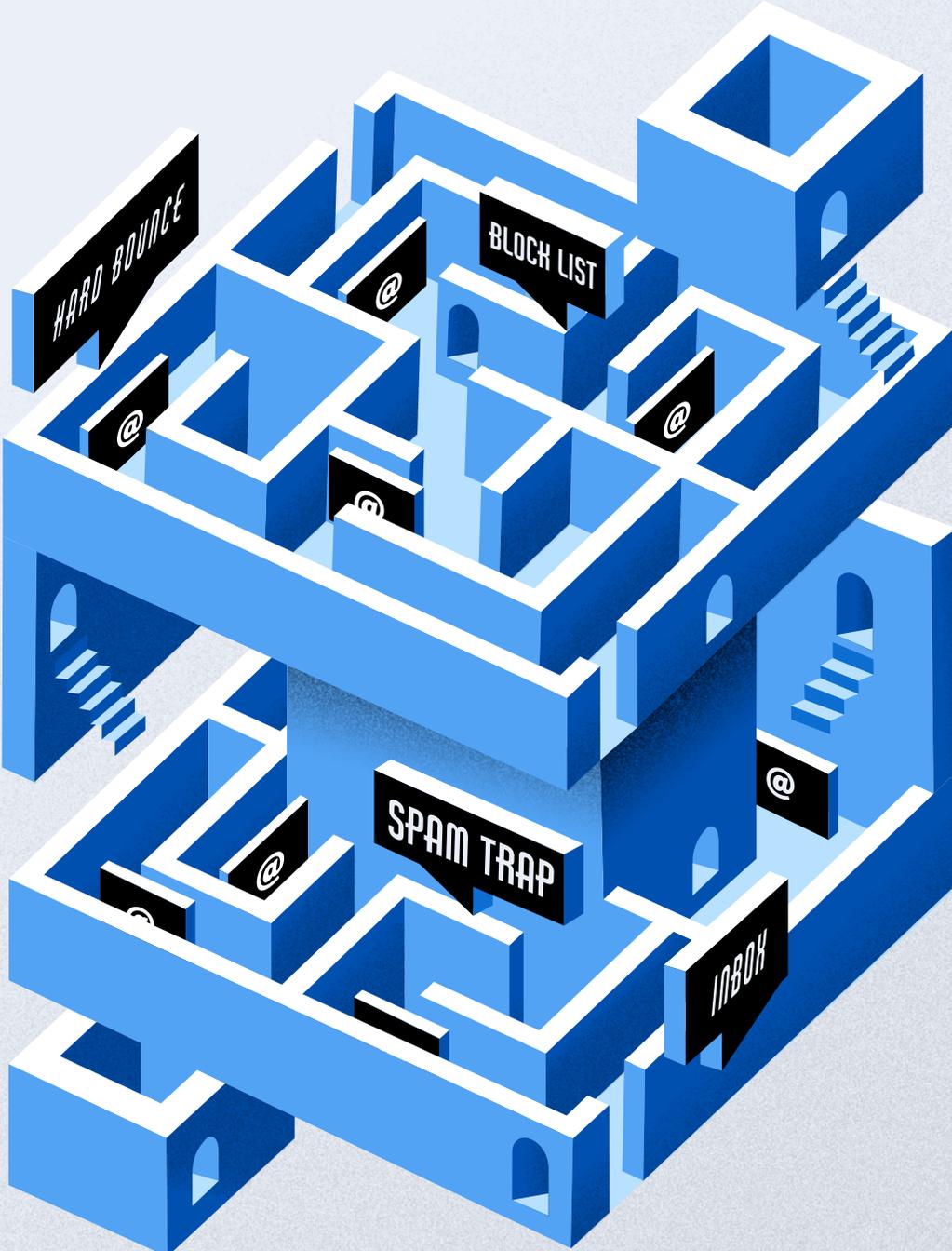


WTF IS EMAIL DELIVERABILITY?

DIGIDAY

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Emails are not reaching the inbox

Email is a fundamental part of digital marketing, thanks to its role as the gateway to consumers' online purchasing behavior. The inbox serves as a nerve-center for recipients' next steps, whether they click a link to a blog in a newsletter, or redeem an offer code in a promotional email from their favorite brand.

Email is an essential part of a business's communications arsenal, and will continue to be, as the number of [global email users amounted to 3.9 billion in 2019](#) and is set to grow to 4.48 billion users by 2024.

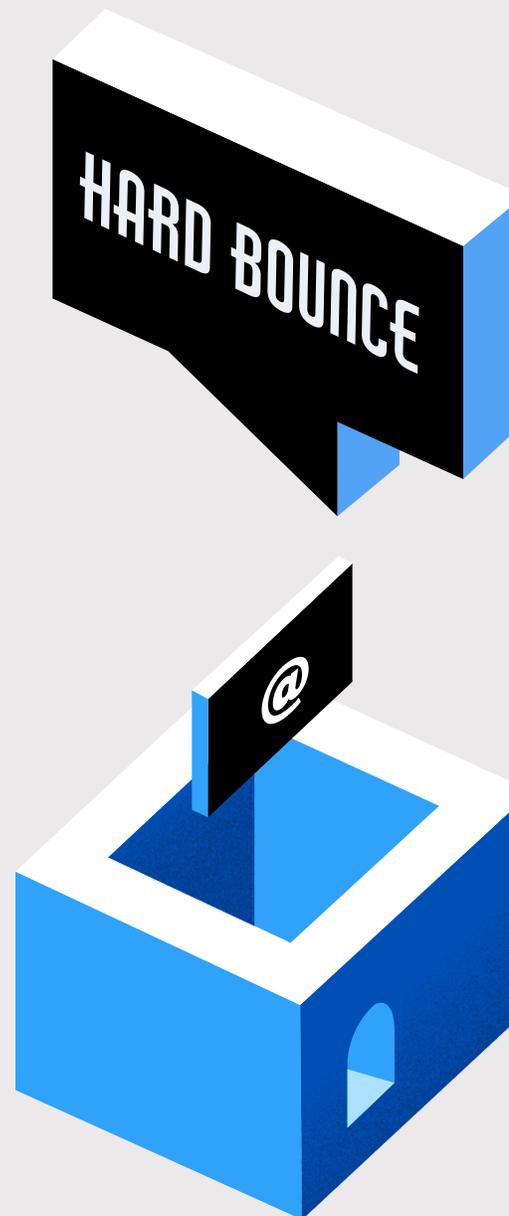
Yet emails often don't reach the consumer's inbox, and marketers likely aren't aware this is even happening. Beyond emails bouncing, which even new email marketers would understand from their delivery metrics, emails could be filtered into spam or simply go missing.

Without a keen eye on deeper metrics beyond the typicals — open and click rates — marketers aren't getting the full sense of their deliverability or their reputation as a sender and how it affects their ability to reach their recipients. What impacts deliverability? A multitude of things, including negative feedback signals like spam complaints and bounces, and positive signals like engagement on delivered mail.

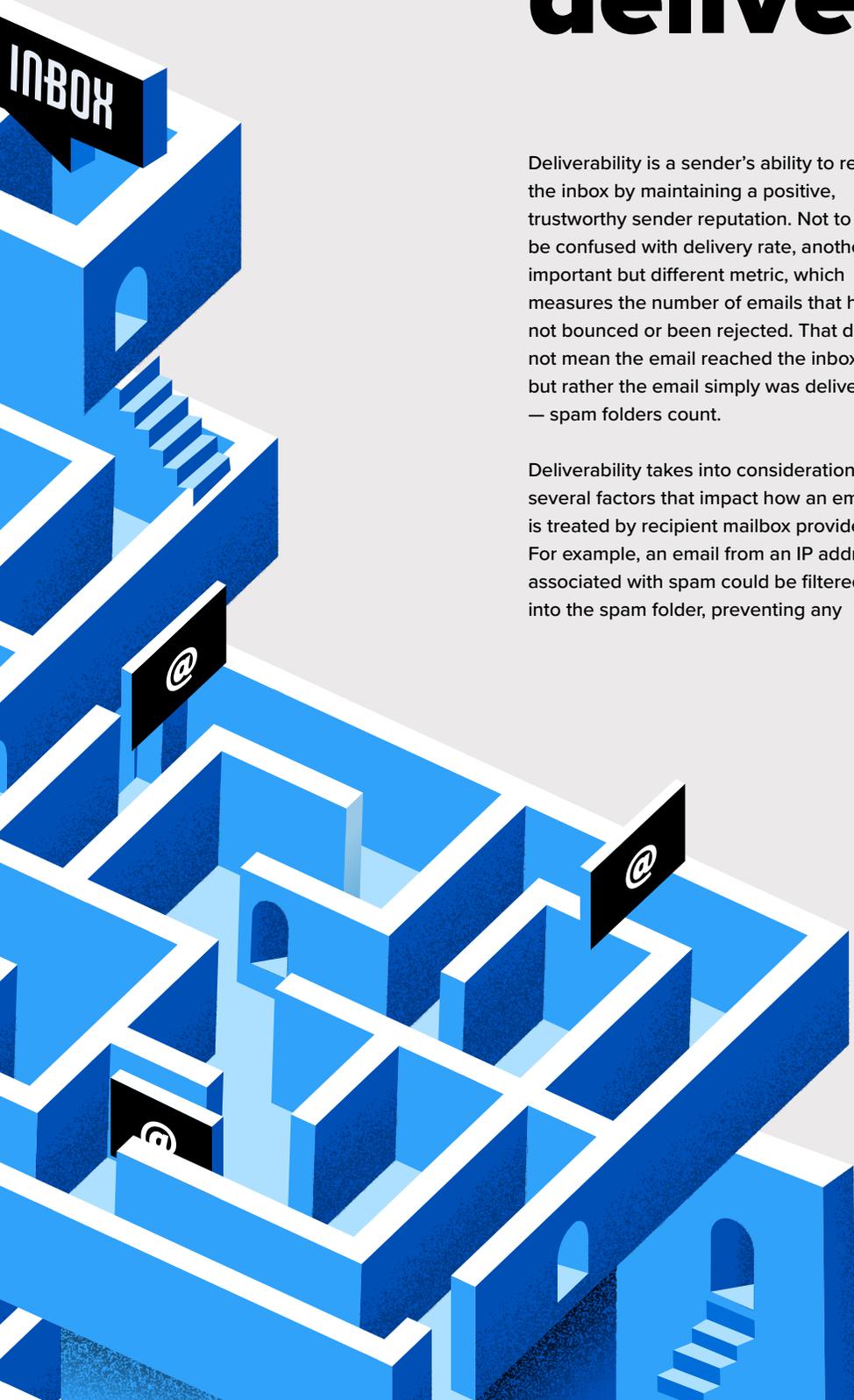
Research shows there is work to be done. [Globally, the average inbox placement rate was 83 percent in 2019](#) — meaning 1 in 6 messages failed to reach the inbox, marking a slight decline of two percentage points from the 2018 average of 85 percent. It's important to note this is simply the average, and all senders are able to improve their inbox placement rate, achieving up to 99.9 percent inboxing

Marketers' budgets are under pressure, and the need to achieve a healthy return on all investments has never been more critical as numerous lockdowns continue to shift consumers online. When it comes to potential customers, now is not the time to allow deliverability to erode. Why? Brands failing to take a closer look at deliverability will lose revenue.

This report aims to help marketers understand the essential elements of deliverability, highlighting the main blockers of email success. The key to successful email campaigns will turn on understanding the difference between delivery versus deliverability, so marketers can maximize budget, time and energy spent on email marketing. That way, their campaigns will deliver for their businesses, one inbox at a time.



WTF is email deliverability?



Deliverability is a sender's ability to reach the inbox by maintaining a positive, trustworthy sender reputation. Not to be confused with delivery rate, another important but different metric, which measures the number of emails that have not bounced or been rejected. That does not mean the email reached the inbox, but rather the email simply was delivered — spam folders count.

Deliverability takes into consideration several factors that impact how an email is treated by recipient mailbox providers. For example, an email from an IP address associated with spam could be filtered into the spam folder, preventing any

positive interaction like opens or clicks, which hurts sender reputation and resulting deliverability.

For marketers, an effective deliverability strategy means understanding they could be delivering 90 percent of their email, but their underlying practices are subtly leading to slow deliverability deterioration. If marketers only look at their delivery, they risk hitting an inflection point in which their sender reputation is too poor to support delivery metrics they might previously have achieved. As many industries pivot to digital during and beyond the pandemic, having a solid grasp on reputation, and thus, deliverability, is paramount.

“You have to start with deliverability. If the internet service providers aren’t giving you a chance to get to the inbox, then how the delivery goes is no longer relevant.”

— Jason Scoggins,
director of loyalty and
CRM, Chipotle

DELIVERABILITY

What's impacting deliverability?

Multiple factors affect deliverability. To ensure their emails reach recipients, and among the different data points senders need to monitor and improve outcomes, the following factors are essential:

Sender reputation:

Whether an internet service provider (ISP) or mailbox provider (MBP) will deliver an email to the inbox is dependent on sender reputation. This is based on the volume of email sent, bounce rate, spam trap hits and recipient behavior, such as positive feedback (opens) and negative feedback (spam complaints).

EXPERT VIEW: *"For data, it's essential to ensure processes are in place, so the data is kept clean — opt-outs and bounced addresses are removed from lists — and work with the email service provider (ESP) to ensure sender reputation is not being impacted," says Duncan Jones, head of personalization at Engine Transformation, a digital and data consultancy. "These are key steps. If sender reputation is impacted for one reason or another, taking steps to rectify this can be a long process, but it is worth it in the end."*

IP and domain reputation:

An IP is a unique set of numbers assigned to each device connected to the internet. There are two primary types of IP addresses for email senders; dedicated and shared. When using a shared IP, the behavior of other senders can negatively — or positively — impact reputation. Choosing whether the sender needs a shared or dedicated IP is a personal, nuanced decision, but overall, shared environments can have an effect, even for great senders.

Domain reputation is more straightforward: It's the power a sending domain, for example @Validity.com, has when attempting to send mail.

EXPERT VIEW: *"An IP reputation is hard to build, easy to lose and hard to regain," says Rob Pellow, digital experience director at Armadillo. "Therefore, ensuring you are sending the best emails before they are sent will limit the damage caused, and monitoring, post-send, will allow fine-tuning — and it will allow you to know when further action needs to be taken to protect or improve your IP status."*



Clean data:

Email lists need to be routinely cleaned to improve deliverability. Senders should remove duplicates, clean up typos in addresses and segment out unengaged audiences into different sends to attempt re-engagement before removing them entirely. Of course, senders must remember to always remove unsubscribers; beyond being a requirement of the law, not doing so is asking for recipients to complain.

EXPERT VIEW: *“We have found the higher quality the data, the higher the open rates and CTR,” says Ciaran Deering, head of online and co-founder at The Grove Media. “In addition, list-growth rate and the frequency that a database is cleaned are also considerations; usually, we are targeting in-market users, and it’s important to us that people who have exited a particular market are removed through regular cleansing.”*

Relevant content:

Email subject lines and content must be relevant to the audience to avoid unsubscribes or being manually moved to spam. Beyond open rates, senders must look at clicks and, if possible, data from pixels illustrating what recipients are reading and for how long.

EXPERT VIEW: *“Ultimately, key to the success of any email program is to hire folks that are passionate about the brand and its purpose as well as all aspects of the channel,” says Jason Scoggins, director of loyalty and CRM at Chipotle. “That is a special person since you need someone who can push the program creatively while also staying very grounded in the data and results.”*

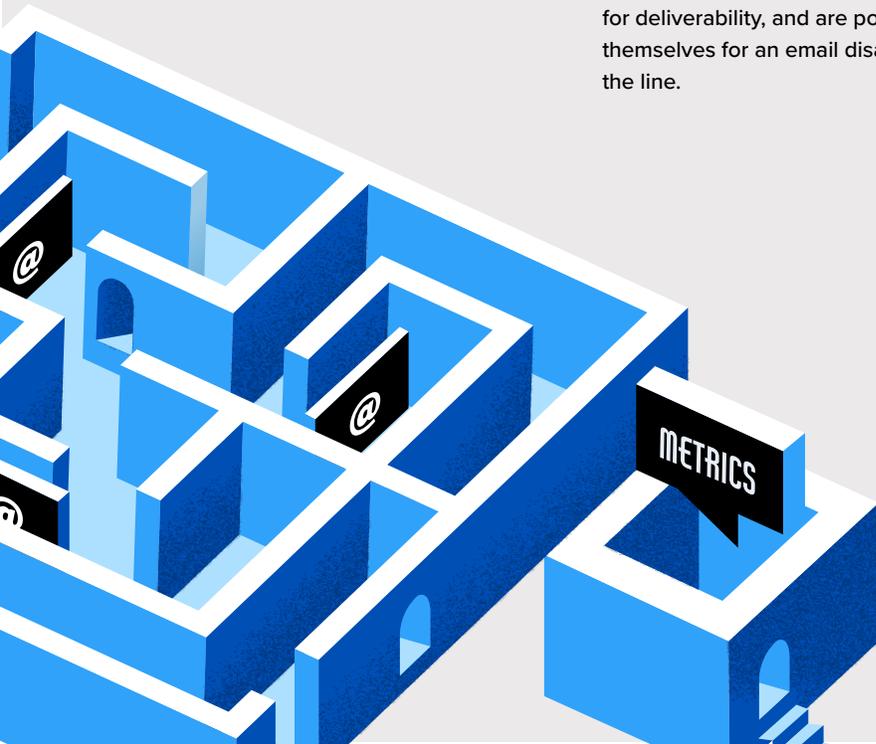


Using the right metrics to gauge deliverability

Businesses continuously monitoring deliverability can start to assess why a campaign went from reaching every inbox to reaching only a portion of them, if it ever happens. Proactive deliverability takes work, which is often why it's easier for businesses to focus on delivery metrics alone and concern themselves with best practices for deliverability only when a problem arises. But brands that fail to look beyond delivery metrics are not, in fact, optimizing performance for deliverability, and are positioning themselves for an email disaster down the line.

Deering, head of online and co-founder at The Grove Media, believes marketers need to look beyond open rates and clicks to judge email marketing success.

“We also look at lots of other ‘hard’ metrics like unsubscribes, bounce rate, shares, forwards and, of course, ROI,” he says. “Softer measures such as traffic quality and list-growth rate are also important. Softer measures can give the marketer a more nuanced understanding of success. We sometimes observe lower than anticipated ROI that is mitigated by high-quality traffic in terms of site visit duration, goal page visits, pages per visit, etc.”



Clarifying the end goal for email marketing

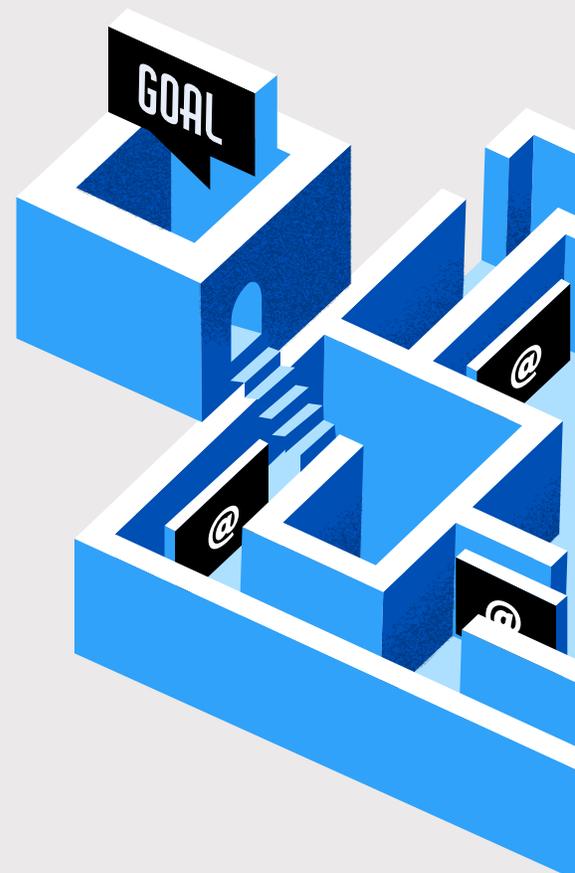
“For most agencies and companies, whether an email has been delivered or not to the inbox, and what the reasons are for this, often seems shrouded in mystery,” says Jones, at Engine Transformation. “The most common metrics used for email marketing are the open rate, unique click through rate and bounce rate or delivery rate. These give an indication of how successful the campaign has been at getting recipients to interact with your campaign. However, for most companies, this doesn’t give the ultimate measure of success.”

Jones says: “Being able to attribute the end goal such as sales, sign-ups or inquiries as a direct result of an email campaign can give a better reflection on the success and show whether a campaign has delivered a return on investment.”

Another case for building the right metrics for determining ROI emerges from thinking about long-term impact and what brands are trying to achieve with their email campaigns — i.e., how are clicks building sender reputation and brand loyalty or converting to app downloads or sales?

Pellow at Armadillo says: “Marketers need to understand the point of metrics and the long-term impact hitting those metrics will create. For example, I’ve worked in the past with brands with a target of getting 500,000 new sign ups per quarter — they didn’t know why or what they would do with those new customers when they achieved that.”

Pellow suggests other metrics: “Looking at the minute-of-send has a function — it’s good for tone of voice and positioning. Looking at the intricacies of landing destination is also good for design, layout and tone.”



“Email isn’t a snack; it’s part of a nutritional diet. Don’t just take click through rate (CTR) as a target — ask what it means as part of a long-term plan.”

— Rob Pellow, digital
experience director,
Armadillo

PLAN AHEAD

Deliverability requires collaboration

Maintaining positive deliverability can take an entire business's input, as deliverability factors and fixes draw upon different teams.

For example, creative could be tasked with developing engaging content and subject lines for their intended audiences, building on deliverability best practices like personalization and segmentation. Sales and marketing will likely be involved in growing lists, but they'll also want to keep their data clean and validated before sending communication to new addresses. Plus, even if IT is less interested in email, they could be very invested in the security measures available for email like DMARC, designed to prevent spoofing and phishing attacks that could damage a brand — and even cost money.

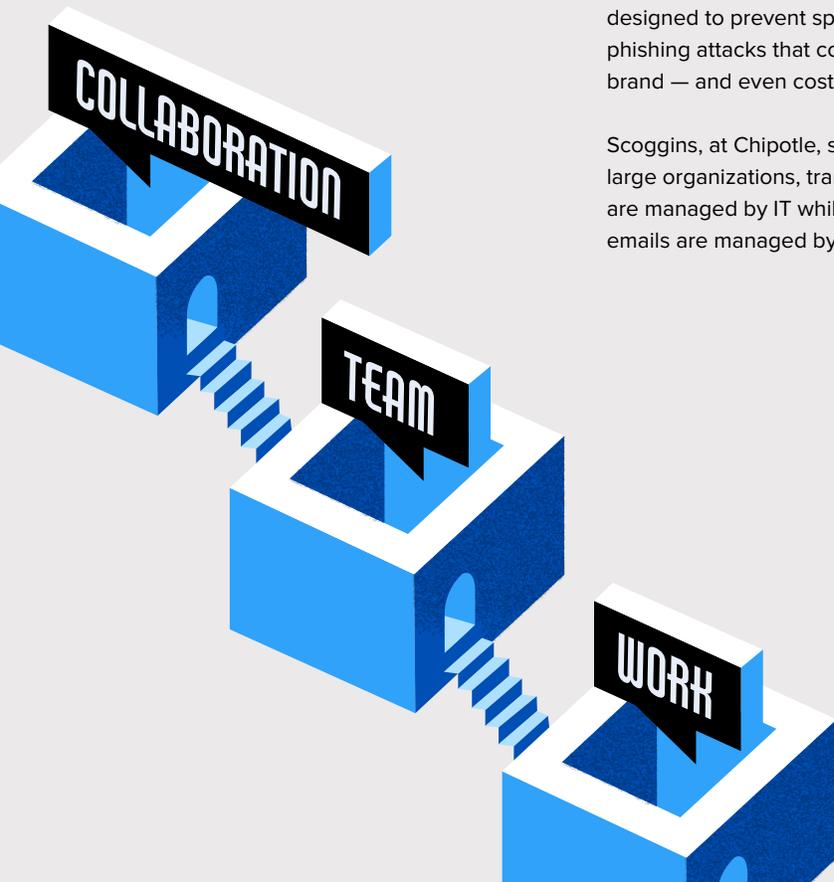
Scoggins, at Chipotle, says: "In some large organizations, transactional emails are managed by IT while promotional emails are managed by marketing. This

can be a challenge for deliverability because most email experts are hired only for the core email marketing team. It's important to make sure both teams work together to ensure best practices across an organization."

As it stands, having a team focused solely on deliverability is a niche position for many organizations.

"It's rare that a client would have a full email deliverability team, as it's such a specialism," says Pellow, at Armadillo.

That being said, he also encourages marketing teams to know the basics and have specialists in the business: "Don't just rely on tech teams. Get an understanding of everything: Try to understand the basics of A/B testing, for example. It has been rare to have a client-side marketer just doing CRM — but its value is on the increase, particularly post-COVID when email really showed its worth."



How to get started with email deliverability

To overhaul email marketing for deliverability — rather than delivery — businesses need to take the following steps:

1

Audit:

Deliverability starts with an audit, or an inventory of the email messages teams are sending before moving on to how they are performing.

2

Measure:

Look beyond the delivery rates or metrics such as bounces or inbox placement rates. Look at the metrics for which email service providers don't often offer a clear picture — spam complaints, read time and devices used — to provide insight into design and optimization.

3

Monitor:

To protect sender, IP and domain reputations, monitor and fix issues around spam, bounce rate and blocklists.

4

Clean:

Take the time to clean the data for unresponsive, potentially fake and duplicate addresses.

5

Tailor:

Use all available data to understand the content with which recipients are engaging. Tailor those communications using this behavioral insight.

6

Optimize:

Take a further dive into engagement data and learn who the recipients are, what they want and which cohorts are delivering low or non-existent returns.

1 in 6 emails did not reach the inbox in 2019 — it's time for a change

Marketers must approach email as an avenue to foster meaningful conversations.

To achieve this will require a deeper understanding of deliverability and the foresight to see how a sole focus on delivery negatively impacts potential reach and revenue.

With 1 in 6 emails not reaching the inbox in 2019, it's clear that effort and budget will go to waste unless the problem is fixed. And make no mistake — with

diligent adherence to best practices and a keen eye on fluctuations needing attention, marketers can absolutely fix it.

Brands crafting email marketing around the right people at the right time with personalized messages and using device-optimized content will find not only does their email reach the inbox, but every successful send — thanks to ironclad deliverability and favorable sender reputation — will increase email's ROI.



About Validity

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