The **5 Minute Guide** to Email Deliverability

The Misunderstood Metric That Can Make or Break Your Email Program

validity

Your emails aren't reaching the inbox

You build a solid subscriber list, craft a killer email, and hit send—but then what happens?
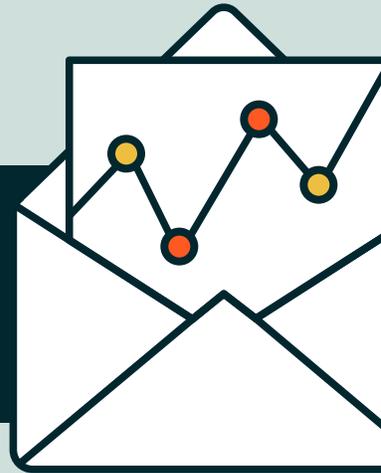
Oftentimes, those carefully planned emails get a one-way ticket to the junk folder.

The average inbox placement rate was only **85 percent in 2021**—meaning **one in six emails didn't reach the inbox**. Worse still, many senders don't know this is happening.

Although most email marketers are metric maniacs, many only focus on surface-level performance indicators, like open rates and clicks.

These metrics are only useful if senders can complete mission one: Getting emails into subscriber inboxes. Not to mention, open rates in particular are less valuable following the arrival of **Apple's Mail Privacy Protection** (MPP).

To learn the truth about their email performance, senders need to monitor **deliverability** (not to be confused with delivery). This is their ability to reach the inbox, where subscribers can see and engage with messages.

Let's dive into email deliverability and explore ways to improve yours, starting **now**.

What is email deliverability?

Deliverability is a sender's ability to reach the inbox by maintaining a positive sender reputation.

No matter how clever the subject line or how juicy the offer, if your email doesn't reach the inbox, subscribers won't have a chance to interact with it.

Potential revenue, meet drain.

To gain the most accurate view of deliverability, senders should monitor **inbox placement rate**. Inbox placement rate represents the percentage of email delivered to the inbox, versus messages sent to the spam folder, rejected, or blocked.

Industry forces like **GDPR** and MPP, unexpected events like COVID-19, and rising global email volumes all affect email deliverability. Even one-off email campaigns can drive your inbox placement rate up or down. While a dud campaign here and there won't necessarily kill you, it's important to know what's happening internally and externally that may influence deliverability.

Delivery ≠ deliverability

Now for the tricky part. Say it with us: Delivery is not the same as deliverability.

Senders often rely on the delivered rate provided by their email service provider (ESP) to measure deliverability. But the term "delivered" can be misleading. Delivered rate only measures the percentage of email that was accepted or rejected by a mailbox provider (MBP). Delivered rate doesn't disclose whether accepted messages land in the inbox, the spam folder, or simply go missing.

Sneaky, right?

Senders can enjoy a high delivery rate—say 98-99 percent—and have their emails regularly sent to the spam folder. On the surface everything looks peachy. But underneath, your sender reputation and overall deliverability are slowly deteriorating.

Deliverability 101: TERMS TO KNOW

Inbox placement rate: The number of emails delivered to the inbox out of total emails sent.

Spam placement rate: The number of emails delivered to the spam folder out of total emails sent. Shows the percentage of emails identified as unsolicited bulk email or spam by the receiving MBP's spam filtering system.

Missing rate: The percentage of mail that did not arrive in the inbox or spam folder and has been deferred or blocked by the MBP.

What impacts email deliverability?

By now, you get it: Deliverability is a big deal. If you suspect your emails aren't reaching the inbox, investigate these common culprits:

→ **POOR SENDER REPUTATION**

Internet service providers and MBPs evaluate your emails gladiator-style. Messages that get a "thumbs up" reach the inbox. A "thumbs down" means you get filtered to the spam folder or blocked. These choices are heavily dependent on your **sender reputation**.

Sender reputation is comprised of factors including sending volume, bounce rates, complaints, and spam trap hits. Recipient engagement with your emails also plays a role, including positive feedback like opens, and negative feedback like spam complaints.

Always check your sender reputation before sending new campaigns to make sure MBPs will receive your messages favorably.

PRO TIP

A Sender Score is a numerical representation of your sender reputation—kind of like a credit score.

To know where you stand, check your score in seconds at SenderScore.org.

→ POOR IP OR DOMAIN REPUTATION

An IP address is a unique set of numbers assigned to every device connected to the internet. Email senders can choose between two primary types: dedicated or shared.

When using a shared IP address, the behavior of other senders using the same address can positively or negatively impact your reputation, and consequently, your deliverability.

A dedicated IP address gives senders more control over their reputation—but only if they properly warm up this address and follow established best practices.

A word to the wise: IP reputation is hard to build and easy to lose. Senders shouldn't take this decision lightly.

Domain reputation is more straightforward. It factors in your IP address and sending domain (for example, @Validity.com). When making filtering decisions, ISPs and MBPs rely more on domain reputation, since sophisticated spammers will frequently change their IP addresses to avoid detection.

→ BLOCKLISTS

Blocklists, now also known as blacklists, are just as scary as they sound. These are lists of known spammers (or email senders who unintentionally practice spam-like behavior) that MBPs reference when making deliverability decisions.

Consult a reputable **blocklist lookup service** to ensure your IP address and domain aren't listed. If you are listed (dun dun dun...), consult that specific blocklist's delisting requirements and follow their stated procedures to the letter.

→ LIST HYGIENE

MBPs like clean lists—so regular housekeeping is a must. Removing unsubscribes is a no-brainer. And in most areas, it's **the law**. Senders must also keep their lists free of the following types of bad addresses:
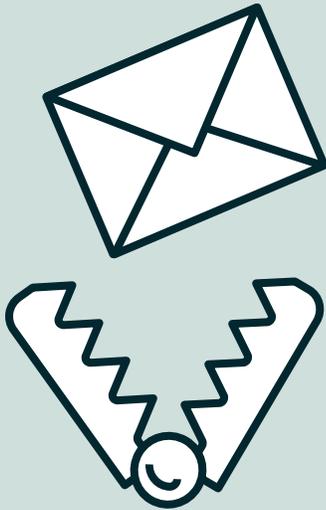
- **Unknown users:** Invalid or unrecognized email addresses. These might include addresses that have been abandoned and shut down by the MBP, or addresses with typos.

- **Recycled spam traps:** Once-legitimate addresses that have been repurposed to catch spam messages.

- **Pristine spam traps:** Email addresses created solely to catch spammers. These traps are most harmful for deliverability since they indicate questionable list acquisition practices.

→ EMAIL CONTENT

When hit with emails that have nothing to do with them or their interests, most subscribers will say "no thanks," and either unsubscribe or mark your emails as spam. Even if they do neither, lower read rates or higher deleted unread rates will send negative signals to MBPs.

To keep engagement high, it's time to retire batch-and-blast sends and old-school personalization techniques. Instead, harness first-party and **zero-party data** to deliver the relevant messages your subscribers now expect.

Senders should also say "see ya" to elements like link shorteners, spammy language, excessive capitalization, and large images, all of which drive MBP filtering decisions.

10 steps to improve your deliverability

Many senders ignore deliverability until it becomes a problem. Big mistake. Huge.

Instead, follow these 10 steps to proactively address deliverability issues.
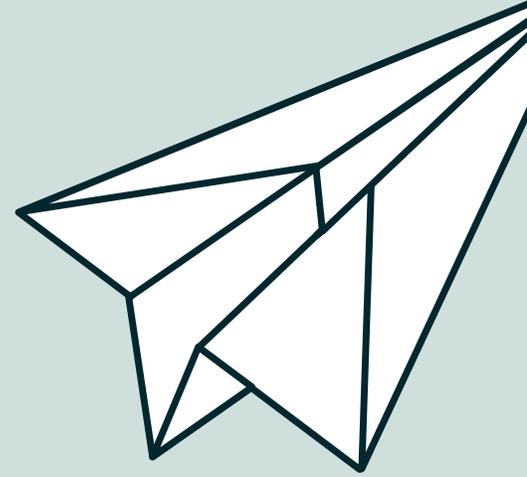
01 AUDIT

Better deliverability starts with an audit of your current program. Start by creating an inventory of the emails your team is sending, how often, and to which audience segments.

02 MEASURE

While inbox placement rate is the best indicator of deliverability, senders should review other metrics that might foreshadow deliverability problems down the road. These include hard metrics like unsubscribes, shares, forwards, and ROI, and softer measures like list growth rate. When possible, attribute end goals like sales or inquiries to specific email campaigns for a more comprehensive look at program performance.

03 MONITOR

Joan Jett might disagree, but you *should* give a damn about your reputation. Protect your sender, IP, and domain reputations by consistently monitoring and correcting issues pertaining to spam, bounce rate, and blocklists. This should include regular bounce log analyses to understand the factors causing rejections.

04 COLLABORATE

Improving deliverability isn't just the marketing team's job. Creative teams must develop eye-catching content, sales reps need to grow the database, and IT professionals must prevent spoofing and phishing attacks. Make it your mission to educate all stakeholders about the importance of deliverability and how they can help.

05 CLEAN

Create a regular schedule by which you'll purge unresponsive, fake, and duplicate addresses from your database. Many senders should be more aggressive here. Gmail now prompts recipients to unsubscribe from an email program after 30 days of no engagement. But many senders wait months before suppressing unresponsive accounts.

06 TAILOR

Use all available data to understand the content your subscribers enjoy most. This might require metrics email service providers don't readily provide, like spam complaints and read times. You should also commit time to becoming an expert on who your recipients are, what they want, and which segments are delivering strong returns. Tailor your emails using these insights.

07 AUTHENTICATE

Email authentication is one of the primary building blocks of good deliverability. All senders should have **SPF**, **DKIM**, and **DMARC** in place to prove their legitimacy.

08 LIST-UNSUBSCRIBE

All emails should contain a list-unsubscribe record in email headers. Unsubscribing should always be visible and easy. Otherwise, subscribers will take the simple route and mark emails as spam, which damages your sender reputation.

09 CONFIRM

A confirmed opt-in model verifies that your subscribers want to hear from you. Senders using a confirmed opt-in model generate higher levels of subscriber engagement and major MBPs view programs with this infrastructure favorably.

10 RECOVER

When subscribers mark emails sent to the spam folder as "Not Spam," this sends a positive signal to MBPs and tells them they've made a mistake. To boost the chances of your emails being recovered, messages should be personalized and clearly branded. Senders should also implement **BIMI**, which allows brands to display their logos in subscriber inboxes for increased recognition and engagement.

Ditch your deliverability problems for good

Global email volume rose by <u>82 percent</u> from 2019 to 2021, as COVID-19 drove millions of traditionally offline consumers online.

Signs indicate this elevated volume is here to stay. This increase coupled with industry shifts like Apple's MPP means new pressures on deliverability.

In this email climate, a technology partner like Validity can provide peace of mind that your messages are reaching the inbox.

Everest, the email success platform from Validity, provides unparalleled insights and deliverability guidance to help senders increase engagement and achieve maximum inbox placement.

BriteVerify, our contact verification solution, provides secure, scalable list validation so senders can start every campaign from a clean list.

To learn more about how Validity can help, schedule a conversation with our email experts today.

Let's Talk

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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 Connect – 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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