

Email Metrics: Identifying Insights to Success



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Introduction

This white paper explains the basics of email metrics and reporting, introducing several principles that are key to effective understanding of what's happening with your email campaigns. Email metrics can provide tremendous insight, but can potentially mislead efforts if not studied correctly. Remember that statistics can say anything. Make sure you understand what the data is showing.

The Basics: Four measurable actions in an email message

Opens

Reporting opens would seem like a simple task. If someone opens your message, an “open” is recorded and counted. Not necessarily so. An “open” can really only be defined by how it is measured. A small, invisible image is placed on every message sent. That image references a specific source – the message it was placed in. When that image is accessed or downloaded, an open is recorded for that message.

In terms of what that means to your open rate, there are some substantial if's. If the person viewing your message has images disabled, the open is not recorded. If the person breezed through their inbox, set up in preview pane view, and passed over your message with images enabled, an open is recorded - though the person may not have more than glanced at your message. In any case, an open can never guarantee that the message was actually read.

Opens are generally reported as two stats: total and unique. Total opens counts every time that the tracking image was downloaded by all recipients. Unique opens only counts the first instance the image was downloaded per recipient.

Clicks

Clicks show a specific activity on a link and are therefore a much more accurate and telling measure of your message. When someone clicks on a link in your message, that link is first directed to a page that records the click, then instantly redirected to the link location. This occurs so quickly that usually the recipient doesn't even know it has happened.

Clicks are far better metrics to watch than opens because they show a specific interest and a related activity. It confirms that some additional activity has taken place as well, most often a visit to a Web page. To further evaluate click activity, you can use that first click as the starting point in analyzing web traffic. You can see where that person who clicked went in your Web site, how long they stayed, where they ended up, and more.

Clicks are generally reported as two stats: total and unique. Total clicks counts every time each link was clicked by all recipients. Unique clicks only counts the first instance each link was clicked per recipient. Most email service providers can provide specific link activity for each individual recipient.

Bounces

Bounces represent some kind of transactional failure with the email address you tried to send a message to. That failure can be either temporary – which results in a soft bounce – or permanent – which results in a hard bounce. Bounces can indicate inactivity and list maintenance needs. A soft bounce can indicate that the recipient's email server is busy, or that their mailbox is full. A hard bounce can indicate that the email address does not exist any longer or that the domain does not exist. In some cases, the email address was simply mistyped and correcting the address can solve the problem. In all cases, bounces should be reviewed to access list health and hygiene.

It's important to note that sometimes people will refer to “delivered” messages as the number of sent messages minus the number of bounced addresses. This is not what “delivery” means as it is defined by the email marketing industry. A bounce indicates that the message was delivered, but was not accepted.

Unsubscribes

Unsubscribes are required for CAN-SPAM compliance, but can also give you valuable insight for successful marketing. Unsubscribes can indicate that someone is no longer interested in your organization or offering, and that your marketing budget is better spent on other, interested people. Understanding why someone unsubscribed can indicate that your email efforts just need to be slightly revised or redirected. Maybe you are not sending them the content that a) they expected they would be getting when they opted in or b) they are really interested in. In order to take this data and put it to use, your email service provider should be able to offer a field for recipients to tell you why they are unsubscribing.

7 Insights for Email Metrics Success

1. Look at trends, not blips

While you can review “blips” to give you a red or green flag that something has gone well or bad, you should not rethink and revise your entire campaign based on something that happens one time. Looking instead at longer-term trends can give you a better understanding of how recipients feel about the overall experience (campaign), not just a specific message. Compiling data to review trends involves more work but is worth the extra effort in that it enables you to make better long-term decisions.

2. Use email metrics to your benefit

One of the strengths of email marketing is the instant results you get after sending a message. Use that to maximize the performance of your email campaign by conducting tests on aspects of your email messages, such as:

- Subject lines
- Content
- Calls to action
- Landing pages

For more information on how to conduct email tests, please consult our white paper, [Email Testing: Six Steps for Success](#).

3. Don't get stuck on opens

Open rates have received a lot of attention in the media, and so their importance has been artificially inflated. The reality is, though, that open rates are becoming less reliable, and therefore less important. As mentioned earlier, preview panes can give false positives. Recipients with images disabled can give false negatives. It's important to understand your opens, but don't base your success or failure on them.

4. Pay attention to clicks as a measure of activity, not just links clicked

Most email messages contain many clickable areas, including company logo, links back to the Web site, specific calls to action, etc. Rather than looking at each link clicked as a separate activity, try to categorize your links into types of actions. For example, categories could be:

- company information
- product information
- calls to action

This makes analysis more insightful and allows you to ensure your messages have the right balance of activity.

5. Identify segmentation opportunities

Breaking an audience into distinct, more manageable segments that are likely to behave in a similar manner has long been a fundamental principle of marketing. Email metrics allow you to segment audiences based on open and/or click activity. This segmentation power allows you to send very targeted follow-up communications to these audiences.

6. Don't forget opt-in metrics

While monitoring list attrition, don't forget to watch your list growth as well. If you are losing more addresses than you are gaining, it's time to step up your opt-in processes. You can also monitor the quality of your different opt-in mechanisms by targeting these groups separately and comparing message metrics across these groups.

7. Tie email metrics into your overall marketing strategies

You don't have to limit the insight you gain from email metrics to your email activities only. Think of them in a broader sense as they may relate to your other marketing efforts. For instance, you may need to communicate differently to people who are not opening your email messages. Try sending them a printed piece instead. For those who are active email recipients, maybe you can take them off your printed promotions and save some of your direct mail budget.

About SubscriberMail

SubscriberMail is an award-winning provider of email marketing services and technology that enables organizations to create, deliver and measure email newsletters and campaigns with simplicity and sophistication. SubscriberMail meets marketers' needs by providing a simple method for creating HTML messages, exceptional customer service, flexible integration with existing technology and the highest deliverability standards in the industry. SubscriberMail also offers email marketing consulting services to help develop breakthrough email campaigns and refine email marketing strategies.

To find out more about our unique email marketing solutions, please email info@SubscriberMail.com, or call us at (630) 303-5000.