2019 Email Deliverability Guide

Change the way your email is delivered

Table of Contents

SECTIONS

Introduction

Making sure you start off on the right foot in 2019 is critical for the success of any business. Between new revenue goals, updating messaging, and making feature or product improvements, optimizing your email program doesn't always get prioritized. However, with such a reliable and attributable tool at your fingertips, the success of your business is tied very closely to the success of your email program.

At SendGrid, we like to say that the key to your email program's success is all about **email deliverability**, and getting the right message in front of the right recipient at the right time. Globally, 15% of emails never make it to the inbox (**Return Path, 2018**). With industry-average deliverability rates so low, many businesses are struggling with missing out on revenue opportunities.

Improvement in your email deliverability isn't just a nice-to-have — it's a mission-critical effort that you should focus on to retain your customers' attention, and continue growing your business. SendGrid can help you accomplish this by helping you track, understand, and improve your email program.

Whether you're taking advantage of our enhanced email activity feed, Email Insights Reports, **Expert Services**, or simply reading through our robust **Knowledge Center**, SendGrid brings you a wealth of email expertise and innovative tools to examine every step on the way to the inbox.

About this Guide

SendGrid's *Email Deliverability Guide* is one of our most popular resources to help you with all things deliverability. Not only do we provide building blocks for email deliverability best practices, but we've worked closely with our internal email deliverability experts and industry stakeholders to ensure the information we're providing every year is new and relevant.

This year's guide is no different! Whether you send transactional emails or marketing emails, the one thing every business can agree on is that getting to the inbox is critical—which is where email deliverability comes in. The *2019 Email Deliverability Guide* includes updates on:

- Gmail Tabs
- Microsoft Filtering
- Oath and Verizon Media Group.
- Privacy and Compliance

In addition to those changes, links and resources have been updated throughout the guide, and we've included insights from our own Email Delivery Consultants.

As companies grow and continue to be ingrained in the lives of their customers, email is the backbone of their customer communications. Can you imagine Spotify, eBay, Uber, AirBnB, or any other web application functioning without email?

ONGOING EMAIL ASSISTANCE

If you want to ensure that your email program is functioning as well as it can be, and driving the results you want, SendGrid provides customers options for getting the support, education, and expert guidance you need. We have flexible offerings for senders of every size so you can get the level of access and value from our email experts that's right for your program. **To learn more about our Expert Services portfolio, please contact sales.**

Nearly every essential (and oftentimes non-essential) customer communication is sent via email:

- Product announcements
- Monthly newsletters
- Privacy and account updates
- Legal notifications
- Billing notifications
- Password resets
- New follower notifications

What Exactly *is* Email Deliverability?

Simply put: *successful email deliverability is your email arriving in the inbox of your recipient as intended*. Failed email deliverability is when your message is either routed to the junk/bulk/spam folder, or is completely blocked by an inbox provider.

Maintaining consistent, successful email delivery is a constant challenge facing any business that relies on email communications. Unfortunately, most companies don't think about email deliverability until they're having a major issue—like when thousands, or even millions, of emails fail to arrive.

Businesses falsely assume that an email is delivered if they don't receive a bounce notification; the reality is very different. According to **Return Path's 2018 Deliverability Benchmark Report**, 85% of global recipient mail is delivered to the inbox, while only 83% of mail from the United States makes it to the inbox. This means 15% of global email, and 17% of United States email doesn't make it to the inbox. Even though recipients are looking for it!

You might think these stats only reflect marketing emails or spammy messages, but that's not the case. In fact, these stats reflect ALL email. Messages like:

- Membership confirmations
- Password resets
- Shipping notifications
- Monthly or weekly newsletters
- Opt-in confirmations

When anticipated messages aren't received, you don't just lose revenue, you lose your customer's trust. Imagine all the time and effort put into crafting email content, subject lines, and a great design, just for the inbox provider filter to block your message!

Getting to the inbox requires a lot of attention and effort from any sender. Not only does your sending reputation greatly impact delivery, but your email authentication and infrastructure can make or break even the best email program. This guide will arm you with all the knowledge you need to navigate the deliverability landscape and get your messages to the inbox.

WHAT'S AN INBOX PROVIDER?

In the past, inbox providers were referred to as ISPs (Internet Service Providers). This acronym was confusing because many senders thought of Internet Service Providers like Time Warner or Comcast. The most common inbox providers include Gmail, Yahoo, Outlook, and Hotmail.

CONSIDER THIS QUICK CALCULATION:

If you have one million email subscribers, and 17% of your emails to those recipients are undelivered due to being blocked or sent to the spam or junk folder, that could be up to *170,000* people left out of your email campaign. While the impact of this loss is unique to every brand, take a minute to ask yourself: *What does losing 17% of my list mean to me?*

To learn exactly how much money deliverability issues could be costing your business, head over to our **ROI Calculator** and fill out some basic email program information!

Inbox Expert Insight

We get asked all the time: "What's the best subject line for my next email campaign?" The fact is, it completely depends on your contact list and what resonates with your recipients. What works for one company, many not work at all for you. Instead of telling you that you **NEED to include a discount**, or make sure your subject lines are 7 or 8 words long, we encourage senders to **A/B test their subject lines** to figure out what's optimal for their recipients.

Tom is an email marketing expert with a passion for deliverability and MTA technologies. Providing knowledge and expertise across a variety of industries, he's been passionate about helping customers with their email programs for the past 8 years.

Tom Emilio

Your Sending Reputation: Make sure you're known as a good sender

The first step to better email deliverability is to evaluate your sender reputation. Sender reputation is determined by a wide variety of factors, including:

- Recipient Engagement
- Email Content
- Spam Complaints
- Spam Traps
- Email Addresses

While each of these contribute to how inbox providers perceive you, the best thing to keep in mind is how recipients are interacting with your emails. When your recipients are opening, reading, and clicking on your messages, inbox providers know that your messages are wanted.

A strong sending reputation, like a great brand or personal reputation, is hard to earn, easy to lose, and built over time. The following are key factors that inbox providers consider when determining your sending reputation. If you'd like to check in on your sender reputation, read our blog **5 Ways to Check Your Sending Reputation**.

Recipient Engagement

Opens, clicks, unsubscribes, and spam reports are all different ways that your recipients engage with your messages, but there are other types of **positive and negative engagement** that are harder to track. Depending on the inbox provider, they might keep track of:

- How many times messages are forwarded
- How often messages are ignored
- How often messages are deleted without being read
- How often a sender is added to a contact book
- How often a message is moved from one folder to another

While the definitions of engagement are based on different sets of insights, the net result is the same: send email to engaged users who want to receive it, and you will most likely have good, sustained inbox placement and deliverability. To use an example, if your email is unopened by 90% of recipients, the inbox providers might start to filter that email to spam, rather than the inbox, because recipient engagement has signaled that the email isn't wanted.

SENDER REPUTATION

Sender reputation also includes things like **IP and domain reputation**, and it provides inbox providers with a snapshot of who you are as a sender. Senders with good reputations get delivered, and senders with poor reputations either get blocked at the gateway or, in the best case scenario, their messages land in the junk folder.

NEW FOR 2019

OATH BECOMES VERIZON MEDIA GROUP

2018 saw the merger of Yahoo, AOL, and Verizon into Oath Inc. Starting in 2019, Oath Inc. is being renamed Verizon Media Group. Name changes aside, what this means for email senders is that sending reputation data, such as spam complaints, at one domain can negatively impact your sending reputation at all related domains. While these receiving domains may each choose to make different decisions with this data, it is wise to view your email engagement data across these domains as related.

"The inbox provider definition of engagement hinges on a combination of these metrics that are invisible to a sender, but are critical to the success of every single campaign.

SEE HOW INBOX PROVIDERS VIEW YOUR MESSAGES

Are you curious about how inbox providers view and analyze your messages? If you are, you might check out these websites to see if there's anything you should change with your messages:

- http://isnotspam.com
- http://www.mail-tester.com/

Email Content

Content doesn't just mean the words within your emails. Images, templates, links, preheader text, subject lines, and from addresses can all impact your reputation. To make sure you build a good reputation, You need to send email with engaging content, a professional look and feel, and legitimate links. You can learn how to customize the content and templates of your next email marketing campaign in the blog post ***How to Customize an Email Marketing Template***.

Spam Complaints

There's a lot more to sender reputation than **spam complaint percentage**; however,

> a recipient marking an email as spam is the strongest negative signal to inbox providers about your email.

Spam complaint rates above 0.2% are considered high, and may result in poor deliverability. At other inbox providers, like Gmail, a spam rate as low as .08% can start to affect your deliverability, which is why you need to keep a close eye on it.

Spam Traps

Spam traps are email addresses that should never receive email because they're either old and haven't been used in a long time, or because the email address has never signed up to receive email. The former is called a recycled spam trap, the latter is called a pristine spam trap (or a honeypot as they're known at AOL).

Having either type of spam trap signals that you aren't keeping your list clean. You can avoid recycled spam traps by removing recipients from your list after long periods of non-engagement. To avoid pristine spam traps, simply avoid purchasing, renting, or scraping email addresses. For other tactics, check out our blog ***Email List Hygiene: 5 Tips to Help You Keep Your Lists Clean***.

DON'T USE LINK SHORTENERS:

This is something that may not seem very important, but can have a real impact on your reputation! **Link shorteners are often used by spammers to mask malicious links that lead to ransomware and other infected pages**. As a result, inbox providers might flag them in your messages.

NEW FOR 2019

AN UPDATE FROM MICROSOFT:

In early 2018, **Microsoft began to migrate its various email infrastructures to a more centralized setup**. As a result, Microsoft moved all of its spam filtering to the Office365 solution. This means that email sent to domains like as Hotmail.com will now be subject to more strict filtering that's more like sending to B2B domains. An appropriate **sunset policy** and a clearly defined recipient lifecycle across all channels will continue to be key to good email engagement and deliverability at Microsoft inboxes in 2019.

WHAT IS LIST SCRAPING?

List scraping or list harvesting is the process of using a software or bot to crawl websites and find email addresses. The problem is that these email addresses (and the people who use them) have no relationship with you or your company. That means you shouldn't be sending them email. Only send your email to people who have told you that they're interested in your product or service, or have asked for your emails outright.

Invalid Email Addresses

Sending email to a large number of invalid or non-existent email addresses is a negative signal to inbox providers. You can reduce the number of messages sent to invalid email addresses by immediately removing bounced addresses from your active mailing list.

Abandoned email accounts can also turn into invalid addresses, so removing long-term, non-engaged addresses from your list is a good habit. You may also use engagement with welcome emails as a way to validate that the email address is real and used by the recipient.

SENDING CONFIRMATION EMAILS

One of the easiest ways to avoid invalid addresses, spam traps, and blacklists is to send a confirmation email to new email recipients. This process validates their email and confirms that they want your messages. We can't stress enough how problematic renting, purchasing, or scraping email addresses can be to establishing a good sending reputation.

NEW FOR 2019

Want to build your email subscriber list, but don't want to ruin your sending reputation by sending unsolicited email? Consider utilizing other digital channels, such as display ads, to reach potential subscribers and invite them to signup for your communications.

Targeted display ads can drive interested people to a landing page where you can inform them of the benefit of receiving your email, and collect their permission to send to them. Anywhere you can make the email process clear to the recipient, and sell the real value of the emails you will be sending will help you build an engaged email list. Learn more about this tactic in our blog post *What are Display Ads and How Can They Help You in 2019?*

"TYPO" TRAPS

Recently, "typo" traps are the majority of senders' trap types. Make sure your address collection methodology removes typos in email addresses (local@gmall.com vs. local@gmail.com), and make sure recipients interact with some kind of opt-in or a subsequent welcome message before including the address in normal email campaigns.

Inbox Expert Insight

As an email delivery consultant, I work with a lot of different customers on improving the deliverability of their email programs. One of the things I have to work on most often with my clients is updating their list acquisition methods.

Rather than bringing over an old list, buying a list from someone, or scraping email addresses off social networks, senders need to create opportunities for people to provide their email addresses... legitimately. If you want to learn more about growing your contact list the right way, you can read our guide *How to Grow Your Email Marketing List*.

Ashley Ortiz

Ashley is truly passionate about businesses and their relationship with their customers. She explores the most up to date strategies and trends of email deliverability by regularly attending industry and marketing conferences. Pairing her past experience as a SendGrid Technical Support Engineer with the nuances of deliverability, Ashley provides unique solutions for clients from a variety of industries. Her goal is to educate businesses and demonstrate the value of a successful email program, which starts and ends with the relationship to the customer.

Blacklists

Many inbox providers monitor blacklists to help them determine which senders to block or filter. Most blacklists will list your IP or sending domain if they detect a high number of spam trap hits, spam complaints, or both.

> You can avoid blacklists by sending relevant content to recipients who have recently engaged with your emails.

NOT ALL BLACKLISTS ARE CREATED EQUAL!

Simply because you're listed on a blacklist, doesn't necessarily mean your deliverability is being impacted. Some blacklists are much more impactful than others, and if you think you've been listed, we recommend working with our Delivery Consultants to determine what to do next. If you're interested in seeing if you've been blacklisted or not, we think MXToolBox is the best free lookup option.

Domain Reputation

Your **domain has a reputation associated with it**, and it's just as important as the reputation of your **IP address**. If messages sent from your domain generate a negative response from recipients, it won't matter what IP addresses the messages come from, they may be filtered by inbox providers.

COUSIN DOMAINS

Cousin domains are triggers for inbox providers. As an example, let's say that company.com also uses company-mail.com, companymail.com, and companydeals.com to send different mail streams. Those extra domains could negatively impact your deliverability.

LINKS TO THIRD PARTIES COULD BE DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD.

Even if you're doing everything right, a single link to an unreputable website in the body of your message could prevent your email from getting to the inbox. Make sure you're linking only to trusted websites and ideally, only those that you control.

Inbox Expert Insight

To be honest with you, switching IP addresses is almost never the answer to your email deliverability problems. Switching IPs when you're having deliverability problems isn't fixing any of the underlying problems. If you get a new IP, but maintain poor sending practices, you'll continue to have email deliverability issues.

In addition to that, switching IPs, but continuing to send similar content from an existing domain is a tactic used by spammers and malicious senders. Inbox providers will see this and may block your messages at the gateway.
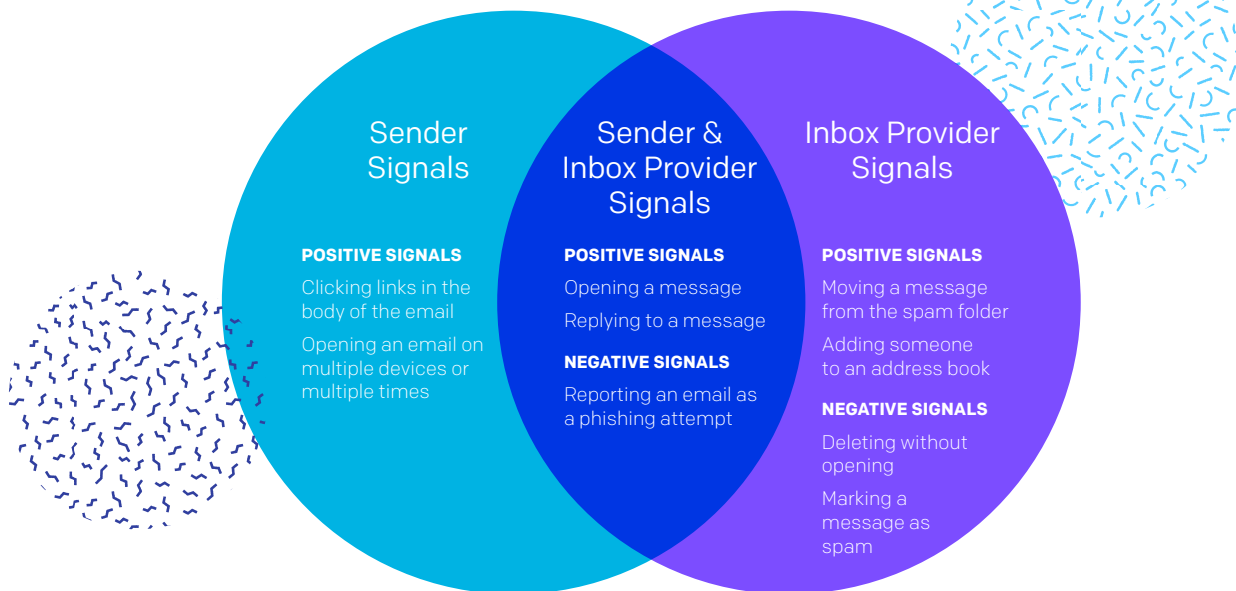
Will has spent the last 7 years in the email delivery world helping senders get their messages to the folks that want them. When he's not thinking about email delivery, Will is a vintage guitar collector, avid blues music fan, and amateur blues historian.

Will Boyd

The Difference Between Sender and Inbox Provider Signals

To recap, here's a list of user actions that affect your reputation and deliverability. Some of these you can control and measure, while others are solely visible to the inbox provider and is how they measure engagement and your sending reputation.

Sender Signals

POSITIVE SIGNALS

Clicking links in the body of the email

Opening an email on multiple devices or multiple times

Sender & Inbox Provider Signals

POSITIVE SIGNALS

Opening a message

Replying to a message

NEGATIVE SIGNALS

Reporting an email as a phishing attempt

Inbox Provider Signals

POSITIVE SIGNALS

Moving a message from the spam folder

Adding someone to an address book

NEGATIVE SIGNALS

Deleting without opening

Marking a message as spam

Infrastructure and Authentication

Your email infrastructure is what goes on behind the scenes and helps get your message to your recipient's inbox. Infrastructure often refers to the IP addresses and servers you're using to send email, while authentication refers to the validation techniques you use to show that email coming from you is in fact yours.

Having a properly configured infrastructure can greatly impact your ability to reach your recipient's inbox. Below are a few of the most important infrastructure you should be taking in order to get your email delivered correctly. Read *The SendGrid Email Infrastructure Guide - It it Better to Build or Buy?*

Inbox Expert Insight

There are a couple important things that I think all senders should keep in mind if they want to improve their email deliverability, and they're both things that every sender is in complete control of!

First, IP warm-up. If you're sending a decent amount of mail, it's very, very important that you take your time and warm up your dedicated IP correctly. If you get a new IP and attempt to send a few million emails over it, you're going to run into a lot of issues.

Secondly, authentication is something every sender should be getting right. This means your SPF, DKIM, and DMARC should all be set up correctly. If you're unsure of how to do this, **contact support** and get help before you start sending email.

Melinda Plemel

Melinda Plemel is a vet with many years of experience in email deliverability. She's worked with ESPs, inbox providers, and reputation services across the globe to better understand the email landscape, email filtering technologies, and how best to service the ecosystem. In her current role as an Email Deliverability Consultant, she will continue to help email marketers send wanted mail and maximize their email programs.

Consider using a dedicated IP address

If you're a high-volume sender who wants to make sure you're in complete control of your sending reputation, you're going to need a dedicated IP address (or even a few addresses if you're segmenting your email strems by type of email).

If you're sharing an IP address with other senders, they can impact your deliverability if they have poor sending practices. As more focus is **shifted toward IPv6**, we believe IP reputation will become even more important for larger senders.

For smaller senders (sending fewer than 50,000 messages per month) **sharing an IP address isn't the end of the world**, in fact, it's likely the smartest choice. However, you should be careful. Your deliverability can still be impacted by other senders. Many of SendGrid's lower volume senders choose to **upgrade their accounts to Pro** so that they can get the benefits of a dedicated IP.

Segment your email streams onto different IPs

Sharing a root domain across mail streams (transactional vs. marketing) will bleed reputations into each other. This means, for example, that poor engagement from your promotional emails may impact the way a purchase receipt or account update email is delivered.

Larger senders should segment their mail streams, and send them from separate IP addresses. The most basic separation is at the level of marketing and transactional messages. These mail streams often have very different reputations and must comply to CAN-SPAM differently. For companies with multiple brands, it may be wise to separate the traffic by IP

for each brand, and then further separate the marketing and transactional mail streams under each brand to provide granular reporting and reputation assessments.

> Want to make sure you warm up your IP correctly? Go read *SendGrid's Email Guide for IP Warm Up!*

EXPERIMENT WITH SEGMENTATION.

You can take segmentation as far as you'd like. Some senders segment based on timezone, engagement level, sign-up date, age, and just about anything else you can think of. It's important to think of each recipient as an individual with unique expectations. Segmentation can help you cater to the needs of various types of recipients. Read *The Essential Guide to Email Segmentation* for more ideas on how to segment your email.

WIN-BACK STRATEGY

Win-back, or reactivation campaigns can be tricky. According to postmasters we've spoken with, reactivation campaigns often have the poorest deliverability and highest spam complaints of any mailstream they see. If you're set on sending this type of campaign, consider an ongoing drip campaign of reactivation emails, just a few hundred at a time (or per hour) vs. a large one-time reactivation run to keep the volume of complaints low. You might also consider using a different IP so that you don't impact your primary IP/domain.

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Create an SPF record for your sending domain

An SPF (**Sender Policy Framework**) record is a domain name system (**DNS**) record that identifies which IP addresses are allowed to send email using your domain. Publish an SPF record and make sure it lists all the IP addresses that will be sending email from your dom

Sign your email with DKIM

DKIM stands for **Domain Keys Identified Mail**. DKIM signatures ensure that the message that arrives at the inbox provider is identical to the message that you sent. DKIM defends against malicious modification of messages in transit, and it carries a lot of reputation weight because a passing DKIM value also means the sender takes responsibility for the content and who they're sending it to.

" These days, messages not signed with a DKIM signature are very unlikely to see the inbox.

Fortunately, SendGrid automatically signs all of your outbound email with DKIM.

Publish a DMARC record

The purpose of a Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting & Conformance (DMARC) record is to tell inbox providers what you want them to do with email that doesn't pass SPF and DKIM: allow it, filter it, or reject it.

GET STARTED WITH DMARC!

To properly implement a DMARC policy, you have to account for every system that sends email on behalf of your domain, and make sure the IP addresses of these systems are present in your SPF record. You can learn all about DMARC in our blog post, *What is DMARC?*

SPF STRATEGY

Inbox providers generally don't block email solely because of a missing SPF record. However, it's one more data point that contributes to a sender's reputation, and it helps protect your brand. SendGrid requires senders to have an SPF record as a best practice. We also **walk you through generating an SPF record during the sender authentication process**.

WANT YOUR LOGO DISPLAYED?

While it's not guaranteed, we've seen Gmail rewarding some senders who implement a DMARC policy of "reject" by showing the sender's logo in the mobile mail client view if they have a Google + profile set up!

	Vivino	10:50 AM
	Flourishing Russian River Takedown...4.3...	
	Vivino Deals | View Online "the world's most pl...	☆
	Rentalcars.com	10:45 AM
	Save up to 20% on your next rental	
	Our low deposit offer is still on | Edit Preference...	☆

You can increase your chances of getting your logo displayed next to your messages on mobile clients by implementing the right DMARC policy.

Have A records and rDNS in place

A records point your domain to an IP address, while rDNS links an IP to your domain. Having these pieces in place is an important step in building trust between you and inbox providers. **SendGrid walks you through generating these records in the sender authentication process.**

Inbox Expert Insight

There's a huge misconception out there that the more email you send the better. Email isn't like other forms of advertising and marketing though. A company could choose to broadcast the same commercial hundreds of times for a month, but you'll ruin your email program if you did that with your messages.
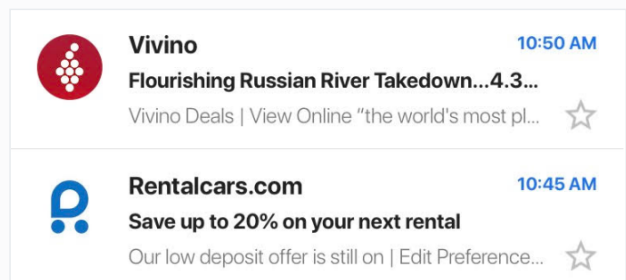
I encourage clients to be as dynamic as possible with their programs. Send new content that will resonate with your recipients, and then send it to recipients who typically open your emails first. Once you see how well those messages are performing, you can start to send to the rest of your contact list.

Samantha Stinn-Shelley

Sam has been at SendGrid since 2014, when she joined the compliance team. Through this role, Sam gained a passion for helping new customers send wanted mail and maintain a good email reputation. Now, as an Associate Email Deliverability Consultant, Sam brings this passion and knowledge to customers so they can become the best senders they can be, and get the results they need. Outside of the office, Sam loves to spend time with her husband and two dogs, and you can often find her catching a movie at the drive-in on the weekends.

Make sure your sending domain is able to receive mail

Your sending domain needs to be able to receive mail, and it must have a valid **mail exchanger (MX) record**. If not, some inbox providers will block your email. SendGrid's sender authentication process generates these records for you. It is as easy as copy and pasting these records into your DNS. We also recommend going one step further and making sure the full "from" address is an inbox that can receive mail (this allows a recipient to respond to that address and not get a failure message).

Use TLS (Transport Layer Security) to send email

TLS is a means of encrypting email in flight. By encrypting messages in flight, senders can prevent someone from reading the mail traffic as it moves between sender and receiver. Most major inbox providers are employing TLS, Google even has a **Transparency Report** that measures the amount of encrypted traffic they receive. Fortunately for you, SendGrid sends using TLS and establishes a secure connection with domains where it is opportunistically available.

Sign up for feedback loops

Most major inbox providers offer spam **feedback loops (FBLs)**. FBLs let you know when recipients mark messages as spam. You should immediately remove the addresses of spam reporters from your active mailing lists. Continuing to email recipients who have indicated that they don't want your messages is extremely detrimental to your reputation.

> " Continuing to email recipients who have indicated that they don't want your messages is extremely detrimental to your reputation.

With SendGrid, your email is automatically integrated with all the major spam feedback loops so our system will suppress email addresses of spam reporters.

Set up "postmaster" and "abuse" mailboxes for all your domains

Many inbox providers require that you have abuse@ and postmaster@ email addresses in order to get access to their FBLs. Not only should these mailboxes be set up, you should be monitoring them. These are also common destinations for complaints from inbox providers that don't have FBLs, so it's a good idea to watch the traffic that flows to them and address any reports of unsolicited email.

ROLE ACCOUNTS

Since postmaster@, abuse@, and a few others, are considered standard role accounts, sending anything other than abuse complaints to them is considered an inherently bad practice. You should consider automatically suppressing these envelopes at any domain to ensure compliance with sending best practices. Learn more about role accounts in our blog post *Role Addresses and Their Effect on Email Deliverability*.

Your Emails: The Basics for Keeping Your Reputation Intact and Your Recipients Happy

Now that you know all about the different factors that are taken into account by inbox providers when evaluating your emails, it's time to take a look at the messages you're sending.

A lot of what impacts your deliverability is what messages you're sending, and how your recipients engage with them. Below are some of our best email tips for creating and sending email campaigns that recipients are interested in and will engage with.

Ask permission and respect it

Unlike a lot of other marketing and advertising, the people receiving your email get to decide if they want to open it or even receive more of it. You're truly a guest in their inbox. If you aren't a polite guest, or if you wear out your welcome, you'll get kicked out.

Create an email preference center

This goes hand-in-hand with being a welcome guest in your recipient's inbox. An email preference center allows users to tell you exactly what types of email they're interested in. The key to a healthy email program is sending email that people are interested in receiving: Take out the guesswork by asking your recipients exactly what they want and how often they want it.

BE A POLITE GUEST!

Being a polite guest in the inbox is all about asking permission to email someone, and honoring the terms of that permission. If someone agrees to receive your weekly newsletter, you're asking for trouble if you send daily offers. You can learn more in our webcast *Great Expectations: Setting Your Email Marketing Up For Success.*
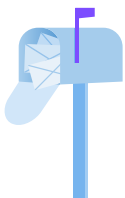
Inbox Expert Insight

We get asked for a silver bullet a lot from our clients, but the fact is, there are a handful of things that we consistently tell people to help them improve their email deliverability:

- Opt people in correctly. Send then a confirmation email, and make sure their address is good and that they want your email.

- Set expectations by telling them what kinds of email they'll be receiving and when. Don't just take their address and then hammer them with every campaign in your toolbox.

- Send a welcome series. Inform your new addresses even more about you, your brand, and your company, and then provide them with an easy way to unsubscribe if they don't want your mail.

The fact is, an address that isn't interested in your email, or even flags it as spam, is worse for you than if you simply drop them from your contact list.

Zack Giftos

Zack was a program manager in ad operations, and began working with email a little bit before moving into a technical account manager role at an email deliverability company. He came to SendGrid a little over 2 years ago as a customer success manager because he wanted the experience of working at an ESP as well as with customers. Since he has a background in email, he then moved onto the Expert Services team to continue learning about email deliverability and helping customers with their email issues.

Send a welcome message

A **well-written welcome message** helps set the tone for a new email relationship and it should remind users why they signed up for your email program. Along with arriving as real-time as possible, it should tell them what types of email they should expect to receive from you and how often they should expect to receive it. Welcome messages should also include unsubscribe and preference center links.

This welcome message from *New York Times Cooking* is a great example of a welcome message that thanks the recipient for signing up, and points them toward some articles they might be interested in. If you look toward the bottom, they even say that this is the first email in a series of 4, so you know exactly what to expect.

> **STOP WORRYING ABOUT GMAIL TABS!**
>
> Gmail uses the promotions tab as a third option outside of "spam" or "inbox." The promotions tab is not a commercial/promotional purgatory where messages are destined to remain floating in obscurity forever. Mail there is checked and interacted with. To learn more, read our blog post, *I Fought Gmail's Tabs, and The Tabs Won*.

`NEW FOR 2019`

Bundled Messages in Gmail Promotions!

Google's been hard at work making the promotions tab less offensive to marketers and more useful to subscribers. Recently, senders have been able to add "annotations" to promotional messages. This allows Gmail to use this important information, in conjunction with their machine learning, to provide recipients "bundles" of the most relevant messages at that time for that subscriber at the top of their promotions tab:

If you're a Gmail user, these bundles are probably already in your promotions tab. Soon, you should be able to see annotations that highlight helpful info such as deal amounts and expiration times in the headers of messages as well. For more info on what's possible and how to utilize this powerful new feature, check out **Google's guide to getting started with annotations**.
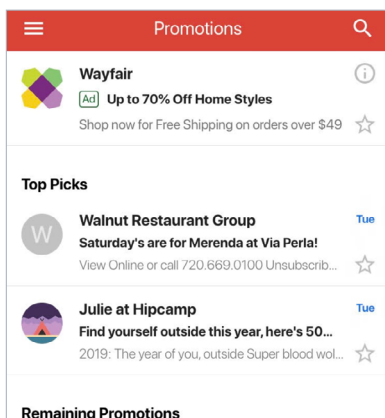
Left: Example of Gmail "bundles"

Right: Welcome message from *New York Times Cooking*

Remove unengaged recipients

Repeatedly emailing recipients who aren't engaging with your emails can be bad for your reputation for several reasons:

- Addresses that don't open or click on your messages are much more likely to mark messages as spam.
- Unengaged addresses may have also been repurposed into spam traps.
- Unengaged recipients can make your traffic look unwanted by lowering your open rates.

Inbox Expert Insight

I probably sound like a broken record on a lot of client calls, but a common theme among clients with deliverability issues is their sunsetting policy... or lack thereof. I've seen companies sending their email campaigns to people who haven't engaged in an email in YEARS!

Not only is this bad practice, it's literally costing them money to store those old, unengaged email addresses. Get rid of them. If you have recipients who haven't opened an email of yours in the last 30 days, it's time to start saying goodbye. Slow down how often you send to them, and remove them if they still haven't opened anything in 3 months.

Emily Thrasher

Inspired by their evolving industries, Emily specialized in digital communications for retail and entertainment brands until she decided to challenge her technical skills and dive into the SaaS world. She came to SendGrid and spent three years on our Technical Support Team where she worked directly with clients and partners, helping them leverage SendGrid to grow their businesses. She transitioned to our Delivery Consultant team in 2018 to continue guiding clients through their email program journeys.

Make it easy to unsubscribe

This may sound counterintuitive, but making your unsubscribe process as easy as possible is a really good idea. If someone doesn't want to receive your messages, and they don't have an easy way to unsubscribe from them, they're most likely going to hit the "report spam" button. Remember, someone who opts out can always opt back in, but a spam complaint can hurt your entire campaign and email deliverability in the future.

Be conscious of your sending frequency!

If you feel like you're doing all the right things with your email program, but you're still landing in the spam folder, it may be a good idea to examine your sending frequency. Between your regular newsletter, special offers, and other announcements, you could be sending your recipients more email than you think. If you're being filtered, even moderately reducing the amount of email your recipients receive from you is almost always a good idea.

THINK ABOUT LIST-UNSUBSCRIBE

List-unsubscribe allows recipients to remove themselves from a mailing list without clicking the unsubscribe link or hitting the spam/junk button. Essentially, if you use list-unsubscribe, Gmail and Microsoft will add an unsubscribe link to the header of your emails, allowing people to unsubscribe without opening the message. You can learn more about them in ***What You Need to Know About List-Unsubscribe***.

ALLOW RECIPIENTS TO "DOWN SUBSCRIBE"!

One of the ways you can use your email preference center to your advantage is by allowing people to "down subscribe." This is when a recipient chooses to not receive messages that are part of a specific campaign, rather than removing themselves from your lists completely. Read our blog ***Email Preference Center Perfection*** to learn more about how to do this!

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

What may be one of the most hot-button topics concerning email in the last decade, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is on the minds of thousands of email senders that do business with people in the European Union.

The GDPR updates and replaces the EU Data Protection Directive (1995) and will apply across the European Union as the de facto standard defining how companies can use customer data. EU citizens will get more say over what organizations do with their data. GDPR came into force in May 2018 across all EU member states.

Who is affected by GDPR?

GDPR applies to all EU businesses, regardless of size or industry, that handles personal data. It also applies to any organization doing business in the EU where EU citizens' data is involved.

Where can I learn more about GDPR?

For more details, you can read the **full text of the GDPR**, or consult the SendGrid resources, below. We should also note that the information provided here does not constitute legal advice. You should seek the advice of a lawyer in cases dealing with domestic or international laws such as the GDPR.

- **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): What Senders Need To Know**
- **GDPR: How New Email Laws Benefit Marketers**
- **GDPR Legislation - What Senders Need to Know**

NEW FOR 2019

Privacy & Compliance in a World of Engagement

GDPR compliance dominated much of the talk in the email world for most of 2018. While a lot of that talk was around how senders can make sure they were compliant as this new law came into enforcement, the importance of user privacy and compliance with international legislation are topics that are not going away any time soon.

From Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation to GDPR, the global privacy trends are moving consistently toward giving the recipient more and more control over the communications they receive and how their data is handled.

In a global marketplace, most senders find it best to make sure that they're compliant with the strictest legislation that impacts their sending. For example, if you're sending any email to recipients in the European Union, it's best to make sure that all of your practices are compliant with GDPR. Compliance, however, isn't only about doing what's required. In fact, compliance with these new privacy laws almost always helps the sender get better results for their marketing efforts. When you set clear expectations about how a recipient's data will be used, and the types of communications they should expect from a sender at the point of address collection, those recipients tend to be much more engaged with the email they receive. Engaged recipient who aren't reporting messages as

spam are exactly what inbox providers look for when deciding which messages to deliver to the inbox, and which ones to block at the gateway.

With this in mind, senders who approach user permissions and legal compliance requirements as an opportunity to optimize their acquisition processes with the recipient's experience in mind will have a much easier time getting their email messages delivered to the inbox.

Summary

Email delivery isn't guaranteed. There's no magic bullet that's going to get all of your email to the inbox. However, we believe that nearly every piece of advice in this guide can be boiled down to a single principal:

> **"**Send the right message, to the right person, at the right time, with the right frequency."

As a sender, you should be attempting to accomplish this with the following process:

- **The right message:** Send the types of messages your recipients are expecting to receive with the content they want.
- **The right person:** Send email to people who have explicitly asked to receive it.
- **The right time:** Send messages when your recipients are expecting to receive it.
- **The right frequency:** Don't send too much email to your recipients or email them too frequently.

In addition to this guide, SendGrid has created numerous resources that we update as often as possible to help you maintain a healthy email program:

- **Documentation**
- **Blog**
- **Best Practice Guides**
- **Webcasts**
- **Customer Success Stories**

About SendGrid

SendGrid helps you focus on your business without the cost and complexity of owning and maintaining an email infrastructure. We help with all technical details (from Sender Authentication to DKIM) and offer world-class deliverability expertise to help your emails reach the inbox. And with a full-featured marketing email service that offers an intuitive workflow, effortless list segmentation, and actionable analytics, all of your email needs are met in one simple platform.

- **Learn More**
- **Read Our Customer Success Stories**
- **Sign Up**