

Deliverability Best Practices

How to Maximize the Power of
Your Holiday Email Campaigns



Creating an effective email cadence is just the first step to a profitable holiday sales season. But if your emails are going to junk folders or being flagged as spam by major Internet Services Providers (ISPs), chances are you have a deliverability problem that can impact your sales or bottom line.

Sailthru sat down with our senior global deliverability director, Ken Pfeiffer, to discuss best practices. With almost two decades of experience, Ken knows how to advise customers to create and maintain healthy email lists, and keep your brand's sender reputation in good standing. Not sure what this is, and if you are doing all you can to maintain a quality email list and brand reputation? Read our Q&A with Ken and [download our 2022 Playbook on Deliverability.](#)



Ken Pfeiffer,
Global Delivery Director



The logo for SAILTHRU, consisting of the word "SAILTHRU" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, centered within a solid blue circle.

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For those that might not be as familiar with deliverability, can you tell us what it is, why it's important and what happens if you have deliverability issues?



Ken Pfeiffer,

Global Delivery Director

Google, Yahoo! and Hotmail, for example, all use a variety of metrics to determine whether or not they will actually send your email to the inbox of the intended recipient. Protecting users' inboxes is the top priority for any ISP.

Each ISP uses its own set of signals to evaluate your sender reputation and then determine if your email will be delivered to the recipient's inbox.

Many of these signals change dynamically based on the current stream of email that ISPs receive. This means that an email that might be good today, may be suspicious tomorrow. Unfortunately, spammers are always trying to mimic and clone legitimate emails to fool these mechanisms. In fact, ISPs outright block over 95% of mail they receive as true SPAM/Phishing or malicious mail — so mail that actually gets delivered, especially to the inbox, is a very small part of what is received.



What is Sender Reputation?



Your sender reputation is largely based on two main factors: the engagement levels of your audience and the quality of your lists. ISPs use sender reputation to determine how to treat your email streams.

Your ESP has helpful tools to view performance metrics like unique opens, total opens, and bounce rates. Metrics like low bounce rates and high open rates do indicate a healthy sending reputation — but they do not necessarily tell the whole story.

ISPs, on the other hand, have their own way of determining if you are a healthy sender. They have access to more details about users and their interaction with your emails. ISPs look at how long you spend reading an email, if the recipient added you to their contacts, if your email was deleted without being opened, and so much more.

While you may not be able to control all the factors that imply a healthy sending reputation, these are a few things that contribute to a score:

- User engagement
- Invalid addresses (hard bounces)
- User complaints
- Spam trap hits
- Drastic changes in send volume



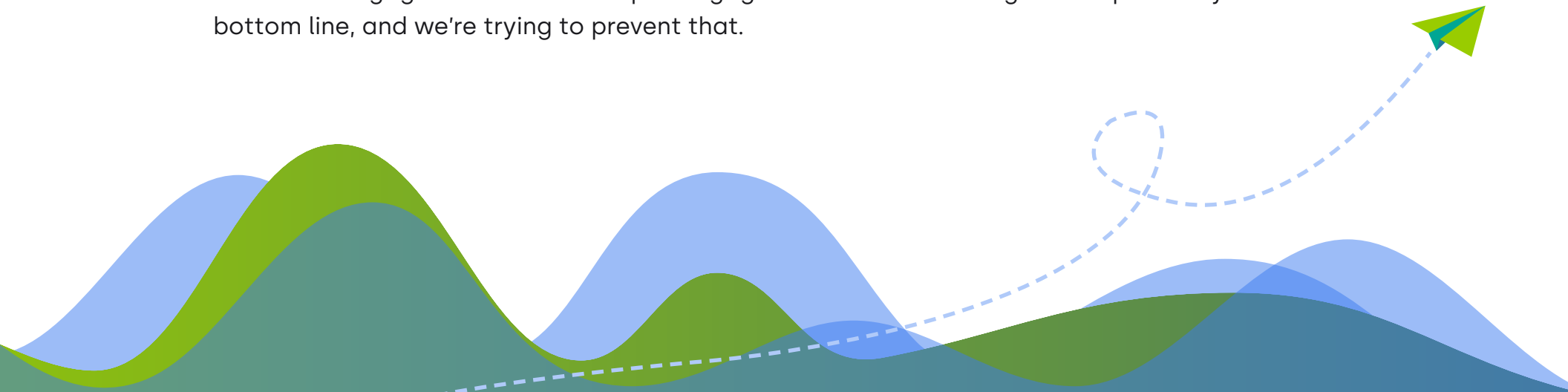
Deliverability is important all year round, but why is it particularly important during the holiday season?



The average daily volume of emails can double, or even triple, leading up to and throughout the holiday season — especially on Black Friday, Cyber Monday or Green Monday.

ISPs must protect themselves from the bad actors and have a finite limit to how much mail they can receive and process in a day. So they'll prioritize those good senders with good practices over those poorer senders with bad practices.

During the holiday season, email will face even more strict filters or can be delayed due to the increase in volume ISPs are receiving. Ensuring your sender reputation is healthy is critical to reaching your recipients. With email being a critical channel for marketing campaigns, we want to help ensure your recipients see your emails so they have the chance to engage with them. A drop in engagement can have a negative impact on your bottom line, and we're trying to prevent that.





What should businesses be monitoring to be sure they are not having a deliverability issue (junk folder placement or blocking)?



There are several indicators and tools that work really well:

- **Monitor your open rates by top domains** using the Domains tab in Campaign Summary. Open rates should be consistent across the top ISPs. If one is significantly lower than the rest, you may have an inboxing issue at that domain.
- **Use Gmail's Postmaster Tool.** If your IP and/or domain reputation dips to the low or bad category, that is usually an indicator of a sender reputation issue at Gmail.
- **Keep an eye on soft bounce rates.** If soft bounces are higher than the norm across any major ISPs, reach out to Sailthru as this is likely the ISPs blocking your mail due to abusive metrics/poor sender reputation.



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What are some warning signs that we may have deliverability issues?



Here are some of the strongest indicators we recommend our customers monitor:

- **Hard bounce rates-** Anything above 0.5% should be reviewed.
- **Complaint rates-** High complaint rates indicate that users do not like what you are sending – either the content or frequency.
- **Fluctuations in overall open rates.** Low open rates can show poorer engagement and play an important role in your sender reputation score.
- **Opt-out rates-** If opt-out rates rise, take a look at what you are doing and adjust. You don't want to sacrifice your loyal year-round list for the holiday season.
- **Increase in sign ups that are potential BOTs-** While BOTs can hit sign up pages with email addresses across all ISPs, we tend to see BOTs hit with Chinese or Russian domains (qq.com, 163.com, mail.ru, etc.) Any major spike in sign ups out of the norm should be investigated immediately. We recommend Google reCAPTCHA to eliminate the risk of a BOT attack.



And to finish up, do you have any final recommendations for Sailthru customers?



Yes. The focus should be on creating content that your audiences really want and making sure it's easy for recipients to opt in or out. This is not the time to test anything new. Some other things we recommend are:

- Do not mail to older lists that you have not been consistently mailing to.
- If you plan to re-engage with some of your less engaged users, make sure you reintroduce them strategically, over time. It's important that you don't send to your entire list of less or unengaged users - rather, they should be gradually re-engaged ahead of the holiday season.
- Be cautious of new acquisition sources. Test them prior to the holiday season and be sure they are not generating poor quality metrics such as complaints or hard bounces.
- Make your sign up and opt out pages easy to navigate.
- Be careful changing your sending cadence. ISPs will penalize you for an inconsistent spike in send volume, so increases in cadence should happen slowly. Provide preferences to allow users to opt down from increased marketing.
- Do not change your sending domain.



Want to learn more? [Download the 2022 Deliverability Playbook](#) today.

About Sailthru

Sailthru, a CM Group brand, helps modern marketers drive higher revenue, improve customer lifetime value, and reduce churn by using its powerful suite of connected capabilities. Sailthru's high-performance email, website personalization, mobile marketing automation, and unique integrations power new customer acquisition by leveraging machine learning and first-party data to easily deliver relevant, personalized engagement across all channels. The world's most innovative publishers, including Insider, Refinery29, and Food52, and the world's fastest-growing ecommerce companies, including Everlane, Thrive Market, and MZ Wallace, trust Sailthru to help them succeed.

For more information, please visit www.sailthru.com.

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