because Apple will only prefetch mail that is sent to a valid email address, this data can be used to identify valid recipients.

It's like Everest is the Watson to your Sherlock: the ultimate sleuthing team.
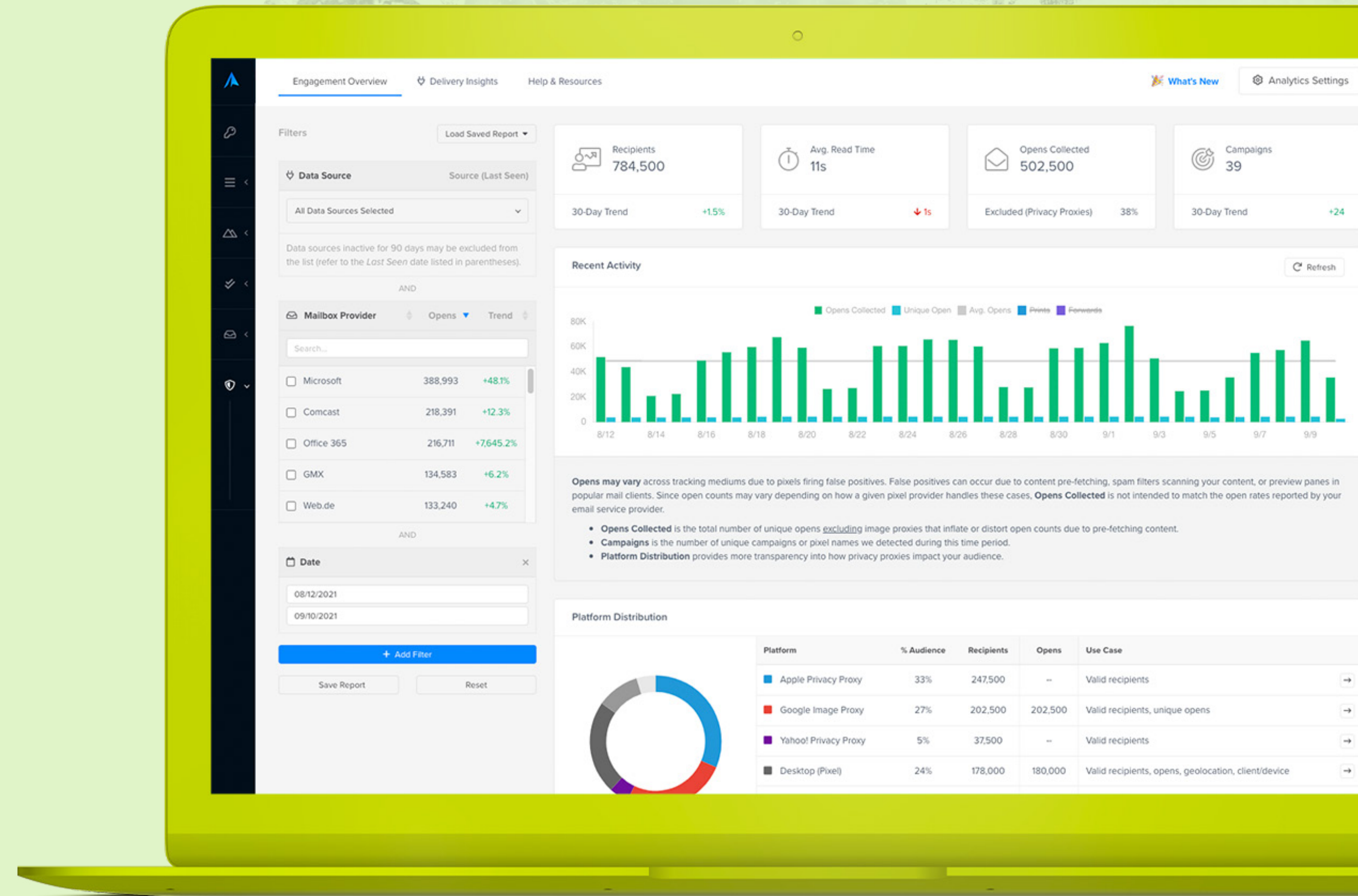
CONCLUSION

It'll be okay.

Lots of marketers now rely on more than open rates to gauge their email performance, so the loss of tracking capabilities for Apple Mail users is unfortunate, but not the end of the world. In fact, it tracks with the internet's entire shift toward more anonymous internet usage, and it's probably just the start of a whole new world for email marketers.

This might mean relying on non-email tactics to better track your users' movements on your web properties, or asking recipients or customers to set their location in a user profile. Then you can segment your lists into general areas like New York or London and personalize the email experience for those general locales without using tech that's apt to break now.

Reach out to us at Validity for an extra hand. We'll set you up for success beyond open rates, because the future is NOW! And the future is privacy. Get ready. We are.

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Businesses run better and grow faster with trustworthy data. Tens of thousands of organizations rely on Validity solutions – including Everest, DemandTools, BriteVerify, 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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