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THE STATE OF

# EMAIL ENGAGEMENT

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



Benchmark Study Report

# Table of Contents

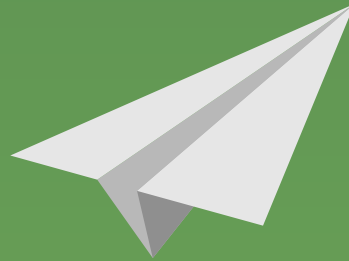
<b>Introduction</b>	3
<b>Executive Summary</b>	5
<b>Where Email Stands</b>	7
<b>Engagement and Deliverability</b>	10
<b>Baseline Email Metrics</b>	13
<b>Email Engagement Factors</b>	15
■ Permissions and Opt In Strategy	16
■ List Segmentation	18
■ Using Data Sources to Understand Subscribers	21
■ Personalization	22
■ Optimal Sending Frequency	24
■ Triggered Messaging	25
■ Competitive Engagement Monitoring	28
■ List Management	29
■ Device Optimization	32
<b>Artificial Intelligence</b>	36
<b>General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)</b>	38
<b>The Bottom Line on Email Engagement</b>	40
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	55
<b>Appendix: Survey Background</b>	45

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THE STATE OF

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---



# Introduction



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# Introduction

Email is still the go-to marketing channel for many organizations—and with good reason.

Studies show that a **vast majority of consumers prefer email** for brand communications, and **current projections** indicate that by 2021, there will be more than 4.1 billion email users worldwide. Clearly, organizations must prioritize email to maintain its effectiveness.

In 2018, Return Path and Demand Metric partnered to study the **state of email marketing** to equip marketers with data and best practices to improve the use of email.

**Engagement is the key to getting email into subscriber inboxes.** This relationship to deliverability made engagement a logical next candidate for study. Return Path and Demand Metric partnered again to study engagement and its relationship to email deliverability.



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# Executive Summary



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Over 200 marketers contributed responses to the December 2018 email engagement study survey.

The data collected provides fresh insights into the importance of email as a marketing channel; looks at the use of various strategies, technologies, and approaches in use to improve engagement; and concludes with advice about best practices for email engagement.

## Key Findings

- **Overall email effectiveness is improving.** As a marketing channel, almost 80 percent of the study's participants reported that email is holding steady or improving in terms of effectiveness.



- **Email remains important.** Almost two-thirds of study participants rate email as one of the most important channels, or the most important channel, in use.



- **A surprising number of marketers don't understand that mailbox providers use engagement to filter email.** Over half of this study's participants were neutral or disagreed with the statement, "Mailbox providers use subscriber engagement to determine where to filter (e.g. inbox, spam, blocked) the email you send."



- **Your opt-in strategy has less of an impact on engagement than you think.** There has been an age-old debate over single versus double opt-in and the impact on one's list and subscriber engagement. Marketers must do more than rely on one opt-in strategy over another to improve deliverability, engagement, and overall effectiveness.



- **List segmentation is a major driver of deliverability.** The ability to segment lists and send different messages to different types of subscribers is a key indicator of capability, data quality, and compliance with best practices that improves inbox placement.



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# Where Email Stands



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## Where Email Stands

In the mix of channels on which marketers rely, **Figure 1** shows that email remains as important as, or more important than, most channels in use.

Nonprofit organizations attached the greatest importance to email, with 85 percent rating it one of the most important channels or the most important marketing channel.

This rating was 65 percent for B2B organizations, and 54 percent for B2C organizations. This email channel importance data correlates to revenue growth.

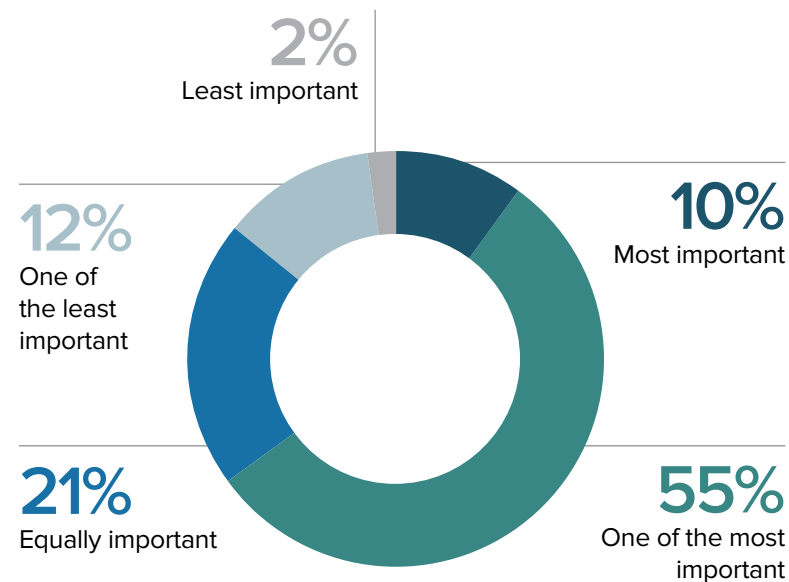
**Organizations that reported revenue growth were more likely to identify email as one of the most important channels or the most important marketing channel (68 percent) compared to organizations that saw no growth or a decline (58 percent).**



Compared to Other Marketing Channels, How Important is Email?

**FIGURE 1: RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE EMAIL CHANNEL**

Almost two-thirds of study participants say email is one of the most important channels or the most important marketing channel.



As the deliverability study revealed, many things such as the adoption of technology, list management, and other practices affect email effectiveness.

**Figure 2** shows a current snapshot of how study participants rate the overall effectiveness of the email marketing channel.

The effectiveness data in **Figure 2** will serve as a filter for looking at other aspects of email engagement in this study.



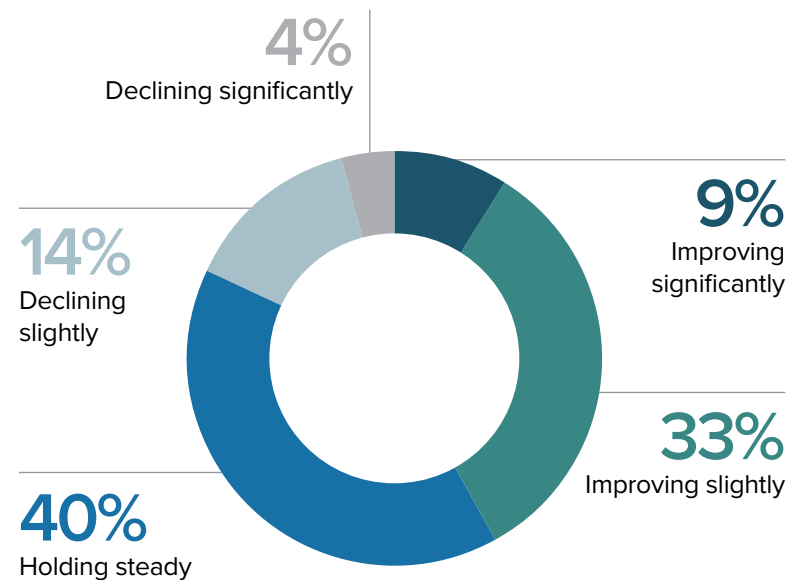
Email effectiveness is **holding steady or improving** for **80 percent** of study participants.



How is the Effectiveness of Email Changing?

### FIGURE 2: HOW EMAIL EFFECTIVENESS IS CHANGING

More than twice as many study participants report that email effectiveness is improving rather than declining.

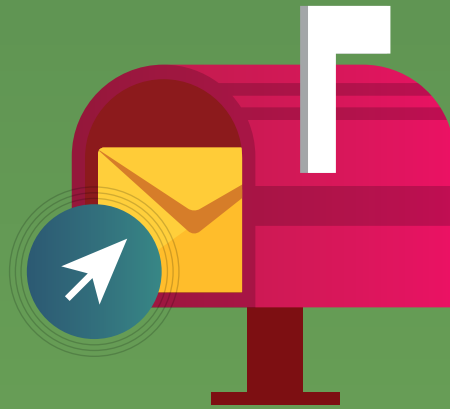


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# Engagement and Deliverability



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# Engagement and Deliverability

Engagement and deliverability are the two sides of the email marketing effectiveness coin. It's important for marketers to understand this relationship as a prelude to boosting email marketing effectiveness.

One of the first things that marketers should understand is the substantial power and influence that mailbox providers have on email deliverability.

Marketers who assume that mailbox providers simply function as utilities that deliver every message that passes through their servers are naïve.

In fact, mailbox providers measure engagement as a means to determine which messages to place in inboxes, and which ones to block or filter.

**Understanding this relationship between email engagement and deliverability is crucial to email marketing success**, and **Figure 3** displays the measure of this understanding.

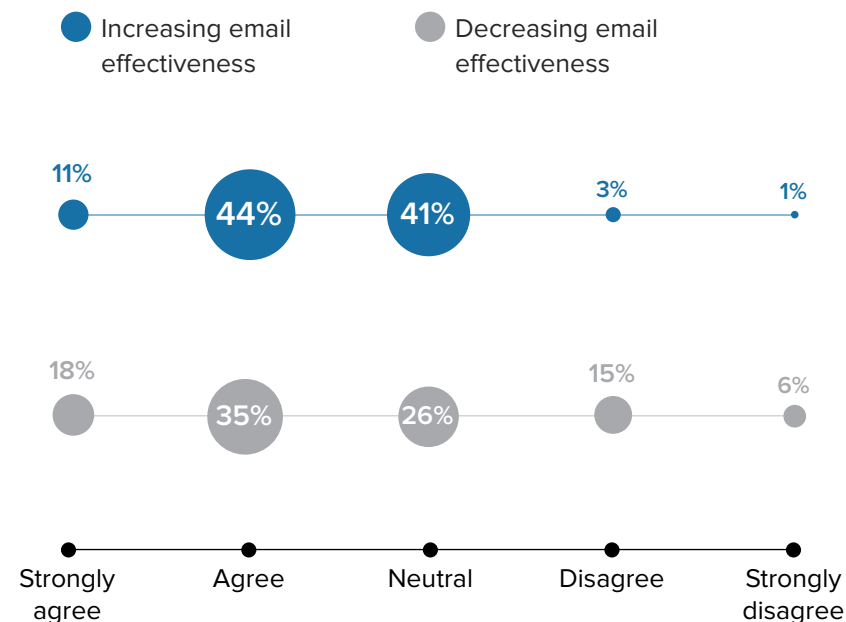
**Figure 3** reveals that marketers who understand that subscriber engagement has a significant impact on filtering decisions are enjoying greater email marketing effectiveness.

To reinforce the importance of what **Figure 3** says about email engagement, consider that global Gmail users numbered 1.5 billion at the end of 2018. Gmail users are familiar with how Google places incoming email into the inbox, social, promotional, or spam folders.

The way recipients engage with received email serves as an input to Google's algorithms that route incoming messages. For this reason, to improve deliverability, marketers must focus on increasing engagement.

**FIGURE 3: MAILBOX PROVIDERS USE SUBSCRIBER ENGAGEMENT TO FILTER EMAIL YOU SEND**

There's a strong relationship between understanding how mailbox providers use subscriber engagement data and email effectiveness



Understanding that mailbox providers use engagement data to determine the deliverability rate of sent emails is a key step to greater email effectiveness. Simply understanding this relationship, however, has no impact unless that understanding is put into action.

**Figure 4** shares another view of study data that further emphasizes the relationship between engagement and deliverability.

Figures 3 and 4 reinforce a key fact that marketers must embrace when using email: **engagement is critical to inbox placement**. Marketers must invest in creating emails that engage, so that inbox placement is as high as possible.

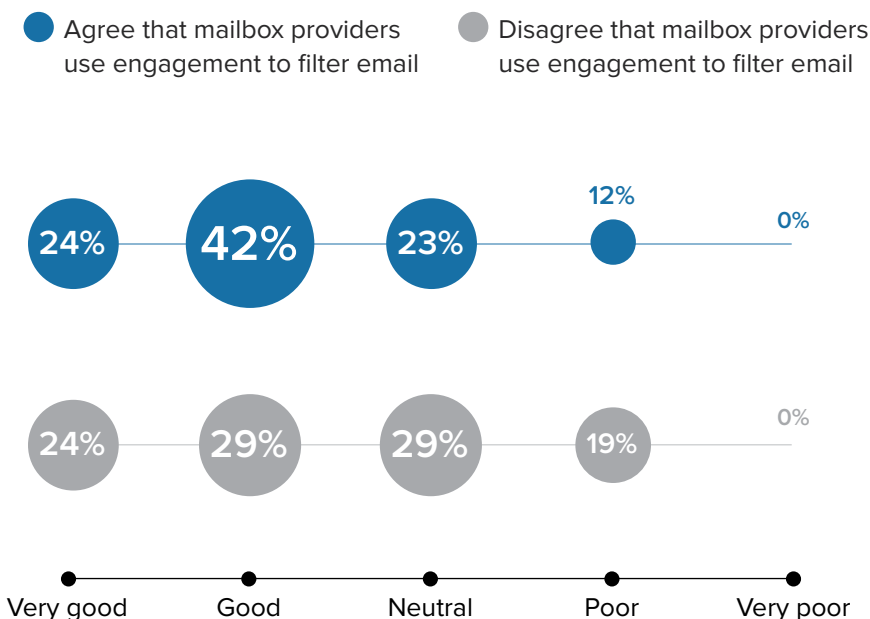
**When engagement doesn't figure prominently in email marketing efforts, marketers are unwittingly digging themselves into a hole from which it is hard to escape.**

This relationship between engagement and deliverability is why marketers must look at both to boost email marketing effectiveness.



**FIGURE 4: DELIVERABILITY (INBOX PLACEMENT) RATINGS**

Those who understand that mailbox providers use engagement data to filter email report better email deliverability.



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# Baseline Email Metrics



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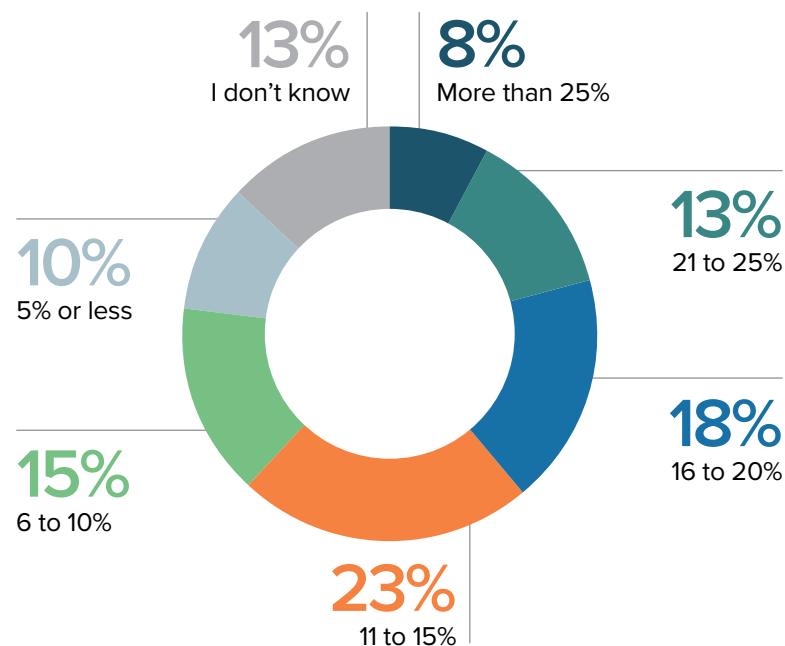
Return Path

## Baseline Email Metrics

Email open and click rates are basic metrics that almost every marketer reviews to gauge the effectiveness of an email campaign. **Figures 5 and 6** display the study's results for these metrics.

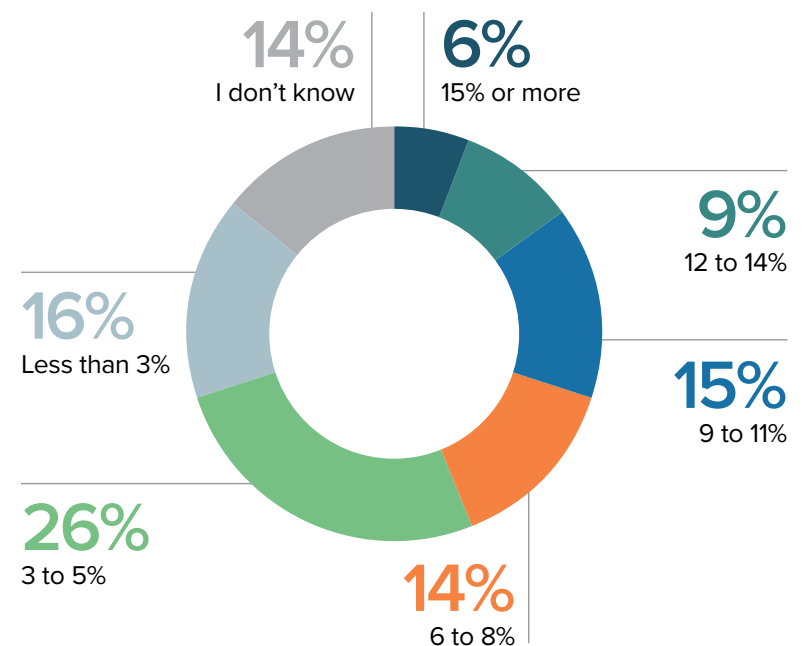
**FIGURE 5: AVERAGE OPEN RATE FOR EMAIL CAMPAIGNS**

Almost half of the study's participants report open rates of 15 percent or less.



**FIGURE 6: AVERAGE CLICK THROUGH RATE FOR EMAIL CAMPAIGNS**

Almost 60 percent of study participants report click-through rates of 8 percent or less.



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# Email Engagement Factors



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## Email Engagement Factors

This section will expand on some of the factors the study determined can help drive better email engagement, and at least one that doesn't.

### Permissions and Opt-In Strategy

One factor that surprisingly doesn't drive engagement, or at least not anymore, is the opt-in strategy.

Many past studies have shown that double opt-in strategies produce better results in the long run.

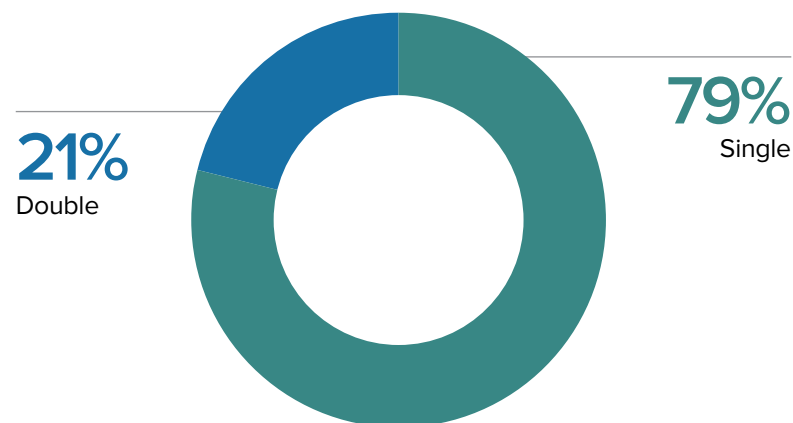
Securing adequate permission is always a sound strategy for an email marketer, and this study does not recommend abandoning such practices.

What the study found was that half of the participants either made no attempt to get permission before adding someone to a list (2 percent) or permission was assumed (48 percent).

For those that do send only to email addresses that have opted in, **Figure 7** shows the type of opt-in strategy in use.

**FIGURE 7: TYPE OF OPT IN STRATEGY IN USE**

Most of those who get permission before adding an address to a list use the single opt-in strategy.



The surprise in the data was that no correlation was found between email effectiveness and the practice of getting permission before adding addresses to a list.

There was also no correlation to the type of opt-in strategy in use. Upon further reflection, the lack of correlation here is likely a result of:

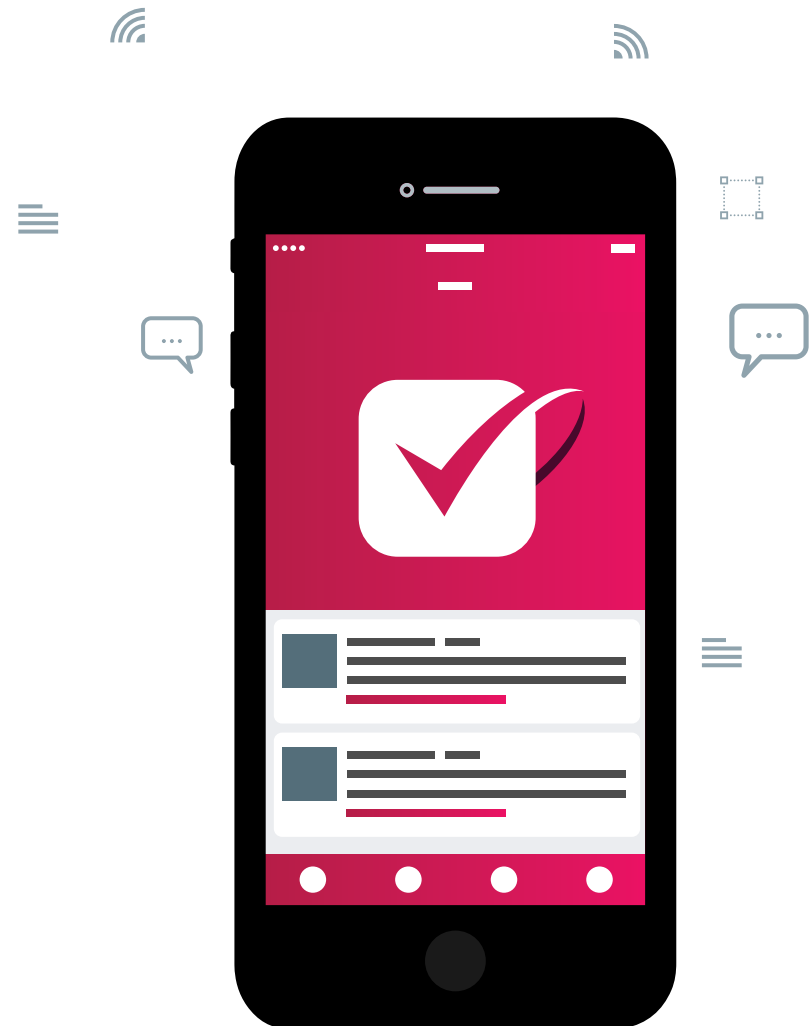
- Consumer cynicism that opt outs aren't always honored, and there's no penalty in the U.S. for failure to comply.
- Better approaches and technologies at the consumer's disposal for keeping unwanted messages and spam out of inboxes.

Whatever the reasons, this study showed no correlation between email effectiveness or deliverability and the use of an opt-in strategy.

**What this data seems to say is that having an opt-in strategy alone is insufficient to ensure emails reach subscribers who then engage with those messages. Marketers must move beyond just having an opt-in strategy if they expect real engagement through the email marketing channel.**

Should marketers continue to practice permission-based emailing? Absolutely. Organizations are required to receive the appropriate consent under regulations like the European Union's GDPR and Canada's CASL.

But this study suggests that effectiveness, engagement, and deliverability gains have little to do with the type of opt-in strategy they use.



## List Segmentation

Many study participants believe the ability to segment email lists (in order to send different messages to different list segments) is a factor in creating better engagement.

Almost 80 percent of study participants report that they are doing some type of list segmentation.

**Figure 8** depicts the relationship found in this study between practicing list segmentation and email deliverability.

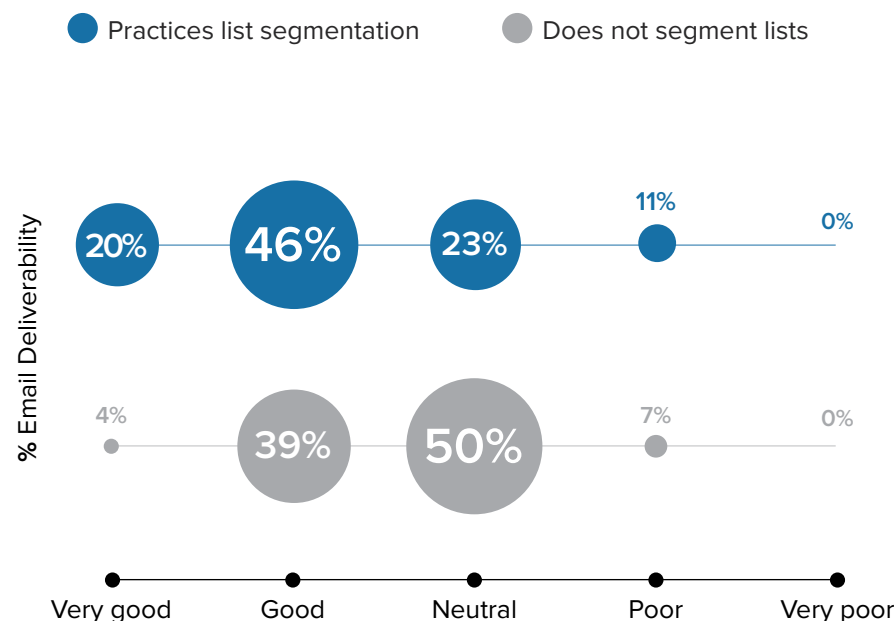
The ability to segment impacts deliverability, and therefore engagement, in a big way.

Less than half of those who don't practice list segmentation report good deliverability, while two-thirds of those who are segmenting their lists are getting good deliverability.

**The ability to segment lists and send different messages to different segments implies a level of capability, list quality, use of best practices, and overall rigor to an email marketing program.**

**FIGURE 8: LIST SEGMENTATION IMPACT ON DELIVERABILITY**

The ability to segment email lists is a major driver of deliverability.



The study participants who are segmenting their email lists shared some of the ways that they are doing so, as **Figure 9** summarizes.

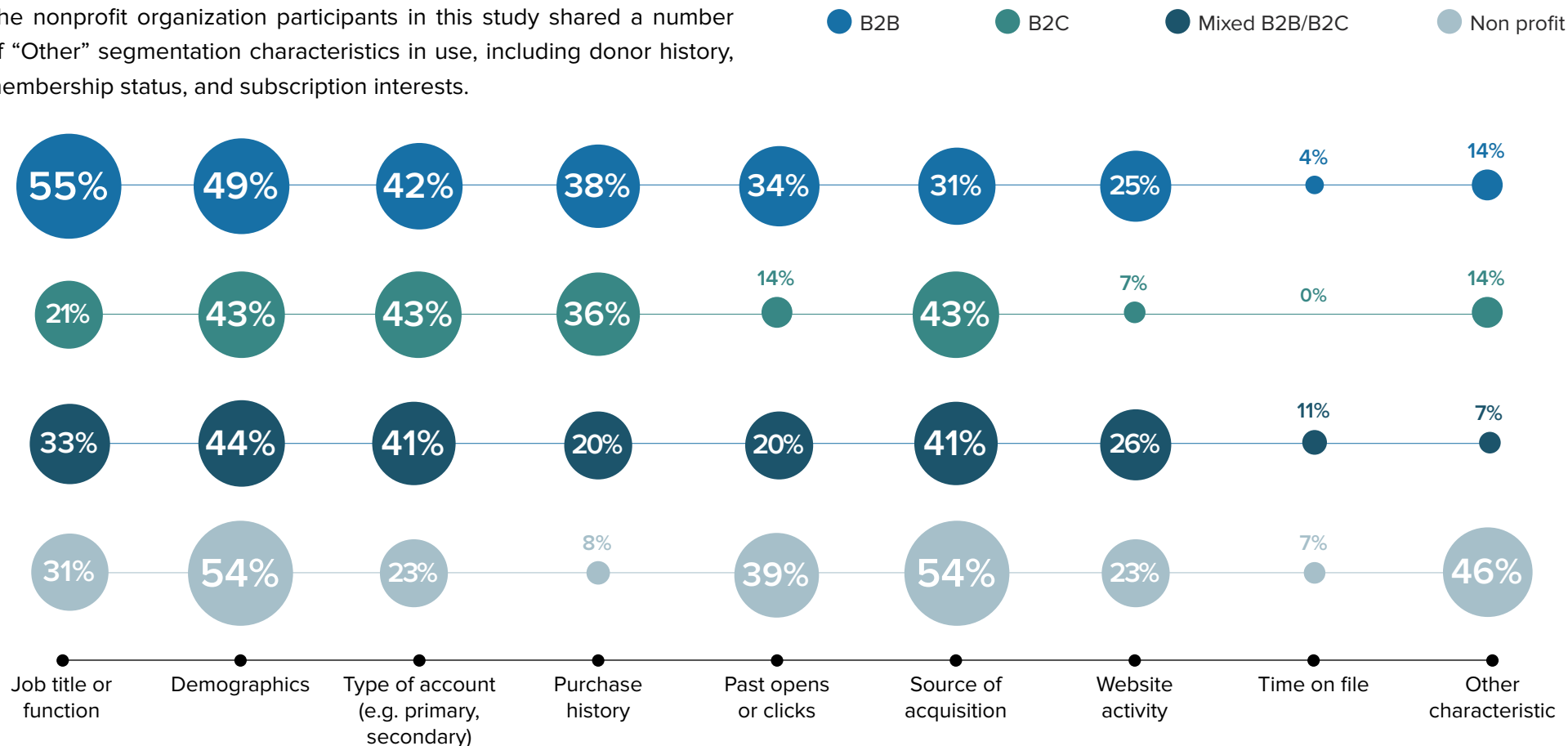
Each type of organization in the study had a different segmentation criterion that ranked first in terms of usage:

- Nonprofit: Source of acquisition
- B2C: Demographics and source of acquisition
- B2B: Job title or function

The nonprofit organization participants in this study shared a number of “Other” segmentation characteristics in use, including donor history, membership status, and subscription interests.

**FIGURE 9: CHARACTERISTICS USED TO SEGMENT EMAIL LISTS**

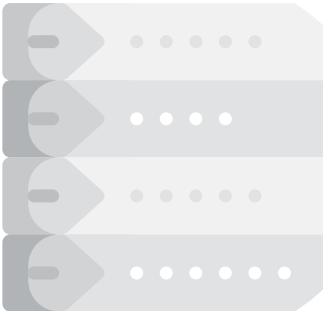
Popularity of list segmentation criteria differs by type of organization.



A minority of study participants (15 percent) are not doing email list segmentation, and **Figure 10** displays the reasons they provided for this inability.

The real barrier to segmentation is data quality, the Achilles heel of many marketing initiatives. The remaining barriers to segmentation shown in **Figure 10** are surmountable with existing technology or vendor solutions.

What's also clear is that virtually no one who isn't segmenting claims there is no need to do so, or that the benefits aren't clear.



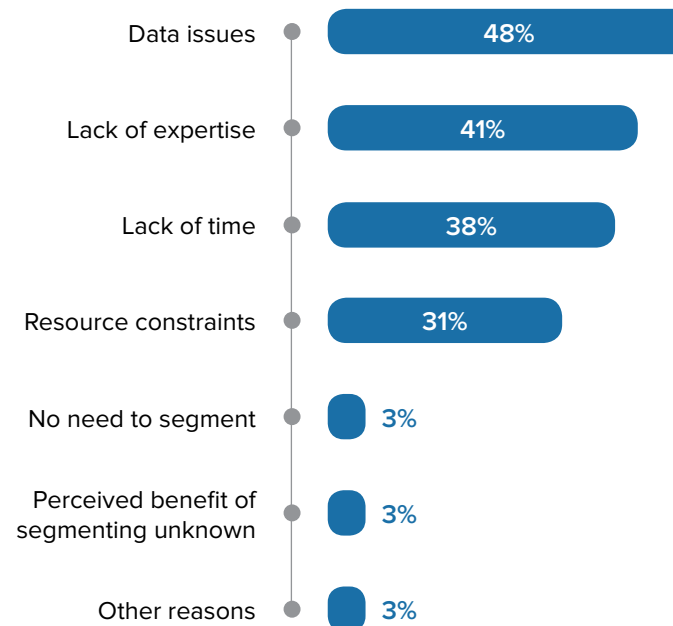
Even those who aren't segmenting their lists indirectly **acknowledge the need to do so.**



### What Prevents You From Segmenting Email Lists?

**FIGURE 10: BARRIERS TO LIST SEGMENTATION**

Almost half of those who don't segment email lists cite data issues as the reason.



## Using Data Sources to Understand Subscribers

If the only item of data a marketer has is the subscriber's email address, there is very little on which to segment.

Since list segmentation is a driver of deliverability, marketers have ample motivation to invest in resources, technology, and supplemental data to enable segmentation.

Most organizations have a rich set of “touchpoint” data stored in marketing automation and CRM systems that comes from the interactions customers and prospects have with marketing content delivered across multiple channels.

**Figure 11** shows the extent to which study participants use available sources of data to better understand their subscribers.

While tracking opens and clicks is useful and even important, **these metrics don't provide enough detail to understand subscriber behavior and intent.**

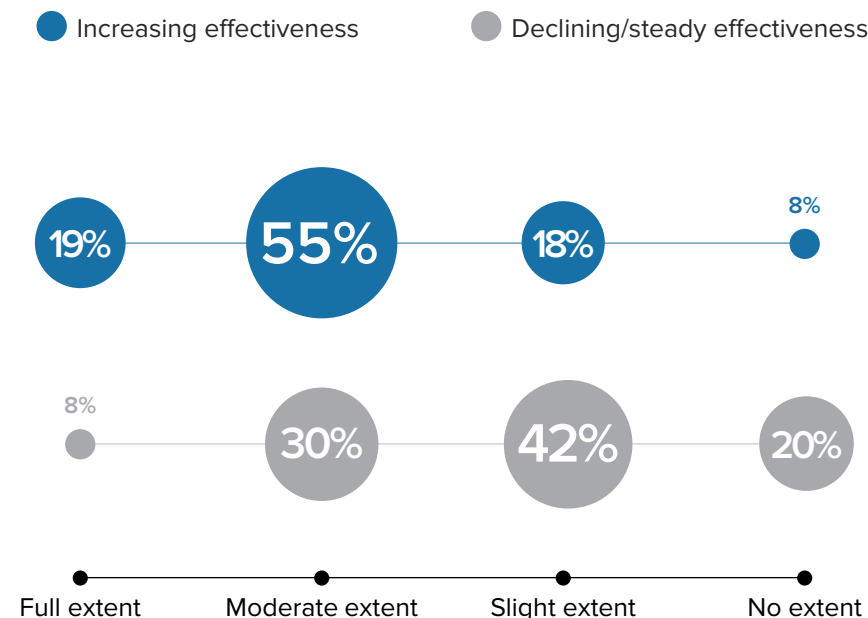
Matching data from other sources to email campaign data can provide marketing and sales teams with insights to better target content or simply know where a prospect is on their journey.

For example, just by utilizing device data, marketers can determine what devices subscribers use to read emails. This way, marketers can ensure that creative is optimized for the reader's device preferences.

Additionally, supplementing with complaint data helps identify campaigns that subscribers view as spam. Complaint data is also useful for helping to determine the optimal frequency or cadence for email sends.

### FIGURE 11: USE OF ANY OTHER DATA SOURCES TO BETTER UNDERSTAND EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

Leveraging available data sources to better understand subscribers has a clear impact on email effectiveness.



Email deliverability solution providers like Return Path have offerings that provide these insights automatically.

Certain types of data that are not directly related to email campaigns are still useful for understanding subscribers better. Correlating website and social data to email campaign data helps create a more complete picture of subscribers' interactions and interest.

The intelligence gained from using this touchpoint data helps marketers deliver a stellar experience regardless of the channel through which customers interact. All of the available data sources represent a vast amount of potential energy that, when analyzed and used, create value for the subscriber and a competitive advantage for the marketer.

## Personalization

Marketers have been hearing about the advantages of personalization for several years. Intuitively, personalization seems like a sure way to increase engagement. **Past Demand Metric studies on personalization** confirm that personalization increases content effectiveness.

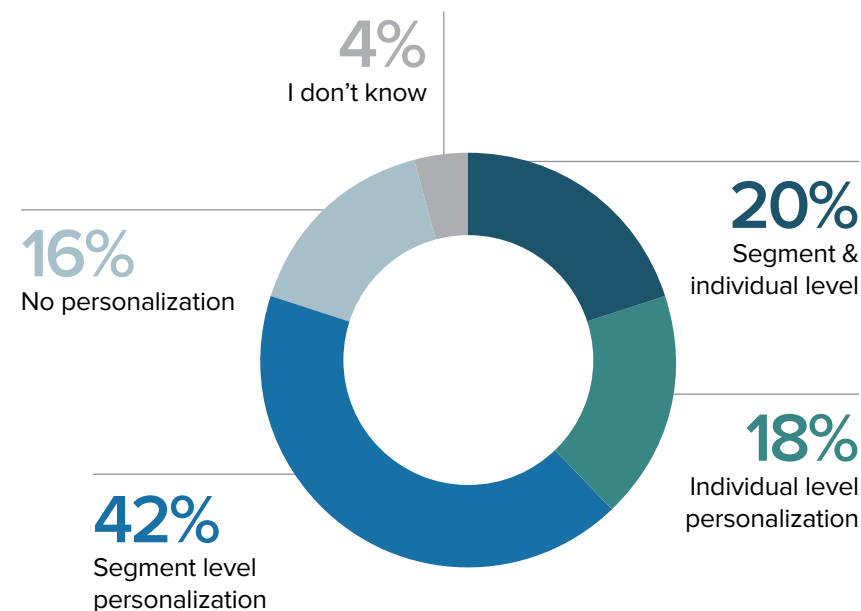
**Figure 12** displays the level at which study participants personalize email content.

For example, just by utilizing device data, marketers can determine what devices subscribers use to read emails. This way, marketers can ensure that creative is optimized for the reader's device preferences.

Additionally, supplementing with complaint data helps identify campaigns that subscribers view as spam. Complaint data is also useful for helping to determine the optimal frequency or cadence for email sends.

**FIGURE 12: PERSONALIZATION OF CONTENT IN MARKETING EMAIL MESSAGES**

80 percent of study participants personalize marketing email content at some level.



Personalization of email content correlates to average open and click rates, and **Figure 13** summarizes the impact of personalization on these rates.

The type of personalization that is used the least—at the individual level—is the most effective. **For better opens, clicks, and engagement, marketers should use individual level personalization.**

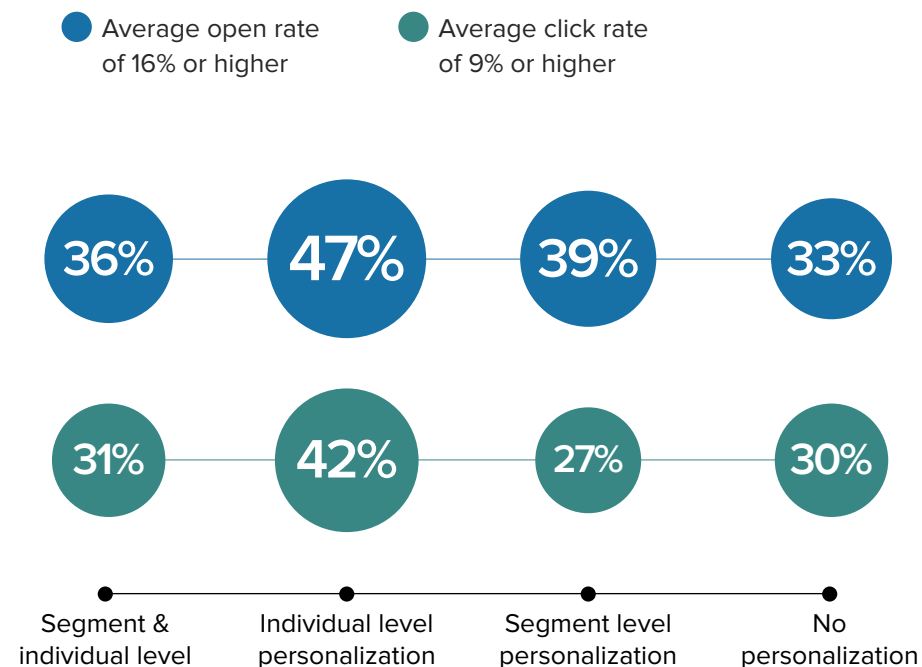
Furthermore, if personalization is done at only one level, the individual level is the best option.



The use of personalization, particularly individual personalization, is **associated with better performance.**

**FIGURE 13: IMPACT OF PERSONALIZATION ON OPEN & CLICK RATES**

Personalization impacts open and click-through rates, but seems to have a greater effect on open rates.



## Optimal Sending Frequency

The study examined how well marketers know the frequency of sends that keep them from wearing out their welcome with subscribers.

**Figure 14** shares the data on optimal sending frequency.

While few study participants have a precise understanding of optimal sending frequency, it's clear from **Figure 14** that there is a relationship between having some understanding of optimal frequency and email marketing program effectiveness.

More than half of those reporting increasing email campaign effectiveness have a reasonable to precise understanding of the optimal sending frequency.

Less than one-third of those with flat or declining campaign effectiveness share this same level of understanding.

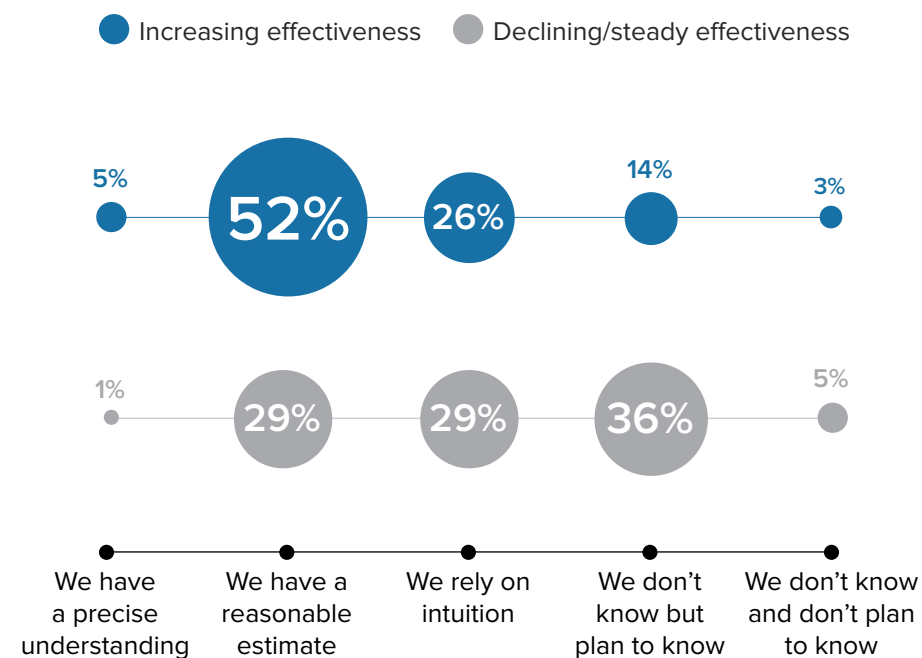
**Marketers must know this frequency to have better engagement with subscribers, and complaint data is one important factor in making this determination.**



Do You Know the Optimal Sending Frequency for Your Lists?

### FIGURE 14: UNDERSTANDING OF OPTIMAL SENDING FREQUENCY

Very few have a precise understanding of the optimal sending frequency.

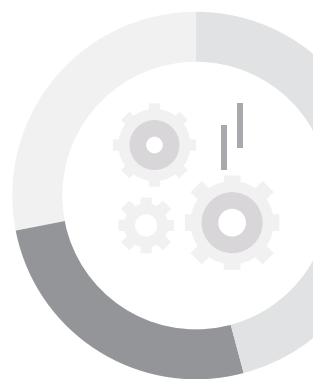


## Triggered Messaging

A triggered messaging program automates the sending of emails based on actions or conditions that trigger the send, such as a web visitor abandoning a cart or a subscriber's birthday.

The advantage of a triggered email is its relevancy and recency to an action or behavior of the recipient.

**Figure 15** shares the prevalence of triggered messaging programs.



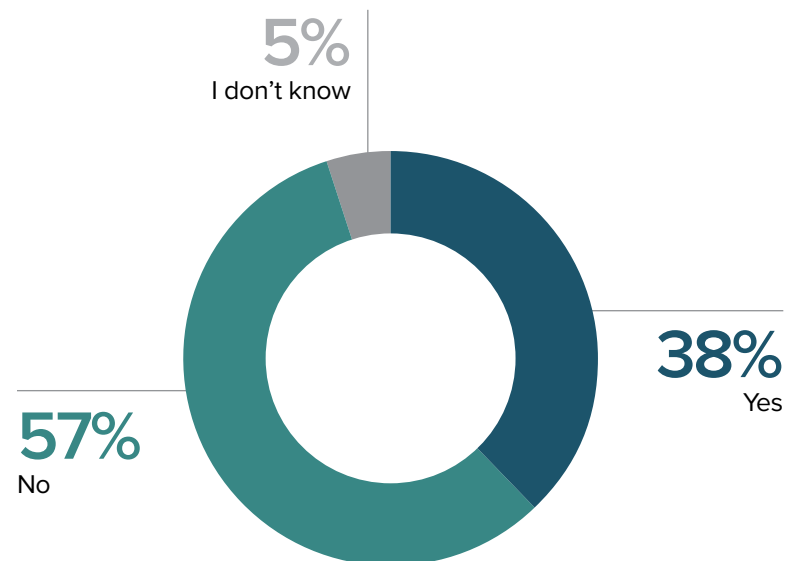
**Mixed B2B/B2C organizations were most likely (46 percent) to have a triggered messaging program, while nonprofit organizations were least likely (26 percent).**



Do You Have a Triggered Messaging Program?

### FIGURE 15: EXISTENCE OF TRIGGERED MESSAGING PROGRAM

Most study participants do not have a triggered messaging program.



Having a triggered messaging program impacts email click-through rates, and **Figure 16** shows that relationship.

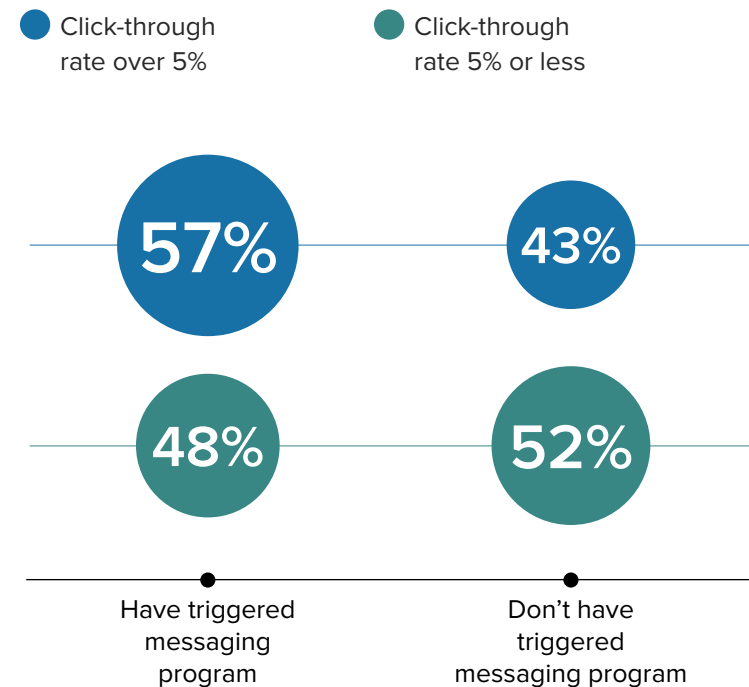
Analysis of study data revealed a strong correlation between having a triggered messaging program and better engagement, as measured by click-through rates.

In a climate where click-through rates are usually measured in hundredths of a percent, the differences in **Figure 16** are quite significant.



**FIGURE 16: TRIGGERED MESSAGING PROGRAMS IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT**

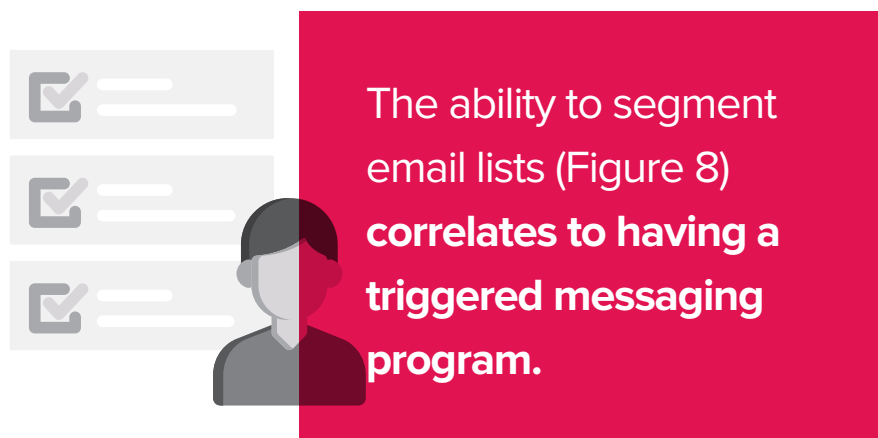
Triggered email message programs correlate to higher click rates.



Marketers can and should **develop triggered email programs** to support their customers' journey. Some of the common triggered message types in use by many study participants are summarized in **Figure 17**.

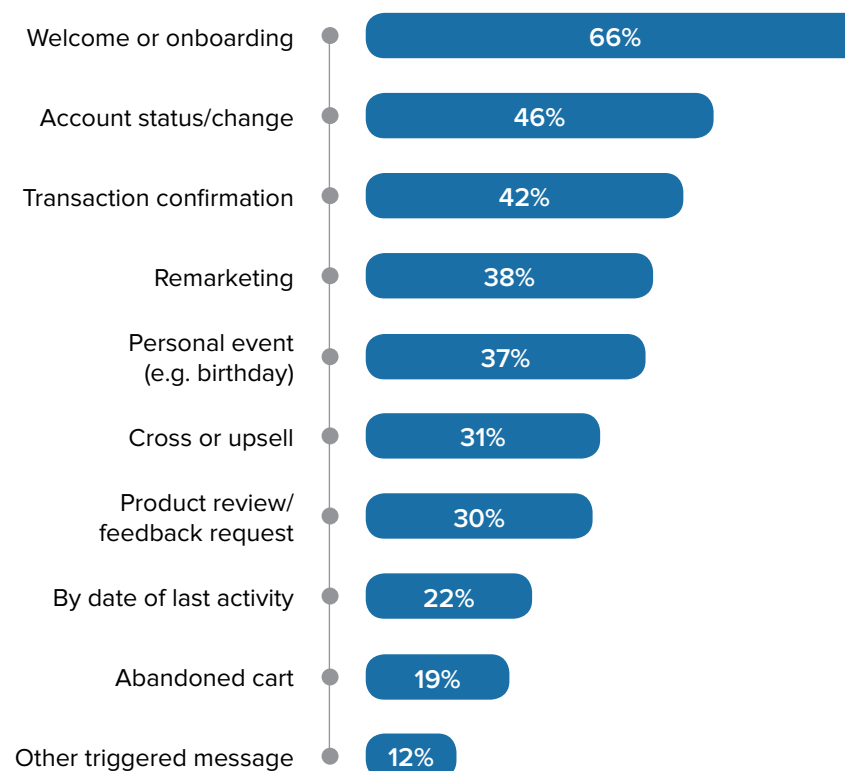
Welcome or onboarding triggered messages are most frequently used by the nonprofit (80 percent) and B2C (88 percent) segments in the study, but lower for the B2B (53 percent) segment.

Account status triggered messages were the second most frequently used type for B2B (53 percent) and B2C (63 percent), while for the nonprofit segment it was transaction confirmation messages (60 percent).



**FIGURE 17: TYPE OF TRIGGERED MESSAGES SENT**

Triggered welcome or onboarding messages are by far the most common.



## Competitive Engagement Monitoring

In the chess match that business often is, keeping tabs on what competitors are doing and how they're engaging their audience can feed into better content and email engagement.

The reason is simple: you share the same audience with your competitors. Having insights into what works for them can easily translate into better engagement for you.

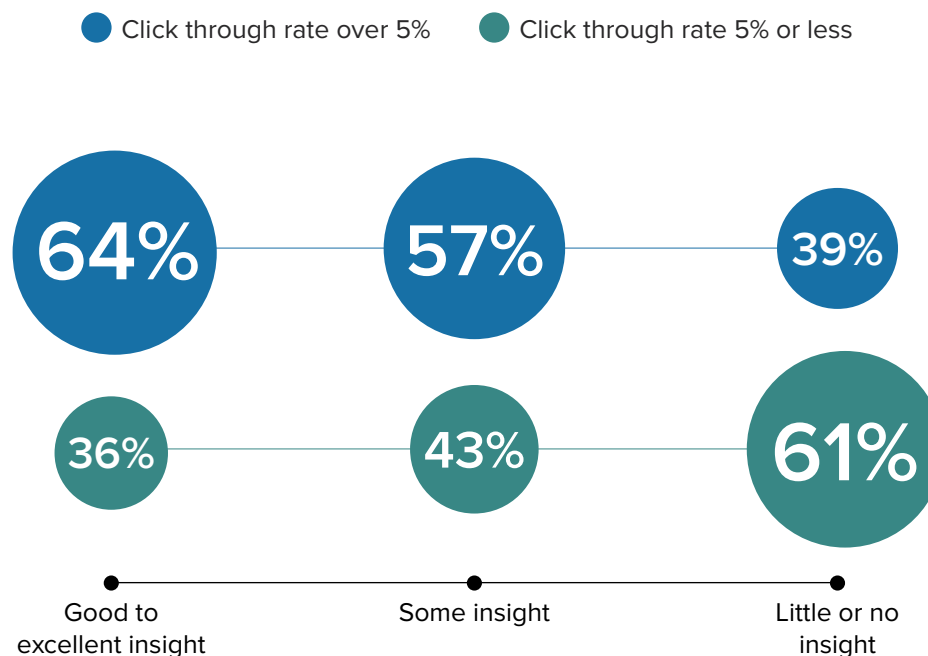
**Figure 18** shows how aware study participants are of how well competitors are engaging their audiences.

There is a marked contrast between study participants with little or no insight into how competitors are engaging their audience and those with good to excellent insight.

Having a holistic view of how content engages your audience—not just your own, but your competitor's content as well—contributes to better engagement.

### FIGURE 18: IMPACT OF INSIGHTS INTO COMPETITORS' AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT TO CLICK THROUGH RATES

Study participants with higher awareness of competitors' audience engagement are getting better click-through rates.



## List Management

The relationship between proactive list management and better email marketing effectiveness is probably intuitive.

Even so, it is helpful to see the data associated with a specific aspect of list management that is considered a best practice for improving email engagement: identifying and removing inactive subscribers from lists.

**Figure 19** shows the relationship between this list management strategy and email effectiveness.

Marketers may be reluctant to remove inactive subscribers from lists. Each subscriber represents a lead for which an investment was made.

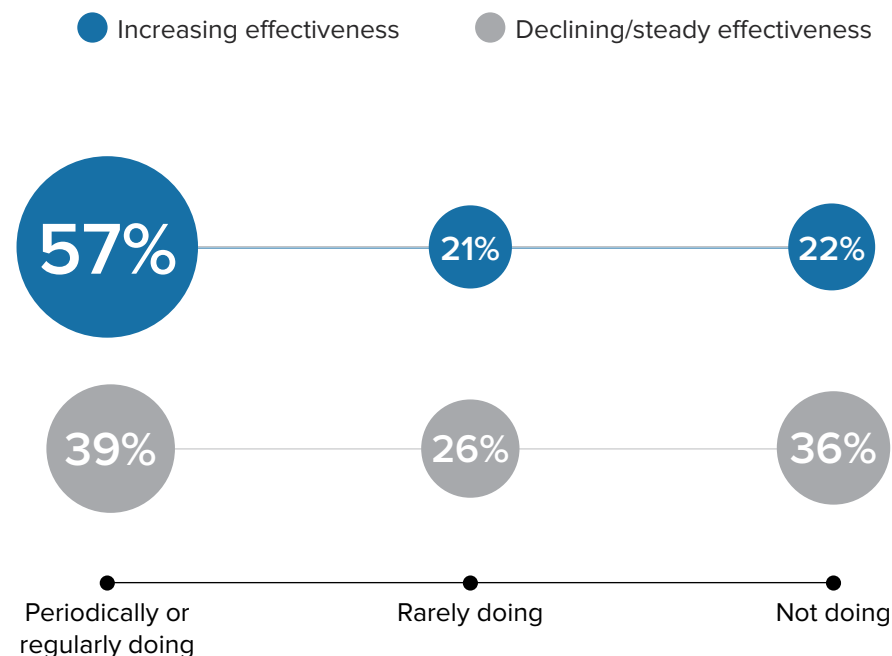
However, when subscribers become inactive, there's a real cost to continue mailing to them, and **Figure 19** summarizes the effectiveness cost.

Mailbox providers track continued attempts to mail inactive subscribers, and at some point, marketers will cross a threshold where the mailbox providers penalize the sender.

Marketers must prune inactive subscribers from their lists if they want to maintain effectiveness and realize better engagement.

### FIGURE 19: HOW ACTIVELY LISTS ARE MANAGED TO IDENTIFY INACTIVE SUBSCRIBERS

Managing lists by removing inactive subscribers is a proven approach for increasing effectiveness and therefore engagement.



From a broader list management perspective, study participants shared some of the things they are doing to maintain the email lists they use for marketing or lead generation, as **Figure 20** summarizes.

In a perfect world, 100 percent of marketers would honor opt-out requests. If this happened, perhaps legislation such as CASL and GDPR would not be necessary.

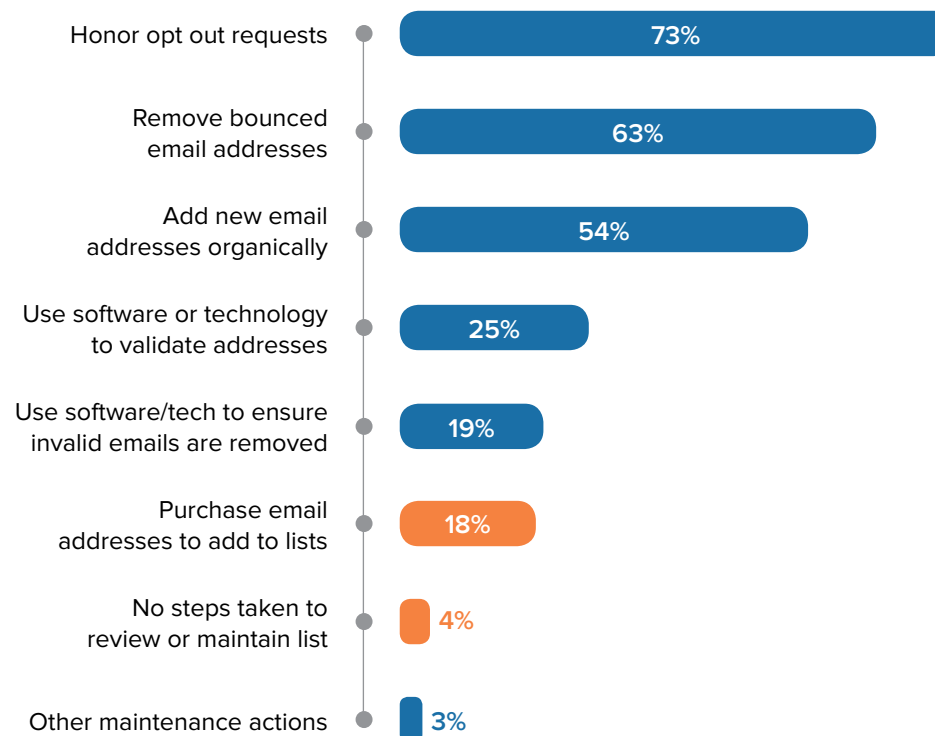
The reality, however, as **Figure 20** shows, is that not quite three-fourths of marketers are doing this.

Another surprise in this data is how many marketers are purchasing email addresses as a way to list build. There are no experts and no data that suggest this is a good idea, yet the practice continues.



### FIGURE 20: HOW MARKETING/LEAD GEN EMAIL LISTS ARE MAINTAINED

Some of the ways study participants maintain their email lists.



One thing marketers can do before simply culling inactive subscribers from their lists is to attempt to **re-engage them with a targeted campaign**. In this study, more than half (56 percent) are not running re-engagement campaigns.

Of those who are (44 percent), **Table 1** shows the effectiveness of various types of re-engagement campaigns.



No single re-engagement campaign stands out as best. **Senders must understand their audience and match tactics to audience preferences.**

TABLE 1: RE-ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness ratings of various re-engagement offers.

	INEFFECTIVE	NEUTRAL	EFFECTIVE	N/A
Surveys	27%	20%	31%	22%
Coupons/ discounts	20%	14%	33%	33%
New product/ service	20%	33%	37%	10%
Free resource offers	16%	27%	39%	18%
Customer testimonials	22%	24%	37%	18%


## Device Optimization

Another correlation to effectiveness in the study was testing and optimizing emails for viewing on different devices.

**Figure 21** depicts this relationship.

The message in the data that **Figure 21** displays is obvious: engagement effectiveness is greatly influenced by testing and optimizing email messages for different devices.

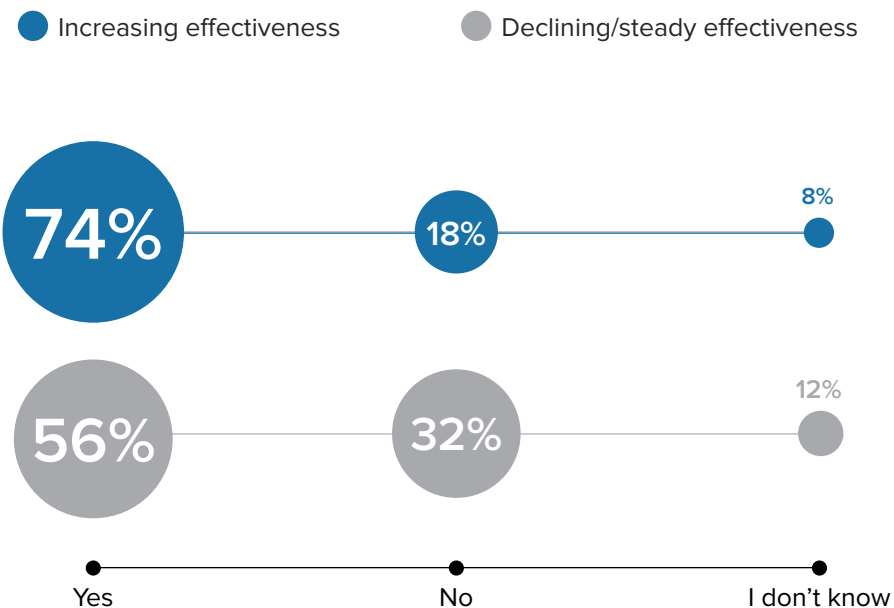
Doing so implies a care and attention to detail that pays dividends in engagement and overall effectiveness.



Senders should **understand what devices their subscribers use to view messages,** and then test and optimize email for those devices.

### FIGURE 21: EMAILS TESTED & OPTIMIZED FOR VIEWING ON DIFFERENT DEVICES

Testing and optimization for different devices has a big impact on effectiveness.

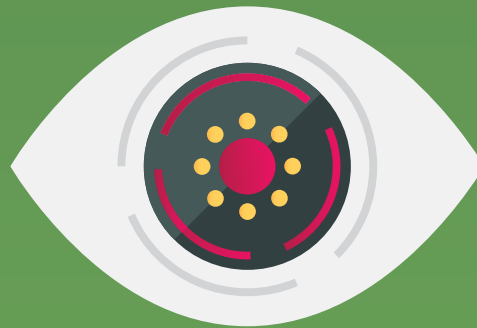


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THE STATE OF

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# Artificial Intelligence



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# Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a game-changing technology that is already embedded in many of the solutions found in martech stacks.

Email is certainly an AI application that represents low-hanging fruit, and the early adopters of AI solutions are seeing significant gains.

A **Relevancy Group study done in partnership with Return Path** found that senders using AI are generating 41 percent more revenue than those embracing manual personalization.

By using AI, marketers get a major technology assist in implementing best practices and consistently applying them across the entire email marketing program.

This study found that the role of AI in email marketing efforts is still quite limited, as **Figure 22** shows.

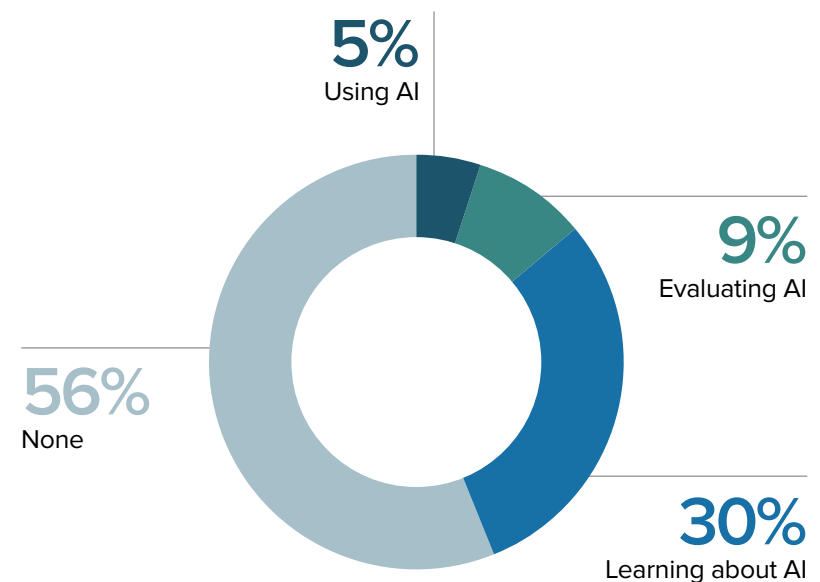
Using AI to personalize email (or other types of content) is probably the first application marketers think about, and of course this use is well within the realm of what AI can do.

**AI can also make a difference** in many other aspects of email marketing efforts, such as building and maintaining a subscriber base creative optimization, and audience optimization. As with many leading-edge technology solutions, the greatest rewards go to the earliest adopters.

Because vendors are rapidly adding AI capabilities to their solutions, the need to have special skills and expertise to exploit AI is not a barrier to adoption.

**FIGURE 22: ROLE OF AI TECHNOLOGIES IN EMAIL MARKETING EFFORTS**

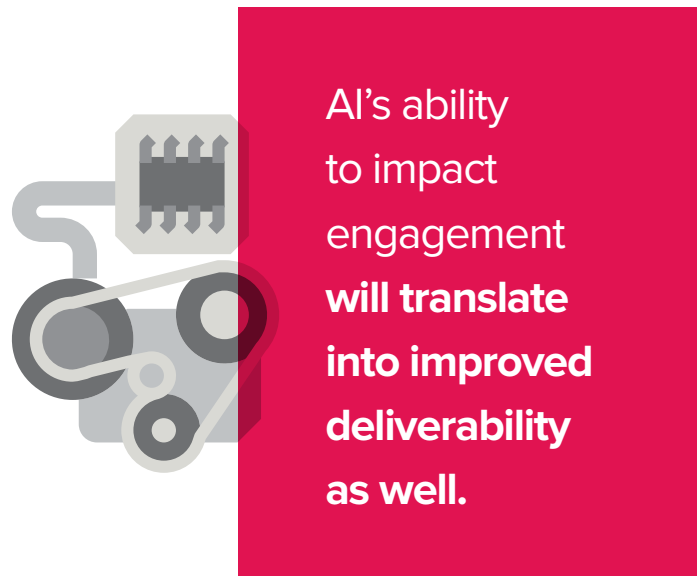
AI technology for email marketing is still in the early adoption stage.



Even though AI adoption is low, expectations are high about how and where it will impact email marketing.

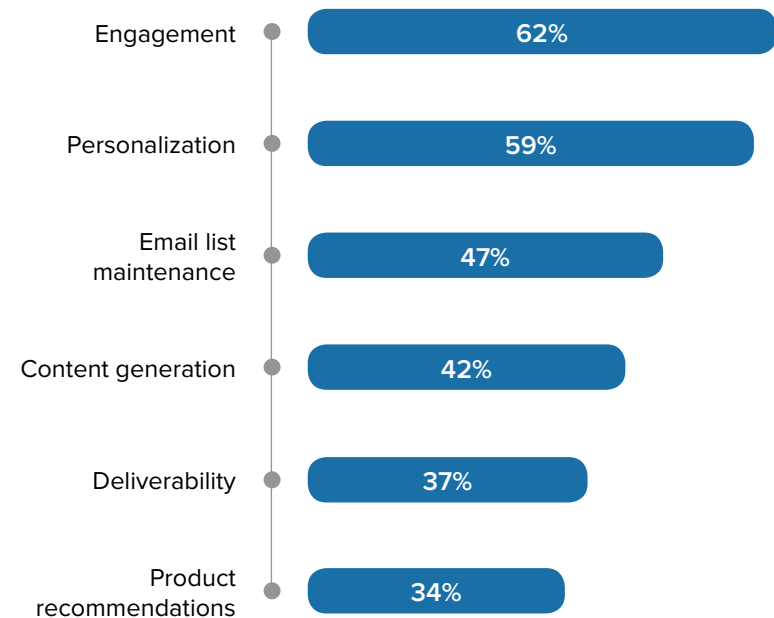
**Figure 23** summarizes where study participants feel AI will have the most impact.

Engagement tops the list of where study participants expect to see an impact from leveraging AI in their email marketing efforts.



**FIGURE 23: WHERE AI WILL HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT IN EMAIL MARKETING**

AI is expected to have the greatest impact on engagement.



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THE STATE OF

# EMAIL ENGAGEMENT

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# Email Marketing Metrics



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## Email Marketing Metrics

Email has long been one of the most measured marketing channels. In the past decade, marketers have had greater expectations placed on them to measure their efforts and prove their contribution.

The ability to do that through the email channel is within easy reach of any marketer.

**Figure 24** shows the email engagement metrics in use by study participants.

Tracking metrics only provides value when those metrics are not just reported, but used to gain insights for program improvement.

The email metrics data from **Figure 24** did not show any significant differences when it was segmented using email program effectiveness data from Figure 2 (page 9), except for two types of metrics: conversions and unsubscribe rates.

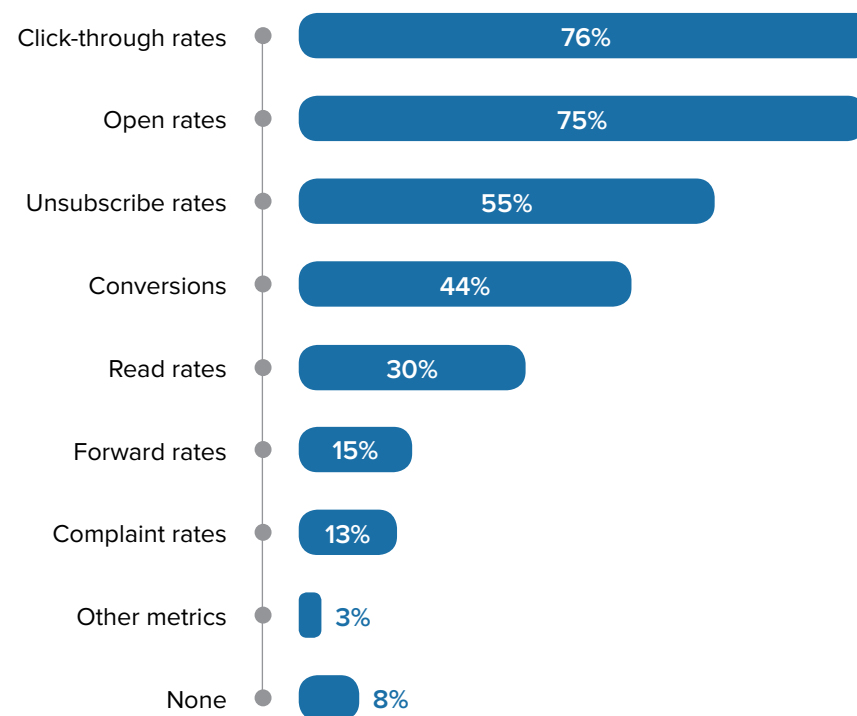
Study participants who reported increasing email program effectiveness were more likely to also track these two metrics.

Marketers that want insight into email engagement must track multiple metrics. While click-through rates are good indicators of engagement, read rates, forward rates, and conversions are important metrics to get a more complete picture of engagement.

Marketers should track and analyze multiple metrics to monitor engagement.

**FIGURE 24: ENGAGEMENT METRICS TRACKED**

Click through and open rates are the most commonly tracked email engagement metrics.



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THE STATE OF  
**EMAIL ENGAGEMENT**

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# General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)



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## General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

When the GDPR became law in the European Union, it created a ripple effect around the globe.

The initial concern about GDPR was that it would negatively impact email marketing programs, even for those that followed the rules and best practices.

This study measured the impact, and the results are seen in **Figure 25**.

While over one-fourth of study participants don't know how they were impacted by the GDPR, over half report that it had no impact or a positive one.

The email permissions and privacy climate in the U.S. has been described as the "wild west" by many industry watchers. The European Union, with the GDPR, is now on the opposite end of this permissions and privacy spectrum.

It is likely that some version of the GDPR will eventually make its way across the Atlantic and become a reality for U.S. marketers.

Those who already understand it and are compliant with its provisions will have a major marketing advantage, and will not experience any disruption to how they use the email channel.

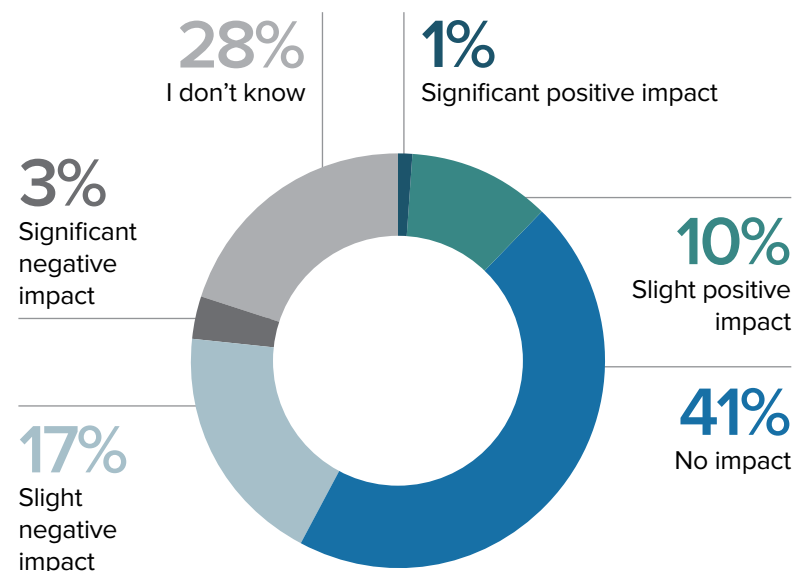
The good news, as **Figure 25** shows, is that the impact is not necessarily negative. There is benefit to getting one's email marketing house in order.



How Did the GDPR Impact the Performance of Your Email?

**FIGURE 25: THE IMPACT OF THE GDPR**

A significant segment of study participants don't know how the GDPR impacted their email performance.



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THE STATE OF

# EMAIL ENGAGEMENT

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# The Bottom Line on Email Engagement



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# The Bottom Line on Email Engagement

Marketers understand that getting better results from email campaigns requires a sustained focus on deliverability.

What some marketers don't understand is that creating and sending messages that engage subscribers is critical to enjoying higher inbox placement rates and overall campaign effectiveness.

**Engagement and deliverability are inseparable. Marketers cannot improve one without paying attention to the other.**

This study identifies many best practices beyond standard, permission-based marketing tactics, that lead to improvements:

1

## Metrics

While it's fine to implement best practices and technology, the right starting place is with metrics.

Marketers are pretty good about measuring open and click-through rates, but to measure engagement, the email marketing dashboard should include more metrics: conversions, read rates, forward rates, and complaint rates collectively give marketing a clearer picture of engagement.

A valid engagement metrics dashboard is the first thing to put in place when working to improve email engagement.

2

## Segmentation

It's a good sign when marketers have the ability to segment their lists. It means they have enough supplemental data about their subscribers, that list maintenance and data hygiene are robust enough to enable it, and that they have the tools to build and send different messages to list segments.

Marketers that are not already segmenting their email lists should aspire to do so because it is a major driver of deliverability.



3

**Personalization**

This study confirms what marketers intuitively know: personalization results in higher open and click-through rates.

Marketers that aren't already personalizing messages and content will find AI capabilities in many of the solutions they already use, or can quickly acquire, and implement to automate personalization.

5

**Triggered messaging**

The use of triggered messages, sent at key points and times in the customer's journey, improve engagement.

The sending of these messages can occur automatically based on certain digital events, and AI capabilities in many vendor solutions enable sophisticated, personalized messages to go out at just the perfect point in the journey.

4

**Sending frequency**

Marketers should not remain in the dark about what the optimal sending frequency is for each of their lists. It is possible to determine the frequency with a high degree of precision and prevent **list fatigue**.

Marketers should develop an understanding of the optimal sending frequency for each of their lists, and analyzing complaint data will provide key inputs into the determination.

6

**Competitor monitoring**

Most marketers already monitor competitors, but not for the reasons of improving email engagement.

Understanding which competitor messages and content resonate and create a buzz can inform the development and execution of an email marketing strategy.

7

### List management

Marketers already understand the need to manage email lists. One aspect of list management that drives engagement, and often gets overlooked according to this study's data, is removing inactive subscribers.

The inactive subscribers will probably not notice, but mailbox providers use the repeated attempts to mail a subscriber that is inactive as filtering criteria.

The final thought is that achieving good levels of email engagement is not a place that marketers arrive at and their journey is finally over.

The right frame of mind on engagement is that it is an ongoing process where the rewards go to those who measure, analyze, change, and then repeat the cycle.

8

### Device optimization

Technology has come a long way in automatically making the content that marketers deliver responsive. If there's a problem now, it's that marketers assume that content is adjusted and works as it should across all device types.

Normally this is true, but it's still recommended that marketers test their sends across all device types to ensure the customer experience is optimal.

Those who test are having greater effectiveness with email campaigns than those who aren't.



## Acknowledgements

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**Demand Metric** helps marketers get stuff done. Since 2006, we've worked with over 100,000 marketers around the world to identify how top performing marketing departments operate. Unlike 'ivory tower' analyst firms, Demand Metric gives you practical tools, training, and advice that will have you operationalizing best practices in minutes.

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**Return Path** is the leading provider of email data solutions. We analyze the world's largest collection of email data to show businesses how to stay connected to their audiences and strengthen their customer engagement. We help mailbox providers around the world deliver great user experiences and build trust in email by ensuring that wanted messages reach the inbox while spam doesn't.

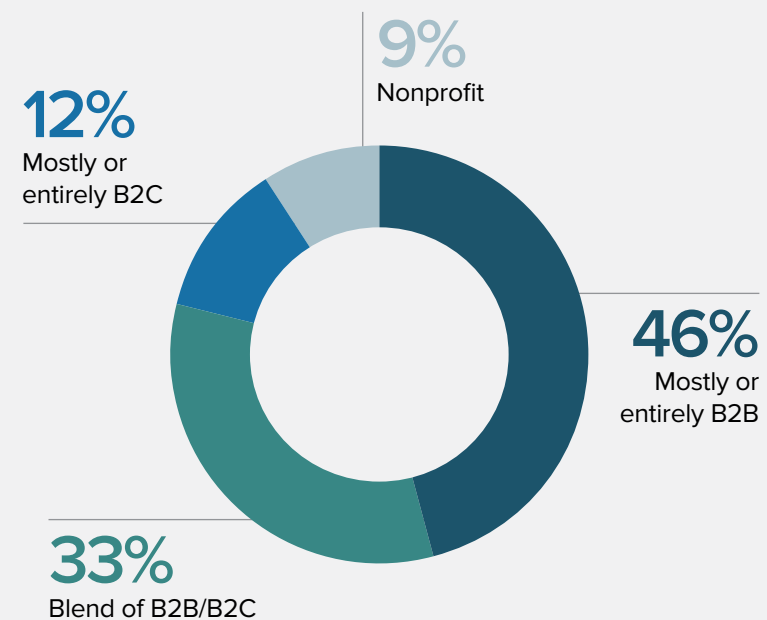
Headquartered in New York, Return Path has offices in Denver, San Jose, Austin, Indianapolis, Toronto, London, Paris, Hamburg, Sydney, and São Paulo.

To find out more about Return Path solutions, visit us at [returnpath.com](http://returnpath.com).

This **Demand Metric The State of Email Engagement Benchmark Study** survey was administered online during the period of Dec. 10, 2018 to Jan 21, 2019.

256 responses were collected, 221 of which were complete enough for inclusion in the analysis. Only valid or correlated findings are shared in this report.

The representativeness of this study's results depends on the similarity of the sample to environments in which this survey data is used for comparison or guidance.





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