Dialog Insight

**Email deliverability:
everything you should know**

Table of content

Introduction

Reaching the inbox is a much more complex process than simply clicking the "Send" button. Many systems are designed to filter email messages and decide what should or should not be received by the recipient.

According to an annual report from Validity, only 83% of email messages actually reach the inbox. As a result, companies miss 17% of the opportunities to communicate with their customers (see APPENDIX I). The explanation for this situation is based on many factors.

The purpose of this guide is therefore to demystify the email message delivery process and to suggest possible solutions to improve your results.

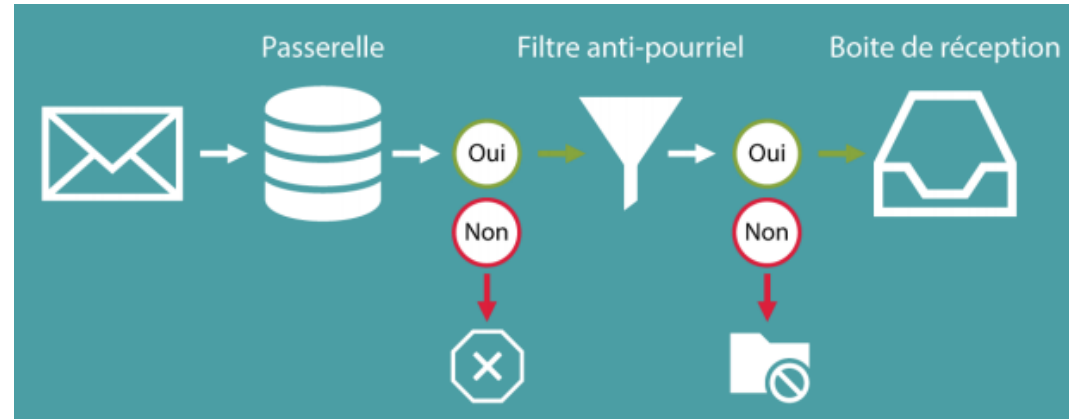**Validity, 2020 Deliverability Benchmark – Global inbox placement**

17% of your emails do not reach the targeted inbox.

Reaching the inbox

How to reach the email inbox

Several factors may explain why some emails never reach their destination. Here is a diagram that represents the obstacles encountered by the email before it reaches the inbox.

Emails blocked at the first stage (gateway) will almost never be delivered. This is a server installed on a company's network that serves as the first line of defense against spam. Since it is a private network, each company has the choice to configure the desired level of restriction on their own network. Thus, a sending platform such as Dialog Insight has no control over this configuration. If the email is blocked at this stage, the information will be indicated as a delivery error in your sending statistics. On the other hand, if the email passes this step, it will then be confronted to the spam filter, which decides whether the email will be placed in the inbox or in junk messages.

The sender's reputation is the main reason why your emails do not reach their destination. This element can be broken down into several factors presented below.

One of the most common reasons for problems with inbox placement is the engagement ratio in emails. Filters analyze and compare the ratio of active and inactive email accounts that receive promotional emails. Engagement is then determined by the number of times the user logs in to their mailbox, in addition to their level of activity, i.e. the number of times they open and click on emails while logged in. Therefore, sending a message to a large number of inactive accounts AND/OR sending a message to an active account that never takes action on your emails may cause your mailings to be blocked.

Another important cause is the number of spam complaints received. Spam filters record complaints made by users and place future campaigns from the same sender directly into spam when they exceed a given percentage. Therefore, the more complaints you generate, the more your reputation is affected and the less your emails will be delivered.

Sending non-responsive emails can also explain why your mailings don't reach the recipient. Today, email opening rates on cell phones have surpassed those on computers. However, an email that is not adapted for cell phones will naturally generate less engagement on the part of your recipients, which impacts your reputation as a sender. Therefore, be careful to adapt your mailings so that, in the long term, you are not penalized for this.

In addition, most messaging services use algorithms to compare incoming messages to those marked as spam, which makes it possible to detect senders, links and similar content. Too many similarities can suggest that it is spam.

Several other elements can also be the cause of poor email deliverability. Among others, we find :

- A bad sending infrastructure,

- Uncertified sender,

- Absence of an unsubscription link,

- A purchased contact lists

… and many others!

9 tips to deliverability

Some essentials

#1. Give details during the subsciption

When offering to subscribe to your communications, mention the type of content sent and the frequency of sending. This way, recipients will know exactly what to expect when they subscribe and will be less likely to identify your email as undesirable. Also, don't wait too long before sending your first communication after a subscription. This avoids confusing your new subscribers, who may wonder why they are receiving your email if the delay is too long.

#2. Dedicated IP adresses

If you have a high volume of mailings, the use of a dedicated IP address will allow you to keep control over the quality of the emails that are sent via this address, unlike the use of a shared address. You will therefore have the assurance that your reputation as a sender will not be altered by a careless third party. On the other hand, it can have the opposite effect if you do not send enough emails to that IP address, so do not use this tactic if you are in this situation.

In addition, it would be appropriate to dissociate your transactional mailings from your commercial mailings by using two separate IP addresses. This will prevent any blocking of your important mailings.

#3. Authentication protocols

Authentication protocols make it possible to confirm the identity of the sender and therefore to pass more easily through the various filters. Every legitimate sender should therefore have authentication. The most common are DKIM (Domain Keys Identified Mail), SPF (Sender Protection Framework), and DMARC (Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting & Conformance).

#4. The choice of your sending platform

When sending emails, it is recommended to choose a serious and credible sending platform such as Dialog Insight, as an example. The reason is simple, serious solutions have expertise and a reputation in the field and have a more robust infrastructure. This greatly enhances deliverability since ISPs are already familiar with the platform used.

In fact, Dialog Insight was created to provide the best deliverability to our users and we are always looking for the best options to improve our platform in this regard.

43% of recipients place a message in spam based on the sender's name or address. – Convince & Convert

#5. Engaging content

Email providers such as Gmail, Outlook and Yahoo often use open and click rates to determine if messages from a particular sender are spam. Thus, a message that is never opened or clicked is likely to end up in the junk mailbox. In fact, the largest email providers have the ability to move messages from one inbox to another, even after they have been received. They can therefore adjust the live shot according to the behaviour of your contacts.

Inappropriate content will decrease the engagement rate or worse, will attract complaints. That's why sending the right content to the right people at the right time on the right channel is the best strategy you could use. In fact, several tools are offered in the Dialog Insight platform to help you get to know your contacts better. Use them to increase the relevance of your messages! And when you say relevance, you also say engagement. Also think about sending emails that read quickly and contain calls to action to encourage clicks.

Also avoid overly marketing terms (free, offer, promo, urgent, etc.). The abuse of exclamation points or the excessive use of capital letters are often considered spam techniques. The content of the message should also remind you of your brand image, however, make sure to use images only to support your text (don't overuse them).

#6. A striking email subject

The subject line is one of the first things the recipient sees when deciding whether or not to open your email. It is therefore worth taking the time to write the best possible subject line to encourage your contacts to click and see the content of your message.

Also, in principle, there is no limit to the number of characters in the subject line. However, each email provider displays a different number of characters in the inbox, between 50 and 80 characters. This is why we advise you to aim for the 50 characters, to avoid it being cut off. In addition, a shorter email subject allows for better efficiency. Finally, adding personalization is also a good idea because it gives better opening results.

69% of recipients mark a message as spam based solely on the subject line.
– Convince & Convert

#7. A good hygiene list

It is essential to keep a close eye on your contact list and to spot delivery errors in order to remove non-existent or abandoned addresses. Abandoned addresses are sometimes used by Internet service providers to trap unscrupulous senders. And just like the spam rate, the rate of invalid addresses shows poor list hygiene, which is not ideal. It is therefore recommended to target fewer people who will be more engaged to maintain a good reputation.

An emailing platform such as Dialog Insight offers all the necessary tools to allow you to easily automate the management of your inactive contacts. The two possible options would be to set up a campaign to reactivate inactive contacts or simply to automate the deletion of those that have been inactive for too long.

It is also suggested to mix the two: you start with a reactivation campaign and then, for all those who did not respond positively to your campaign, these contacts will be automatically deleted by the system.

A well-maintained list avoids being blocked by Internet service providers and this is why you should update your database regularly.

#8. Acquire contacts the right way

Some people may think that buying contact lists is a good strategy to quickly increase their database... The problem with this practice is that those contacts have not consented to have emails sent to them from your company. In fact, these contacts will receive your emails wondering why they are receiving them, since they have not subscribed, have probably never visited your website and certainly do not know your products either.

This is a spamming tactic aimed at sending emails to people who know nothing about you and who have not given their consent to be contacted... It can only end badly! Three scenarios are often observed. In the best case, these contacts remain subscribers but are not at all engaged, which considerably affects your sending results (as said before). But very often, these contacts unsubscribe as quickly as they appeared, and in the worst case, can flag you as a spammer.

These three scenarios have a big impact on your reputation as a sender. This is why you should make it a point of honor to comply with the laws concerning the sending of spam and to respect the consent of your contacts. This may take more time, but naturally acquired contacts are more valuable and are much less damaging to your reputation.

#9. Regularly monitor its results and reputation

It is also important to keep an eye on the performance of your mailings and to react quickly if the results decrease. Since the engagement of your contacts has an impact on your reputation, make sure you monitor it on an ongoing basis and adjust when necessary.

Compare yourself to your industry rates to see if you're on track or not. Several benchmarks are available to compare yourself to other players in each industry. This is valuable information that you should consult in order to have an indicator that allows you to evaluate your results.

There are also several tools that allow you to monitor your reputation: TalosIntelligence is a tool to search for different threats in real time. MXtoolbox lists the MX records of a domain in order of priority. Mail-tester allows you to test your emails and check their spam score. You can also test your SPF and DKIM and make sure they are properly configured. Then, SenderScore is a tool that assigns you a number between 0 and 100 that represents your sender reputation score and gives you tips on how you can improve this score.

Some more technical aspects

IP adresses

Here are a few steps to follow to prepare the reputation of an IP address so that it can deliver your emails without them falling into spam. This is called IP address warm up:

1. Prepare in advance the volumes and targets that will be used for the IP warm up. For example, choose the mailing that is generally the most efficient.
2. Inform your team that there will be unusual rates at the beginning but that over time, things should return to normal.
3. Exclude contacts who have unsubscribed, are blacklisted or quarantined.
4. Target first your most engaged contacts in terms of clicks and openings (frequency and recency) based on, for example, openings in the last 30 days, clicks in the last 90 days and completely exclude contacts that have been inactive for the last 6 months.
5. Send to all ISPs at the same time since each one works on its reputation separately.
6. It is important to set opening targets based on your current rates so that they are realistic and based on real data.

IP adresses

7. Spread sendings over several days for the first 2-3 weeks. If you are using a dedicated IP address, you should start with a smaller daily volume, between 2000 and 5000 sendings. For example, for 10,000 recipients, aim for 2000 per day over 5 days for the first week.

8. Gradually increase the volume by about 20-30% per sending, per week.

9. Monitor the results of these sendings and take action if necessary. If, for example, you observe a decrease in the opening rate, reduce the rate and lower your target according to the engagement. For example, if you initially targeted openings in the last 30 days and clicks in the last 90 days, reduce the target to 60 days to reduce the number of recipients.

10. It is important to send regularly during the warm-up period to make as much "noise" as possible and for the ISP algorithms to recognize you and get used to your sending (this concerns both IP addresses and sender addresses).

What is a spam trap

Spam traps are used by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to stop, or at least reduce, spam sending. These addresses can be created specifically to catch those who collect addresses fraudulently, or they can be recycled, i.e. they are addresses that have already been used but abandoned long ago. The latter allow you to trap senders who do not keep their contact list up to date.

Depending on the type of trap address to which a message is sent, the repercussions will be different. The worst thing that can happen to you is to communicate with a trap address created for this purpose since your IP address, or even your domain, will be immediately blocked by Internet service providers. As a result, your delivery rate will drop drastically from the first infraction.

If, however, you have sent a message to a recycled trap address, the consequences are less severe. More often than not, your sending will simply be directed to the junk mail box. The first infraction of this type acts as a warning signal. On the other hand, if you continue sending to this address, your delivery percentage may suffer.

Understanding delivery statistics

When your email service provider informs you that your message has a good delivery rate, unfortunately this does not mean that all your recipients have received it, but only that the recipient's server has received the message. The task of the sending server is to generate the messages and deliver them to each recipient's server. Once the message is sent, the recipient's server receives the message and has 2 choices:

Accept and deliver the message

Refuse the message and send an error code

In the first case, the message is considered delivered when the recipient's server has accepted it. From that moment on, the email is no longer on the sending servers. The "signal" is therefore momentarily lost because the email becomes the responsibility of the recipient's server (Hotmail, Gmail, Outlook, etc.) which will have to process it and deliver it to the contact's inbox.

Servers have anti-spam filters, computers have antivirus and security configurations... all elements that can hinder the delivery of a message. It is therefore possible that the email may be blocked somewhere between delivery to the recipient's server and delivery to the mailbox, but your statistics will show a successful delivery.

The delivery time is therefore the time at which the recipient's server accepted the e-mail, and not the time at which the contact actually receives it in his or her inbox, which is impossible to define.

The email service provider will be able to provide you with behavioral data of openings and clicks given by all tracking elements in your emails, and inform you when the contact opens the email or downloads images and clicks on links.

In the second scenario, the recipient's server refuses the message and returns an error code. Depending on the case, the email is identified as a delivery error with the code and/or related error message provided by the server. There is nothing else your email service provider can do other than receive the error and display it to you.

IP addresses that appear on 1 of the top 12 blacklists have a 25-point lower email delivery rate than IP addresses that do not appear on any blacklist. – Convince & Convert

To conclude

Email message delivery is a complex field and the rules for blocking spam are constantly evolving. Algorithms are becoming more and more restrictive and adapt faster than companies and even providers can keep up. Organizations must constantly review their ways of doing things and continue to learn about best practices in order to keep up with the evolution of technology in the field.

The elements described in this guide will certainly help you to better manage the various obstacles to delivery. It is also important to be vigilant and monitor your delivery results so that you can react quickly in the event of a problem.

Dialog Insight has all the necessary resources to accompany you and provide you with adequate support in improving your email delivery rate. Do not hesitate to call on our team for specialized advice and support.

ANNEXE I
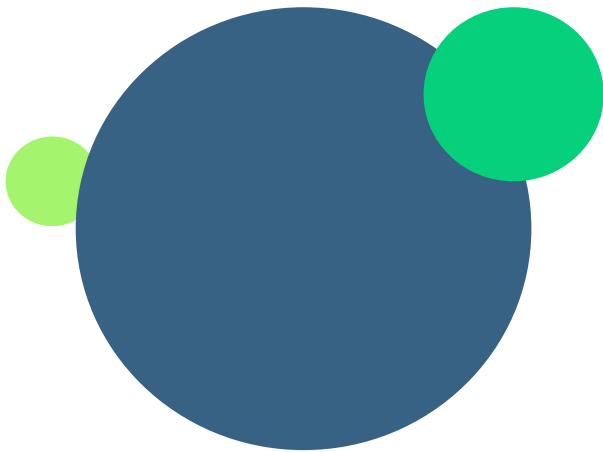
Validity 2020 Email Deliverability Benchmark – Global Inbox Placement

About Dialog Insight

One of the most effective ways to achieve your growth objectives is to take control of your customer data to maximize your marketing actions.

At Dialog Insight, we believe that each of our clients is unique and that their needs are specific. That's why we have developed a platform that adapts to your ever-changing context. On the one hand, we provide you with a unified platform that brings together your centralized customer database, campaign orchestration tools and detailed analyses of the performance of your actions. On the other hand, we offer strategic support services aligned with your needs.

Whether you're aiming to increase sales or boost customer engagement, leverage the customer knowledge you've gathered over time. You will then be able to communicate in a more relevant, consistent and personalized way than ever before. Make every point of contact an opportunity to provide your customers with a brand experience beyond their expectations.

With Dialog Insight at your side, you are more than ever the master of your success.