Improving Email Deliverability
In 2026

Google, AI-powered Algorithms, Spam, Technical Setup, Engagement, and Metrics - What B2B & SaaS need to know right now!

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Email marketing isn't getting easier—if anything, it's becoming tougher to navigate. Inbox providers are smarter, audiences are savvier (and a touch weary?), and the margin for error is razor-thin.

Today, the challenge isn't just crafting beautiful emails but ensuring they actually land in the inbox and resonate with your audience. Yet despite these hurdles, email remains a cornerstone of B2B marketing, delivering an astonishing ROI of $36 for every $1 spent. The question isn't whether email is worth it; it's how to make it work.

This ebook is your roadmap to mastering the complexities of email deliverability in a landscape shaped by AI-powered algorithms, stricter security protocols, and constantly shifting audience expectations.

We'll explore what Google wants, how to balance technical precision with creative brilliance, and why consistent testing remains your ultimate secret weapon. Whether you're a seasoned CMO or a newbie in B2B marketing, these insights will help you keep your emails front and center.

Why Email Still Matters

Let's start with some eye-popping numbers:

- 3,500% ROI: Email generates $36 for every $1 spent (Litmus, 2025).
- 71% of B2B marketers say email newsletters are their most-used content marketing tactic
- (Content Marketing Institute, 2024).
- 50% of B2B marketers claim email marketing is their most effective marketing channel (G2, 2024)

Email remains a powerhouse in B2B marketing, but only for those willing to embrace its evolving complexity. With these stakes, getting email right isn't just beneficial—it's essential.

What does Google want?

Google's Latest Email Policies

Google has implemented significant changes since 2024 in handling email sending and deliverability, reflecting its commitment to enhancing security and improving user experience. Understanding these changes can help you adapt and thrive.

Enhanced Security Measures

With more phishing scams and fake emails created using AI, Google has ramped up its security measures to protect users. These include stricter rules for email authentication using SPF, DKIM, and DMARC, which help stop scammers from faking email domains or sending scam messages.

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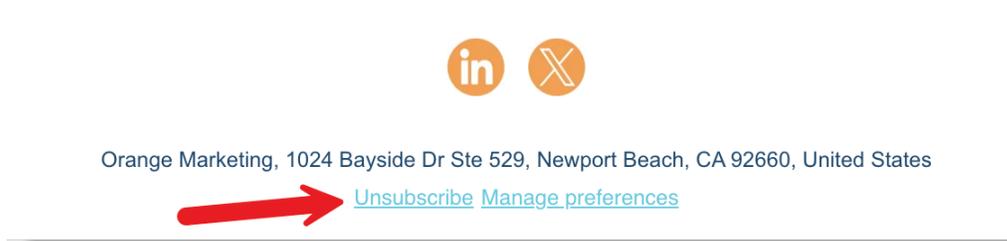Let's take a peek at these terms for those who need a refresher:

- **SPF (Sender Policy Framework):** This makes sure an email is sent from an approved server for your domain.
- **DKIM (DomainKeys Identified Mail):** Adds a secure signature to your email, showing it hasn't been tampered with.
- **DMARC (Domain-Based Message Authentication, Reporting, and Conformance):** Combines SPF and DKIM to decide what happens if an email fails authentication, like marking it as spam or rejecting it.

For SMBs, implementing these protocols is no longer optional. Google's updates in 2024 mandated that bulk senders with over 5,000 daily emails must authenticate their domains using these methods.

Even businesses sending smaller volumes benefit significantly by adhering to these best practices, as authenticated emails are far more likely to land in primary inboxes rather than being flagged as spam.

Addressing New Privacy Expectations

Privacy regulations such as GDPR and CCPA have also reshaped email of late, and Google has aligned its policies accordingly. These privacy laws require businesses to obtain clear, explicit consent before sending marketing emails and to provide transparent opt-out mechanisms.

Orange Marketing, 1024 Bayside Dr Ste 529, Newport Beach, CA 92660, United States
Unsubscribe Manage preferences

Google actively monitors compliance with these regulations and prioritizes senders who uphold these standards.

SMBs can align with these expectations by:

- Using double opt-in mechanisms to verify subscriber consent.
- Honoring unsubscribe requests promptly (within two days, as per Google's guidelines).
- Keeping detailed records of subscriber consent for auditing purposes.

By prioritizing transparency and consent, SMBs can improve their sender reputation and foster stronger customer relationships.

The Role of BIMI in Branding and Trust

Brand Indicators for Message Identification (BIMI) is another feature supported by Google to enhance trust in email communications. BIMI allows businesses to display their verified corporate logo next to their emails in the recipient's inbox, but only if they enforce SPF, DKIM, and DMARC policies.
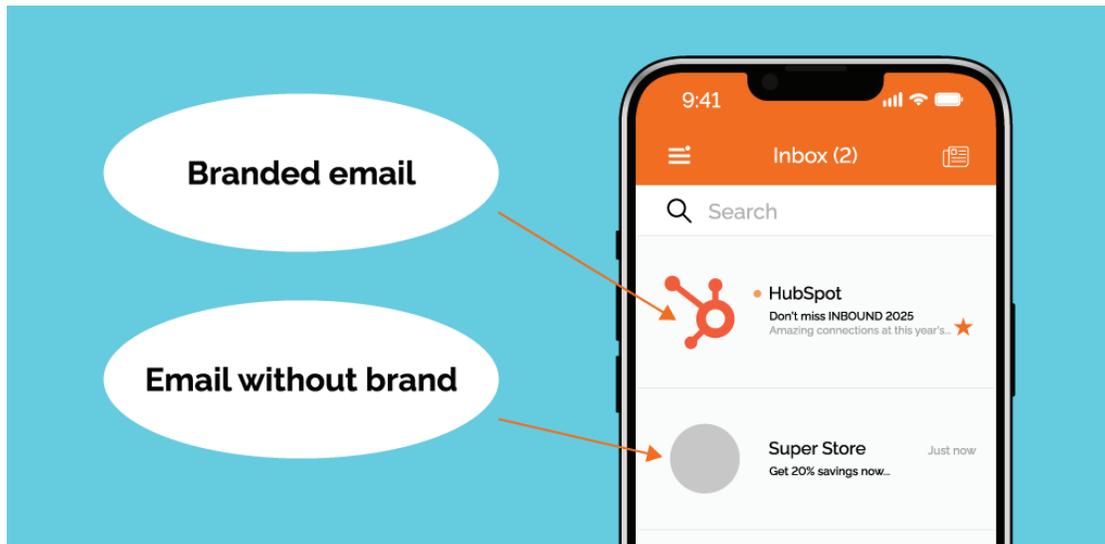
Although BIMI does not directly influence deliverability, it:

* Improves brand recognition.
* Boosts customer trust and engagement.
* Enhances the visual appeal of email communications.

As many businesses are still adopting email authentication and implementing BIMI, there is a significant opportunity for SMBs to stand out in crowded inboxes by adopting this standard.

Adapting to Google

There is an overall slow pickup in adopting stricter DMARC policies, which suggests that Google, Yahoo, and other major email providers will likely introduce further mandates in the near future. These gradual, incremental changes are designed to give businesses time to adapt while minimizing disruptions.

Experts predict that within two to four years, stricter enforcement of DMARC will become the new norm, compelling organizations to prioritize email authentication for the sake of security and deliverability.

Businesses that plan proactively for these shifts will be better positioned to maintain email trust and effectiveness.

AI Influence and Tools

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an essential tool for maintaining and enhancing sender reputation in email marketing. By monitoring sending practices in real time and flagging potential issues before they escalate, AI helps ensure emails land in the right inboxes. From identifying segments with low engagement to recommending adjustments for reducing unsubscribe rates.

AI empowers SMBs to optimize their strategies proactively. In marketing, every interaction counts, and leveraging AI effectively can make the difference between a successful campaign and one that misses the mark.

Smarter Spam Filters

AI has made spam filters significantly more advanced, transforming how inbox providers like Google and Yahoo determine email placement. These filters analyze vast amounts of data in real time, assessing factors such as:

- **Sender reputation:** Evaluating historical performance and authentication protocols like SPF, DKIM, and DMARC.
- **Engagement metrics:** Considering open rates, click-through rates, and subscriber actions like marking emails as spam.
- **Content analysis:** Detecting spammy language, excessive capitalization, and misleading subject lines.

For SMBs, this means that emails must meet higher standards of authenticity, relevance, and quality. AI-powered spam filters leave no room for error, underscoring the importance of aligning with email authentication protocols and best practices.

Advanced Segmentation

AI tools have elevated email segmentation, enabling marketers to create hyper-targeted campaigns that drive engagement and improve deliverability. By analyzing behavioral data, purchase history, and preferences, AI empowers businesses to:

- Identify high-value audience segments based on engagement levels.
- Tailor content and offers to specific demographics or behavioral trends.
- Predict customer needs and preferences to send relevant messages at the right time.

For SMBs, advanced segmentation powered by AI ensures that email campaigns reach the right people with the right message, improving open rates and click-through rates while reducing the risk of unsubscribes and spam complaints.

Balancing AI and Human Creativity

AI is a powerful ally in email and content marketing generally, offering insights and automation that enhance efficiency and engagement. However, over-relying on AI without human oversight can lead to generic messaging, poorly timed automation, or a lack of authenticity, which will alienate your audience.

To avoid these pitfalls, treat AI as a complement to human creativity. Regularly review and adjust AI-driven content to ensure it reflects your brand values, resonates with your audience, and strikes the right balance between efficiency and personalization.

Spam—Don't Get Canned

Spam classification doesn't just hurt your open rates; it can damage your sending domain's reputation, hindering all future campaigns.

So what can you do?

Technical Setup: Laying the Foundation for Email Success

A robust technical setup is critical for avoiding spam filters.

Here's are 4 tasks SMBs should prioritize:

1. **Configure DNS Records Properly** - Ensure your Domain Name System (DNS) records include the necessary email authentication protocols, including SPF, SKIM, and DMARC.

   [NOTE: For more information, catch our post HubSpot Customers: How to Fix Your DNS Records to Comply With Google & Yahoo]

2. **Secure a Dedicated Sending Domain** - SMBs benefit from separating their marketing email domain from their corporate domain. For example, use a subdomain like "marketing.yourcompany.com." This separation minimizes risks to corporate email deliverability while giving marketers the freedom to refine their campaigns.

3. **Use Inbox Warm-Up Services** - Services like ZeroBounce can help you build a positive sender reputation. By gradually increasing your email volume and encouraging interactions, ISPs recognize your emails as legitimate.

   [NOTE: Read more in our post How to Create and Warmup a Marketing Email Sending Domain]

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4. **Implement Email Hygiene Practices** - Set workflows to categorize hard bounces, spam traps, and invalid addresses into a "non-sendable" list. Regular hygiene ensures your contact lists remain clean and reduces the risk of being flagged as spam.

ISP Importance: Understanding the Gatekeepers

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are the guardians of inboxes. Knowing how they operate helps you work with them rather than against them.

- **Deliverability Standards Vary by ISP**
  Each ISP—whether Apple, Gmail, or Outlook—has unique criteria for classifying emails as spam. Gmail may focus heavily on engagement metrics (opens, clicks, replies), while Outlook places more weight on domain reputation.

- **Engagement is Key**
  ISPs monitor recipient engagement. Emails with high open and click-through rates are more likely to land in the inbox. Design campaigns with clear CTAs and compelling subject lines to boost interaction.

- **Monitor Blacklists**
  Being listed on a spam blacklist can devastate your email campaigns. Regularly check your sending IP and domain using tools like MXToolbox to ensure compliance.

December 2025 Email Client Market Share Report.

Calculated from over 1.4 billion opens in Litmus Email Analytics, in December 2024.

APPLE
55.44%

GMAIL
25.89%

OUTLOOK
6.66%

YAHOO MAIL
2.25%

QQ MAIL
0.71%

* Data from Litmus.com

ESP Importance: The Foundation of Deliverability

Your Email Service Provider (ESP) plays a critical role in maintaining deliverability and avoiding spam classification. Choosing the right one ensures you're leveraging advanced tools and infrastructure.

- **Choose a Reputable** ESP Platforms like HubSpot, Mailchimp, and SendGrid provide high-quality sending IPs, reducing the risk of being flagged as spam. Cheap or obscure ESPs often lack the infrastructure to protect your reputation.
- **Leverage Built-In Analytics** Use your ESP's deliverability reports to track metrics like bounce rates, spam reports, and open rates. These insights help you proactively adjust your strategy.
- **Optimize Email Segmentation** Modern ESPs allow precise audience segmentation. Send highly targeted emails to specific groups, increasing relevance and reducing the likelihood of recipients marking your messages as spam.

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AI-Enabled Automatic Email Cleaning: A Game Changer

Artificial intelligence isn't just for content personalization; it's revolutionizing list management and deliverability:

- **Real-Time Validation** AI-powered tools like [ZeroBounce](#) and automatically identify invalid or dormant email addresses before you send a campaign. This ensures your email reaches active recipients.
- **Spam Trap Detection** AI can scan your lists for email addresses that are likely spam traps, helping you avoid penalties that come from unwittingly targeting these problematic addresses.
- **Predictive Engagement Insights** Some AI tools analyze past behaviors to predict which recipients are most likely to engage. This insight allows you to focus efforts on high-probability contacts, boosting open rates and reducing spam complaints.
- **Automated Warm-Up** AI automates the inbox warm-up process, mimicking natural email behaviors like opening, replying, and marking emails as important. This builds credibility with ISPs and ensures better inbox placement.

Pro Tip: Don't Overlook HubSpot Global Bounces

Hidden issues in your email list can quietly undermine your campaigns—case in point: **HubSpot Global Bounces.** These are contacts permanently bounced across multiple HubSpot accounts due to reasons like invalid email addresses. While HubSpot prevents you from emailing these addresses, they aren't automatically flagged in a way that's visible to you, leaving marketers scratching their heads over why their "clean" list doesn't match sendable counts.

For marketers frequently importing external lists, like trade show leads, running this process quarterly can save you from inaccuracies, inflated contact costs, and the frustration of unseen deliverability issues. A small tweak, but one that makes a big difference!

Email Engagement Top 8

While delivering your emails to the inbox is crucial, engaging your audience is your very next step to converting email recipients into customers. By following these best practices, your emails can stand out in crowded inboxes and drive meaningful interactions.

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1. Combine Subject Lines and Preview Text for Impact

Your subject line and preview text work together to grab attention.

- **Keep It Short:** Stick to under 60 characters for subject lines and concise preview text.
- **Personalize and Add Value:** Include names or interests and highlight the benefit of opening.
- **Test and Improve:** Experiment with formats and avoid spammy words like "Free."

2. Design for Mobile and Readability

With most emails opened on mobile, simple, readable designs are key.

- **Streamline Layouts:** Use single columns, clear CTAs, and large buttons.
- **Keep It Skimmable:** Use short paragraphs, bullet points, and easy-to-read fonts.
- **Test Across Devices:** Ensure consistent performance everywhere.

Mobile optimization is non-negotiable (75% delete non-mobile-friendly emails)

3. Deliver Valuable, Reader-Focused Content

Provide clear, actionable content that resonates.

- **Be Brief:** Use short paragraphs and bullet points.
- **Focus on Needs:** Address pain points and offer tailored solutions.
- **Add Credibility:** Include testimonials or case studies.

B2B marketers report that new product and feature announcements get the highest CTR (click-through-rate)

4. Personalize for Better Engagement

Tailored emails perform better.

- **Segment Your List:** Group by industry, interests, or behavior.
- **Use Past Data:** Tailor content to prior actions like clicks or purchases.
- **Add Dynamic Elements:** Include personalized names, locations, or recommendations.

5. Keep CTAs Clear and Actionable

CTAs drive action, so make them count.

- **Be Direct:** Use action-focused phrases like "Sign Up Today."
- **Focus on One CTA:** Avoid confusion by prioritizing a single action.
- **Stand Out Visually:** Use bold, high-contrast buttons.

Include clear calls-to-action—can increase clicks by 371%!

6. Use Visuals Wisely

Enhance emails with intentional visuals.

- **Optimize for Speed:** Use quick-loading, high-quality images.
- **Balance Text and Images:** Stick to 80% text, 20% visuals to avoid spam filters.
- **Add ALT Text:** Ensure accessibility for all users.

7. Send at the Right Time and Frequency

Timing and consistency matter.

- **Test Best Times:** Monitor when readers are most active.
- **Be Consistent:** Maintain a regular schedule without overwhelming subscribers.

8. Track and Improve Performance

Use data to refine future campaigns.

- **Monitor Metrics:** Focus on open, click-through, and conversion rates.
- **Fix Drop-Offs:** Identify where readers lose interest.
- **Iterate:** Apply A/B test results to improve.

Maximizing email engagement is both an art and a science. Keep your audience's needs at the forefront, and remember: every detail counts in creating an email that not only lands in the inbox but also leaves a lasting impression.

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Metrics: Your Email's Report Card

Metrics are the backbone of effective email marketing, offering insights to refine strategies and maximize engagement. By focusing on a few critical measures, you can identify what works and address areas for improvement:

- **Open Rates** reveal the effectiveness of your subject lines and sender name, setting the stage for deeper engagement. Personalized, timely emails consistently perform better.
- **Click-Through Rates (CTR)** measure whether your content and CTAs inspire action. Place clear, actionable CTAs where they're easy to find, ensuring alignment with your audience's needs.
- **Conversion Rates** indicate how well your email drives the desired outcome, like sign-ups or purchases. Simplify user flows and follow up with non-converters to boost results.
- **Bounce Rates and Spam Complaints** highlight technical and list hygiene issues. Keep lists clean, respect recipient preferences, and follow authentication best practices to maintain deliverability.
- **Unsubscribe Rates** offer feedback on relevance and frequency. Use these insights to tweak content, timing, and re-engagement efforts to retain interest.
- **ROI** connects campaign performance to business impact. Track results from click to conversion to ensure your emails deliver meaningful outcomes.

By treating metrics as a continuous feedback loop, you can adapt campaigns to meet both audience expectations and business goals, ensuring your emails consistently perform.

Getting into the Inbox!

As we wrap up this guide, there's one universal truth about email marketing: *things always change*. What works today—whether it's a clever subject line, a personalization trick, or an AI-driven segmentation tactic—can quickly lose its luster as soon as it becomes the norm. Audiences adapt, inboxes get smarter, and marketers must evolve to keep delivering results.

This isn't a cause for alarm—it's an opportunity. The ever-changing landscape of email marketing encourages creativity, innovation, and staying informed. Success comes to those who are agile, experimental, and connected.

Stay in the Know

To keep your strategies sharp, follow the thought leaders and resources shaping the future of email marketing. We're huge fans of email experts like Jay Schwedelson, whose work with Subjectline.com provides invaluable insights into what drives open rates.

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Joining communities like HubSpot Tips and Tricks on LinkedIn can also help you stay ahead of the curve with practical tips and real-world examples.

And of course, newsletters from experienced B2B agencies—like ours—can keep you updated on HubSpot's capabilities and the latest email marketing trends. Surrounding yourself with the right resources ensures you're equipped with the tools and knowledge to adapt to shifts in audience behavior, email regulations, and platform algorithms.

Never Stop Testing

Above all, remember: what works for one audience might not work for yours. Testing is the cornerstone of effective email marketing. Whether it's experimenting with subject lines, adjusting send times, or trying new segmentation strategies, testing and retesting is how you discover what truly resonates with your audience.
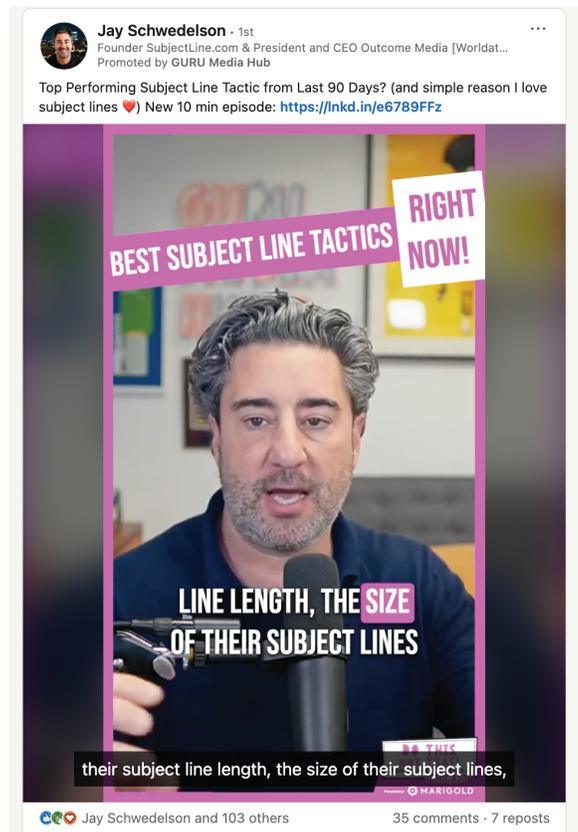
Brands that rigorously test their emails—through A/B testing, spam filter checks, and preview tools—report an ROI of 45:1, significantly outperforming the 28:1 ROI of those that skip these steps.

A word of caution from your college statistics days regarding A/B testing. If you are in B2B it is highly likely that your email lists are less than 10,000 contacts. With small quantity testing, unless there is high drama in the A/B test results, they are generally statistically insignificant. Quick lesson here from dynamicyield.com. Net: if you are A/B testing a contact list with 1,000 contacts, you need to see a dramatic difference. Changing a subject line or adding an emoji generally does generate much difference.

Each email you send isn't just a message—it's an opportunity to learn. Analyze results, refine your approach, and don't be afraid to try something new. Success lies not in perfection but in progress.

Getting B2B Email To Work Harder for You

If we have sparked ideas or highlighted areas for improvement in your email marketing, let's take it a step further. Orange Marketing specializes in helping B2B and SaaS companies generate demand and grow their businesses through smart, data-driven marketing strategies.

Whether you're just starting with HubSpot or looking to optimize your efforts, we've got the expertise to make email—and your entire marketing strategy—work harder for you.

At Orange Marketing, we tailor our services to fit your unique business goals, leveraging the best tools and strategies available. Here's what we bring to the table:

- **HubSpot Expertise:** As a certified HubSpot partner, we help you unlock the full potential of the platform to drive demand and manage campaigns seamlessly.
- **Targeted Demand Generation:** From crafting email templates to creating engaging newsletters and running effective webinar promotions, we focus on delivering results, not just clicks.
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** We combine analytics with creativity to refine your strategy continuously and ensure you're getting the best return on investment.

Let's make your next email campaign your best one yet. Contact us to get started!

Diamond Partner Agency Helping B2Bs Grow With HubSpot

About Orange Marketing

Orange Marketing helps B2B companies succeed with HubSpot by offering implementation, optimization, and operational support across all Hubs: Sales, Marketing, Service (Help Desk), and CMS (website).

Achievements & Recognition

- 151+ 5-Star HubSpot Reviews
- Women-owned business (WBENC certified)
- HubSpot Data Migration Accredited
- HubSpot Onboarding Accredited
- HubSpot Marketing Impact Award winner
- Hold all 42 HubSpot certifications

Expertise

- **Marketing Services** – Email marketing, content creation, customer marketing, full inbound and outbound marketing services, SEO, social media, conversational marketing, landing pages
- **Paid Media Management** – Google, Bing, LinkedIn
- **Sales Services** – Sales coaching & training, CRM migration, sales and marketing alignment, CRM implementation, sales enablement
- **Customer Success Services** – Ticketing system implementation, knowledge base development, customer success training, help desk implementation
- **Content Marketing** – Case studies, ebooks, pillar pages, blogs, articles, website copy, email nurture campaigns, etc.

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