2018
EMAIL MARKETING LOOKBOOK

Performance benchmarks for 10 email campaign types
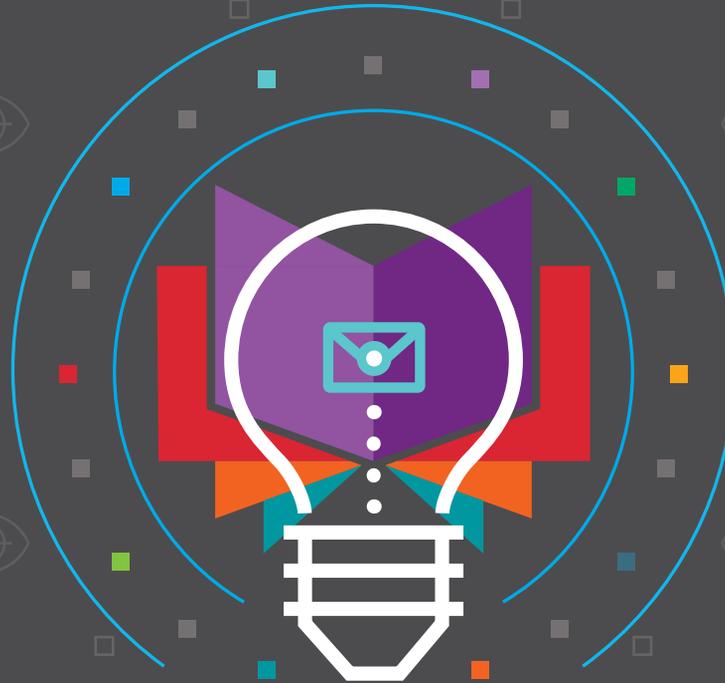
Return Path

Table of Contents

Introduction

Today's email marketers strive to build relationships with their customers and drive revenue through the email channel. Building an optimized email program requires marketers to incorporate certain key email campaigns designed to keep customers engaged throughout the subscriber lifecycle.

In our first email lookbook we highlighted some examples of great emails, to provide inspiration for your own campaigns. In this second edition, we've chosen new examples that represent the best of email marketing. We also take a more in depth look at the performance of each campaign type and report the average performance metrics, including:

Inbox placement rate: the number of emails that land in the inbox out of total emails sent.

Spam placement rate: the number of emails delivered to the spam folder out of total emails sent.

Read rate: the number of emails that are marked as "read" out total emails sent.

Deleted before reading rate: how often email is deleted before it is read, calculated as the total number of unread emails deleted out of total emails sent.

"This is not spam" rate: the number of times a subscriber marks your message "this is not spam" or "not junk" out of the number of emails sent to spam.

Complaint rate: the rate at which subscribers report your messages as spam, calculated as the number of "report spam/junk" complaints out of emails sent.

Abandoned Cart Messages

Sometimes customers need an extra push to purchase. They have gone to your website and selected items they are interested in, but stop just short of buying. Fortunately, marketers can take advantage of this situation by sending an abandoned cart message. Abandoned cart messages are triggered campaigns sent to subscribers to remind them to complete the purchase of items they have already identified as a potential purchase.

Though abandoned cart emails have a moderate read rate, they experienced one of the highest deleted before reading rate of all campaign types analyzed for this report, demonstrating that these types of emails are more actively ignored than others.

Abandoned cart message example: Walmart

Subject line: *Complete your order & we'll add Free 2-Day Shipping*

Campaign description: As an incentive to prompt customers to purchase items left in their cart, Walmart sends an abandoned cart email offering free two day shipping. This is a great way to give customers the nudge they need to place an order, while the effective use of dynamic content cross promotes additional products the customer may be interested in based on the items in their cart.

Average Abandoned Cart Performance Metrics

Inbox placement rate	**95%**	
Spam placement rate	**5%**	
Read rate	**20%**	
Deleted before reading rate	**12%**	
Complaint rate	**0.12%**	
"This is not spam" rate	**0.90%**	

Abandoned Cart Message example: Walmart

Inbox placement rate

96%

Read rate

20%
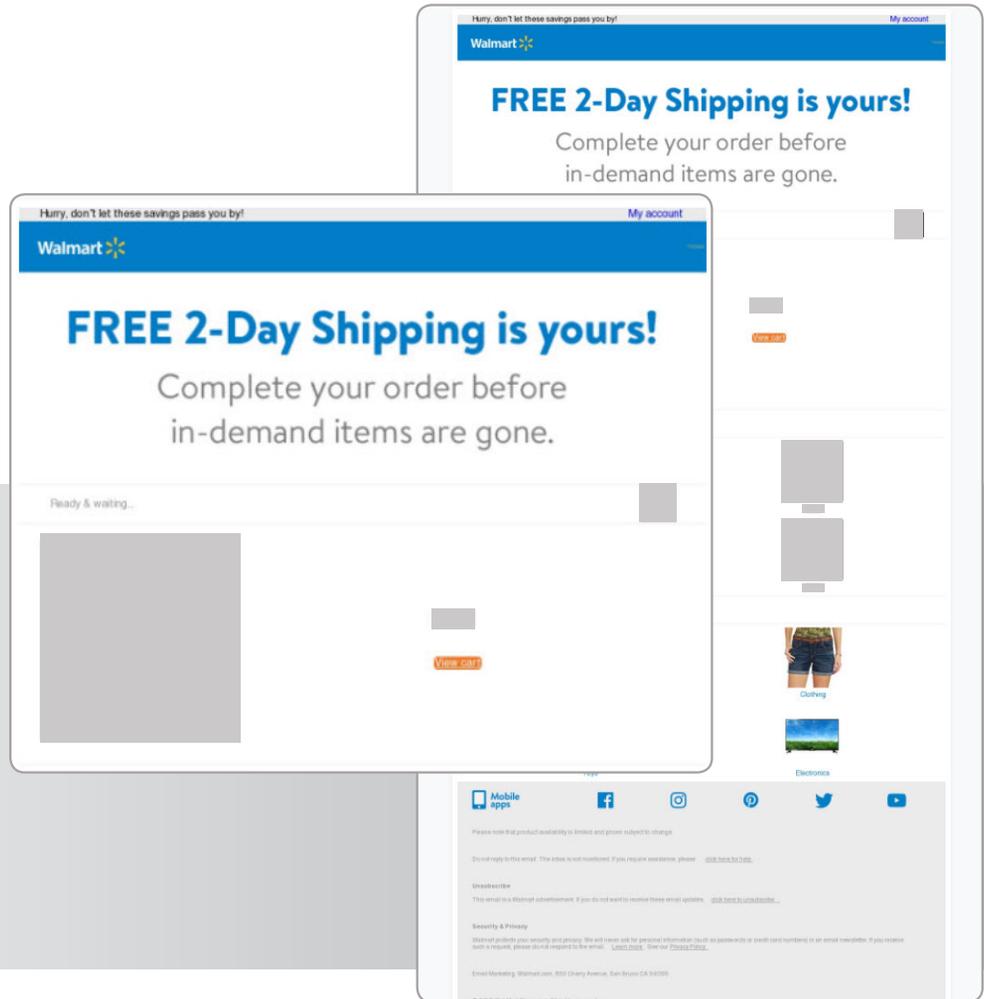
Account Related Messages

Account related messages are sent to notify subscribers of a change or activity related to their account. These emails are meant to keep subscribers informed rather than generate revenue. As such, they see relatively high engagement, with an average read rate of 30 percent and a deleted before reading rate of just nine percent.

Average Account Related Message Performance Metrics

Metric	Value
Inbox placement rate	**92%**
Spam placement rate	**8%**
Read rate	**30%**
Deleted before reading rate	**9%**
Complaint rate	**0.21%**
"This is not spam" rate	**1.42%**

Account related message example: TripAdvisor

Subject line: *David, thank you! You're on a roll: here's a summary of your recent activity*

Campaign description: TripAdvisor sends online reviewers a monthly account update with a digest of stats related to their recent posts. The message is highly personalized and interactive, using dynamic content to provide interesting information related to the subscriber's reviews, such as country of readers and most popular reviews. This is a solid tactic for keeping subscribers engaged with the brand and serving as a reminder to continue posting reviews.

Account Related Message example: TripAdvisor

Inbox placement rate

99%

Read rate

32%

Birthday Messages

"Happy birthday" emails —and accompanying discounts—provide an annual opportunity to generate revenue while also building a personal connection with your customers. Of the campaigns we studied, birthday messages were the least commonly sent campaign type. This is likely due to the fact that marketers can only send this type of message to each subscriber once per year, and many marketers don't collect birthday information. The birthday emails we did see generated relatively high engagement with a read rate of 23 percent. These messages were also frequently retrieved from the spam folder, with a "this is not spam" rate of 2.29 percent.

Birthday message example: Auntie Anne's
Subject line: *Happy Birthday! Enjoy a free pretzel on us!*
Campaign description: A triggered birthday email allows a brand to create a personalized relationship with each email subscriber and strengthen brand loyalty. Auntie Anne's sends members of their pretzel perk program a special birthday email, promoting a free pretzel in the subject line to capture subscriber attention and drive engagement. The creative uses eye catching images and large, bold text to convey the birthday message and offer.

Average Birthday Message Performance Metrics

Metric	Value
Inbox placement rate	**93%**
Spam placement rate	**7%**
Read rate	**23%**
Deleted before reading rate	**11%**
Complaint rate	**0.30%**
"This is not spam" rate	**2.29%**

Birthday Message example: Auntie Anne's

Inbox placement rate

96%

Read rate

39%

Feedback Messages

Brands frequently send surveys to collect customer opinions and elicit feedback beyond traditional metrics. These surveys can be about anything, from comments on recent purchases to opinions on the email program, or even to collect new subscriber preference information allowing marketers to better segment their list. Surprisingly, feedback messages generated the highest "this is not spam" rate at 6.35 percent. This is likely related to the high spam placement rate for this message type, as only email landing in spam can be rescued.

Feedback message example: Zip Car

Subject line: *What cars would you like near you, Christopher?*

Campaign description: Zipcar, the world's largest car sharing company, shows their dedication to their customers by asking for their valued opinion. The subject line uses first name personalization and poses a question to stand out in the inbox, and the content outlines the importance of customer feedback in order to improve the experience. In order to be transparent with the customer, Zipcar does an excellent job of providing detailed survey information, such as how long it will take to complete, and also offers the customer an incentive for their time and participation.

Average Feedback Message Performance Metrics

Metric	Value
Inbox placement rate	**87%**
Spam placement rate	**13%**
Read rate	**19%**
Deleted before reading rate	**11%**
Complaint rate	**0.26%**
"This is not spam" rate	**6.35%**

Feedback Message example:
Zip Car

Inbox placement rate

99%

Read rate

33%

Loyalty Program Messages

Loyalty program messages are campaigns sent to a special set of subscribers who participate in the brand's loyalty program. Both the loyalty program itself and related messages are designed to create a sense of exclusivity and additional benefits. The metrics indicate that customers appreciate this exclusive treatment, as loyalty program messages saw a read rate that is two percent higher than that of general promotional messages. On the other hand, the deleted before reading rate of 12 percent has loyalty messages tied for the most actively ignored message type.

Loyalty program message example: Toys-R-Us
Subject line: *Here's your $5 Reward!*
Campaign description: Through the Toys-R-Us loyalty program, members earn cash rewards to use on future purchases. This $5 reward email uses a simple subject line and mobile friendly design to convey its message. Within the email, there is a link which allows the customer to save the coupon on their mobile device—a great feature that makes it easy and convenient to locate the coupon when they're ready to use it, rather than searching back through their inbox.

Average Loyalty Program Message Performance Metrics

Metric	Value
Inbox placement rate	93%
Spam placement rate	7%
Read rate	21%
Deleted before reading rate	12%
Complaint rate	0.13%
"This is not spam" rate	2.49%

Loyalty Program Message example: Toys-R-Us

Inbox placement rate

99%

Read rate

59%

Newsletters

Many brands send email newsletters to update subscribers on the latest news and provide other engaging content. These emails typically contain a mixture of editorial and promotional content. Newsletters saw the lowest read rate (18 percent) among the campaign types we studied, with very few rescues from the spam folder—despite a high spam placement rate of 11 percent.

Newsletter example: National Geographic

Subject line: *Sunday Stills: A heartbreaking photo reveals a troubling reality, the meditative beauty of fall, and more*

Campaign description: National Geographic uses an engaging subject line to pique interest in the newsletter content. After opening the email, subscribers are treated to stunning imagery the brand is known for. Clean design makes the content easy to digest across viewing environments, while concise copy gives subscribers just enough content to entice them to click and read more. Social media links allow subscribers to easily share newsletter content with their networks, which expands National Geographic's reach to new audiences.

Average Newsletter Performance Metrics

Metric	Value
Inbox placement rate	**89%**
Spam placement rate	**11%**
Read rate	**18%**
Deleted before reading rate	**11%**
Complaint rate	**0.35%**
"This is not spam" rate	**1.97%**

Newsletter example: National Geographic

Inbox placement rate

98%

Read rate

38%

Promotional Messages

The most common of all email campaigns is the promotional email. In fact, promotional messages accounted for more than 70 percent of all the emails we studied. Promotional emails are a type of sales message, highlighting a particular product or products, often with a discount to entice subscribers to purchase.

On average, promotional emails have relatively poor performance. However, because they are the most common campaign type, volume is a factor—so an average read rate of 19 percent and a deleted before reading rate of 12 percent still leaves plenty of room to generate sales.

Promotional message example: The Grommet
Subject line: *The charging hub that keeps on growing!*
Campaign description: The Grommet takes a fresh approach to the traditional promotional email by sharing a behind the scenes story which demonstrates the potential impact of purchases and product feedback. A "Who's Next" call to action essentially invites subscribers to become brand influencers by purchasing their favorite up and coming featured products. By humanizing their products, The Grommet is able to foster brand loyalty and engagement.

Average Promotional Message Performance Metrics

	Inbox placement rate	**91%**
	Spam placement rate	**9%**
	Read rate	**19%**
	Deleted before reading rate	**12%**
	Complaint rate	**0.24%**
	"This is not spam" rate	**2.79%**

Promotional Message example: The Grommet

Inbox placement rate

99%

Read rate

44%

Post Purchase Messages

Post purchase (or transactional) emails are follow up campaigns that provide details of the completed purchase, including order confirmations, receipts, and shipping instructions. As the messages contain valuable information, this campaign type has the highest average read rate (44 percent) and the lowest average deleted before reading rate (seven percent) of any category analyzed.

Average Post Purchase Message Performance Metrics

Inbox placement rate	**98%**	
Spam placement rate	**2%**	
Read rate	**44%**	
Deleted before reading rate	**7%**	
Complaint rate	**0.06%**	
"This is not spam" rate	**0.64%**	

Post purchase message example: T-Mobile

Subject line: *Your new device order has been placed*

Campaign description: While order confirmation emails typically have strong subscriber engagement, they tend to get the least attention from marketers. Fortunately, that's not the case with this optimized order confirmation email from T-Mobile. Aside from being well branded, the clean design is mobile friendly, which is critical for a target audience likely to view the message on a mobile device. Order status is represented with an easy to understand three step visual within the preview pane. Beyond simple first name personalization, T-Mobile demonstrates good customer service by letting the subscriber know they will receive "shipping and delivery updates as they come through," while also encouraging tracking via the T-Mobile app. The content of the email is well organized with detailed sections for "Order Summary" and "Delivery Info."

Post Purchase Message example: T-Mobile

Inbox placement rate

96%

Read rate

86%

Welcome Messages

First impressions are everything, and welcome emails are the first experience your new subscribers have with your program. So rather than simply adding your new subscribers into your normal sending cadence, take advantage of the opportunity to showcase your email program and demonstrate what subscribers can look forward to receiving.

Because they represent the first email contact in a new subscriber relationship, welcome campaigns have more challenges than other campaign types—and this is reflected in their metrics. Among all the campaign types we looked at, welcome campaigns have the lowest average inbox placement rate at 84 percent. Along with reduced deliverability, welcome messages also had the highest average complaint rate.

Average Welcome Message Performance Metrics

Metric	Value
Inbox placement rate	**84%**
Spam placement rate	**16%**
Read rate	**23%**
Deleted before reading rate	**9%**
Complaint rate	**0.62%**
"This is not spam" rate	**5.77%**

Welcome message example: AMC Entertainment

Subject line: *Welcome! Congrats on becoming an AMC Stubs Insider Member*

Campaign description: AMC Entertainment uses this message to welcome new members to its loyalty program while reinforcing membership perks. Throughout the email, AMC offers opportunities for new members to engage, either by setting up an account, downloading the AMC Theatres mobile app, or purchasing movie tickets. AMC effectively invites members to share additional information (birthday, preferred theatre, mobile number) by clearly explaining how the information will be used to send more personalized, relevant messages.

Welcome Message example: AMC Entertainment

Inbox placement rate
97%

Read rate
71%

Win Back Messages

Sometimes subscribers become distant and stop interacting with your messages. Before they disengage entirely by unsubscribing—or worse, complaining—marketers have one last option to re-engage subscribers before they decide to leave—a win back campaign. A win back campaign (also referred to as a re-engagement campaign) is a tactic marketers can use to revive their relationship with the subscriber by reminding them the value of the email program. On average, win back emails saw a read rate of 20 percent—which means one out of five subscribers who were previously ignoring your messages may be inspired to re-engage with you. These campaigns are also helpful for identifying and removing inactive addresses from your list, to prevent list hygiene issues from damaging your deliverability.

Win Back message example: Kate Spade
Subject line: *where'd you go?*
Campaign description: Kate Spade's triggered win back message appeals to subscribers' FOMO (fear of missing out) by highlighting new products and popular categories they've missed. The pre-header text promotes an exclusive, limited time offer to prompt subscribers to re-engage, and this call to action is repeated within the email message. Social media icons promote alternate channels for subscribers to continue engaging with the brand.

Average Win Back Message Performance Metrics

Inbox placement rate	**88%**
Spam placement rate	**12%**
Read rate	**20%**
Deleted before reading rate	**12%**
Complaint rate	**0.23%**
"This is not spam" rate	**3.51%**

Win Back Message example: Kate Spade

Inbox placement rate

98% • • •

Read rate

40% • • •

Methodology

Return Path conducted this study using global consumer data consisting of more than 3,000 commercial senders, one million consumer panelists, and more than 600 thousand unique commercial email messages sent to Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, and AOL users between July 22 and November 29, 2017.

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