

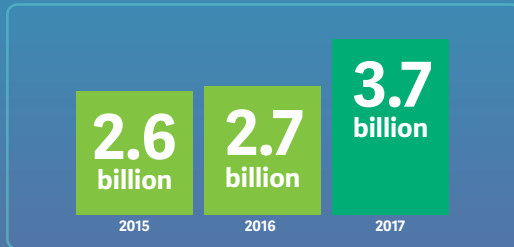
The Era of Optimization

How Small Changes Can Drive Huge Gains
in Email Performance

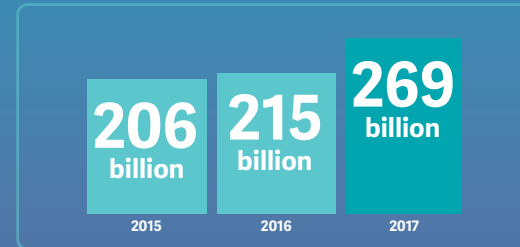


Introduction

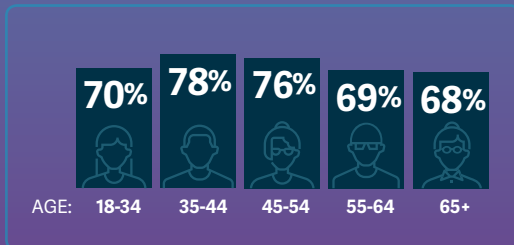
As marketers, we're living in an interesting time. After more than 45 years, email is just as important as it's ever been—perhaps even more so. Consider these statistics:



Email is not dead—in fact, it's growing! Today there are over 3.7 billion email users, representing more than half of the world's population. This is a huge jump from 2.7 billion in 2016 and 2.6 billion in 2015.



Email volume is on the rise, too. In 2017, an average of 269 billion emails are being sent every day—up from 215 billion in 2016 and 206 billion in 2015.



Consumers consistently rate email as the top channel for brand communications—regardless of age! From Millennials to Baby Boomers, a vast majority of consumers prefer email.



Email generates the highest ROI of any marketing channel!—an average of \$38 for every dollar spent.

Introduction *continued*

While email remains a critical channel for marketers, the challenges we face on the path to the inbox are becoming exponentially more sophisticated and complex. From phishers and spoozers to constantly evolving filtering algorithms and increased consumer expectations, we're all looking for new solutions to address these issues. But in a mature industry like email marketing, the chances of finding a "silver bullet" that solves every marketing challenge are slim.

Instead, true improvement in today's world comes through subtle, incremental adjustments to the things we're already doing—rather than drastic, sweeping change. The tools we need to be successful are at our fingertips; it's simply a matter of using them in more effective, strategic ways.

We call this the **Era of Optimization**.

Instead of looking for the "holy grail" of email, marketers should begin to focus on subtle ways to optimize each campaign, leading to incremental improvement in overall effectiveness. Every small change can make a big difference to the bottom line.

In the pages that follow, we'll help you identify a few areas where you can make the most impact.



Make List Quality a Priority

Think about this: if your subscriber list is full of invalid addresses, unknown users, and even spam traps, you aren't reaching a lot of actual people who can read and act on your message. What's more, ignoring list hygiene issues can affect your sender reputation and lead to deliverability problems down the road.

To improve list quality, you can take advantage of our **Real-Time Email Validation** solution to confirm the quality of your subscriber list before you hit send.

- The email validation software scans your list and removes any mistyped or invalid email addresses.
- You can run this scan as a one time or periodic cleanse, as part of your overall list maintenance process.
- You can also incorporate the email validation solution into your opt-in forms, so addresses are reviewed at the point of capture and invalid addresses never end up on your list.



"We reduced our hard bounces on marketing emails by over 45 percent and we removed over 150,000 invalid email addresses from our POS system alone. Without invalid addresses clogging up our list, data from our email service provider becomes more accurate and actionable, and our open and click rates become more reflective of our actual performance."

— Gail Buffington
Director at Soft Surroundings

Soft Surroundings
my time. my place. my self.

Consider the Subscriber Experience

Subscriber experience provides a wealth of opportunities to improve email performance—but first you have to understand how subscribers interact with your messages. Every subscriber is different, with different patterns and habits. To help with this, we've made some significant enhancements to our **Email Client Monitor** solution.

Email Client Monitor has always offered the ability to monitor which devices customers are using to open your mail (mobile, desktop, or webmail). But now it also provides deeper insights like what time messages are opened, how much time subscribers spend reading messages, and where they're located.

With these valuable insights, marketers can make smart decisions about where to focus their optimization efforts, including:

- Optimizing email layout and design features based on platform and device
- Adjusting content based on the subscriber's physical location
- Scheduling send time based on when each subscriber is likely to be in their inbox
- Analyzing how long customers spend reading the message to understand which messages are capturing customers' attention and which ones are being ignored



"The majority of email opens occur on a mobile client regardless of the day, but the weekends see a boost in mobile opens. Smartphones and tablets accounted for 60 percent of all opens on the weekend, as people are out and about or just relaxing on the couch."

— **The Email Client Experience**



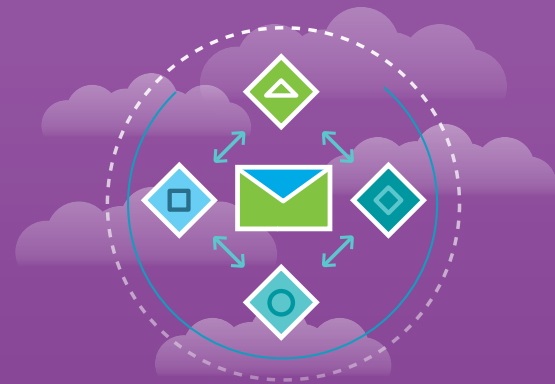
Optimize Email Creative and Imagery

Having the right creative elements in your campaigns can improve subscriber engagement and overall campaign performance. Most marketers do some degree of testing, using traditional A/B testing methods to determine what's most effective.

But email creative is often left to guesswork and gut feelings. With so many potential variations in imagery and other creative elements, simple split testing becomes overwhelmingly complicated and tedious.

To help with this, we're excited to announce our new **Multivariate Testing** solution, powered by technology from 8Seconds.

- Multivariate Testing provides real time, image based content optimization using automated testing, which takes the time and guesswork out of image selection.
- Multiple combinations of creative elements can be tested simultaneously. The combination with the highest engagement is then used to optimize the rest of the campaign.
- Many creative elements can be tested using this solution, including image variations, headlines, CTAs, alternate layouts, and more.
- Increased opens and clicks drive better business results, while also providing positive engagement signals to mailbox providers—ultimately leading to better inbox placement.
- Findings from email tests can also be used to optimize other channels, such as websites and landing pages.



“By using 8Seconds, within 72 hours we were able to validate assumptions to maximize performance of our email marketing engagement strategy. Real-time creative optimization has the potential to dramatically improve email business results with minimal cost and effort in digital speed—unlike more conventional approaches like e-panels or focus groups.”

— **Daniel Molero**
Marketing Manager at Worten

Think Outside the Box

Keep in mind, too, that optimization can occur in unexpected places. For example, consider how important your subject line is in driving engagement. It's the one of the first things people see in the inbox, and it's a key factor in the decision of whether to open an email.

There are lots of ways to optimize a subject line, which generally involve using different combinations of words to capture attention. What if your subject line could look totally different from everything else in the inbox?

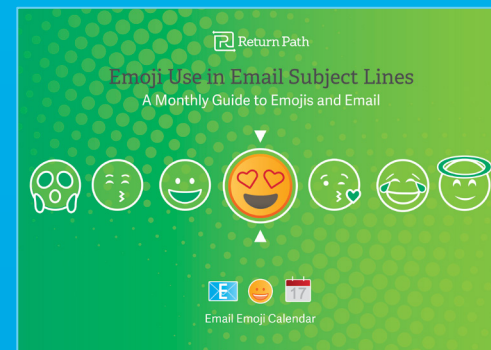
We recently studied the use of emojis in email subject lines to determine how they impact important metrics like read rate. Our findings showed that in some cases, subject lines containing emojis actually saw a higher read rate than comparable text-only subject lines.

- Around Valentine's Day, the 💋 emoji drove a read rate of 24 percent. By comparison, Valentine's Day promotions with text-only subject lines had a read rate of just 20 percent.
- Father's Day emails with the 🍷 emoji in the subject line had a read rate of 22 percent and inbox placement of 96 percent, compared to read rate and inbox placement rate of 21 percent and 88 percent, respectively, for comparable text-only promotions.
- The most successful emoji in our study? The "poo" emoji, with a 33 percent read rate.



"There's a certain novelty factor seeing emojis in one's inbox. As an email marketer, don't be surprised if performance from use of emojis wanes over time. Avoid using the same emoji(s) every time, and stand out from other emojis in the inbox by avoiding widely used ones."

— Emoji Use in Email Subject Lines



Get Certified!

At a high level, there's one critical step you can take to optimize your entire email program: get certified through **Return Path Certification**. Return Path's Certification program is the industry's most recognized and valued certified whitelist.

When you become Return Path Certified, email providers acknowledge you as a safe, reputable sender—and that's because our Certification process involves a rigorous review of your sending practices, email infrastructure, and more. As a result, your email program will improve simply by going through the process of becoming Certified!

And of course, you'll receive reduced filtering at major mailbox providers like Microsoft, AOL, Yahoo, Comcast, and Mail.ru. It's the only program of its kind with such universal acceptance.

The end result is that you have the opportunity to reach more of your subscribers' inboxes. In fact, Certified senders have an average of **5 percent higher inbox placement** than non-certified senders.



"Certification provides a measurable lift when it comes to inbox placement rates, but also provides an invaluable data set at various mailbox providers, such as Yahoo and Outlook.com, that helps guide our deliverability strategy."

—**Ryan Boyd**
Postmaster & Director of Deliverability
at Groupon

GROUPON

Key Takeaways

Email is more important than ever. It's a growing channel. It's effective in driving ROI. And every message that fails—by getting sent to spam, blocked, ignored, or deleted without reading—is a missed opportunity.

To take full advantage of the email channel, you need to start making small, incremental improvements:



Maintain a clean subscriber list.



Understand how your subscribers are reading your messages, and optimize their experience based on those behaviors.



Don't guess—test, test, test to get your creative elements right.



Look for unexpected opportunities to make a difference!



Become a Certified sender through Return Path Certification.

And don't forget, we're here to help! Worldwide, our employees have more than 2,000 years of marketing experience. Our Professional Services team is comprised of the best and brightest minds in email marketing—and they're ready to put that expertise to work for YOU.

Get to Know Return Path



Visit our website. There's no better place to find out about Return Path! Browse our resource library, check out our customer success stories, and learn more about our products and services at returnpath.com.



Request a demo. See Return Path's data powered solutions in action. Visit returnpath.com/request-a-demo to get started.



Browse our blog. Every day, we publish new content on the topics that matter to email marketers and security professionals. Bookmark blog.returnpath.com, or [subscribe](#) to have fresh content delivered straight to your inbox.



Or give us a call. Visit returnpath.com to contact the office in your region.
AUS: +61 2 8188 8700
US: 1-866-362-4577
UK: +44 (0) 207 479 8800

