

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO

OPTIMIZING EMAIL MARKETING FOR CONVERSIONS



How to Grow Your
Email List, Increase
Engagement
& Ensure
Deliverability

A publication of
HubSpot



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INTRODUCTORY

Introductory content is for marketers who are new to the subject. This content typically includes step-by-step instructions on how to get started with this aspect of inbound marketing and learn its fundamentals. After reading it, you will be able to execute basic marketing tactics related to the topic.

INTERMEDIATE ◀..... *This ebook!*

Intermediate content is for marketers who are familiar with the subject but have only basic experience in executing strategies and tactics on the topic. This content typically covers the fundamentals and moves on to reveal more complex functions and examples. After reading it, you will feel comfortable leading projects with this aspect of inbound marketing.

ADVANCED

Advanced content is for marketers who are, or want to be, experts on the subject. In it, we walk you through advanced features of this aspect of inbound marketing and help you develop complete mastery of the subject. After reading it, you will feel ready not only to execute strategies and tactics, but also to teach others how to be successful.

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OPTIMIZING EMAIL MARKETING FOR CONVERSIONS

By Meghan Keaney Anderson

As marketing manager for inbound marketing company HubSpot, Meghan is specializing in product definition and promotion. She came to HubSpot through the company's 2011 acquisition of Performable, a marketing automation and analytics start-up.

At Performable, Meghan championed the marketing efforts, working to build the Performable brand and online presence.

Meghan also teaches writing for mass communication as an adjunct professor at Boston University's College of Communication.



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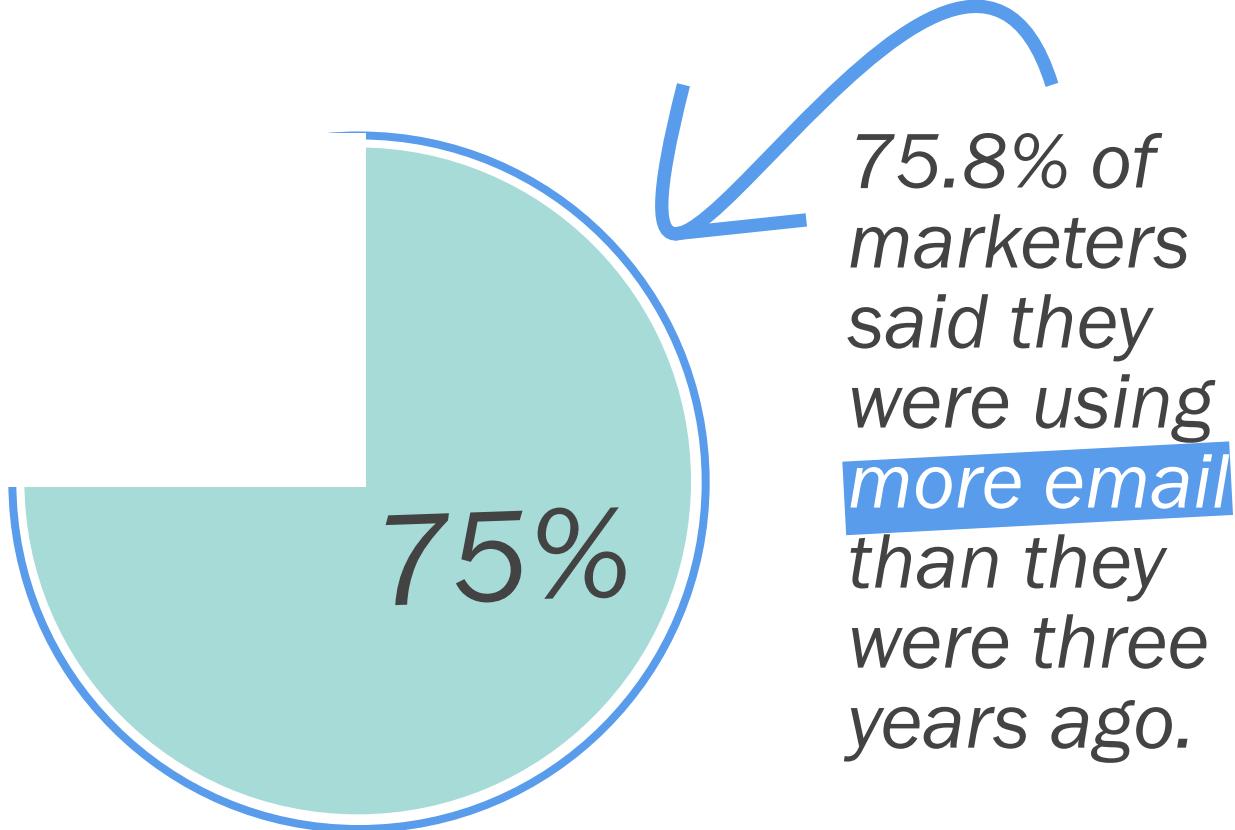
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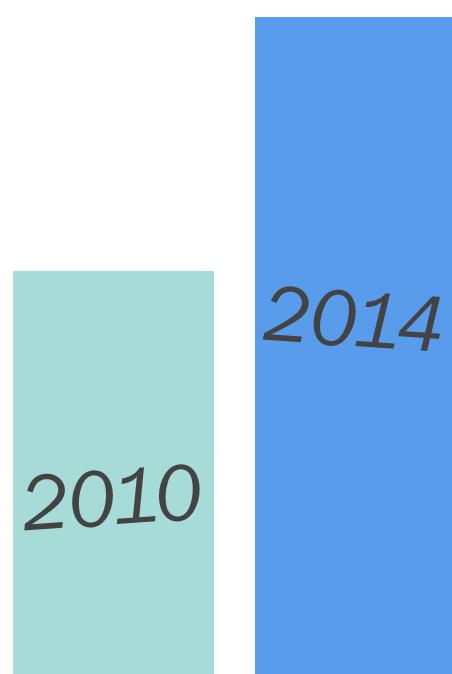
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As a marketing channel, email isn't going anywhere. In [a recent DMA study](#) 75.8% of marketers said they are using more email than they were three years ago. In fact, according to [Forrester Research](#), investment in email marketing is forecasted to grow from \$1.3 billion in 2010 to \$2 billion in 2014.

The **investment** in email to increase.



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*As investments in
the channel grow,
how will email fit in
your larger inbound
marketing strategy?*



As investments in the channel grow, how will email fit in your larger inbound marketing strategy? Will it be an isolated tool or part of an integrated experience? The following pages will walk through the reasons and methods for incorporating email more closely into your inbound marketing strategy.

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CHAPTER 1

HOW TO GROW YOUR EMAIL LIST



“Email marketing is only as good as the quality of your recipient list.”

Email marketing is only as good as the quality of your recipient list. Each year there is a natural decay that happens in email marketing lists that reduces the effectiveness of email as an influencer. People leave their companies, get married and change their names – life happens. In B2B marketing, on average lists only retain 75% of their members after one year due to turnover at companies and other factors. As a result, marketing lists have a tendency to expire at a rate of about 25% a year.

If you aren't replenishing your list with new, interested prospects each year, your email marketing will likely bottom out. So how do you keep your list full in the face of inevitable decay? There are two ways marketers tend to grow their email lists. The bad way and the good way.

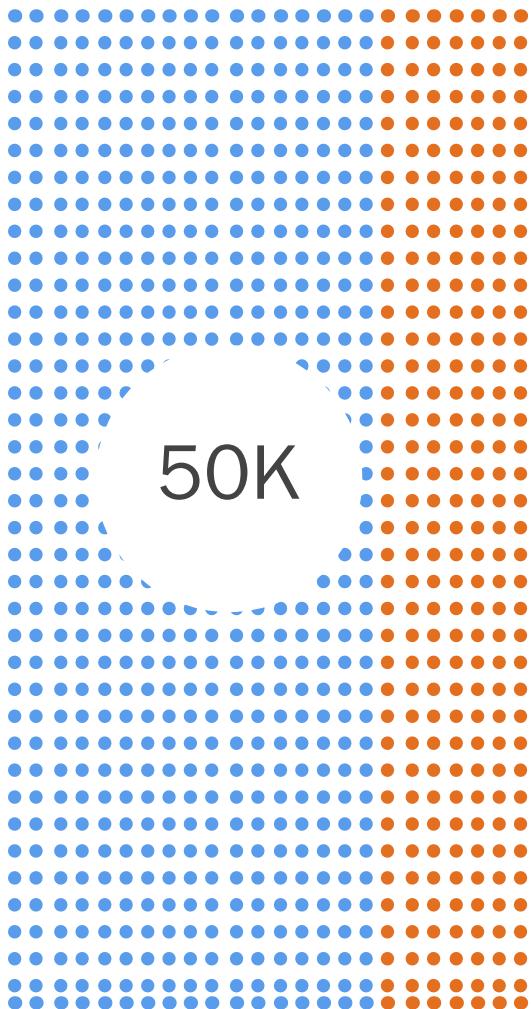
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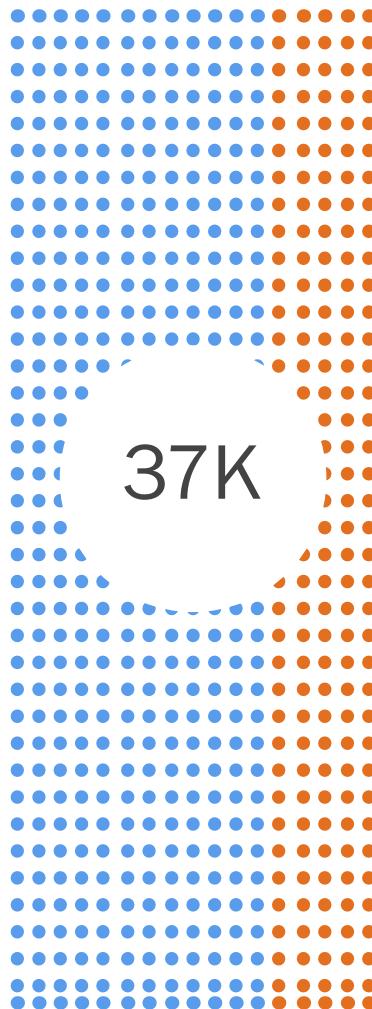


YOUR LIST EXPIRES AT ~25% / YEAR

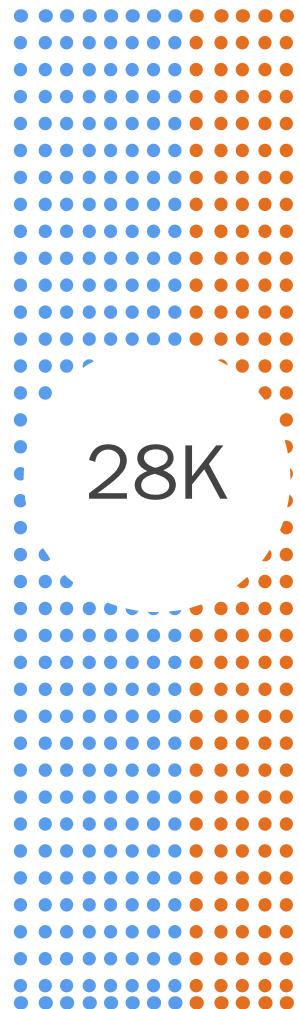
YEAR 1



YEAR 2



YEAR 3



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GROWING YOUR EMAIL LIST THE BAD WAY

Many marketers try to increase their reach by buying third-party email lists. We advise you against doing that. Buying a third-party list, even from a reputable vendor, comes with a number of risks.

YOU CAN ALIENATE RECIPIENTS

If people haven't expressly signed up to receive emails from you, they aren't going to be very happy to get them. This is the antithesis to [inbound marketing](#), which is based on attracting quality visitors and leads by providing value rather than interrupting them with irrelevant ads or marketing messages.

YOU COULD GET BLACKLISTED OR MARKED FOR SPAM

We'll cover this more in the next section, but one of the biggest reasons not to buy an email list is that it can negatively affect your deliverability rate.

BOUGHT RECIPIENTS AREN'T AS ENGAGED AS OPT-IN RECIPIENTS

Emails sent to opt-in recipients will always have a higher click-through rate than purchased lists, and the leads generated from those lists will typically be of higher quality.



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IT UNDERMINES YOUR INBOUND MARKETING STRATEGY

Inbound marketing is about attracting leads to your website through useful, valuable content rather than harassing prospective customers with ads or direct mail. If you use a purchased list as a separate method you're undercutting the work that has gone into building your company's reputation as a helpful inbound marketer.

WHAT IS INBOUND MARKETING?

It's marketing with a magnet, not a sledgehammer — marketing based on content that attracts and nurtures prospects, not spam that interrupts them. HubSpot prepares you for all three stages of inbound marketing.

[SEE HUBSPOT IN ACTION](#)



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GROWING YOUR EMAIL LIST THE GOOD WAY

Inbound marketing is a strategy that focuses on building useful, interesting content to attract subscribers and leads. The basic idea is to provide value, make it relevant, and the subscribers will come.



Tactically speaking, the best way to start generating leads through inbound marketing is to launch a blog and start creating good, search-friendly, content.

DON'T HIDE YOUR SUBSCRIBE BOX

If you're creating good inbound content, your blog and website will become a magnet for potential subscribers. Make sure that those readers can easily find your subscribe box. It's worth A/B testing the placement of the subscriber box on your site. You can start by placing an email submission field in the top of your blog and remove any other distractions.

CONSIDER PARTNERSHIPS

Co-host a webinar or another marketing event with a company that is in a related but non-competitive space. Make the webinar informative and encourage participants to opt-in to hear more from each company. Capitalizing on each company's existing reach can help you grow your number of engaged subscribers.

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HOW TO REDUCE UNSUBSCRIBES



An important role in increasing your email subscribers is maintaining the number of recipients you already have. Here are a few tips on how to reduce your unsubscribe rate:

..... OPTIMIZE THE UNSUBSCRIBE PROCESS

The top two reasons for U.S. email users to unsubscribe from a business or non-profit email subscription are too many emails (69%) followed by content that is no longer relevant (56%) ([Chadwick Martin Bailey](#)).

When someone clicks to unsubscribe from your communication, give them the option to sign up for less frequent emails or emails that are only on a given topic (e.g., only major announcements). You can also present the former subscriber with alternative channels by suggesting following the company's social media sites on the unsubscribe page.

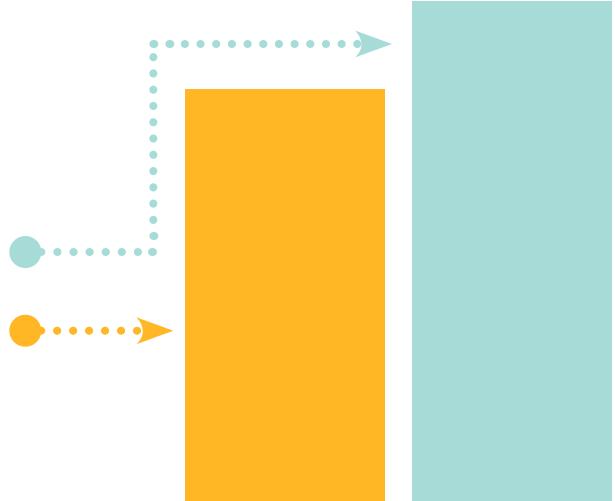
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TOP REASONS FOR UNSUBSCRIBING

- *too many emails*
- *irrelevant content*



CONDUCT A FREQUENCY STUDY

Every audience is different. The best way to determine how often to send emails to your subscribers is to test out a hypothesis. If possible, survey your recipients about how often they'd like to hear from you. Test that frequency pattern against a second one and analyze which results in more conversions and fewer unsubscribes. According to [Marketing Sherpa](#), the average unsubscribe rate for more than 80% of the companies they surveyed was less than three percent.

FOCUS ON TARGETING

According to a [MarketingSherpa study](#), four out of ten subscribers reported that they've marked emails as spam simply because the communication was irrelevant. On the flip side, MarketingSherpa also reports that emails that have been tailored to specific audiences through segmentation get 50% more clicks than their counterparts. Use the data you have about your audience to [segment your emails based on subscriber behavior and interests](#).

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CHAPTER 2

HOW TO INTEGRATE EMAIL INTO INBOUND MARKETING



“ *Email is most powerful when it’s integrated with the rest of your marketing.* ”

.....

Email is most powerful when it’s integrated with the rest of your marketing. You have a lot of marketing channels and assets - make sure you use them together for best results!

In this section we will review some of the different ways you can achieve integration between email and other marketing assets, such as search, social media, mobile and analytics.

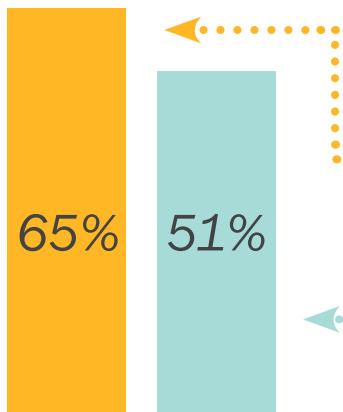
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EMAIL & SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION

Study after study shows that email strategies that integrate social media into their sends lead to better results. 65% of the top 20% of B2B marketers in social media lead generation integrate email with social media, compared to the industry average of 51% ([Aberdeen Research](#)).



- Top B2B marketers in social media lead generation **INTEGRATE** social & email
- Industry average

Integrating social media into your email strategy is easier than you might think. Here are some tactics to help you get started:

..... ADD SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING BUTTONS TO YOUR EMAILS

Adding social media sharing and follow buttons to your emails will extend the reach of your email sends beyond the recipients in your database, expanding the visibility of your content and brand.

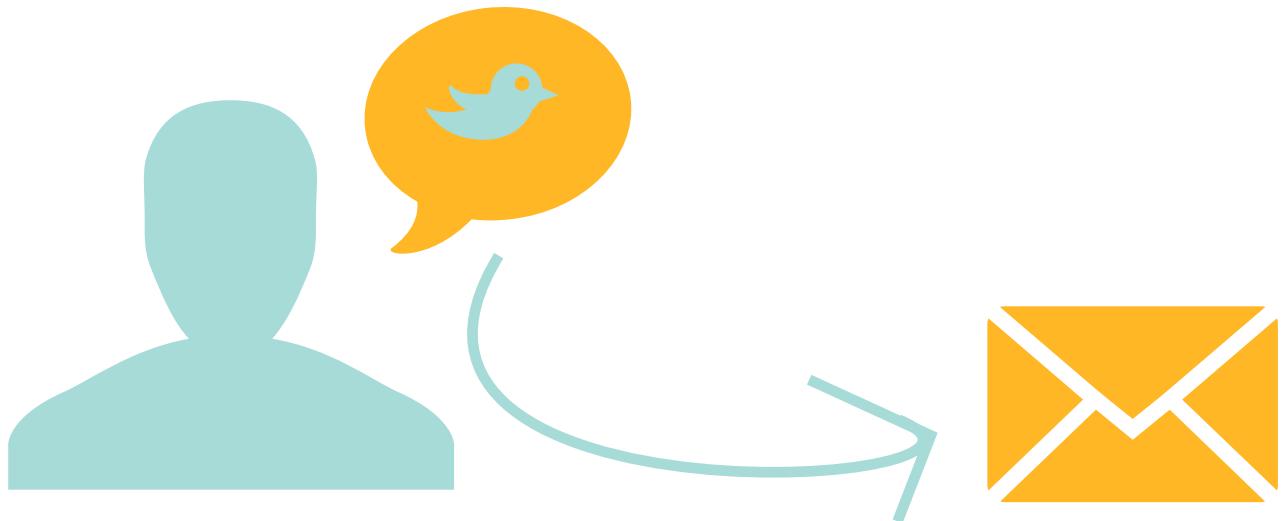
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EMAIL BASED ON SOCIAL MEDIA INSIGHTS

Send targeted emails to subscribers who have mentioned you on social media. Using [integrated marketing analytics, like HubSpot](#), you should be able to see a list of email subscribers and leads who have mentioned your company on Twitter. In addition to responding to those highly engaged leads on social media, you might also send them a follow-up email with targeted information.



GROW YOUR EMAIL LIST THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Leverage your social media presence to give followers a reason to subscribe to your email list. For example, consider placing a [call-to-action](#) on your Facebook page. Make sure you determine clear benefits to email subscription so that you can turn your social media followers into subscribers.

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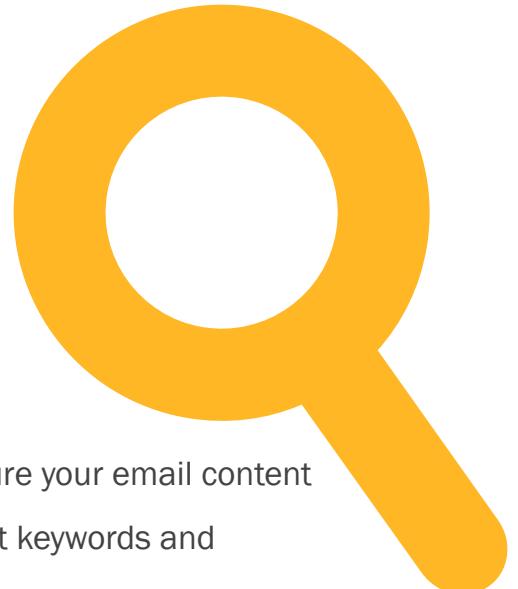




EMAIL & SEARCH INTEGRATION

Emails can help you optimize for search. Many email tools, like HubSpot, enable you to create and host an HTML version of your email for people who are having trouble viewing the email in their inbox. Not only is that version good for usability, it also helps you with SEO.

Knowing that an online archive of your email will exist, make sure your email content follows the same SEO rules as your website does. Use your best keywords and anchor text when constructing the body of the message. Ensure all images have alt tags and include social media sharing buttons to stretch the content further.



Net rendering correctly? View this email as a web page [here](#).

HubSpot

A new article has been published to the HubSpot Inbound Marketing Blog by Andy Prite:

[How to Create Custom Tabs for Facebook Business Pages](#)

Want customized feedback on your current website and marketing strategy? [Click here to request a free assessment](#) to learn how you can better optimize your website, get found by more prospects, and convert them into leads and paying customers with HubSpot software.

Enjoy the read!

HubSpot Blogging Team

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You received this email because you are subscribed to HubSpot's Inbound Marketing Blog.
If you prefer not to receive emails from HubSpot you may [unsubscribe](#) or edit your [email preferences](#).

Ensure your emails can render as web versions.



INTEGRATED ANALYTICS

Today's marketing goes well beyond the boundaries of your website. As a result, individual analytics for your website, social media, email and other channels just aren't enough anymore.

A **multichannel** view enables you to see how prospects are navigating their experience with you. **Marketing analytics** data can answer cross-channel questions, such as:

- How many people clicked through on your email but didn't convert?
- Of the people who converted on your website, how many of them came from social media? How many opened your last email campaign?
- Which results in more leads, PPC or organic search: email or social?



of B2B marketers say,

“Lack of user data is the major obstacle to effective segmentation.”

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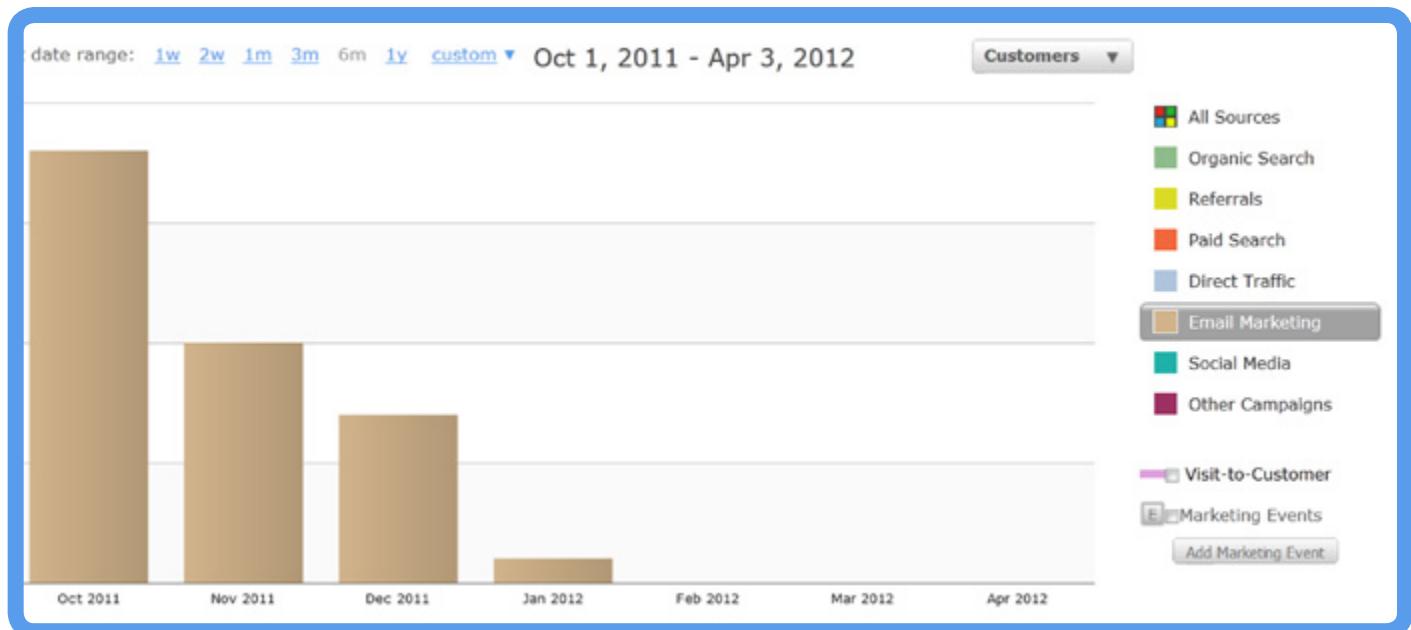




Not only do integrated analytics reports show you the effectiveness of your marketing strategy, but they also help you get more targeted in your email sends. 37% of B2B marketers say lack of user data is the major obstacle to effective segment targeting ([B2B Magazine](#)). By exchanging single channel analytics for [integrated marketing analytics](#), you can begin to segment your mailing list and send communications based on the lead's history of downloads and pages viewed.

In the screenshot below (of [HubSpot's Sources tool](#)) you will see that email and its analytics are only one piece of the inbound marketing puzzle. You need to look at the entire context in order to make smart decisions on segmentation and nurturing.

SOURCES TOOL, HUBSPOT:



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INTEGRATION WITH MOBILE

According to [Return Path](#), 16% of all emails are opened on mobile devices. In fact, this number [can rise to 50%](#) for some companies and industries. Creating a strategy that reflects the changing way recipients open and read emails is going to be increasingly important in the coming years. So what does it take to make your email strategy mobile?



- Test your email templates to see how they come across in different mobile devices.
- Give your calls-to-action (CTAs) wiggle room – make sure buttons and links are easy to click for readers using touch screens.
- Offer both plain text and HTML versions of your email.
- Use descriptive alt text under your images in case they don't display.
- Optimize for mobile the landing pages and forms your email links to.

The [HubSpot marketing software](#) automatically optimizes your emails and landing pages for mobile viewing, so if you are a customer, you should be all set.

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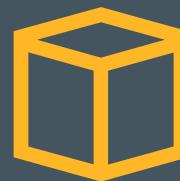
CHAPTER 3

DELIVERABILITY: WHAT IS IT & HOW TO GET IT?

17%
OF ALL
EMAILS



SEE



THE
RECIPIENT'S
INBOX

Source: [IBM](#)

IBM found that 17% of all emails never see the inside of a recipient's inbox. From defunct emails to spam traps, the reasons behind the lack of deliverability vary. Achieving a high deliverability rate relies heavily on three main factors:

1

KEEPING YOUR EMAIL LISTS CLEAN

2

ENSURING YOU'VE PROPERLY WARMED UP YOUR IP WHEN
STARTING WITH A NEW EMAIL SERVICE PROVIDER

3

FOLLOWING BEST INBOUND MARKETING
PRACTICES FOR EMAIL

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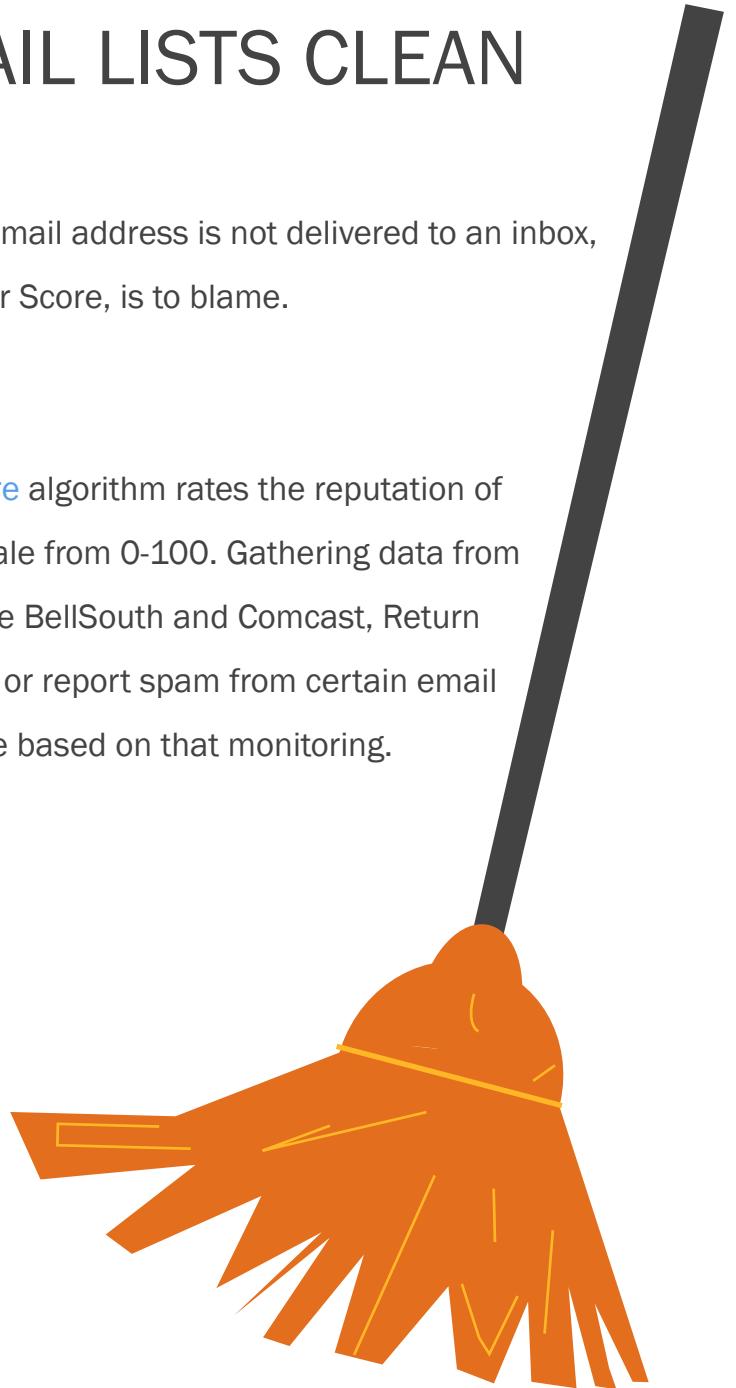
KEEPING YOUR EMAIL LISTS CLEAN

Return Path [reports](#) that 83% of the time an email address is not delivered to an inbox, the sender's reputation, defined by the Sender Score, is to blame.

WHAT IS A SENDER SCORE?

A free service of Return Path, the [Sender Score](#) algorithm rates the reputation of every outgoing mail server IP address on a scale from 0-100. Gathering data from more than 60 million mailboxes at big ISPs like BellSouth and Comcast, Return Path records if people frequently unsubscribe or report spam from certain email senders, and then assigns you a Sender Score based on that monitoring.

Your Sender Score will continue to change depending on your email sending habits and the responses of your recipients. It's a crucial number to stay on top of, because mail servers will often check your Sender Score before deciding what to do with your emails.



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The lower your Sender Score, the harder time you'll have getting into someone's inbox. Scores are calculated on a rolling, 30-day average and represent the rank of an IP address against other IP addresses, much like a percentile ranking. The closer your score is to zero, the worse it is.

If you are using a provider, [like HubSpot](#), to send emails for you, the Sender Score will apply to your provider's IP address, not your company's. Don't be afraid to ask your email service providers about their Sender Score. At the time of publication, HubSpot's sender score was between 96% and 99%.



“Don’t be afraid to ask your email service provider about their Sender Score.”

Even if an email network or ISP doesn't query your Sender Score to determine whether they will deliver your email, the factors used in determining your Sender Score are similar to those used by email networks and ISPs to determine your sender reputation. As such, the Score is a great, free email sender reputation tool to ensure you are aware of and have the opportunity to fix any deliverability problems.

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HOW TO TELL IF YOU'VE GOT A GOOD LIST

Here is a checklist to evaluate if your email list is good or not.

Answer the five questions below and find out where you stand.



1 DOES EVERYBODY ON THIS LIST HAVE A PRIOR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BUSINESS?

Yes?

No?

Get rid of the list -- or at least the people you don't have a relationship with. If they don't have a prior relationship with your business, they're not going to be expecting your email. Not only is emailing them spammy, but it will also hurt you. Without a prior relationship, many of the recipients will mark your message as spam. Those spam designations will then turn around and hurt the Sender Score of the servers you send from, which will make it harder for you to get your messages delivered.

Nice job! On to the next question...

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2 DO YOU HAVE AN UNSUBSCRIBE LIST?

Yes?

No?

Don't not send to list. Go back to the drawing board, and build a new list. Every list should be accompanied by an unsubscribe list. If you have a prior email relationship with the people on your list, you will inevitably have people who have unsubscribed from said list. When you load that list into a system [like HubSpot](#), you need to load both the master list and the unsubscribe (suppression) list. If you don't, you're going to end up emailing people who have already unsubscribed. That's against the law, and, since people on the unsubscribe list are likely to mark your email as spam, it will also reduce your ability to send successful emails.

3 DID YOU PURCHASE, RENT, OR LEASE THE LIST FROM A THIRD PARTY?

Yes?

No?

Any sending you do to this list will get flagged for spam and reduce your future conversion rates. The people on that list don't have a prior business relationship with you. At best, they gave their address to somebody else and are expecting email from them, not you. At worst, their address was harvested from some sort of directory, and they're not expecting any type of email.

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4

WILL THE PEOPLE ON THE LIST BE EXPECTING (NOT BE SURPRISED) BY YOUR EMAIL?

Yes

No?

Game over. Time to do some more [inbound marketing](#) to build yourself a clean and quality list of recent opt-ins. Which leads us to our final question...

5

HAVE YOU EMAILED THESE CONTACTS WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

Yes

No?

Sorry. Twelve months is a long time. Chances are, a big chunk of your list already forgot about you and will be surprised by your message (remember question #4?). That means they'll mark it as spam, which means your delivery rates will drop.

You're good to go. Your list is smelling great. Create some awesome emails with super useful content, and you'll have yourself some amazing conversion rates.

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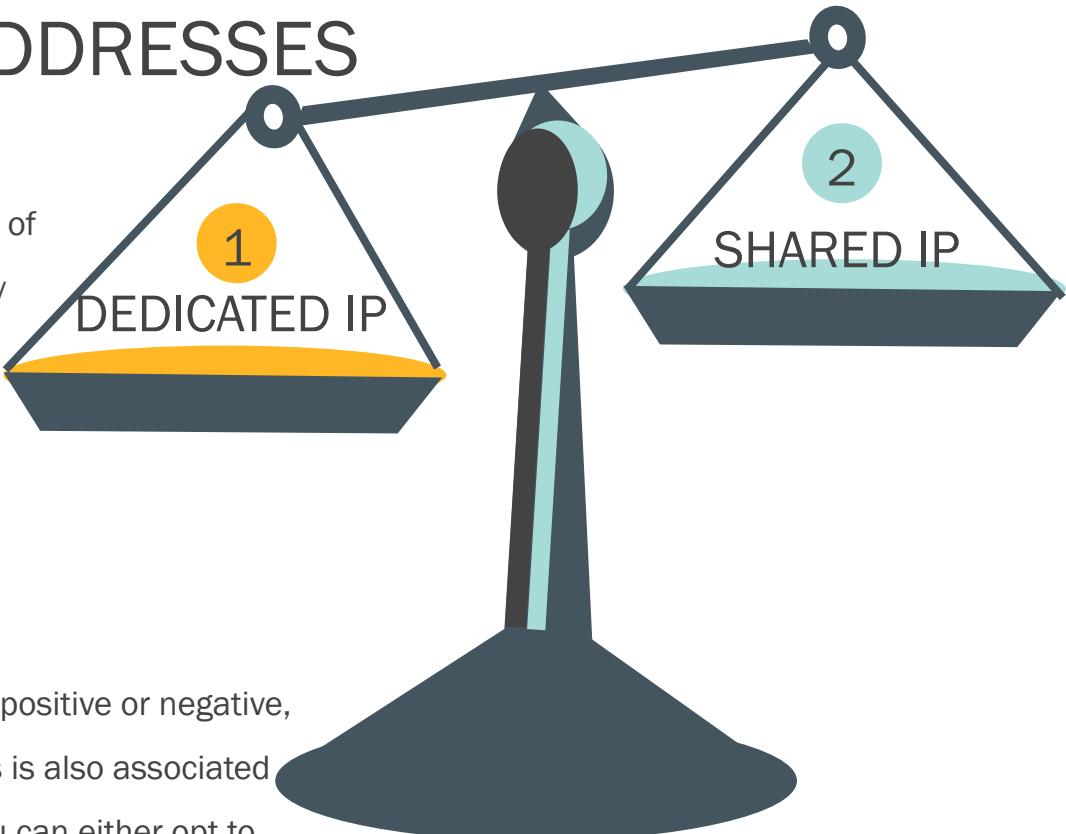
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WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT SERVER IP ADDRESSES

A server IP address is a series of numbers that uniquely identify the server that's sending your emails, e.g. 172.16.254.1

Each time you send an email campaign out, it's associated with your IP address.

The reputation that you build, positive or negative, through your email campaigns is also associated with that given IP address. You can either opt to have a dedicated IP address for your email sense or use a shared IP address.



1 DEDICATED IP

A dedicated IP is an address that is completely unique to you. The advantage of using a dedicated IP is that the reputation staked on it is completely your own. The disadvantage is that dedicated IPs tend to be very expensive and if you aren't sending enough emails, the IP won't even register on the Sender Score scale. Having an unknown Sender Score isn't a bad thing, but it's a good thing to have a high Score registered.

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2

SHARED IP

Most companies that send emails through a provider like [HubSpot](#), Constant Contact, Mail Chimp and the like use what's called a Shared IP. This is one IP address that sends for multiple companies. Shared IPs are much more affordable than dedicated ones, and give you the scale of sends to actually register a Sender Score. However, since you are sharing your reputation with others, consider talking to your email service provider about their highest and lowest Sender Scores on record.

WARMING UP YOUR IP ADDRESS

Spammers are known for moving quickly through IP addresses to have the best shot at avoiding filters and other blockers. They will use one IP address, send out thousands of unwanted emails, and then move on before their IP address can get blacklisted. Because of this practice, a number of companies have automatic blocks set up to limit or reject large-scale email sends coming from brand new IP addresses.



When you move to a new IP address, don't send emails to your whole list all at once. Instead, "warm up" your IP by slowly building up your total sends over time. You only need to do this once. If you have been sending emails from your IP address for awhile, it's already stretched out and ready to go.

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CHAPTER 4

5 SAVVY WAYS TO SEGMENT MARKETING EMAILS



Relevancy is becoming even more central to today's marketing strategy, and buyers have come to expect personalization in their communications. According to a study by [MarketingSherpa](#), four out of ten subscribers reported that they've marked emails as spam simply because they were irrelevant. On the flip side, MarketingSherpa also reports that emails that have been tailored to specific audiences through segmentation get 50% more clicks than their counterparts.

There are a number of different ways to start segmenting your audience. For a segmentation method to work, however, it needs to reflect two things:

1

YOUR CORE BUSINESS STRATEGY

2

WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR TYPICAL BUYERS' PURCHASING DECISIONS

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Here are five great ways to segment your audience to create more tailored and effective email communications.

GEOGRAPHIC SEGMENTATION

Segmenting by geography works best when the location of a buyer plays a significant role in his or her purchasing decision (e.g. with events and other invitations). Here is a quick list of instances when you should segment by geography:



- When sending invitations to special events
- When your company or service has geographic limitations
- When your connection to a town or region is a strength. For example, with local landscaping companies, cleaning services, or restaurants.

INDUSTRY/ROLE SEGMENTATION

For B2B companies, a recipient's role or division is an important factor in how he or she interprets your communications. In simpler terms, you would speak differently to a salesperson than you would to a marketer. They have different goals, and different interests in your company. Targeting these interests can increase your click-through rates.



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CONTENT INTERESTS

The best segmentation tactics are based on true data about your audience rather than assumptions based on their role or geography. To segment based on interest, take a look at the content that members of your audience have viewed or the materials they have downloaded. The easiest way to start doing this is to pull a list of people who have downloaded a certain whitepaper or other marketing offer, and then segment them into more targeted email or lead nurturing campaigns about that topic.

The [HubSpot marketing software](#) enables you to do this type of segmentation by easily creating a list based on recent conversion event.

Contacts > Lists

Lists Organize and segment your contacts [Tutorial](#)

Name your list

Should HubSpot update this list over time?

Yes, make a dynamic list No, make a static list

Describe the contacts who should be in this list

Select users based on:

Property Member of a List Filled out a Form

Add "OR" [Save](#)

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BEHAVIOR-BASED SEGMENTATION

In addition to segmenting by interest area, you can also use audience behavior as a filter for your communications. This segmentation also relies on having the right [closed-loop marketing analytics](#) set up on your site to understand your typical sales cycle.

Think about it: a person who has spent a lot of time on your site and viewed a lot of different marketing materials has different needs than someone who is just visiting for the first time. If you are using analytics that enable you to distinguish the browsing behavior of different website visitors, you can start to leverage this information to make your communications more relevant to how far along the recipient is in his or her purchasing decision.

The example below shows how you can email people who have seen less than five pages on your website. Similarly, you can nurture visitors who are much more engaged, but maybe haven't converted into leads yet.

The screenshot shows the HubSpot 'Lists' creation page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Contacts > Lists' and a 'Tutorial' link. Below that, a section titled 'Name your list' contains a text input field. Underneath, a question asks 'Should HubSpot update this list over time?' with two options: 'Yes, make a dynamic list' (selected) and 'No, make a static list'. The next section, 'Describe the contacts who should be in this list', contains a search interface with dropdowns and a numeric input field set to '5'. At the bottom are 'Add "OR"' and 'Save' buttons.

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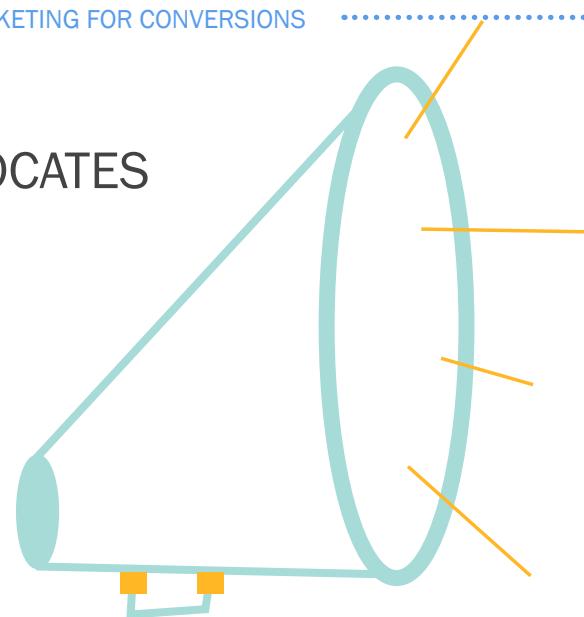




SEGMENTATION BY BRAND ADVOCATES

Brand advocates are a key segment that you should get right. Your brand advocate segment should contain:

- FREQUENT BUYERS
- SOCIAL MEDIA FANS
- CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE RECOMMENDED YOU TO OTHERS
- NON-CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE ADVOCATED FOR YOU ONLINE

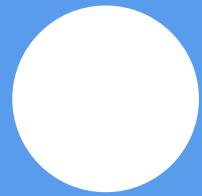


Customer loyalty needs to be nurtured. Once you determine a list of your best (and most vocal) advocates, tailor your emails to acknowledge them. Send thank-you's, advanced notice on new services or products, requests for feedback, rewards, and other communications to show you recognize and appreciate their support.

You can start small with segmentation. Take a look at your audience, and see if there are any stand-outs or natural differentiations. Even the slightest segmentation can increase your email success rates. The list above is just a starting point, and you'll likely discover other ways to segment based on the individual characteristics of your audience and your industry.

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CONCLUSION & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



“Now you are fully equipped to optimize your email marketing for success.”

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After having read this ebook, you now have a solid foundation in optimizing your email marketing efforts for lead conversion and customer acquisition. We started by looking at ways in which you can grow your email list and reduce unsubscribes. Then we covered processes of integration between email and the rest of your marketing efforts. We also introduced some deliverability concepts and how you can ensure your subscribers receive your communication. Lastly, we covered segmentation and how you can approach it.

Now you are fully equipped to optimize your email marketing for success. Go ahead and apply this new knowledge! For further email marketing optimization resources, check out our webinar [The Science of Email Marketing](#).



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