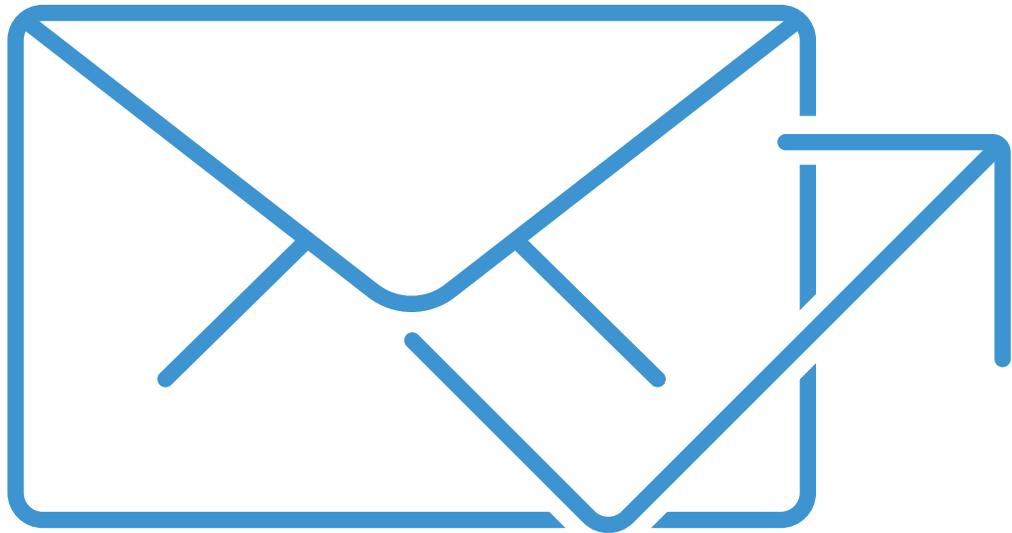


A COMPLETE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING (AND FIXING)
HARD EMAIL BOUNCES



Email marketing has an ROI of [4300%](#). Is your startup or small business looking to grow fast? Permission-based email marketing is your best chance for explosive revenue growth.

Yet, email marketers are often associated with spammers. As you know, spam is a major problem for consumers. In the first quarter of 2013, over [97 million spam](#) emails were sent every day. Email service providers look to stop spammers before they can even send an email. How? They look at the key metrics. One of the most essential metrics is called bounce rate.

What is Bounce Rate?

Your bounce rate shows you how many of your emails weren't delivered. [Mailer Mailer](#) has a great definition, one that clearly illustrates the formula.



The bounce rate of a given campaign is calculated by dividing the number of bounced emails by the number of delivered messages. The resulting value is then expressed as a percentage.

You want your bounce rate percentage as low as possible. A low bounce rate means almost all of your emails are being delivered.

A high bounce rate means quite a few of your emails aren't being delivered.

Why Is Bounce Rate So Important?

A high bounce rate can ruin your email marketing plan, even if you have a lot of people on your list.

An effective email marketing campaign has solid email list deliverability.

Spammers traditionally have high bounce rates.

If you have elevated bounce rates, you'll look like a spammer.

This will destroy your sender reputation and get you blacklisted by the Internet Service Providers.



What Is a Healthy Bounce Rate?

Ideally, you want your bounce rate as close to zero as possible. Yet, email bounce is an organic part of email marketing. A bounce here or there is unavoidable. Also, it's vital to remember that more active emailers have lower bounce rates.

[Mailer Mailer](#) says,



Mailing at least once a day yielded an average bounce rate per send of 0.3% (across all industries). On the other end of the spectrum, mailing less than once a month produced the highest average bounce rate per send of 3.8%.

So, how high is too high? Will a bounce rate of 3.8% destroy your deliverability. Probably not.

For instance, Mailjet is a popular email service provider. They start considering suspensions and warnings at an [8%](#) bounce rate.

In an exclusive quote for this eBook,

Andres Cardenas of [OutBurst Marketing](#) says,



The highest acceptable bounce rates range from 6% to 10%.

There's no magic number here. You want your bounce rate as low as possible though.

If you're in the 6% to 10% range, you need to take immediate action.

What's the Difference Between Hard and Soft Bounces?

A hard bounce indicates a permanent delivery issue. A soft bounce indicates a temporary delivery issue. If an email hard bounces today, it will almost certainly hard bounce next week too. Therefore, you need to expunge hard bounces from your list immediately. These emails offer plenty of danger, yet virtually no upside for your email marketing efforts.

Conversely, soft email bounces generally indicate a problem with the recipient. If the issue is corrected, you can continue to email them.

Let's take a look at some examples of hard and soft bounces.

Hard Bounce Reasons

The Email Username is Incorrect- The email username is the first part of the email address; the part before the @.

The Email Domain is Incorrect- The email domain is the last part of the email address; the part after the @. Double check both sections for accuracy.

Email Delivery Blocked- This means your email is blacklisted. It means a certain Internet Service Provider thinks you're a spammer. This results in a hard bounce, not a soft one.

[Blacklist Monitoring](#) explains,



If an e-mail is returned to the sender before being accepted by the recipient's mail service, the resulting bounce is often called a hard bounce.

Think of it like this: the recipient's email account didn't even get a chance to accept or reject the email – it was bounced from the server as though it hit a hard wall.

If your email is blacklisted, you can't fix it by tweaking your headlines or changing your body copy. You can't solve the problem by providing more value in the email. You'll need to contact the person who blacklisted you or wait until your name is removed from the list.

Soft Bounce Reasons

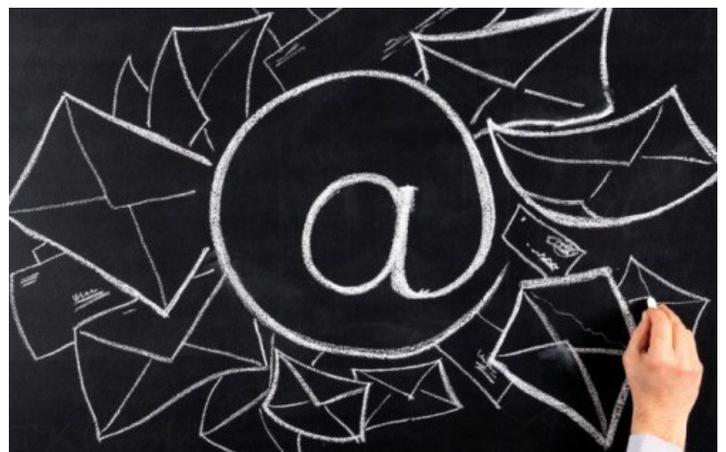
All email bounces are not the same. A soft bounce isn't as problematic as a hard bounce. As a matter of fact, a soft bounce typically indicates a problem with the recipient, not the sender.

Server Down- If an email server is down or overloaded, that may result in a soft bounce.

This is one of the more common reasons for a soft bounce. It's also one of the best outcomes. Unlike a full mailbox, it doesn't indicate a potentially inactive email account.

Full Mailbox- If someone's mailbox is full, your email will be soft-bounced. This is also known as being over quota. A mailbox that is perpetually full is inactive.

So what should you do? First, you should monitor soft bounces. Unlike hard bounces, one soft bounce doesn't mean you need to remove that email from your list immediately.



Email marketing is a robust tool for small businesses. The blog [Inbound Rocket](#) notes,



Email marketing allows business owners to reach a large number of consumers at a rate of nearly nothing per message.

For small-business owners on a budget, this makes it a better choice than traditional marketing channels like TV, radio, or direct mail.

What's double opt-in?

Here's how [Opt-In Monster](#) describes it,



Double Opt-In is when a user needs to confirm their sign up for an email list. Only after this confirmation is the user officially added to email list.

On the other hand, single opt-ins are added to the email list immediately. The benefit of single opt-in is that more people are added to the list.

The problem with single opt-ins is that more of those leads are disinterested, supplying an email address they don't even own.

These disinterested users are far likelier to bounce. According to [Elegant Themes](#),



Double opt-in emails saw 48.3% lower bounce rate than single opt-in emails.

Lots of new email marketers like single opt-in. They believe they can overwhelm lukewarm prospects with value and convert them into loyal customers.

In other words, email marketing is important for your small business. And a healthy bounce rate is important for your email marketing campaign. Here are solutions you can use to keep your bounce rate low. These are tips for every stage of the list-building process.



Yet, that's a tall order. Modern email marketers provide a valuable lead magnet in exchange for an email address. Some people will enter a fake or inactive email to get that lead magnet.

That's fine, you can't force a prospect to be interested. Still, you can't provide value to a prospect that never even sees your subject line. Additionally, this fake or inactive email is likelier to bounce when you start your campaign. And as you know, a high bounce rate puts your reputation at risk. If you must use single opt-in, use it with caution.

Update Emails Via Your Website

Allow users to update their emails in the member preferences page on your site. Users change their email address from time to time. Give them the option to refresh their inactive address. Make sure they confirm the new address.

Update Emails Via The Mail or Phone

Many businesses have a diverse and large group of customers. Everyone won't update their email address through your website. If someone has an inactive email, contact them through the phone. You can also send them a postcard, asking for an update.



Monitor the Email Blacklists

If you're on a blacklist, your bounce rate will skyrocket. Your emails won't be delivered to any customers if they're using an Internet Service Provider that follows the blacklist. There are many blacklists with varying degrees of importance. MailChimp expands on this with concrete examples,



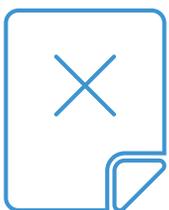
Not all blacklists are created equal. Smaller blacklists, including [SORBS](#) and [Spam Cannibal](#) have less influence with the bigger ISPs. Most large ISPs only use the most reputable blacklists like [SpamCop](#), [Spamhaus](#) and [URIBL](#).

A blacklist inclusion isn't all bad news. For one thing, anyone can start a blacklist for the email server. Many times they'll share this information with the public, but the large Internet Service Providers take no stock in small custom blacklists. Moreover, reputable blacklists will remove servers after a period of time.

So, how can you monitor the blacklists?

You can use the free service [Domain Blacklist Check](#) to see if you're on a blacklist. It also shows who you contact to get off that blacklist as well.

Additionally, it's critical to track your bounce rates by major domains. If you're getting a lot of bounces from Yahoo, but nowhere else, you're probably blacklisted from Yahoo. It means Yahoo is following a blacklist the others are not. If you can isolate which blacklist they are using, you can contact the blacklist owner and ask for your name to be removed. Use the tool above (or a similar tool) to find out who you can contact.



Spam Traps and Blacklists

Have you heard of email scrapers?

They use software to harvest emails from all over the web. Well, some blacklist owners take advantage of that. A spam trap is an email address, planted somewhere in cyberspace. It's bad news if a marketer sends an email to one of these traps. The first type is called a pristine spam trap.

The blog [Return Path](#) elaborates,



Pristine traps are hidden throughout the internet and are almost always acquired by a bot "scraping" websites looking for email addresses. The presence of pristine spam traps on an email list indicates questionable address acquisition methods.

If you email a pristine spam trap, you can be added to a blacklist. Yet, there's another type of spam trap too. It's called the recycled spam trap.

[Return Path](#) explains,



Recycled spam traps, while less impactful than pristine spam traps, can still cause severe damage to sender reputation and inbox placement. A recycled spam trap is an email address that an individual has abandoned (think of that super cool first email address you created!) and the mailbox provider has retaken control of the address to use as a trap.

A recycled spam trap isn't as damaging as a pristine spam trap. Otherwise, the practical difference between a recycled spam trap and a pristine spam trap is small. Malicious agents can add spam traps to your database. This is especially true if you use (or ever used) single opt-in.

That's another reason why it's important to use double opt-in. Yet, if you've used single opt-in the past, you can still clear out these spam traps.

This brings us to our next point.

Keep a Clean Email List

You need to deal with email bounces in order to keep your reputation intact.

The blog [Survey Gizmo](#) opines,



Bounces and autoresponders need to be dealt with in order to maintain your send reputation.

This means with each email campaign you send out you've got to manually review your soft and hard bounces to see if that address needs to be deleted.

Doing this work manually is fine when you have a small email list. As you list starts to grow, this task becomes a chore. It takes more and more time to maintain proper list hygiene. And if you let it go, your bounce rate will start to rise. That puts you in peril of not contacting the people who are truly interested in your emails.

A great way to clean out those hard email bounces and spam traps is to use an **email cleaning list service**. These services will automate the process, detecting invalid emails and removing them from your list. As your list grows, this becomes a critical consideration.



The Basics of a Low Bounce Rate

A healthy bounce rate will improve your email marketing plan. If you want a low bounce rate, follow the tips below.

1) Above all, provide value to your customers. The more value you provide, the more engaged your subscribers are. When customers change their email address, they'll be sure to properly update their email.

2) Use double opt-in. Single opt-in is perilous. Customers can provide fake or inactive emails that will bounce. Moreover, malicious agents can add spam traps to your database. If you use double opt-in, you can avoid spam traps. These spam traps are inactive accounts, monitored by blacklist owners. They won't be added to your double opt-in campaign.

3) Monitor the Email Blacklists

It's not over for you if you're on an email blacklist. These systems are here to punish spammers, not block marketers. Many blacklists additions expire in a few hours or days (especially for the first or second offense). If your ban is not expiring, you should contact the blacklist owner. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

4) Catch the People that Change Their Email

People change their email all the time. Those old accounts get full or sometimes they are repurposed for spam traps. Invalid emails aren't always malicious. Many times it's an old email address of a current customer. That's why you need to stay in contact with your list. Be active about this process. Don't rely on the customer to update the email themselves without anything prompting from you.

You can be active in a variety of ways. You can use their phone number to call them. You can use their address to send them a postcard. If you think a customer has two emails on file (and one is inactive), you can email the new address to confirm your suspicions.

If you follow these tips, you'll have a low bounce rate and a happy customer base.

ABOUT

emaillist*verify*

[Email List Verify](#) helps email marketers remove hard bounces and spam traps from their email list. Our clients typically experience a 10x reduction in bounce rates. Moreover, we have a 97% match rate and no false positives.

We also have top-tier customer support. We answer your questions quickly and provide unlimited access to our knowledge base.

One of the best benefits of working with Email List Verify is our pay-as-you-go package. That means you don't pay a monthly subscription. You only pay for the emails you need to verify. So, you can clean your list when you feel it's the right time to do so.

It doesn't matter how big your list is. Our API can verify a single email or millions of emails (more than you'll ever need) in one take. We also speak your language. Our real-time API is available in PHP, Python, Node.js, and .NET.

More than 5,000 customers in over 214 countries use Email List Verify. [Contact us today](#) to improve your email marketing campaign and grow your business.

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