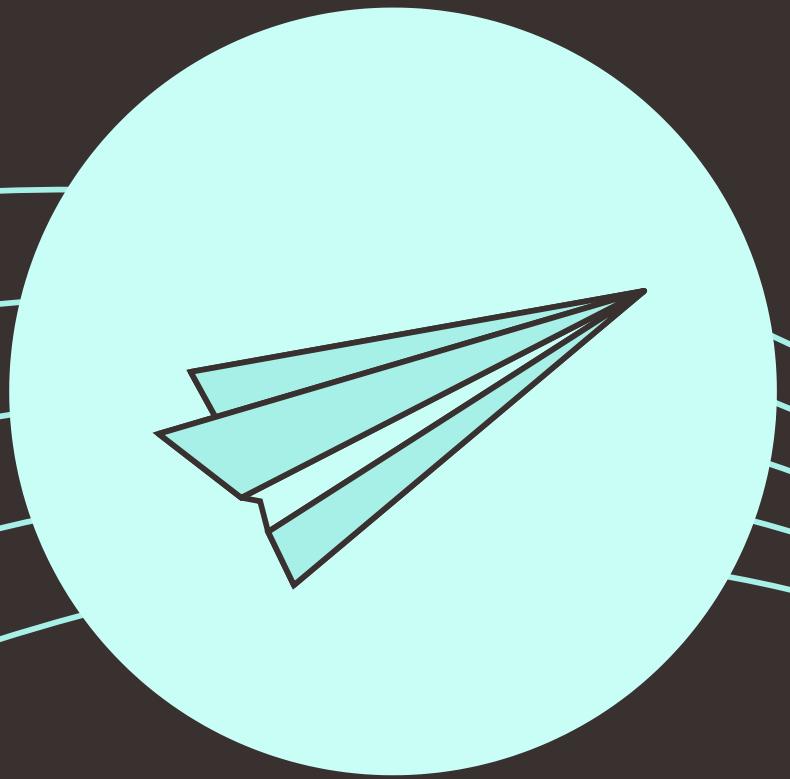




10 TIPS TO IMPROVE EMAIL DELIVERABILITY

(that you can do yourself)

Force24™

“Deliverability isn’t for techies. It’s our responsibility as marketers to get it right.”

Adam Oldfield - Force24 Founder



Contents

Introduction

- TIP 1** The hardware - Mail server configuration
- TIP 2** Data quality
- TIP 3** Go for engagement
- TIP 4** Aggressively qualify out
- TIP 5** Retargeting super charges your engagement rates
- TIP 6** Plan the subject line ahead of time
- TIP 7** Segmentation to drive insight and relevance
- TIP 8** Increase the cadence
- TIP 9** Consider broadening your communication channels
- TIP 10** Personalise

Summary

Introduction

We all rely on email day to day to perform our essential business tasks. Since the average inbox receives more than 100 emails per day, our email server providers are engaged in a competition to make sure that your inbox only contains emails that are important to you. By learning about your habits, behaviours, and senders’ reputations, it essentially promotes the things you care about and hides the ones you don’t.

It is crucial for marketers to understand the recipient’s perspective and how the mail servers distributing their email are working to support their customers and maintain the quality of their inboxes.

By putting ourselves in the shoes of our recipients and ensuring we are meeting their expectations, we can improve our email deliverability and maintain a positive relationship with our audience. It’s not just about getting our emails into the inbox, but about ensuring our emails are welcomed and valued once they arrive.

Given this context, it should come as no surprise that there are numerous variables of email deliverability to take into account. Our top tips provide a solid foundation from which to work.

Consider email deliverability to be somewhat similar to SEO; in the past, gaining lots of backlinks and spoofing a few meta tags was enough to get results; today, however, much more is required, and we are all aware of the benefits of getting it right in the realm of SEO. Email operates in the same way.

How can I know if I have a deliverability issue with my emails?

There are many ways to check, but if you're using email regularly and have never really thought about it or are unsure of how to check, there is a high probability that you do. Some of the tell-tale signs include:

Low commercial engagement - There aren't many leads generated by email campaigns.

An unsubscribe rate per email equal to or higher than your click through rate - 500 clicks and 500+ unsubscribes are clear indicators that your messages are irrelevant and that delivery will be affected.

Bot activity - You will notice that cryptic links in your emails, such as social network links, are being clicked. These bots are deployed when credibility is low to ensure you are not misleading the recipients.

An open rate disparity between obvious Microsoft and Google email addresses - To test if the open rates are comparable, try sending an email to solely Microsoft addresses (outlook, hotmail, live and others) before sending it to Google (Gmail). If there is a big disparity, you will most likely have an issue with the provider of the lowest number.

High open rate with low click rates - Apple's iOS MPP* (Mail Privacy Protection) may be skewing your open rate statistics, however, be warned this can be skewed if you receive a high volume of bot click activity.

High soft bounce or out of bounds bounce rate

- Often if an email provider does not like the content of your email, it may decide to start rejecting your email after a set time period.

Slow email delivery - Your emails are taking a long time to deliver, this can be because of imposed delays by the ESP's who don't have the faith in your reputation.

Are Email Open Rates Now Redundant?

Email open rates are still an important metric to consider when evaluating your email delivery, even despite the fact that they have been significantly skewed recently by the IOS MPP* update. However, we wouldn't recommend taking the open rate as a campaign success metric or a forward indicator.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Our top tips are not all the usual advice around the use of spam keywords and general bad practices you can find online with email deliverability guides, but instead attempts to address the conceptual challenges marketers are faced with in the world of email deliverability.

***IOS MAIL PRIVACY PROTECTION (MPP):** is a feature implemented on Apple devices that masks the recipient's IP address (no matter what email client they are using) so it can't be linked to other online activity or location. This is achieved by preloading the pictures and text of email, along with the tracking pixel, whether or not the recipient actually opened the email. This therefore renders open rates on apple devices as an unreliable performance metric.

TIP 1

The hardware

- Mail server configuration

Understanding and appropriately configuring your mail server is a crucial step in ensuring your emails reach their intended destination. This goes beyond simply sending an email; it involves a series of authentication protocols that vouch for the legitimacy of your emails.

In today's email world it's crucial to understand each.

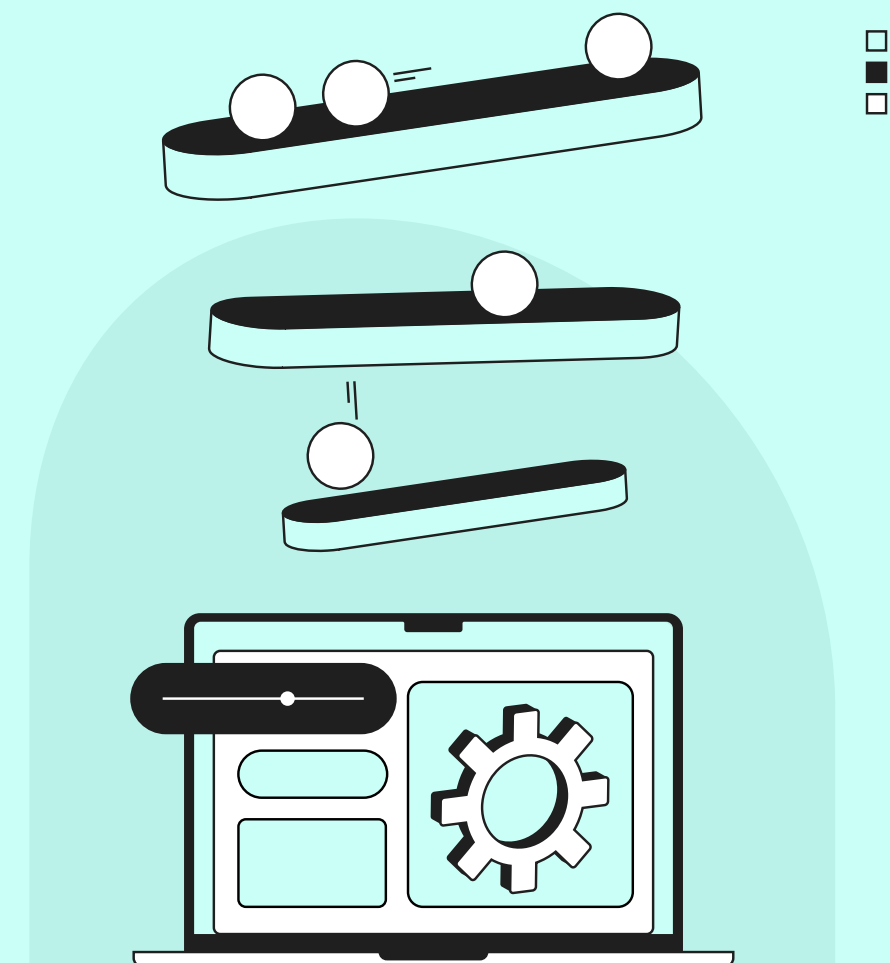
These include **SPF** (Sender Policy Framework), **DKIM** (DomainKeys Identified Mail), and **DMARC** (Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting & Conformance). These protocols act as digital signatures, allowing Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to verify that your emails are legitimate and not spoofed.

- **SPF** is like a VIP list, specifying which mail servers are allowed to send emails on behalf of your domain.
- **DKIM** adds a digital signature to your emails, linking them to your domain. This verifies that the email hasn't been tampered with during transit.
- **DMARC** builds upon SPF and DKIM. It allows you to specify what should happen to emails that fail SPF or DKIM checks, providing an extra layer of security.

Properly implementing these protocols not only enhances your security but also builds trust with ISPs, increasing the chances of your emails being delivered to the inbox instead of the spam folder.

While this might sound technical, it's quite straightforward when you get down to it. If you're not confident about whether these are correctly configured for your domain, we highly recommend speaking with a member of the Force24 team. They can guide you through the process, ensuring you become compliant and improve your email deliverability.

Remember, it is your responsibility to ensure consistent testing and updating of these configurations is also necessary as your business evolves, and as email regulations and standards change over time.



TIP 2

Data quality

When we talk about data quality, there are so many factors to consider. As Marketers, we should be questioning “how much do I know about these contacts”. If the answer is “not much” this presents a massive risk. We would recommend taking the following into consideration:

Data Source - If a marketer is unable to confirm the exact data of collection or purchase this represents a significant risk, as old data (records that have not been mailed in the last 3 months presents a massive risk to your delivery profile). Beware - sending emails to out of licence data is extremely costly as many data providers use seed records to ensure this doesn't happen.

If you find yourself in a position where you can not confidently say where each record originated and when it was last emailed (but are confident you have permission to use the data for email marketing), or you have been emailing the data and have experienced significant delivery problems you should seek advice on how best to clean the data using a cleaning service and develop a low volume reengagement strategy to this data. The Force24 team has access to the latest and most reliable data cleansing service and a compliance team to ensure you are always acting in accordance with the GDPR and PECR.

Marketers Responsiveness - How responsive are you to recipient feedback? This includes promptly honouring unsubscribe requests and addressing any issues or complaints. A responsive sender is more likely to maintain a positive relationship with their recipients.

Contact Engagement - Monitoring recipient engagement can provide valuable insights into the quality of your data. You may gauge how interested your recipients are in your content by looking at metrics like how frequently a contact opens or clicks through. It's beneficial to remove unengaged contacts from your regular emails; after that, you can either completely remove these contacts or reactivate them when they return to the market by establishing slow, low volume re-engagement strategies for them.

Permission - Have the recipients given their explicit permission to receive emails from you, or are you relying on legitimate interest to communicate? Unsolicited emails can quickly harm your sender reputation and lead to deliverability issues.

Bounce processing - You must ensure you are cleaning hard bounces from your data and permanently marking the records. We recommend implementing a soft bounce policy that converts a soft bounce to a hard bounce if it has been observed a number of times in a 4-week period.

Remember in the world of email less is more! The more I can remove the better my ROI becomes. Data quality is not just about collecting as much data as possible, but also about maintaining and managing that data effectively. By focusing on the quality of your data, you can improve your email deliverability and overall email marketing results.

TOP TIP: If you are using a reputable data cleaning service like the Force24 cleaning service, it is important to continually refresh this data on a 90 day basis. A lot can change in a quarter in the digital world.

TIP 3

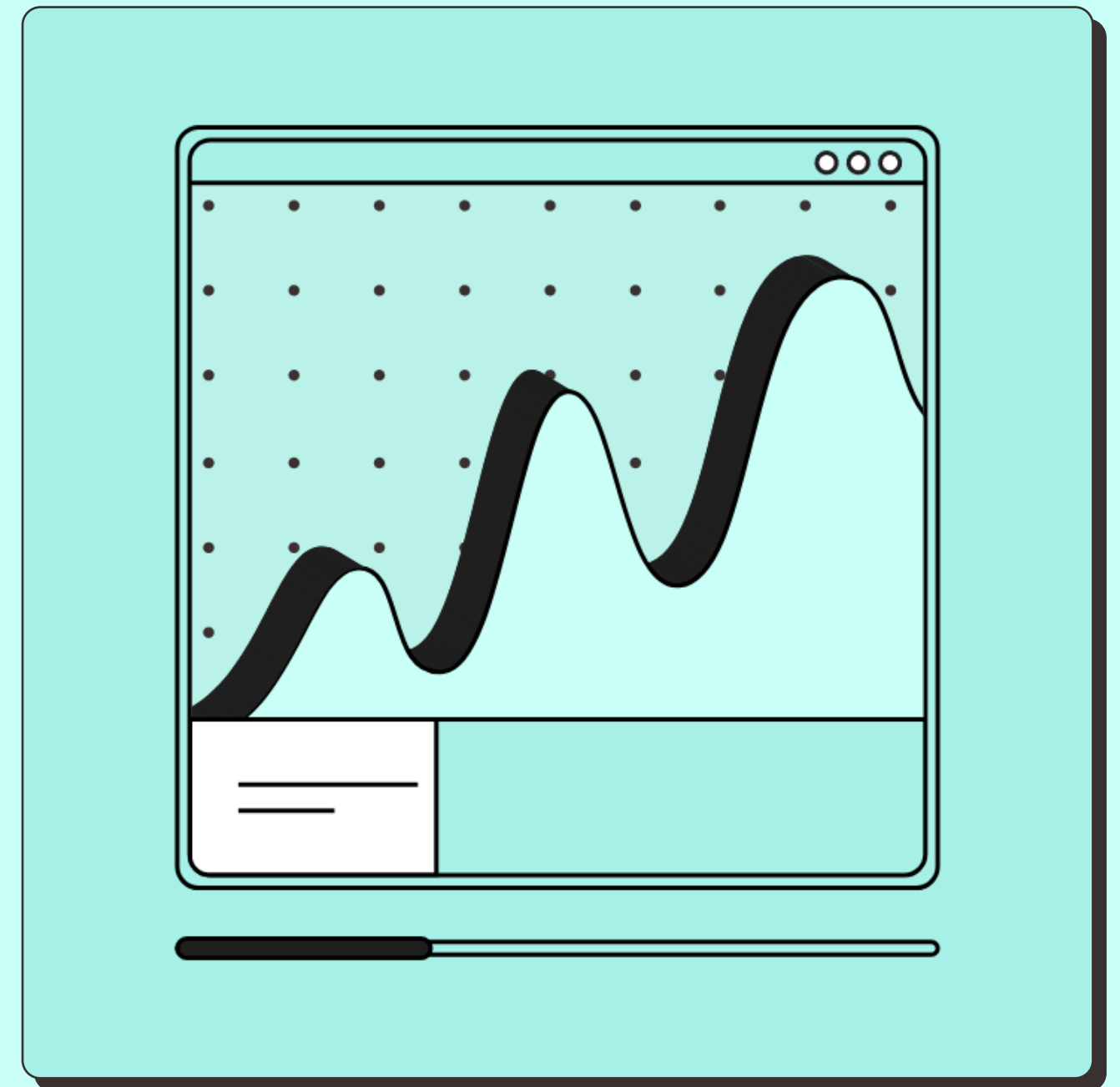
Go for engagement

One of the many factors that determines your email deliverability profile is how people react to your emails. A clear indication that you are not aligning your value to the recipients is if the majority of people simply delete your emails without opening them. However, if your emails are being opened and clicked - that credibility will lift your profile and be recognised by the ESP's as a marketer that delivers excellent, relevant content to your recipients. It's therefore critical as we are establishing credibility that we make it our goal to get engagement over anything else, such as leads or sales (these will come with time).

Working on the basis you have understood your data and segmented appropriately, we should be delivering small bite sized value led messages targeted to the recipients. The golden rule is your key message should be conveyed in less than 10 words, with only 1 button. The recipients will be able to understand your value proposition and determine if it is right for them much more rapidly if you simplify your message as much as you can and go right to the point.

A single call to action removes the choice for the recipients meaning it's even easier for them to engage with your email. It is this engagement you are seeking for an excellent email delivery profile.

Once you have established an excellent email delivery profile, you can start to bend these rules and experiment with increasing the amount of content you share with your recipients and present them with a choice. It is this choice that can help drive further segmentation and targeted communications.



TIP 4

Aggressively qualify out

Aggressively qualify out: In order to maximise the effectiveness of your campaigns it is essential to continually assess the engagement of your contacts and remove those that are not engaging with your emails. It is crucial to create an engaged & unengaged data list, however the rules that determine what is ‘engaged’ or ‘unengaged’ will vary. If you believe you have a deliverability issue you should consider setting any contact that has not engaged (open/click email, website visit etc) for 30 days + as unengaged, whereas if you feel you are in a good place you may wish to set the bar lower at say 60-90 days. This is just simple maths, but it is exactly what the ESP’s are asking you to do. For example:

I have 100 people in my email list and send an email campaign. I get a 15% open rate, and send a further 4 emails which I continue to receive a further 15% on each. At the end of the campaign, I can review my data and determine only (for example) 40% of my contacts actually opened my emails. If I were to exclude the 60% that did not open my previous email from the next email campaign, it is likely I would receive a 37.5% open rate.

With this in mind, there are 2 things to consider:

1. Firstly, to overcome the thought that more is better, in actual reality you would find (from the example above), your open rate would actually be inflated beyond 37.5%. By getting a much better inbox placement, you may see 40%+. Less really is more.
2. How should you proceed with the contacts you have removed? At the moment these contacts are not engaged, so our job now is to re-engage them with specific strategies designed to do nothing more than ‘get a click or open’. Sending these emails can be risky as they are all unengaged, so the distribution schedule should be slow and steady. See the example below. As these contacts perform an action, they should be moved to your ‘engaged contacts list’. Automation is a key partner in doing this, as most marketers do not have the time to continually perform these actions.

My engaged segment contains 40 contacts, my unengaged contains 60. I plan to send 2/3 emails per week to my engaged contacts. My blended average open rate may decrease if I send my re-engagement strategies to my unengaged contacts at a rate of 20% of my engaged contacts per campaign, but whilst you remain in control targeting 30% you can increase the volume of your unengaged contacts if you are outperforming your benchmark.

Segment	Campaign 1 volume	Campaign 1 open %
Engaged	40	35
Unengaged	8	12.5
Blended average	48	31.25

Please note: while this example assumes only 1 campaign is running, the calculation should be based on all commercial emails being sent via your ESP

TIP 5

Retargeting supercharges your engagement rates

Retargeting excels your engagement rates: Taking tip number 4 into account, user centric triggering will excel your open and click rates. The following types of campaigns are particularly powerful:

Browser retargeting - a series of emails triggered upon detecting the contacts browsing your website, retargeting with relevant content tied to the browsing behaviour. You can expect to see a daily volume of contacts being created as contacts browse your website, which is excellent for your reputation. Within the first 7 days of the engagement, you may expect to see open rates of 50-60%. This will have a big impact on the blended average open rate for your company.

Date triggered emails - these are emails relating to a particular date of significance to the contact. For example, a renewal date or an anniversary of purchase. These emails can be highly personalised and provide a valuable message for the recipient, again these emails will generate a potentially strong “always on” email volume with a strong engagement rate of 40-50%.

By viewing your company as a single profile rather than on a campaign-by-campaign basis, we can start to look for ways to drive engagement with email rather than a commercial return on every email.

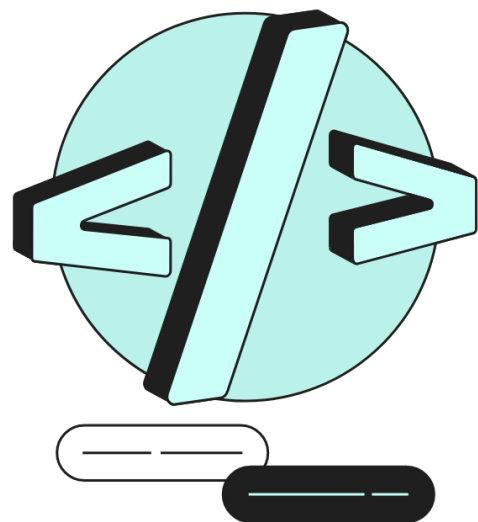


TIP 6

Plan the subject line ahead of time

A drastically underestimated component of the email engagement argument is the subject line, as most marketers admit to writing a subject line just as they plan to send the email as an afterthought.

Try flipping everything around and focus on the subject line first. Write a series of email subject lines that you believe are compelling and will resonate with your contacts, review these subject lines as a series and only proceed if you get excited with the content and execution. List a few options out, then select the most powerful and expand upon it - it really gets the creative juices flowing!



Subject line: The 3 horizons of AI and automation
Subject line: How bad grammar in emails is killing conversion
Subject line: Why busy marketers are falling behind
Subject line: Data collection top tips

I have selected *Subject line: Why busy marketers are falling behind*, as my candidate to expand:

Subject line: Why busy marketers are falling behind
Subject line: Marketing ROI grows with your free time
Subject line: Marketing burn out is real
Subject line: Only 3/10 Marketers lean on automation effectively, are you?

Once you have your subject lines, it is much easier to create content and messaging around a subject that you are confident will resonate within the contact base.

Always make sure the language you have used in your subject line is carried through your email. ESP's are specifically looking to check the subject sentiment and message is conveyed within the body of your email. This is to protect users from misleading subject lines. Just like SEO, try to carry the language on through the email.

TIP 7

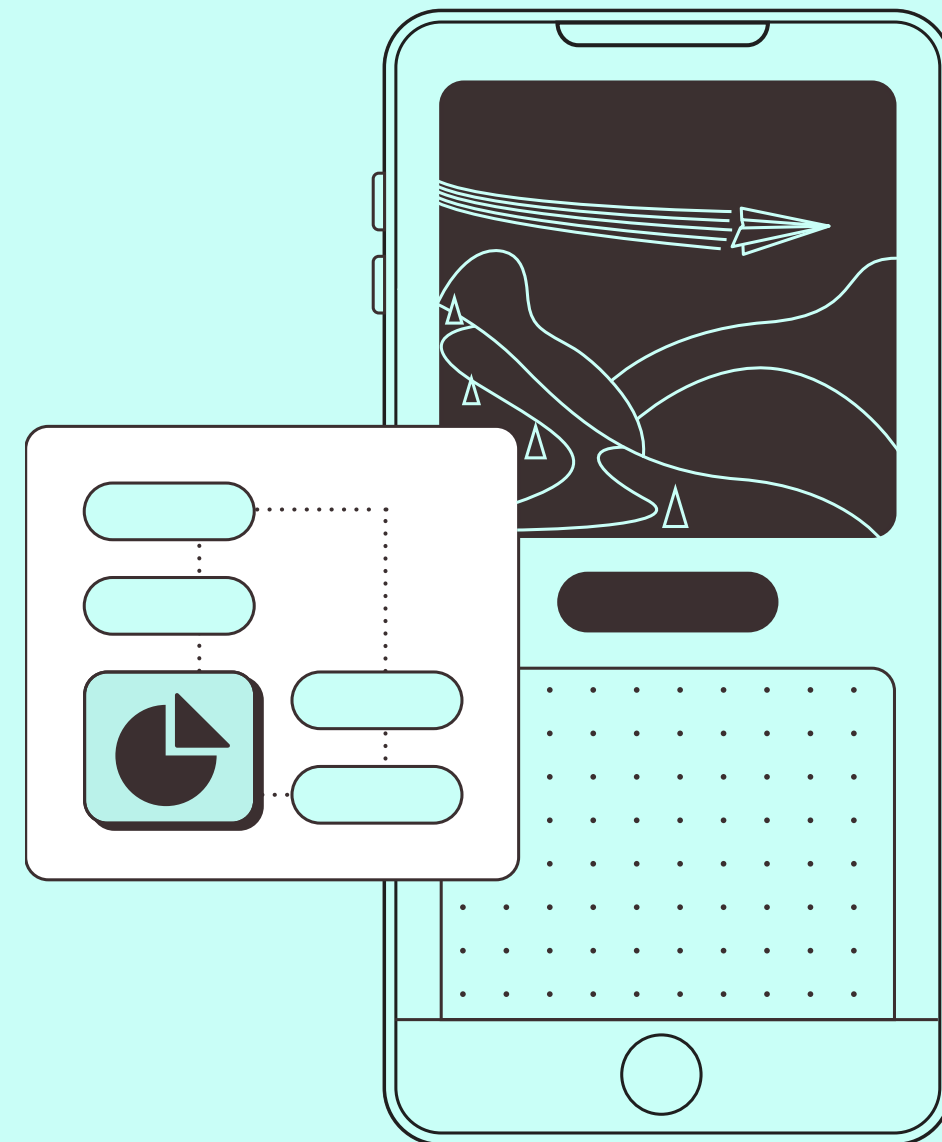
Segmentation to drive insight and relevance

Segmentation to drive insight and relevance: Segmentation has been on the marketers' mind forever and yet this is a discipline many claim to struggle with. The most common form of segmentation is explicit segmentation, this is where we are working with a data variable on the contact record, such as 'Men who have purchased within 30 days' or any specific combination of the data you hold.

Obviously, this form of segmentation is extremely powerful in helping you understand the types of content that will resonate with the audience. Sending generic messages often leads to high unsubscribe rates and low engagement, thus affecting the overall email deliverability.

We all know how frustrating watching TV adverts has become, due to the lack of segmentation and relevance of the ad; we shouldn't be inciting the same feeling within our audience.

You can test the effectiveness of your segmentation by honing in on a particular segment and crafting a single custom message directly to this segment. The effect of this effort alone will have an immediate impact on the email engagement rates, and if combined with the engaged and unengaged approach is transformational.



TIP 8

Increase the cadence

Cadence refers to the frequency of your emails. A high cadence refers to how many campaigns in any period we are sending. Finding the optimal cadence for your emails, interestingly, should not be done at a campaign level but instead at a contact and mail server level. What do I mean by that:



Mail server level, ideally, we would like to see a regular sending pattern through your ESP, this means we have a steady flow of emails out of the door each day with peaks in volume at optimum times. This gives the ESP's the ability to predict and get to know your sending patterns. It also helps you ensure you are maintaining your blended average engagement rates. To achieve this, you should:

- Use segmentation to stagger your campaigns through the week, aiming for a consistent daily volume (ignoring weekends is OK if you are B2B)
- Use retargeting campaigns to boost your daily volume with high quality email to contacts showing signs of engagement
- Use your unengaged base to top up the volume in a safe and controlled manner.

Campaign level, by assessing the cadence at a campaign level we are essentially saying “talk when you have something quality to say”. Sending an email because it's a Tuesday is not a good enough reason to communicate with your base. You should proactively seek content well in advance that will resonate, plan a cadence based on the campaigns you have in sight. Ideally you can communicate with your contacts 2/3 times a week with quality, value-led emails, whilst remembering when people stop engaging with your email. The automation should detect this and automatically add them to your unengaged segment, where they will not receive such regular communications.

Trying to remember the people receiving the regular communications are only the ones that appear to be enjoying it.

It is critical you automate as much of this process as possible so you can remain focussed on building high quality targeted content while the computers do the hard work.

TIP 9

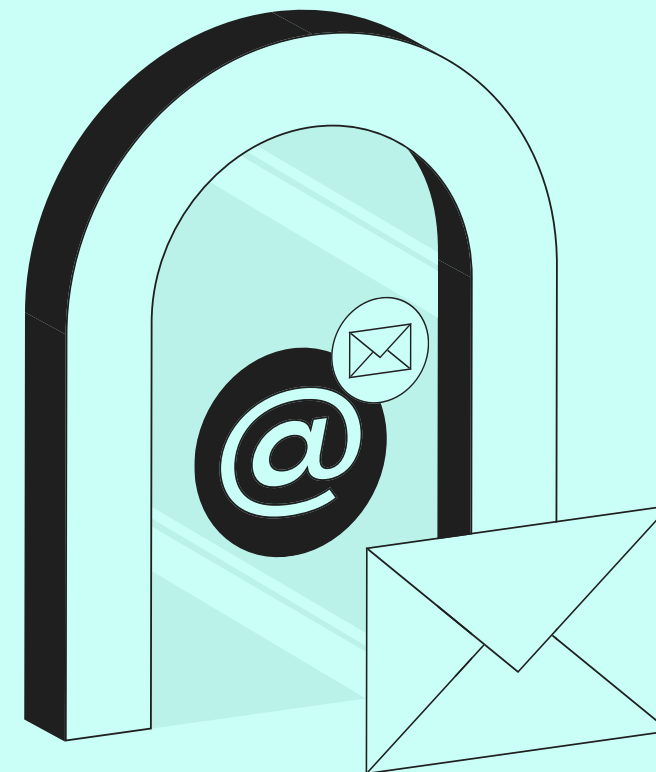
Consider broadening your communication channels

Consider broadening your communication channels: Email is the default direct communication channel these days in the digital world. However, it is important to note individuals lifestyles' impact your email engagement, a contact may want to hear from you but operates a very busy inbox, with lots of unread messages and leads an active and busy life. Recognising this and being able to communicate on a wider array of direct channels for these people may mean you still talk to them, but in a way that suits them more. This contact will be sat in your "unengaged contact base", not receiving your wonderful content and insight.

The use of SMS and direct mail as an alternative channel format means we can maintain first class email deliverability while supporting our contacts in a way they prefer.

A process we call channel optimisation says, start with the cheapest form of communication and escalate through until you achieve your desired outcome. Email, goes to SMS, SMS goes to direct mail. All the while seeking to revert the user back to the cheapest form of communication.

We're not suggesting you should be sending as many SMS and direct mails as you do emails, as these contacts would be in the unengaged segment that are unresponsive to email, instead these channels allow you to reactive contacts without the risk of email reputation issues.



TOP TIP: Post-pandemic direct mail response rates have seen a significant increase according to research performed by Royal Mail. The work from home movement has meant while consumers at home are ready to receive B2C messages, businesses have developed approaches to forward mail on to employee's home addresses. That coupled with the reduction in overall volume, the doormat is a quieter place today meaning you can have impact.

TIP 10

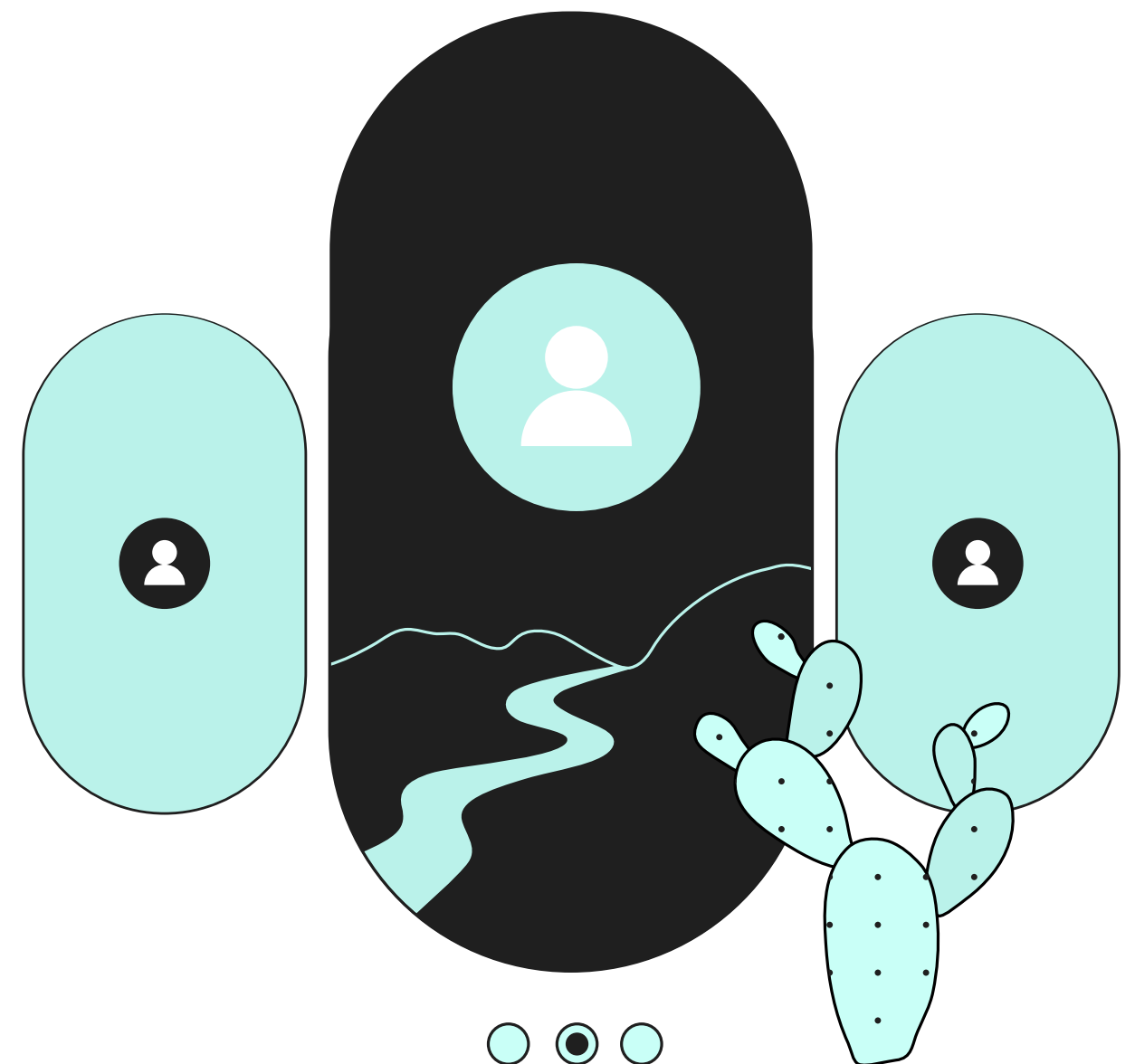
Personalise

For many marketers this means inserting [firstname] or [company name] into an email. Personalisation goes way beyond that, it is actually the culmination of all of my tips and doesn't actually need you to insert [firstname] (although feel free to do it if you can - it can only help).

Quality segmentation, driving quality content on a well-timed send schedule is the art of sending the right message to the right person at the right time. While it is very difficult to achieve perfection, if the ESP's can see we have moved beyond "batch and blast" or "hit and hope", and as we inch closer and closer, our email delivery profile gets better and better.

That being said, the process of inserting [tokens] into your email actually does work, as long as you can be confident your data is strong enough to support this and you don't end up greeting someone with:

Hello DONT CALL THIS CONTACT

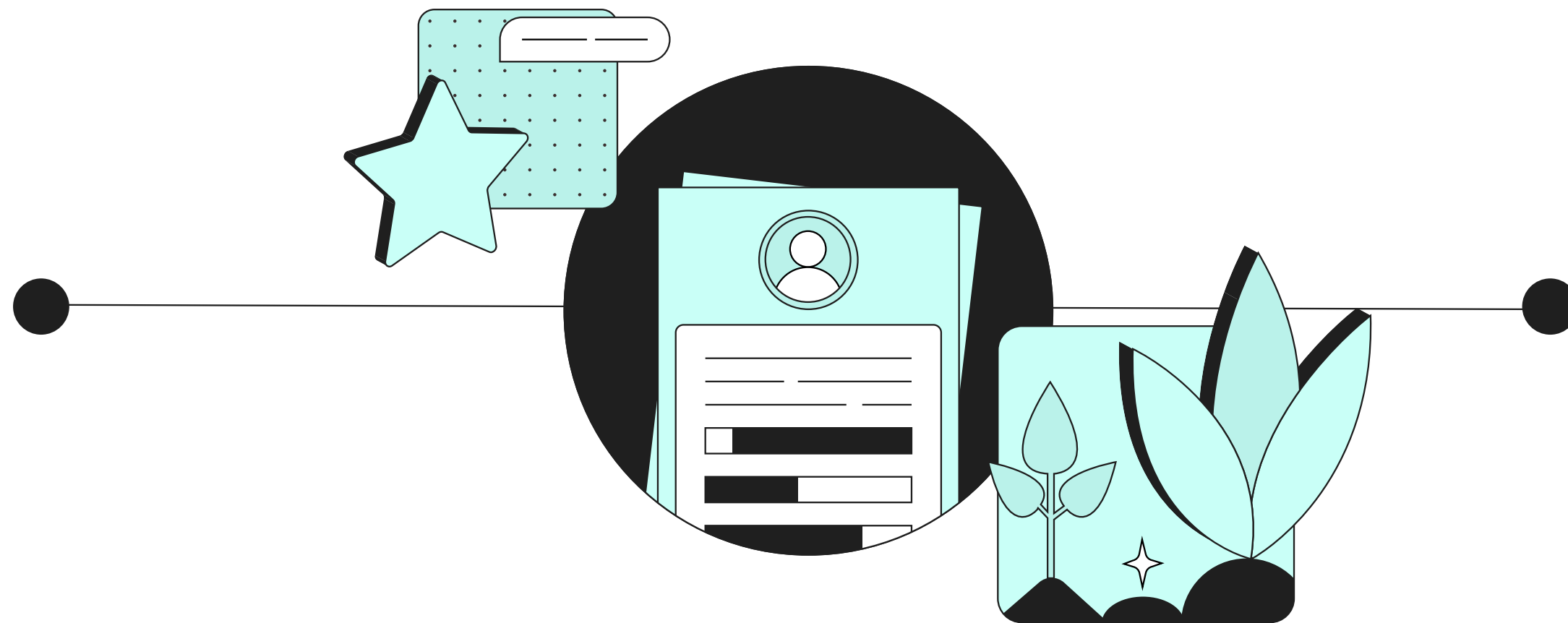


Summary

Email deliverability is now evolving in a similar way to that of SEO 10 years ago, but is rapidly catching up.

From a marketer's perspective, if we plan to succeed we must embrace our obligations to maintain clean and quality data, tightly segment based on both implicit information and engagement, all whilst developing highly engaging content designed to drive value to the contacts we communicate with.

Now more than ever working with a business like Force24 to support you in the ever-changing world of email deliverability is critical, we can support you and mentor you with important “behind the curtain” information along with proven methods that can help you succeed.



Get in touch

If you want to talk about your marketing

call us **0845 272 5990**

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