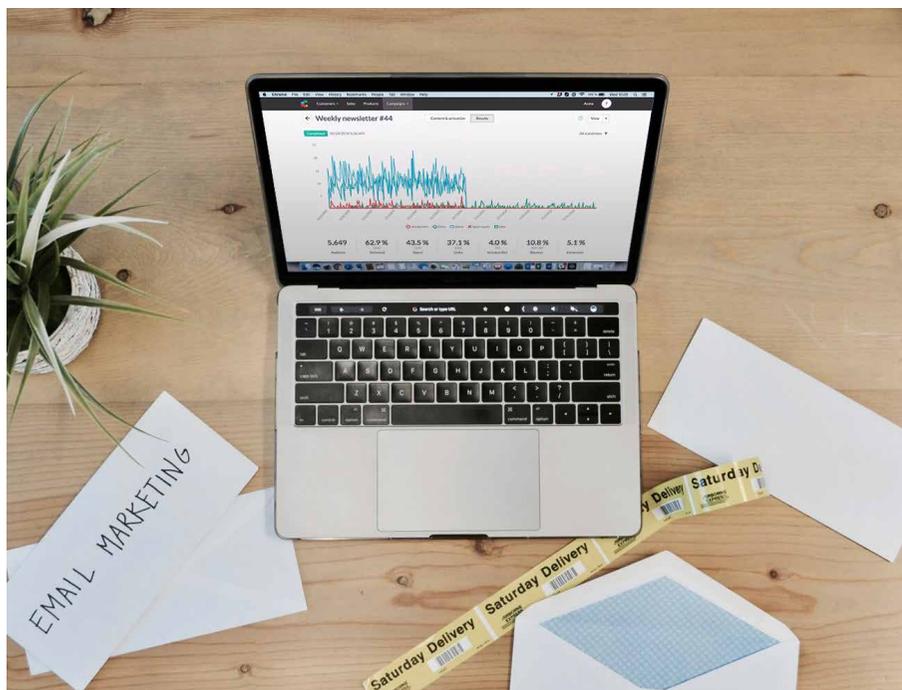


Email deliverability: Your email marketing strategy has gatekeepers you may not be aware of



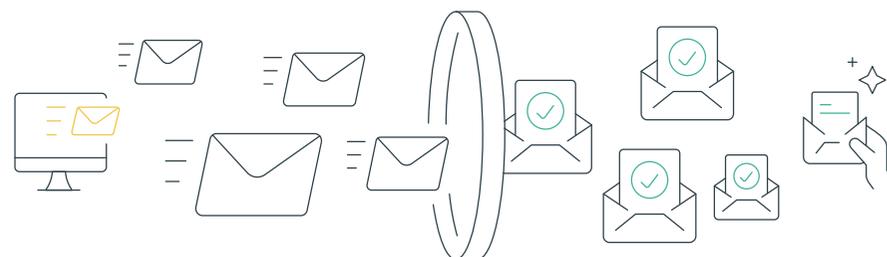
Email deliverability is something that needs constant care and monitoring. Its rules cannot be broken, avoided, or bypassed.

In this white paper you will learn to look out for indicators and warning signs that tell on poor email deliverability. You will also get tools to understand deliverability issues and to avoid the pitfalls. But fear not, for even if the numbers don't add up and your email deliverability is in a rut, we will provide you with a checklist of actions to take to get your key ratios on the rise again. We have seen time and again that things can literally be turned around in just a few weeks.

If you want to know, what the one single most important step you need to take is, keep reading.

In this age of Big Data, we think that we can rely on what analytics tell us. When it comes to email marketing, however, the statistics we are looking at do not tell the whole story. The delivery rate that you see in your email marketing solution is not the same as deliverability rate. What this means, simply put, is that the delivered rate you see does not match the number of emails actually delivered to your subscribers' inboxes or other folders of their choice for your messages.

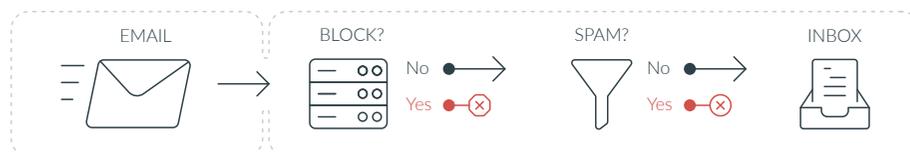
Email deliverability is an issue of its own within email marketing, which of course, in turn, is an independent field among marketing strategies. It is precisely deliverability that makes email marketing unique in a way that renders other marketing strategies impossible to copy or to transfer directly onto an email marketing strategy.



To be delivered or not to be delivered? That is the question

Email deliverability rate - apart from email delivered rate - is the field of evaluating whether or not your email marketing messages, transactional messages and other emails actually reach your customers. The reason they might not lies with mailbox providers (also called internet service providers, ISPs). Big mailbox providers, such as Gmail, Outlook (formerly Hotmail or Windows Live Hotmail), and Yahoo all sort incoming emails using quite complicated AI analytics and algorithms in order to determine whether the message is relevant to the recipient, and/or something that the recipient will really want.

Smaller mailbox providers sort incoming emails in a similar fashion, but not necessarily with the level of sophistication that the big mailbox providers do. Still, no matter what the recipient's chosen email, the mailbox provider powering that email address and providing the service for it will act as a personal assistant or as a gatekeeper determining what emails will end up - or not end up - in the recipient's inbox.



These gatekeepers cannot be totally managed by either email marketers or subscribers, but they can be coaxed into the right direction by both parties. Subscribers can unsubscribe, make spam mail reportings, and manage their email folders to “educate” their mailbox providers as to which categories certain messages belong. **The steps that email marketers can and should take are the core or this white paper.**

There are four key areas to email deliverability, and they all have an impact:

1. Subscribers' engagement.
2. Subscribers' life cycle management.
3. Email/newsletter content.
4. Technical deliverability/infrastructure.

Delivery vs. deliverability, what's the difference?

EMAIL DELIVERY RATE

Delivery rate indicates that the emails you have sent to your subscribers have been technically received by the subscribers' mailbox providers.

Delivery rates do not indicate how many of your messages have reached your subscribers' inboxes.

EMAIL DELIVERABILITY RATE

Deliverability of an email newsletter or campaign message indicates that emails reach the subscribers' inboxes.

Deliverability rates can be determined by analyzing key email metrics. Engagement, measured first and foremost by email opens and clicks, is the most important one. It also directly impacts sender reputation.

1. Subscribers' engagement - the number one factor in email deliverability



Subscribers' engagement means their interaction with newsletters, automated emails and other email messages. Engaging your audience to open and to take action on the emails they receive is the most important factor in email deliverability, because it directly impacts the marketer's sender reputation.

So, how can you know if your email marketing strategy engages your audience?

Subscriber engagement is measured by these key email metrics:

- open rates
- click rates
- unsubscribed rates
- spam complaints
- bounce rates (soft and hard)

BASIC ACTIONS

Monitoring your email open rates should be a pivotal part of your email marketing strategy. Generally speaking, the open rate percentages of mass messages are between 15 and 30 percent. Anything over 30% is great. If your open rates are below 15%, you need to take action to improve that percentage and your conversion.

The amount of spam complaints should never be higher than 0,08%. Anything above this will quickly damage your sender reputation. The most common reasons for spam complaints are too many messages from the same marketer or unexpected/unwanted messages from the marketer. Monitor closely, which messages receive low opening rates and/or spam complaints, and make changes (modify content, manner of email marketing, frequency, etc.).

ADVANCED ACTIONS

Monitor your key email metrics by customer segments. This will give you more insight into which segments are more engaged than others. Furthermore, utilize the results in finding new strategies to improve customer engagement for those segments that are less likely to engage.

Keep an eye also on your soft and hard bounce rates. They both indicate email messages that have not been delivered. Removing email addresses that produce hard bounce is particularly important, since it also directly impacts your sender reputation.

Sender reputation - how well do you score?

Mailbox providers assign email sender reputation scores to organizations that send email. Sender reputation is a crucial component of your email deliverability. The higher your score, the more likely a mailbox service provider will deliver emails to the inboxes of your subscribers.

Every mailbox provider has their own algorithms to calculate your sender reputation. Regardless of their size and level of finesse, the makings of these gatekeepers are highly protected secrets. If they were made public, spammers would have a field day manipulating these algorithms to better serve their purposes.

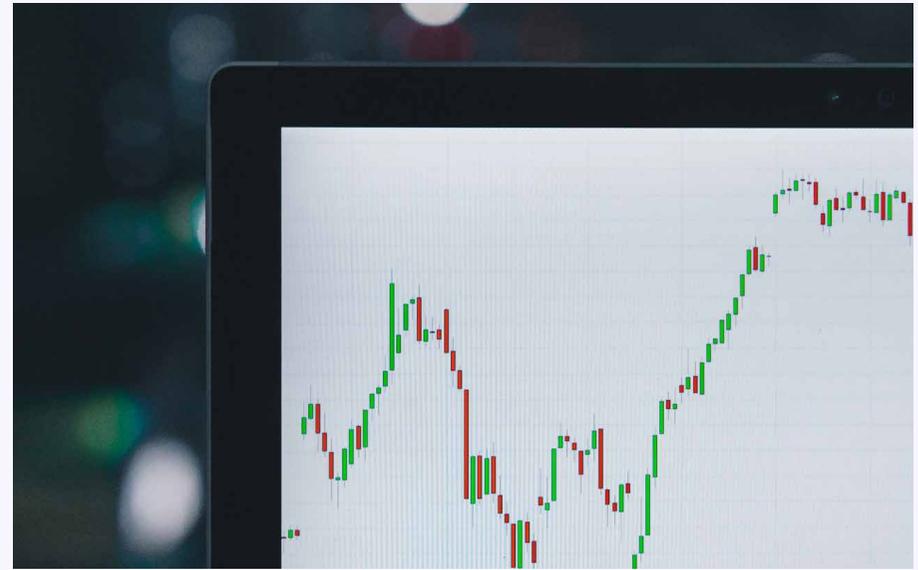
Soft bounce vs. hard bounce, what's the difference?

Soft bounce

Soft bounce means a valid email address and that the message reached the recipient's mailbox provider.

Common reasons for soft bounce:

- User's mailbox is full.
- You have been sending too many messages too quickly.
- The mailbox provider's server was down.



Common fixes by your ESP: continued attempt to send messages for a period of time, such as 72 hrs.

Hard bounce

Hard bounce means a permanent rejection of an email message.

Common reasons for hard bounce:

- Recipient's invalid email address.
- A non-existent email address.

Note! Your ESP is likely to add these addresses to a suppression list, although not all ESPs do so. Continuing to try to send to a bad address will harm your sender reputation. Therefore, it is important to check the validity of emails at the sign-up via automated welcome or confirmation messages.

2. Subscribers' life cycle management in three easy steps

There are three stages to a subscriber's life cycle:

1. starting the relationship
2. building the relationship
3. ending the relationship

Any deliverability issues you will ever have will lie within one of these three stages.

2.1. Starting the relationship:

SUBSCRIBING TO A MAILING LIST

There are four important things and one important action to take when a new lead becomes a subscriber. When somebody gives their email address to you, make sure that they know that they are joining your subscribers. They also need to know explicitly, what kind of messages to expect, and how often. Also, make sure that the recipient's email address is correct.

If you fail to meet these requirements, you risk your sender reputation by risking that the recipients will report spam or not open your messages.

The one step you absolutely need to take with new subscribers is to send a confirmation email. It ensures that the user's email is valid and that they want to receive your emails. It also helps you to maintain a good list hygiene, since you can purge your email subscribers' list of invalid emails. Automated confirmation emails that bounce will not have a great impact on your sender reputation. Poor list hygiene will.



2.2. Building the relationship:

DEVELOPING AND OPTIMIZING SUBSCRIBER ENGAGEMENT

The key to building subscriber relationships is twofold. Firstly, you need to constantly monitor your subscriber engagement. Secondly, you need to optimize subscriber engagement by reworking your email marketing content and frequency.

Here are some tips and tricks:

- No one wants to keep getting messages that are too similar in kind over and over, month in, year out. Work on being relevant and interesting for your recipient.
- Work out the best email message frequency for different customer segments. Your more engaged recipients are more susceptible to more frequent messaging. Don't "spam" the ones that are not so engaged.
- Automate messages according to context. For example, you could automate a reminder message of an abandoned cart. You could automate a thank you message for someone who browsed your product/service and a call to action (CTA) for a purchase. Also, you could automate a message on related products to be sent 2 weeks after a purchase.

2.3. Ending the relationship:

AVOIDING THE KISS OF DEATH TO YOUR REPUTATION

What is the kiss of death for your sender reputation?
Sending to recipients who haven't engaged in 6 months.

A part of managing relationship building is knowing when to stop. You should never mass email message a subscriber that hasn't engaged for several months. Rather, try to activate a passive subscriber by automated messages that are

triggered by certain behaviours, such as not engaging for, say, three months. These automated messages* could be repeated every three months, for instance, for up to two years. Another great way to try and activate a passive subscriber are automated SMSes.

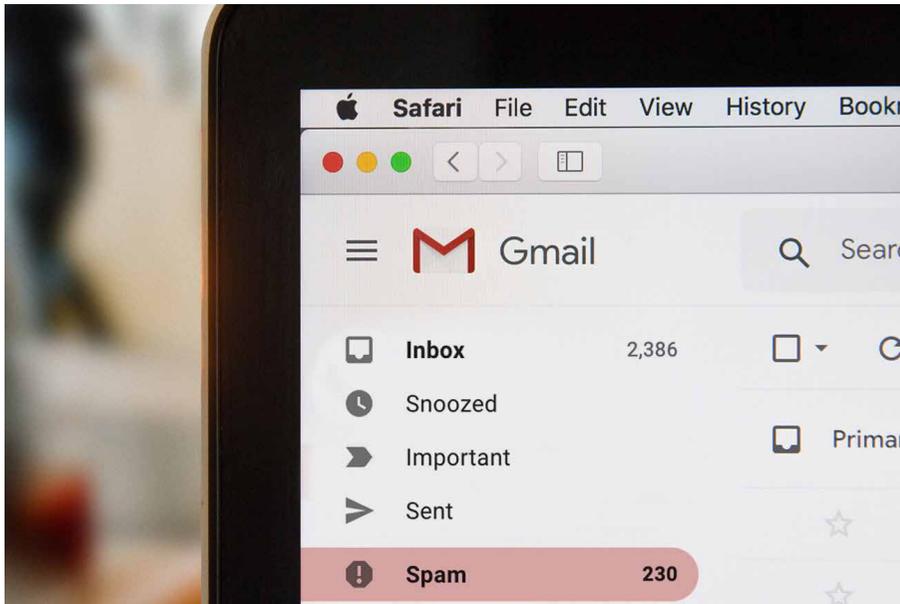


If a subscriber doesn't engage in automated messages either, they should be cut loose. Never sacrifice your sender reputation for greater subscriber numbers. The absolute end of your subscriber relationship for mass messages is 6 months, which is known as the kiss of death for your sender reputation.

And one final tip: It is very important that unsubscribing is made easy!

*Automated messages are referred to here as individualized messages as opposed to mass messages that are sent to all recipients in a list/customer segment.

3. Email/newsletter content - demands on technical and copy content



Each factor also in email content has an impact on deliverability. The wrong subject line or phrase can send your email straight to the spam folder. A poorly placed call to action may prevent your customers from taking the next step in the buyer journey. Broken links are sure to lower your sender reputation.

Here are some actions to take to be delivered and seen, and to improve engagement.

BASIC ACTIONS

Do at least these:

- Use segments, personalization, and dynamic content to establish relevance.
- Ensure that your email is mobile friendly, since phones are now the preferred platform for reading emails.
- Make sure your email messages do not look like spam.
- Balance your text and images: a high image - low text ratio may harm your sender reputation.
- Take into account that images may not be displayed by default.
- Add messages also onto your images to motivate their downloads.
- Balance your text and link ratio. Too many links end up looking like spam.
- Make sure that your links work.
- Make it easy for subscribers to opt out.

ADVANCED ACTIONS

These will make your email messages even better:

- Use alt attributes with your images. It is important that text of images is shown when images are turned off.
- Don't use full URL links as text. Also avoid URL shorteners. Instead, use clickable hyperlinks on keywords in your copy or on images.
- Avoid spammy words and phrases (WINNER!, 100% Free) and don't overuse special characters.
- Add a permission reminder in the header or footer.

4. Technical deliverability/infrastructure - choose your ESP wisely

Email technical infrastructure is a compilation of technical details that play a part in email deliverability. Success in meeting all of the technical requirements has everything to do with choosing the right email service platform/partner. Make sure your email service provider is reputable.

Note! You can leave the actions described below to the tender care of your ESP.

BASIC ACTIONS

There is a number of technical prerequisites for optimal email deliverability: Sender Policy Framework (SPF) defines which IP addresses are allowed to send mail for a particular domain.

- DomainKeys Identified Mail (DKIM) provides an encryption key and a digital signature that verifies that an email message was not forged or altered.
- Domain-based Message Authentication (DMARC), which is an email authentication protocol.

ADVANCED ACTIONS

Marketers may sometimes need to have separate IP addresses for email marketing, because mailbox providers monitor the sender reputation of each individual IP address. There needs to be an adequate number of IP addresses for email marketing messages. A good rule of thumb is to have one IP per 100K of sent emails per delivery.



Custobar has a stellar deliverability rate. Our chosen email service partner is SendGrid, one of the largest email services for legitimate email marketing and transactional messages in the world. SendGrid serves two trillion email addresses, sends more than 60 billion emails every month, and has more than 82 000 customers, including Uber, Spotify and Airbnb.

Because Custobar as an ESP uses SendGrid, our technical infra is superb. This, however, does not guarantee an excellent deliverability rate for our customers, which is why the issues addressed in this white paper are vital for anyone looking to succeed in their email marketing.

Not rocket science, after all. Fix your email deliverability rate by doing these 4 things

1. Constantly maintain and develop your email deliverability, for it is a central part of your email marketing strategy.
2. Accept the specific rules of email deliverability. They are unique to email marketing rendering other marketing strategies designed for other channels utterly useless.
3. Remember that email deliverability is a larger whole, not separate individual email deliverability issues and factors. The quality of one part cannot compensate the lack of quality in another.
4. See below.

Take action to build up your sender reputation

There are third party tools and resources available for checking your sender reputation. These tools are subject to a charge, so utilizing them will mean extra cost. Some of these tools include Sender Score, ReputationAuthority by WatchGuard, and TrustedSource.

Note, however, that even with an excellent sender score you may still have inboxing issues. This is because reputation monitoring systems only work as one data point among an overarching and holistic email deliverability assessment.

TARGET EMAIL MARKETING METRICS

			
Open %	More than 25%	15-25%	Less than 15%
Click %	More than 5%	2,5%	Less than 2%
Bounce	Less than 1,5%	2%	More than 2,5%
Unsubscribe	Less than 0,2%	Less than 0,5%	More than 0,5%
Spam reports	Less than 0,02%	0,05%	More than 0,08%

About Custobar

Custobar is a customer data platform (CDP) and marketing automation tool that combines data from all customer touchpoints: purchases from both online store and the physical locations, browsing data, mobile app transactions, customer service tickets etc. Custobar offers the easiest user interface in the market for business users to understand their customer behaviour and build marketing automations. Custobar also provides comprehensive and real-time integration APIs for agile integration with other systems.

Custobar was founded in 2012 and is based in Helsinki. Its unique sales and marketing platform is already in use in more than 11 countries across Europe and the US by retailers and B2C service providers.



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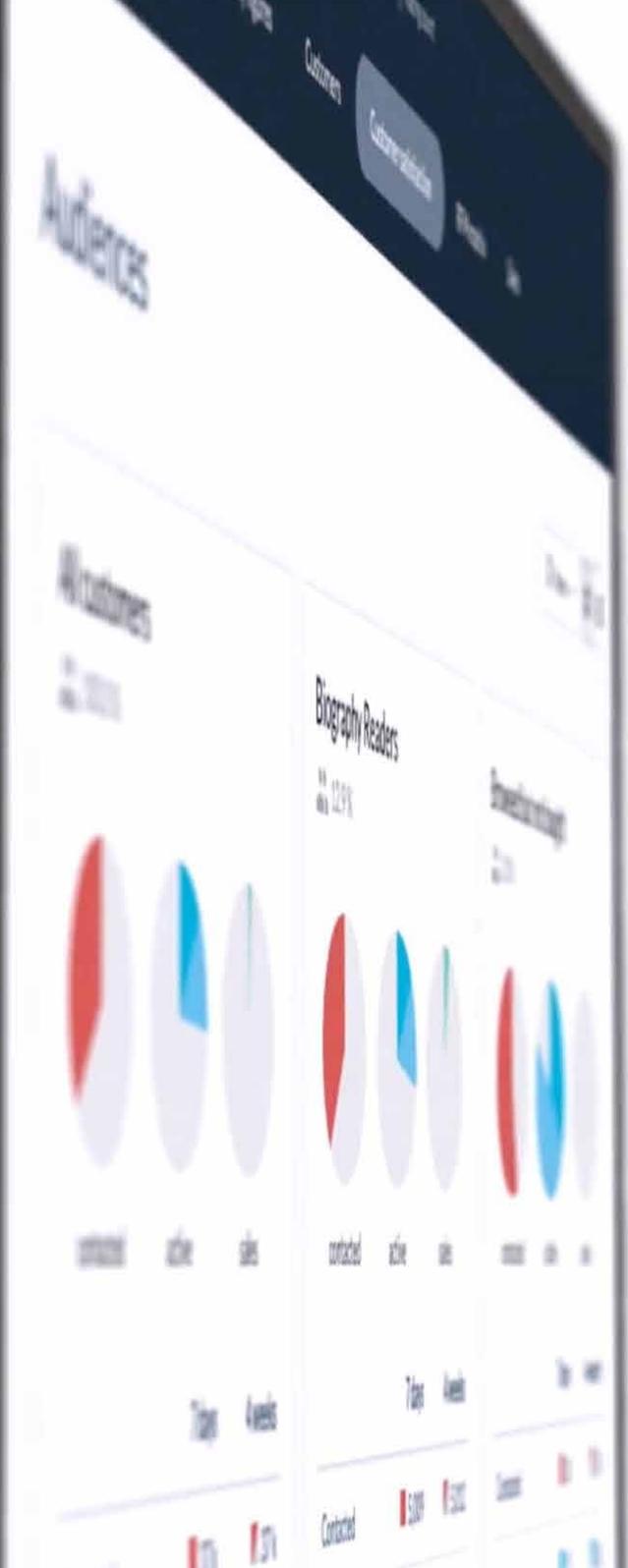


All too few companies know or pay attention to the principles of the email deliverability. If you do, it can have a significant effect on the conversions you get from your email marketing. Poor email deliverability in email marketing is the same as low search engine optimization is to your website: you might have great content but nobody can find it!

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CEO Custobar

Please visit:
WWW.CUSTOBAR.COM



Email deliverability guide 2020 - Tatu Kuivalahti

Thank You!