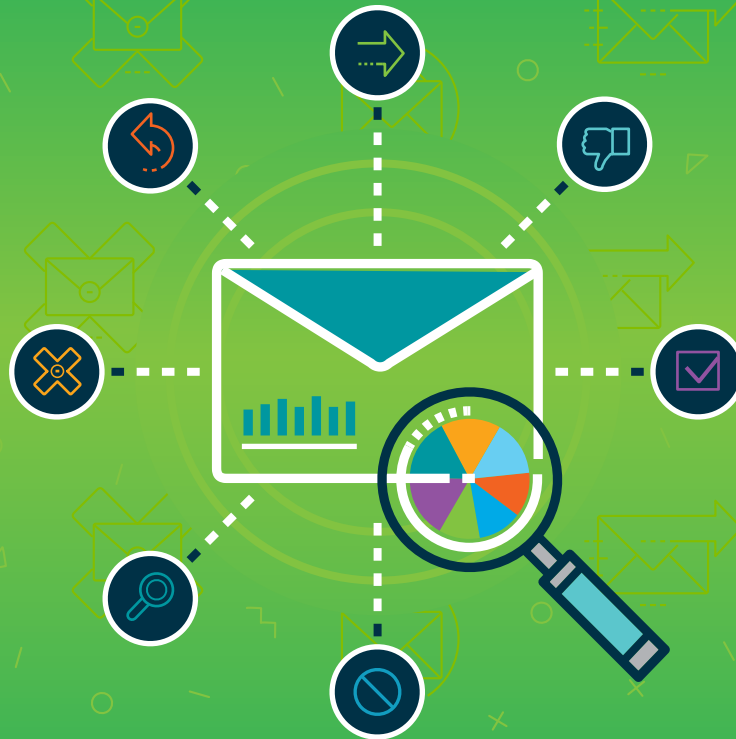


The 2018 Hidden Metrics of Email Deliverability

Industry Benchmarks for 7 Key Metrics



Return Path

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Introduction

Deliverability is not just about following “best practices.” Simply adhering to common standards is not enough to land your messages in the inbox. Today’s marketers need to create an engaging email program, not only to entice subscribers to read their emails—and hopefully convert—but because a lack of read emails could lead to decreased deliverability.

Tracking engagement-based metrics (which measure how subscribers interact with your email program) is a critical step in evaluating the success of any email program. Mailbox providers like Microsoft, Gmail, and Yahoo track the positive and negative interactions subscribers have with your program to determine where to place your incoming messages—so marketers need to pay attention to these measures, as well.

While most marketers track metrics like open rates and click-through rates, mailbox providers actually use a different set of data to measure how their users (your subscribers) are interacting with your messages.

They look at metrics like:

These metrics may not be familiar to you, because they typically aren’t included in reporting provided by your email service provider (ESP). Instead, these metrics are measured by mailbox providers—not ESPs—based on all the email they receive. Mailbox providers then analyze how their users engage with emails from a given sender and factor this engagement into their inbox placement decisions. Until recently, marketers were unable to access these important metrics or use them to improve email performance.

In *The Hidden Metrics of Email Deliverability*, we detail these “missing metrics” that every marketer should be tracking, what they mean, and why they are important. We also provide industry-specific benchmarks so you can evaluate your email program against your competitors.



Messages read:

A positive indicator that subscribers want to receive messages from a particular sender



Messages forwarded:

A positive indicator that a message is desired, and likely personal in nature



Messages replied to:

A positive indicator that the recipient desired the message and that others may want it, too



Messages marked as “not spam:”

Subscribers marking messages in the spam folder as “not spam” is a very strong signal to mailbox providers that email should have been delivered to the inbox



Messages marked as spam:

A negative signal that email is spam and does not belong in the inbox



Messages deleted before reading:

A negative indicator that your message wasn’t relevant or desired

Spam Placement Rate

The spam placement rate is calculated as the number of emails delivered to the spam folder out of total emails sent. Your spam placement rate shows the percentage of your emails that were identified as unsolicited bulk email, or spam, by the receiving email provider's spam filtering system.



Factor: The same elements that block you from the inbox will land you in the spam folder. The reasons can be content based (content triggers that flag emails as spam), reputation based (sending patterns and behaviors), or engagement based (subscriber behaviors).



Significance: Spam placement rate is valuable in understanding how mailbox providers and their spam filters classify your emails. A low spam placement rate signifies you're a trusted sender, and your emails are desired. A sudden increase in spam placement could indicate an issue with a specific campaign, or your entire email program. High spam placement will also impact your other engagement metrics as few subscribers interact with the messages that land in their spam folder. To learn more about what prevents your emails from reaching the inbox, read the [Ultimate Guide to Email Deliverability](#).



Observations: The overall spam placement average for all industries in 2017 was 13.5 percent. Sectors like distribution & manufacturing, banking & finance, insurance, and general merchandise managed to achieve spam placement below 10 percent. The education/nonprofit/government and social & dating industries had the highest average spam placement, both over 20 percent.



Year Over Year Change: Overall spam placement rose by one percentage point over last year. The pet and office supplies industries saw the greatest increases in spam placement this year—4.4 percentage points above 2016 levels. The telecommunications and automotive industries had the largest decrease in spam placement.

Spam Placement Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017 AVG	2016 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	15.6%	16.2%	9.7%	7.4%	13.4%	12.5%	0.9%
Automotive	20.4%	18.7%	12.7%	10.7%	16.7%	23.9%	-7.2%
Banking & Finance	6.4%	6.0%	4.9%	4.5%	5.7%	5.6%	0.1%
Business & Marketing	16.1%	16.7%	15.1%	12.3%	15.3%	17.1%	-1.8%
Computers & Electronics	14.7%	12.2%	9.0%	8.5%	11.6%	10.4%	1.2%
Deals & Rewards	15.3%	17.8%	10.6%	8.4%	14.1%	12.6%	1.5%
Distribution & Manufacturing	2.8%	2.4%	3.9%	5.6%	3.5%	6.0%	-2.5%
Education/NonProfit/Government	27.1%	27.0%	18.6%	15.7%	23.7%	20.3%	3.4%
Flowers & Gifts	20.2%	19.3%	12.2%	11.7%	17.3%	15.0%	2.3%
Food & Drug	15.5%	17.0%	13.2%	11.2%	14.8%	11.5%	3.3%
General Merchandise	7.9%	10.6%	16.1%	6.9%	9.7%	7.5%	2.2%
Health & Beauty	18.9%	19.1%	13.5%	10.3%	16.5%	14.7%	1.8%
Household & Home Improvement	12.4%	13.9%	10.8%	7.4%	11.8%	10.3%	1.5%
Insurance	9.6%	9.8%	4.6%	3.9%	8.2%	10.9%	-2.7%
Jobs	11.8%	10.9%	9.0%	8.8%	10.4%	11.6%	-1.2%
Kids & Babies	12.6%	13.5%	8.5%	5.5%	11.0%	9.3%	1.7%
Media & Entertainment	18.1%	19.4%	14.4%	11.3%	16.5%	15.7%	0.8%
Office Supplies	22.6%	20.3%	10.6%	9.7%	17.3%	12.9%	4.4%
Pets	15.1%	17.3%	13.7%	10.6%	15.3%	10.9%	4.4%
Real Estate	13.9%	12.0%	11.1%	9.6%	11.9%	11.3%	0.6%
Service	8.9%	18.7%	15.5%	11.9%	13.8%	11.6%	2.2%
Social & Dating	22.9%	24.0%	18.3%	12.8%	20.7%	19.6%	1.1%
Sporting Goods	21.6%	20.2%	13.7%	11.4%	18.6%	16.3%	2.3%
Technology/Software/Internet	15.6%	17.7%	11.8%	9.3%	14.2%	13.6%	0.6%
Telecommunication	12.6%	13.0%	12.7%	9.5%	12.1%	21.8%	-9.7%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	13.1%	14.7%	9.2%	7.4%	11.9%	10.8%	1.1%
Travel	11.9%	12.7%	8.3%	6.2%	10.6%	8.4%	2.2%
ALL	15.8%	15.8%	12.1%	8.9%	13.5%	12.5%	1.0%



Read Rate

The read rate is calculated as the number of emails that are marked as “read” out of all emails sent. Read rate is similar to open rate, but it is far more accurate because it accounts for all emails viewed, regardless of image rendering.



Factor: Various factors can have an impact on read rate. The quality of your subject lines and timing typically have the greatest influence, but deliverability issues can also be the culprit behind a sudden decline in emails being read.



Significance: Read rate allows you to distinguish successful campaigns that grab subscribers’ interest, from the failed campaigns that are ignored. Read rate also has an effect on your deliverability, as poor engagement impacts how mailbox providers deliver your email. If your read rates are consistently low, mailbox providers will begin to view your email as unwanted and start delivering your messages to the spam folder.



Observations: Overall, the average read rate in 2017 was 21.5 percent. Earning the highest read rate for the second consecutive year was the distribution & manufacturing sector (57.7 percent). Insurance companies followed in distant second place with a read rate of 39 percent. Business & marketing and education/nonprofit/government marketers struggled to engage subscribers in 2017, with read rates of 15.5 and 15.0 percent, respectively.



Year Over Year Change: The overall average read rate declined by 0.7 percentage points in 2017. Most industries saw a decrease in read rate, with the service and office supplies industries having the largest decreases. The insurance, automotive, and telecommunications industries were the only sectors to see an increase in read rate.



Read Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017 AVG	2016 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	21.2%	21.4%	20.3%	20.0%	20.9%	21.9%	-1.0%
Automotive	22.4%	22.8%	21.1%	20.9%	22.0%	20.9%	1.1%
Banking & Finance	37.3%	36.0%	35.0%	35.0%	36.1%	37.4%	-1.3%
Business & Marketing	15.8%	15.2%	14.0%	14.3%	15.0%	15.1%	-0.1%
Computers & Electronics	26.0%	26.1%	25.7%	24.0%	25.5%	26.8%	-1.3%
Deals & Rewards	17.4%	17.5%	16.9%	17.0%	17.3%	17.9%	-0.6%
Distribution & Manufacturing	61.7%	60.2%	43.4%	58.4%	57.7%	57.7%	0.0%
Education/NonProfit/Government	16.2%	16.0%	14.8%	14.1%	15.5%	16.6%	-1.1%
Flowers & Gifts	21.0%	21.6%	21.2%	19.0%	20.8%	21.6%	-0.8%
Food & Drug	20.8%	20.6%	18.8%	18.2%	20.0%	20.7%	-0.7%
General Merchandise	26.0%	24.6%	21.8%	23.8%	24.5%	26.0%	-1.5%
Health & Beauty	20.9%	21.1%	19.4%	19.3%	20.4%	20.4%	0.0%
Household & Home Improvement	23.8%	23.9%	22.9%	22.0%	23.4%	25.4%	-2.0%
Insurance	38.3%	37.7%	42.2%	41.4%	39.0%	38.3%	0.7%
Jobs	24.2%	24.0%	23.0%	21.9%	23.4%	23.7%	-0.3%
Kids & Babies	19.1%	19.2%	18.3%	17.9%	18.8%	20.7%	-1.9%
Media & Entertainment	19.7%	19.4%	17.0%	16.9%	18.6%	18.7%	-0.1%
Office Supplies	21.5%	21.8%	21.3%	20.3%	21.3%	24.3%	-3.0%
Pets	22.1%	21.5%	21.0%	20.1%	21.5%	22.4%	-0.9%
Real Estate	28.2%	29.0%	27.6%	26.7%	28.1%	30.5%	-2.4%
Service	31.8%	27.3%	26.1%	26.5%	28.3%	31.9%	-3.6%
Social & Dating	17.2%	16.9%	15.9%	15.6%	16.6%	16.7%	-0.1%
Sporting Goods	21.9%	21.9%	22.3%	20.8%	21.8%	23.1%	-1.3%
Technology/Software/Internet	22.5%	21.0%	20.0%	19.4%	21.0%	21.0%	0.0%
Telecommunication	33.9%	32.7%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	31.5%	1.8%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	19.8%	20.2%	18.3%	18.1%	19.4%	19.9%	-0.5%
Travel	24.7%	25.0%	25.2%	23.2%	24.5%	25.5%	-1.0%
ALL	22.2%	21.9%	20.7%	20.4%	21.5%	22.2%	-0.7%



Deleted Before Reading Rate

Another term for this would be the “ignore rate.” As the name indicates, the deleted before reading rate measures how often a recipient deletes email without reading it, calculated as the total number of unread emails deleted out of total emails sent.



Factor: An unread email sent to the trash may signal a disinterested subscriber. A high deleted before reading rate is a sign of a failed campaign. But a consistently high deleted without reading rate can be an indication of permission issues or a lack of satisfaction with your overall email marketing program.



Significance: From a mailbox provider’s perspective, the read rate is an important metric indicating how desirable subscribers find your messages which can impact your inbox deliverability. A high deleted before reading rate, therefore, indicates disinterest in your messages, and can result in future emails being filtered to the spam folder.































Observations: In 2017, the average deleted before reading rate for all industries was 11.9 percent. To go along with its high read rate, the distribution & manufacturing sector saw the lowest deleted before reading rate of any industry studied (5.9 percent). Social & dating companies, which had one of the lowest read rates, saw the second lowest deleted before reading rate (9.0 percent). The household & home improvement, office supplies, pets, and flowers & gifts industries remained the most actively ignored industries for the second consecutive year, each with deleted without reading rates between 14 and 15 percent.



Year Over Year Change: Subscribers ignored messages at a slightly lower rate in 2017 with a decrease of 0.6 percentage points in overall deleted before reading rate. The majority of industries saw a decline in deleted without reading, with the pet industry achieving the largest decrease at 2.1 percentage points. Telecommunications, business & marketing, social & dating, and technology/software/internet were the only industries with a higher delete before reading rate in 2017 than the previous year.

Deleted Before Reading Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017 AVG	2016 AVG	YOY CHANGE
 Apparel & Accessories	13.3%	12.3%	11.6%	12.4%	12.6%	13.5%	-0.9%
 Automotive	11.1%	11.0%	10.3%	10.9%	10.9%	11.4%	-0.5%
 Banking & Finance	10.9%	10.7%	9.7%	10.2%	10.5%	10.8%	-0.3%
 Business & Marketing	11.7%	11.5%	9.8%	10.5%	11.1%	10.6%	0.5%
 Computers & Electronics	12.7%	12.4%	11.0%	11.5%	12.1%	13.2%	-1.1%
 Deals & Rewards	13.1%	11.7%	10.7%	11.4%	12.0%	13.1%	-1.1%
 Distribution & Manufacturing	6.7%	6.2%	4.2%	5.8%	5.9%	6.8%	-0.9%
 Education/NonProfit/Government	10.6%	10.4%	9.4%	10.1%	10.3%	10.5%	-0.2%
 Flowers & Gifts	14.7%	13.9%	13.5%	13.7%	14.1%	15.7%	-1.6%
 Food & Drug	13.7%	12.8%	11.6%	12.6%	12.9%	14.0%	-1.1%
 General Merchandise	13.2%	12.3%	10.5%	11.9%	12.3%	13.3%	-1.0%
 Health & Beauty	12.5%	11.7%	11.1%	11.8%	12.0%	13.0%	-1.0%
 Household & Home Improvement	15.6%	14.4%	13.7%	14.6%	14.8%	15.9%	-1.1%
 Insurance	9.6%	9.3%	8.8%	9.5%	9.4%	9.6%	-0.2%
 Jobs	11.9%	11.5%	10.2%	10.7%	11.2%	11.2%	0.0%
 Kids & Babies	14.4%	12.9%	12.0%	13.2%	13.4%	15.0%	-1.6%
 Media & Entertainment	12.0%	11.4%	9.9%	10.8%	11.2%	11.3%	-0.1%
 Office Supplies	14.3%	13.7%	14.6%	14.6%	14.2%	15.6%	-1.4%
 Pets	15.2%	13.6%	13.2%	14.0%	14.2%	16.3%	-2.1%
 Real Estate	11.3%	10.9%	11.2%	11.5%	11.2%	11.9%	-0.7%
 Service	10.5%	9.5%	8.9%	9.6%	9.7%	10.1%	-0.4%
 Social & Dating	9.4%	9.1%	8.1%	8.9%	9.0%	8.7%	0.3%
 Sporting Goods	13.3%	12.7%	13.8%	14.1%	13.3%	14.1%	-0.8%
 Technology/Software/Internet	9.6%	9.4%	8.3%	8.7%	9.1%	8.9%	0.2%
 Telecommunication	10.1%	9.8%	8.2%	9.1%	9.5%	8.5%	1.0%
 Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	13.4%	12.8%	11.3%	12.1%	12.6%	13.0%	-0.4%
 Travel	14.0%	13.2%	12.2%	13.3%	13.4%	14.3%	-0.9%
 ALL	12.7%	11.9%	10.7%	11.6%	11.9%	12.5%	-0.6%



Reply Rate

The reply rate is calculated as the number of replies to your email out of the total of email sent.



Factor: A high reply rate could mean one of two things: an engaged subscriber list or subscribers trying to unsubscribe. Truthfully, there's isn't a target "reply rate" that your email marketing program should try to achieve. Having a low—or no—reply rate won't necessarily hurt your deliverability, but having a high reply rate can help.



Significance: A reply to an email message is a very strong positive signal of engagement showing mailbox providers that a message was likely desired, and improves the sender's chance of being delivered to the inbox for any future campaigns sent to a particular subscriber. We don't suggest email marketers try anything gimmicky to increase their reply rate. Instead switch from your "noreply@" from: address to one that's managed.



Observations: Reply rates for commercial emails are unsurprisingly quite low—often less than one response for every thousand emails sent. While the overall average reply rate for this study was just 0.11 percent, the telecommunications (2.16 percent) and insurance (1.93 percent) sectors achieved remarkably high reply rates in 2017. Companies in the toys/hobbies/crafts, deals & rewards, kids & babies, and social & dating industries had a four-way tie for lowest reply rates at 0.02 percent.



Year Over Year Change: The overall reply rate in 2017 decreased by 0.02 percentage points. The largest decline came from the service and real estate industries (-0.19 and -0.14 percentage points, respectively.) Telecommunications and office supplies were the only industries to see an increase in replies from the previous year.



Reply Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017 AVG	2016 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	0.06%	0.05%	0.07%	0.05%	0.05%	0.07%	-0.02%
Automotive	0.15%	0.14%	0.15%	0.13%	0.14%	0.14%	0.00%
Banking & Finance	0.28%	0.25%	0.32%	0.25%	0.27%	0.34%	-0.07%
Business & Marketing	0.04%	0.03%	0.05%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.00%
Computers & Electronics	0.17%	0.16%	0.19%	0.14%	0.16%	0.18%	-0.02%
Deals & Rewards	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.00%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.53%	0.50%	0.51%	0.49%	0.51%	0.51%	0.00%
Education/NonProfit/Government	0.05%	0.05%	0.06%	0.04%	0.05%	0.05%	0.00%
Flowers & Gifts	0.09%	0.09%	0.12%	0.07%	0.09%	0.10%	-0.01%
Food & Drug	0.06%	0.04%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.07%	-0.02%
General Merchandise	0.12%	0.11%	0.10%	0.10%	0.11%	0.12%	-0.01%
Health & Beauty	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.05%	0.00%
Household & Home Improvement	0.09%	0.09%	0.11%	0.09%	0.09%	0.10%	-0.01%
Insurance	1.60%	1.73%	3.00%	2.42%	1.93%	1.97%	-0.04%
Jobs	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.04%	0.04%	0.05%	-0.01%
Kids & Babies	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.03%	-0.01%
Media & Entertainment	0.07%	0.05%	0.06%	0.05%	0.06%	0.07%	-0.01%
Office Supplies	0.14%	0.12%	0.19%	0.14%	0.14%	0.18%	0.04%
Pets	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	0.00%
Real Estate	0.28%	0.27%	0.41%	0.36%	0.31%	0.45%	-0.14%
Service	0.74%	0.64%	0.73%	0.64%	0.68%	0.87%	-0.19%
Social & Dating	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.03%	-0.01%
Sporting Goods	0.06%	0.07%	0.10%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.00%
Technology/Software/Internet	0.29%	0.29%	0.35%	0.32%	0.31%	0.31%	0.00%
Telecommunication	2.00%	1.94%	2.91%	2.24%	2.16%	2.10%	0.06%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.00%
Travel	0.21%	0.21%	0.28%	0.20%	0.22%	0.23%	-0.01%
ALL	0.11%	0.10%	0.14%	0.11%	0.11%	0.13%	-0.02%

Forward Rate

The forward rate is calculated as the number of your emails that are forwarded on to others out of total emails sent.



Factor: Forwards are generated when subscribers find an email interesting enough that they want to pass it on to others.



Significance: A high forward rate shows strong subscriber engagement and indicates the content you're sending is relevant to not only your subscribers, but also their networks.































Observations: Similar to replies, forwards are quite uncommon for commercial emails with an overall average of 0.02 percent in 2017. Insurance companies had the highest forward rate (0.16 percent), followed closely by distribution & manufacturing and telecommunications (0.15 percent each). The only industries that failed to have any of their emails forwarded were deals & rewards and social & dating, which saw a zero percent forward rate in 2017.



Year Over Year Change: The overall average forward rate declined slightly in 2017. Across all industries, the forward rate was either flat or lower than 2016 levels, with real estate and distribution & manufacturing industries seeing the largest decrease.

Forward Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017 AVG	2016 AVG	YOY CHANGE
 Apparel & Accessories	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
 Automotive	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.03%	-0.01%
 Banking & Finance	0.05%	0.05%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%	0.06%	-0.01%
 Business & Marketing	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
 Computers & Electronics	0.03%	0.03%	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	0.04%	-0.01%
 Deals & Rewards	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.01%	-0.01%
 Distribution & Manufacturing	0.16%	0.17%	0.13%	0.13%	0.15%	0.18%	-0.03%
 Education/NonProfit/Government	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
 Flowers & Gifts	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	-0.01%
 Food & Drug	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.02%	-0.01%
 General Merchandise	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.04%	-0.01%
 Health & Beauty	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
 Household & Home Improvement	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.00%
 Insurance	0.14%	0.15%	0.24%	0.19%	0.16%	0.18%	-0.02%
 Jobs	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
 Kids & Babies	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	-0.01%
 Media & Entertainment	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	-0.01%
 Office Supplies	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.04%	-0.02%
 Pets	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
 Real Estate	0.05%	0.05%	0.07%	0.06%	0.06%	0.09%	-0.03%
 Service	0.08%	0.08%	0.07%	0.07%	0.08%	0.09%	-0.01%
 Social & Dating	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.01%	-0.01%
 Sporting Goods	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	-0.01%
 Technology/Software/Internet	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.00%
 Telecommunication	0.14%	0.14%	0.18%	0.15%	0.15%	0.16%	-0.02%
 Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
 Travel	0.07%	0.07%	0.09%	0.06%	0.07%	0.09%	-0.02%
 ALL	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.02%	0.03%	-0.01%

Complaint Rate

The complaint rate is the rate at which subscribers report your messages as spam. It is calculated as the number of “report spam/junk” complaints out of emails sent.



Factor: There are various reasons why a subscriber would mark your messages as spam throughout the different stages of an email relationship. For more information about why complaints occur, download the [Marketer's Guide to Subscriber Complaints](#).



Significance: Spam complaints are a direct signal from subscribers to mailbox providers that your content is unwanted. As such, mailbox providers heavily factor spam complaints into their filtering decisions.































Observations: The average complaint rate for all sectors was 0.17 percent in 2017, but complaints varied significantly across industries. Real estate companies achieved the lowest complaint rate at 0.05 percent, followed by general merchandise and distribution & manufacturing at 0.08 percent. On the other end of the spectrum, the office supplies industry managed to spark quite a few complaints from its subscribers with an average complaint rate of 0.76 percent.



Year Over Year Change: Total complaints declined this year, from 0.19 percent in 2016 to 0.17 percent in 2017. However, just like the 2017 complaint rate averages, the year over year changes varied significantly by industry. The health & beauty and toys/hobbies/crafts saw the greatest decrease in complaints. In addition to its high average complaint rate, the office supplies industry also saw the largest year over year increase in complaints—0.76 percent in 2017 vs 0.38 percent in 2016.

Complaint Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017 AVG	2016 AVG	YOY CHANGE
 Apparel & Accessories	0.09%	0.09%	0.24%	0.23%	0.14%	0.14%	0.00%
 Automotive	0.17%	0.16%	0.47%	0.43%	0.27%	0.24%	0.03%
 Banking & Finance	0.06%	0.07%	0.14%	0.15%	0.09%	0.11%	-0.02%
 Business & Marketing	0.16%	0.34%	0.66%	0.72%	0.42%	0.32%	0.10%
 Computers & Electronics	0.08%	0.09%	0.16%	0.15%	0.11%	0.14%	-0.03%
 Deals & Rewards	0.04%	0.07%	0.21%	0.40%	0.15%	0.10%	0.05%
 Distribution & Manufacturing	0.04%	0.04%	0.10%	0.18%	0.08%	0.19%	-0.11%
 Education/NonProfit/Government	0.19%	0.11%	0.27%	0.47%	0.23%	0.30%	-0.07%
 Flowers & Gifts	0.44%	0.37%	0.64%	0.36%	0.42%	0.41%	0.01%
 Food & Drug	0.08%	0.14%	0.46%	0.30%	0.19%	0.27%	-0.08%
 General Merchandise	0.05%	0.07%	0.10%	0.11%	0.08%	0.08%	0.00%
 Health & Beauty	0.13%	0.17%	0.48%	0.36%	0.23%	0.40%	-0.17%
 Household & Home Improvement	0.07%	0.10%	0.21%	0.20%	0.12%	0.12%	0.00%
 Insurance	0.16%	0.18%	0.23%	0.22%	0.18%	0.15%	0.03%
 Jobs	0.12%	0.25%	0.53%	0.63%	0.34%	0.27%	0.07%
 Kids & Babies	0.10%	0.10%	0.28%	0.35%	0.17%	0.12%	0.05%
 Media & Entertainment	0.17%	0.14%	0.37%	0.42%	0.24%	0.37%	-0.13%
 Office Supplies	0.43%	0.22%	1.31%	1.70%	0.76%	0.38%	0.38%
 Pets	0.04%	0.04%	0.28%	0.31%	0.10%	0.07%	0.03%
 Real Estate	0.04%	0.04%	0.07%	0.08%	0.05%	0.07%	-0.02%
 Service	0.08%	0.08%	0.20%	0.27%	0.14%	0.13%	0.01%
 Social & Dating	0.13%	0.10%	0.19%	0.25%	0.15%	0.19%	-0.04%
 Sporting Goods	0.19%	0.23%	0.65%	0.59%	0.31%	0.31%	0.00%
 Technology/Software/Internet	0.12%	0.11%	0.18%	0.24%	0.15%	0.17%	-0.02%
 Telecommunication	0.24%	0.24%	0.25%	0.30%	0.25%	0.22%	0.03%
 Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	0.07%	0.07%	0.17%	0.16%	0.10%	0.24%	-0.14%
 Travel	0.08%	0.08%	0.14%	0.13%	0.10%	0.10%	0.00%
 ALL	0.10%	0.11%	0.28%	0.32%	0.17%	0.19%	-0.02%



“This is Not Spam” Rate

The “this is not spam” rate is calculated as the number of times a subscriber marks your message “this is not spam” or “not junk” out of the number of emails delivered to the spam folder. Another term for this would be the rescue rate as these messages are rescued from the spam folder by subscribers.



Factor: There are a number of reasons for a low “this is not spam” rate. Only email that lands in the spam folder can generate a “this not spam” vote; therefore, a low “this is not spam” rate may not be a problem at all and could indicate that few of your emails are being sent to the spam folder. But if you have a high percentage of mail being sent to spam and your “this is not spam” rate is still low, the causes could be a lack of permission, lack of awareness, or simply a lack of interest from your subscribers.



Significance: The “this is not spam” metric is a strong and positive indicator to mailbox providers that your emails are desired and may indicate a false positive with the spam filter. A “this is not spam” selection shows mailbox providers that subscribers are actively searching for your messages, enough to go into the spam folder and “rescue” them.



Observations: The overall “this is not spam” rate for 2017 was 1.77 percent. The general merchandise sector had the highest average “this is not spam” rate (3.20 percent), followed by flowers & gifts (2.61 percent). The service industry had the lowest “this is not spam” rate, with only 0.53 percent of mail being retrieved from the spam folder.



Year Over Year Change: All industries saw an increase in “this is not spam” rates in 2017 with an overall average increase of 0.73 percentage points. In addition to the highest “this is not spam” rates for the year, the general merchandise and flowers & gifts segments also saw the greatest increase in this metric.



“This is Not Spam” Rate by Quarter

INDUSTRY	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017 AVG	2016 AVG	YOY CHANGE
Apparel & Accessories	1.76%	1.64%	1.75%	2.71%	1.91%	1.17%	0.74%
Automotive	1.38%	1.31%	1.29%	1.91%	1.46%	0.82%	0.64%
Banking & Finance	0.87%	0.79%	0.87%	1.10%	0.89%	0.53%	0.36%
Business & Marketing	1.33%	1.05%	1.31%	1.65%	1.32%	0.82%	0.50%
Computers & Electronics	1.74%	1.08%	1.65%	3.98%	2.09%	1.13%	0.96%
Deals & Rewards	1.46%	1.20%	1.57%	1.88%	1.47%	1.12%	0.35%
Distribution & Manufacturing	0.88%	0.54%	0.70%	1.13%	0.81%	0.58%	0.23%
Education/NonProfit/Government	2.35%	1.80%	2.00%	2.60%	2.19%	1.53%	0.66%
Flowers & Gifts	2.75%	2.24%	2.31%	3.14%	2.61%	1.53%	1.08%
Food & Drug	1.29%	1.19%	1.49%	1.88%	1.40%	0.78%	0.62%
General Merchandise	1.18%	2.65%	10.32%	2.57%	3.20%	0.92%	2.28%
Health & Beauty	2.08%	2.31%	2.48%	3.55%	2.52%	1.72%	0.80%
Household & Home Improvement	1.46%	1.44%	1.43%	1.85%	1.53%	0.97%	0.56%
Insurance	1.07%	0.75%	0.65%	0.90%	0.88%	0.71%	0.17%
Jobs	1.01%	0.69%	0.77%	0.98%	0.87%	0.63%	0.24%
Kids & Babies	1.30%	0.87%	1.11%	1.40%	1.15%	0.96%	0.19%
Media & Entertainment	1.71%	1.42%	1.32%	1.79%	1.58%	1.07%	0.51%
Office Supplies	2.15%	2.11%	2.25%	2.61%	2.26%	1.40%	0.86%
Pets	1.85%	1.64%	2.00%	3.12%	1.94%	1.31%	0.63%
Real Estate	0.68%	0.60%	0.61%	0.96%	0.70%	0.47%	0.23%
Service	0.60%	0.43%	0.46%	0.63%	0.53%	0.42%	0.11%
Social & Dating	1.74%	1.35%	1.38%	1.60%	1.53%	1.12%	0.41%
Sporting Goods	2.99%	1.52%	2.19%	3.36%	2.52%	1.89%	0.63%
Technology/Software/Internet	1.39%	1.21%	1.10%	1.35%	1.28%	0.90%	0.38%
Telecommunication	1.86%	1.66%	1.19%	1.49%	1.62%	0.80%	0.82%
Toys/Hobbies/Crafts	1.53%	1.47%	1.52%	2.65%	1.76%	1.06%	0.70%
Travel	1.63%	1.38%	1.62%	2.34%	1.69%	1.09%	0.60%
ALL	1.52%	1.49%	2.55%	2.12%	1.77%	1.04%	0.73%



Key Takeaways

This year's engagement metrics reflect a mixed bag for marketers. Spam placement continues to rise, but this is somewhat offset by the fact that consumers are more likely than ever to "rescue" wanted mail from the spam folder. Subscribers are reading email at a slightly lower rate than last year, but mail that is "deleted before reading" is also slightly less common than a year ago.

Overall, marketers still have work to do to ensure that subscribers are engaging with their email program, as this is a critical factor in getting messages delivered to the inbox. The fact is, mailbox providers care about engagement—and marketers should, too.

Following are a few ideas to help drive positive engagement and reduce negative engagement.



Maintain a clean list

One simple way to increase subscriber engagement is to prevent unengaged subscribers from deflating your performance metrics.

Keep a close eye on engagement, and remove unengaged subscribers from your list in a timely manner. (We normally recommend doing this after 60 days of inactivity.) Using an [email validation service](#) can also help to ensure that invalid email addresses don't damage the quality of your list.



Find creative inspiration

Subscribers receive hundreds of marketing messages every month.

How do you keep your campaigns fresh and engaging? One way is to draw creative inspiration from best-in-class campaigns. Return

Path's [Inbox Insight tool](#) gives marketers access to millions of real life emails—sortable by subject line, industry, and campaign type—along with performance metrics for each campaign.



Test, test, test

Of course, what works for one brand may not work for everyone. That's why we recommend thoroughly testing your email campaigns, to get a better understanding of what works—and what doesn't—for your unique audience. Our feature rich [Multivariate Testing solution](#) streamlines the testing process and provides an automated way to test multiple combinations of creative elements, simultaneously.



Methodology

Return Path conducted this study using global consumer data consisting of over 17,000 commercial senders, 2 million consumer panelists, and over 5.5 billion commercial email messages sent to Microsoft, Gmail, Yahoo, and AOL users between January 1, 2017, and December 31, 2017.

Consumer data is Information captured from monitored email accounts controlled by real subscribers to sample user initiated and engagement based filtering decisions by mailbox providers. Consumer data can uncover behavior based factors and thresholds that influence inbox placement at large mailbox providers, and can't be identified by non-interactive seeds.



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