Email and the customer experience

How to deliver what consumers want

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INTRODUCTION

The cornerstone of customer communication

The customer experience is built around the many interactions a business has with the people it serves. What defines that experience differs widely from industry to industry and brand to brand. There is, however, something that's vital to any customer experience – effective communication.

Email is the digital cornerstone of communications between brands and consumers. It plays a pivotal role in the customer experience and can make or break connections with people, impacting their purchase decisions.

Email has been around for more than 50 years. It is one of the oldest places for consumers and brands to connect online. Despite the emergence of many other communication channels, email's relevance as part of the customer experience remains strong.

While the way businesses and consumers use email in 2024 has evolved, the results from our recent survey show people around the world still rely on their inboxes to support a positive customer experience every day.

What consumers say about email

75.4%
choose email as a preferred channel for promotional messages.

74.0%
choose email as a preferred channel for transactional messages.

84.9%
check their personal email at least twice per day.

Unfortunately, it's not all smooth sailing for the email channel. **Around half of consumers say they only open a few emails from brands per day.** It's no secret that most people receive far more emails from brands each day than that. So, what makes your messages matter? How do you build connections via email?

You need to understand the expectations and preferences of the people you're emailing to ensure these messages actually support the customer experience. There are countless best practices for getting the most out of your email program. But what do consumers have to say? How would they describe an optimal inbox experience?

To find out, **Sinch Mailgun surveyed more than 2,000 people in the U.S., UK, France, Germany, and Spain**. We wanted to uncover their habits and preferences around brand communications as well as the impact of email on the customer experience.

This report applies strictly to consumers and will be most relevant to B2C organizations. While it's always a human being at the receiving end of an email, the way we use work email is quite different than personal email. **Use the big-picture findings in this report to guide you.** Apply them to your business as you adapt your communication strategy and establish an ideal customer communication experience.

"Email as a channel has evolved, and it's actually become a more important channel for consumers and brands to have one-to-one communications. Email is not dead, but the idea behind batch-and-blast mass email marketing is over. Now brands are sending highly targeted email traffic based on zero- and first-party data. That's how you keep consumers engaged and deliver a better customer experience."

Kate Nowrouzi, VP, Deliverability and Product Strategy, Sinch Mailgun

Email habits and preferences

Let's begin by examining the ways consumers use email in their daily lives. When you understand how people use email, it helps you determine how to build a better customer experience around those habits and preferences.

Consumer email accounts

One clear finding is that many people own multiple personal email addresses. **The survey found 71.5% of respondents have more than one email account.** It was most common for consumers to have two personal email addresses (43.6%), while just 28.5% of respondents claimed to have only one account.

How many personal email addresses do you have?

- Five or more 5.7%
- Four 4.6%
- Three 17.6%
- One 28.5%
- Two 43.6%
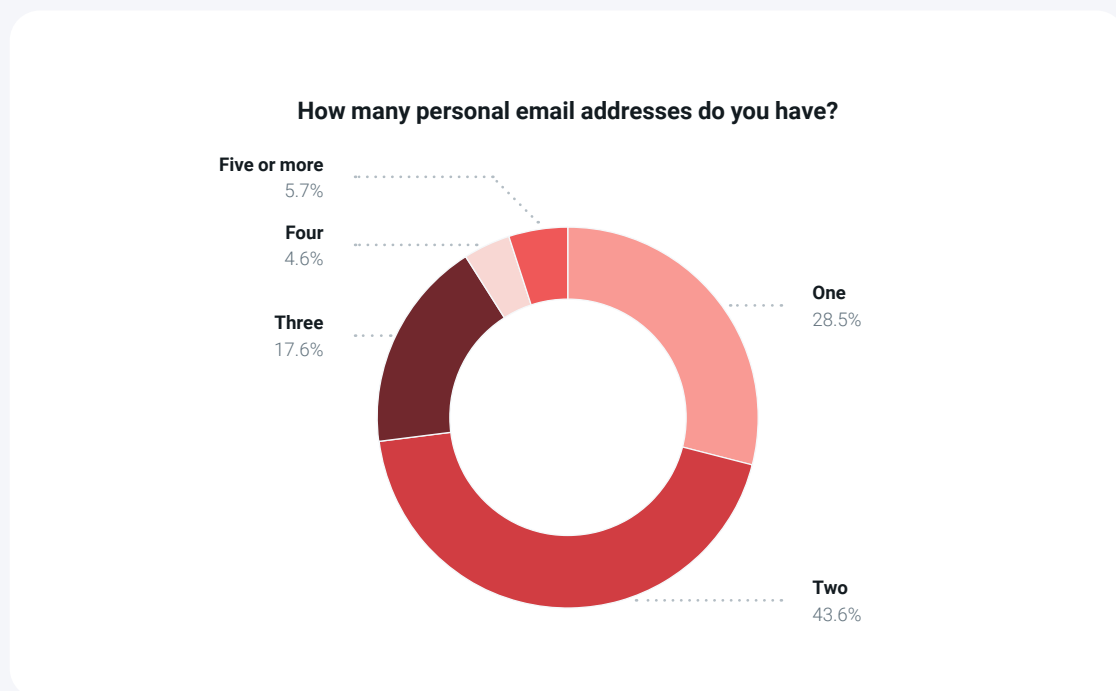
There are various reasons for having multiple personal email accounts. Some people may choose to switch mailbox providers but leave their old accounts open. Others may create a new personal email account after running out of storage space or getting overwhelmed by a cluttered inbox. However, the reason we're most interested in is whether consumers create accounts specifically for promotional emails.

Our survey found that **28% of consumers say they do have a separate email address they use to collect email marketing messages from brands**, and more than half of them check it every day. That suggests this behavior is not unusual, but it's not exactly common either. Popular mailbox providers may already be filtering promotional messages into a separate area of the inbox.

Do you use a separate email address to receive promotional emails from brands?

Yes
28.0%

No
72.0%
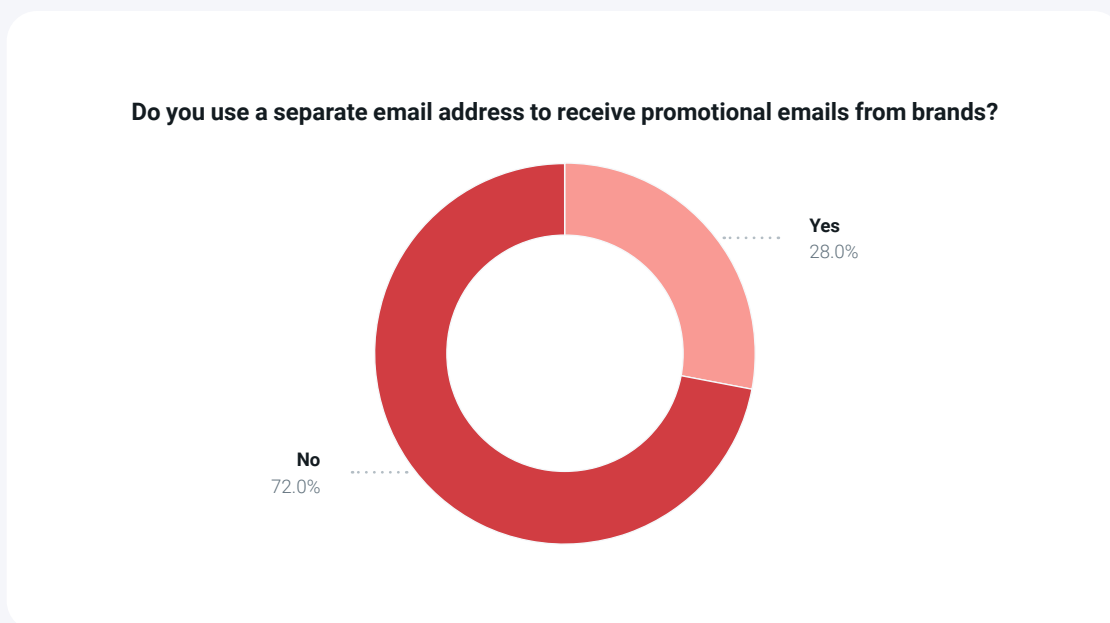
Gmail introduced the tabbed inbox around a decade ago. It automatically sorts recipients' messages into useful categories. That includes the well-known Gmail Promotions tab, which is where many marketing emails are filtered. **Our survey found nearly half of consumers (48.7%) reported having a tabbed inbox.**

The truth about inbox tabs

Don't consider landing in the Gmail Promotions tab to be a bad thing. The truth is, that's where promotional emails belong, and tabbed inboxes make email more useful to consumers.

For senders who know how to take advantage of this type of inbox placement, there are unique opportunities. That includes the ability to showcase product images, coupon codes, and more at the inbox level – *before* the email is opened.
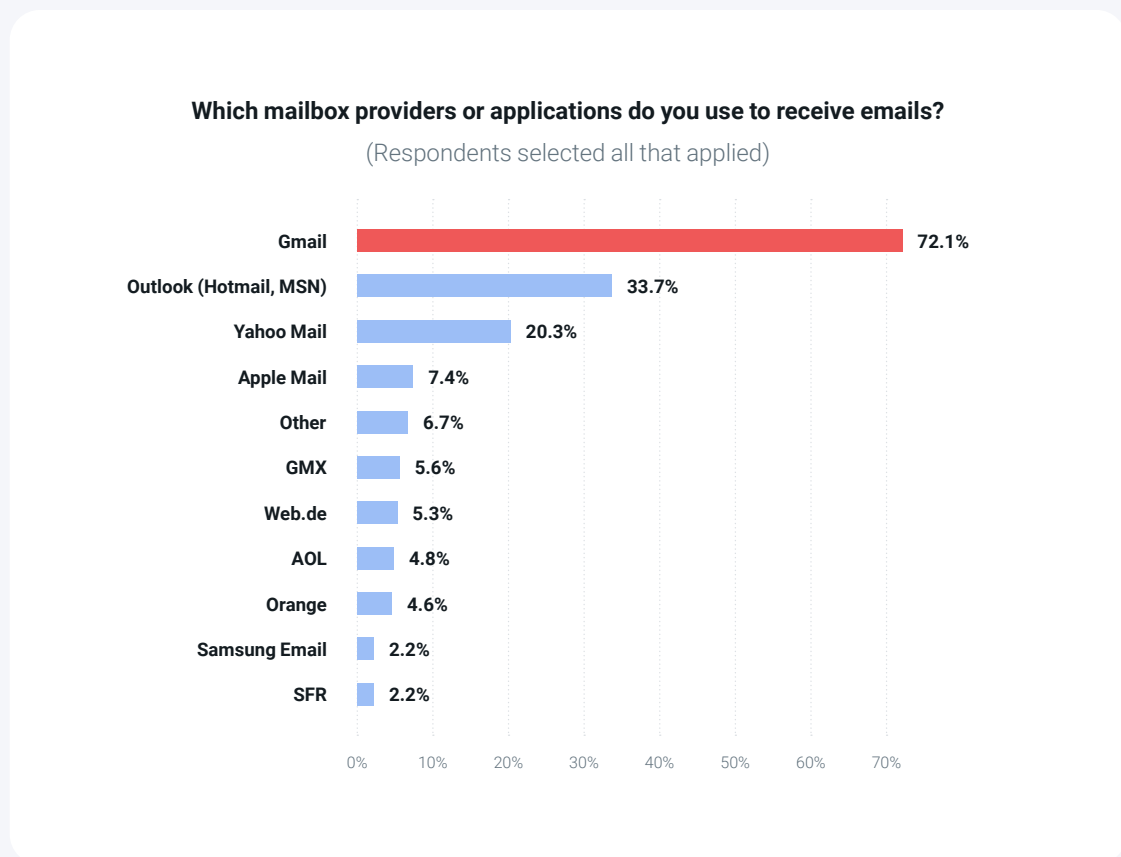
"More than half of consumers say they check their Promotions tab or accounts they've dedicated to marketing emails every day."

Email services and devices

Gmail was the clear leader when our survey asked consumers which services they use for email. **More than 71% of respondents said they have a Gmail account while more than one-third (33.7%) said they use Outlook.** Yahoo Mail took the third spot with 20.3% of consumers using the service.

These findings underscore the importance of following new bulk sender guidelines from Gmail and Yahoo in 2024. Senders need to ensure effective authentication, provide an easy unsubscribe process, and keep spam complaints low if they want messages delivered to Gmail and Yahoo.

Which mailbox providers or applications do you use to receive emails?

(Respondents selected all that applied)

Provider	Percentage
Gmail	72.1%
Outlook (Hotmail, MSN)	33.7%
Yahoo Mail	20.3%
Apple Mail	7.4%
Other	6.7%
GMX	5.6%
Web.de	5.3%
AOL	4.8%
Orange	4.6%
Samsung Email	2.2%
SFR	2.2%

You may have seen other industry statistics that show Apple Mail is the most popular email client. It's important to remember that Apple Mail is *only* an email client. It does not provide its users with an email address. Rather, a consumer would use the Apple Mail application to access Gmail and other accounts.

Another key caveat is that iPhones are less popular in Europe compared to the U.S. While U.S. respondents made up the largest cohort in our survey, the UK, France, Germany, and Spain account for more than 70% of respondents.

The devices consumers use to view their emails also impact the way campaigns look and behave. When asked about the type of device used to check email most often, **71.5% of the consumers surveyed selected their mobile phone.** 16.7% of respondents check email from a web browser on their computer while another 7.8% use a desktop application such as Outlook or Apple Mail.

On what type of device do you check and read emails most often?

Tablet/iPad
3.8%

Smartwatch
0.2%

Computer (Desktop app)
7.8%

Computer (Web browser)
16.7%

Mobile phone
71.5%
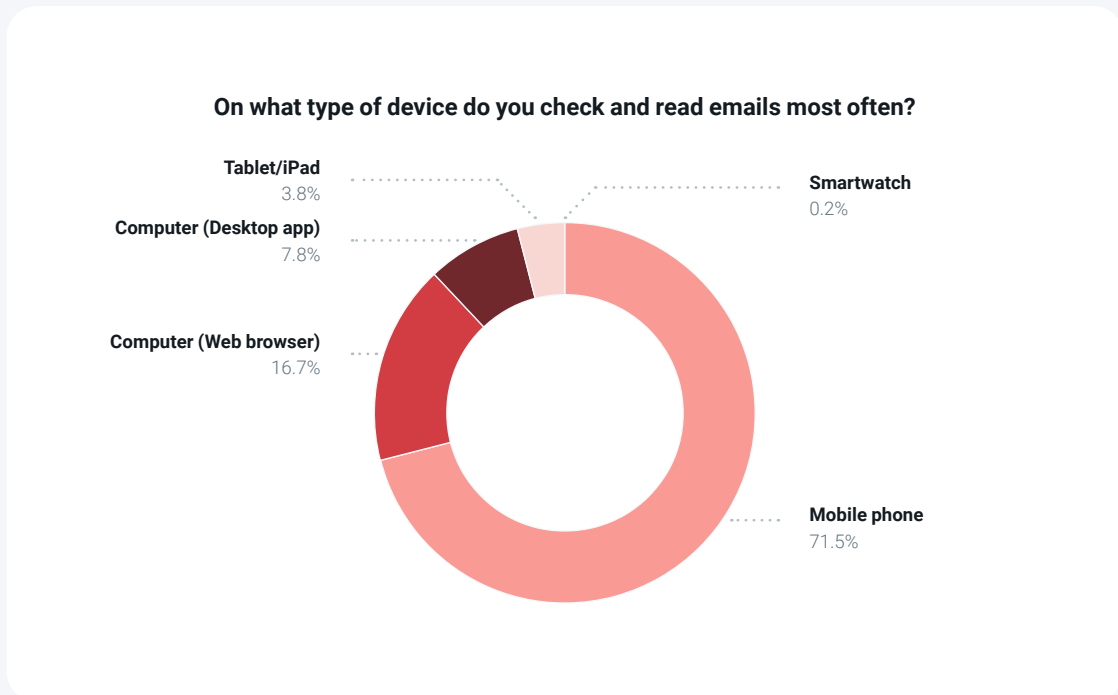
While the propensity for mobile viewing is unsurprising, it's an important consideration when building an effective customer experience for the inbox. **Email campaigns that are mobile-friendly and responsive, adjusting for various screen sizes, are a must-have for B2C brands.** B2B recipients may be sitting at a computer reading email, but smartphones are the clear choice for consumers.

Coding an optimal email experience for smartphones isn't always easy. The Inbox Insights report from Sinch Mailjet found that 36% of senders called responsive email design one of their three biggest challenges. That number jumped to more than 42% among the developers who code HTML emails.

Why mailbox providers and device usage matter

How does knowing which mailbox providers your customers use help you improve their experience?

There are two main reasons:

1. **Email deliverability:** Mailbox providers have specific rules for evaluating your sender reputation, which influences whether you end up in spam or the inbox. Using services like Google Postmaster Tools for Gmail and Microsoft SNDS for Outlook helps you manage your reputation with these providers.

2. **Email rendering:** There is varying support for HTML and CSS among different email clients. That means, for example, the way your email looks in Gmail could be quite different in Outlook. In some cases, it may be rendered unreadable or broken. This is where a service like Email Previews from Mailgun Optimize can help you deliver an ideal customer experience.

Quick tips for a mobile-friendly email experience

- Use a font size of at least 16 pixels for readability.
- Mobile tap targets should be at least **44 pixels** wide and tall.
- A single-column layout is best for mobile email viewing.
- Keep image files under 200kb for faster mobile load times.
- Code for mobile first by using a `min-width` media query.

Dark mode vs light mode email viewing

Another factor that can easily impact the way an email renders for consumers is the type of theme they are using with a device or email application. Here we are referring to the choice between light mode and dark mode email viewing.

Dark mode rose in popularity after it became an option for common operating systems and applications. In dark mode, light backgrounds with dark text switch to dark backgrounds with light text. It's become a significant user experience (UX) trend that appears to be here to stay. Email subscribers may choose to set an application or operating system to dark mode, or their device may automatically switch to dark mode at a certain time of day.

Our survey found just over half of consumers prefer a light theme for viewing emails while nearly 25% are using dark mode. Another 11% say their theme changes by time of day and 14% were unsure which theme they use.

What sort of inbox theme do you prefer when viewing emails?

Unsure
14.0%

Light mode (usually default)
50.6%

Changes by time of day
11.0%
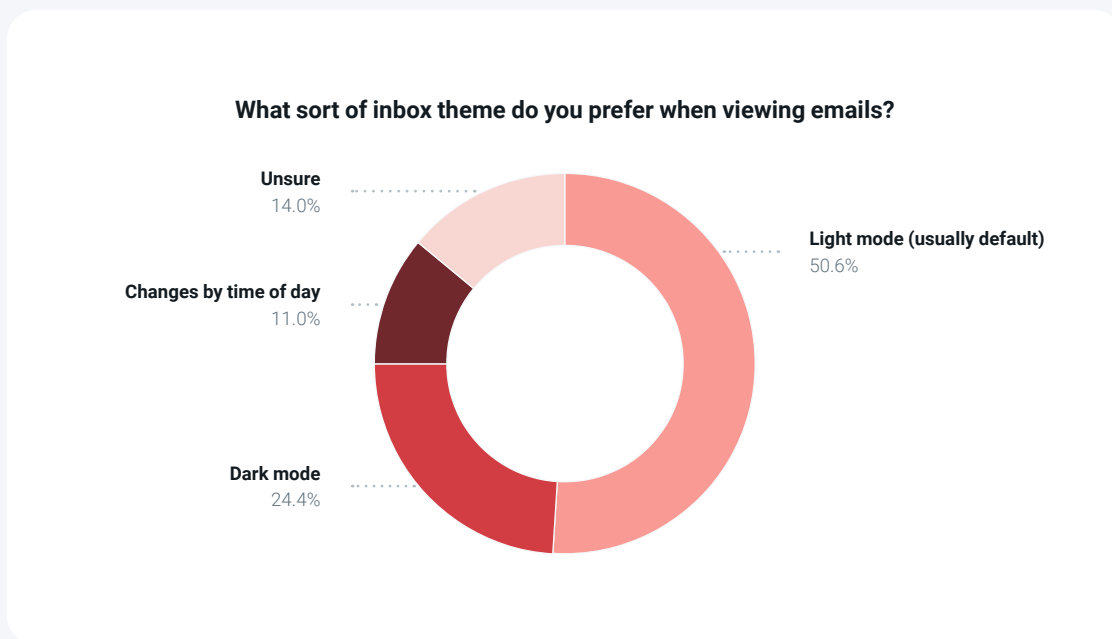
Dark mode
24.4%

If your organization employs email developers, they can optimize emails for dark mode and even code campaigns that respond to the recipient's chosen theme. Visit Sinch Email on Acid to learn more about coding dark mode emails.

Consumer choices affect the way your marketing emails look and function. Optimize for specific email clients, mobile devices, and dark mode settings to deliver an ideal customer experience to every inbox.

The daily email routine

Let's dive deeper into the email habits of consumers. How often are people compelled to see what's arrived in their inboxes? When are people most likely to check email? While everyone has their routine, there are some clear preferences revealed in our research.

When asked how often they check email, 28.5% chose Whenever I get a notification. That's nearly as much as the 29% who said they check email **More than 5 times per day**. Another 27.4% reported checking email **2-5 times per day**.

How often do you check your personal email?

Whenever I get a notification	28.5%
More than 5 times a day	29.0%
2-5 times a day	27.4%
Once a day	11.4%
A couple times a week	2.3%
Once a week	0.3%
Once a month	0.2%
Only if I'm expecting an email	1.0%
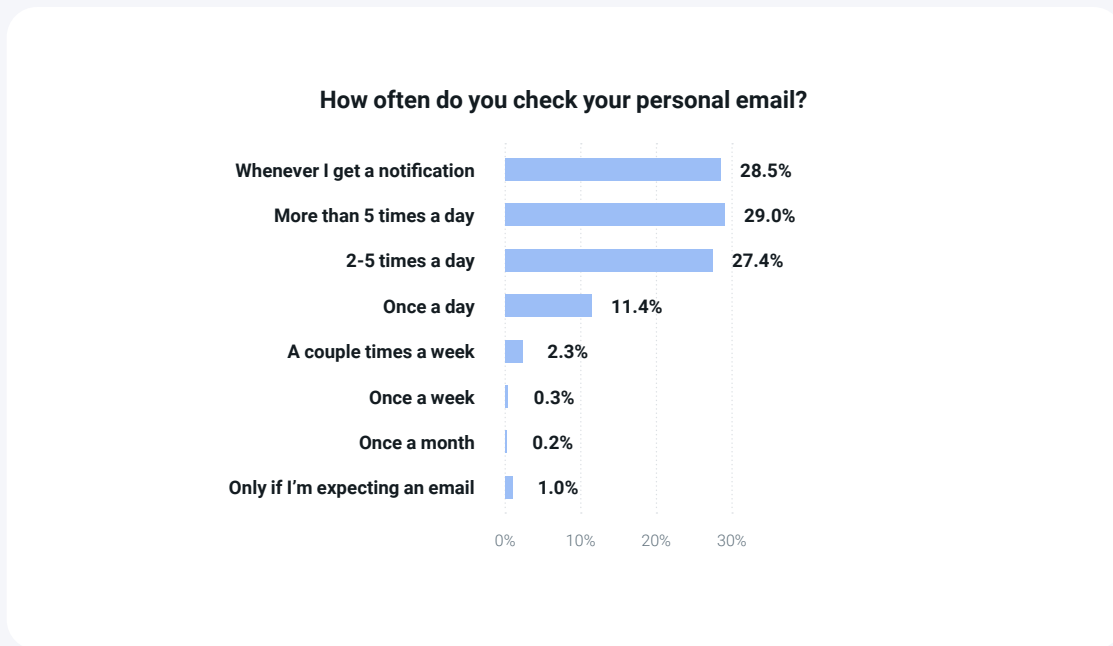
Add them all up, and it is safe to assume that **nearly 85% of consumers are inside their email inboxes at least twice per day**. That speaks to the importance of email in the daily lives of global consumers.

Of course, individuals also have certain times of the day when it's most convenient to check their personal inboxes. **More than 55% of the consumers in our survey say they are likely to check email sometime in the morning after waking up.** More than 40% also report checking email in the afternoon or evening hours.

What times of day do you typically check your personal email address?

When I wake up	In the morning	Around lunchtime	In the afternoon	In the evening	Before I go to bed
24.5%	55.2%	33.9%	42.6%	44.5%	20.1%
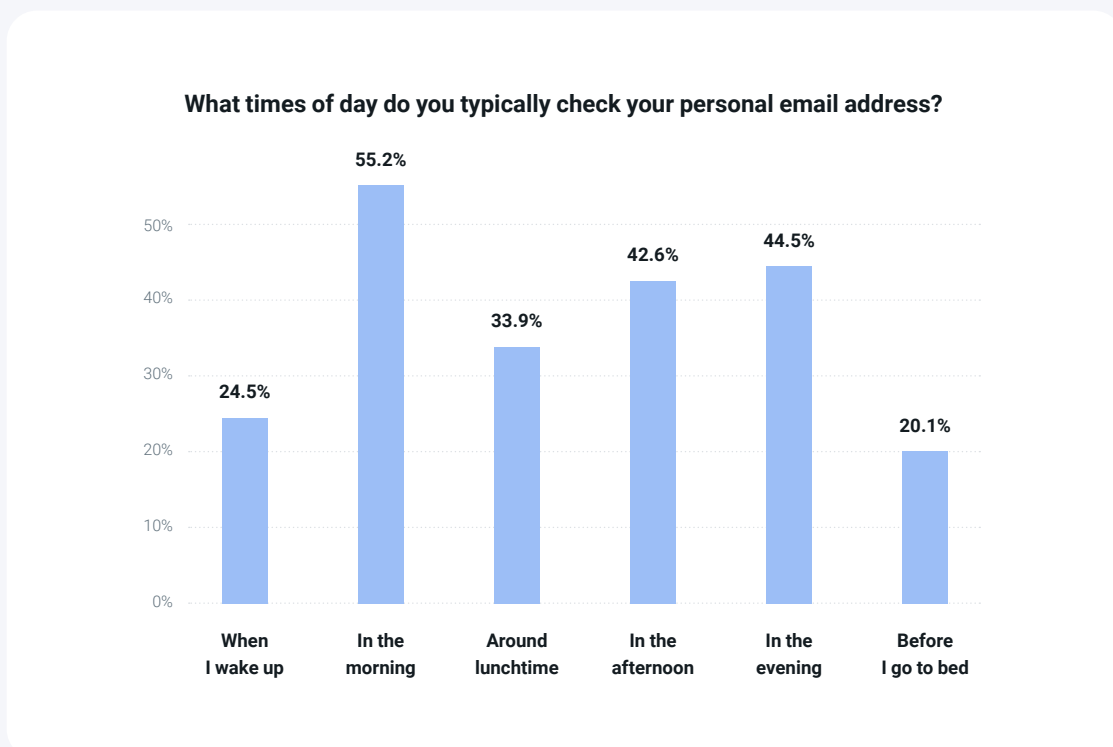
Respondents indicate they are least likely to be checking email immediately after waking up or before going to bed. Of course, what survey respondents say and do can be different. Review email analytics to find the best send times for your customers.
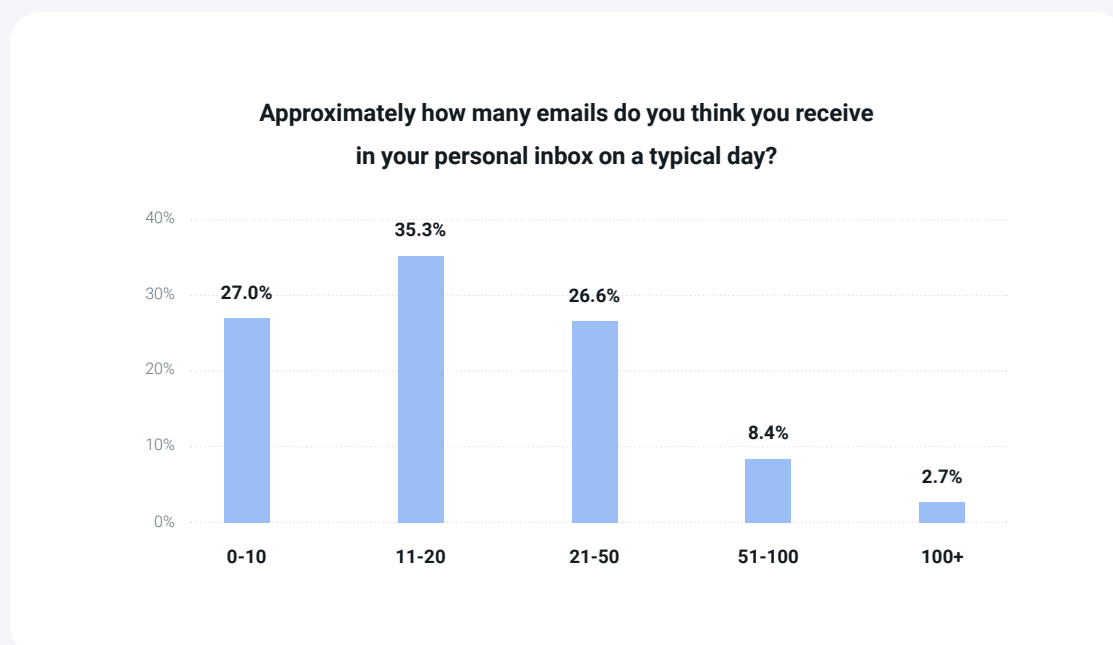
Calculating the right time to send your emails is hard, but advanced senders don't have to estimate the best time to launch campaigns. There's a way to use actual data from individual subscribers to get emails delivered at the perfect time. A feature known as Send Time Optimization (STO) takes the guesswork out of the process.

With STO, your emails are held in a queue until it's the right time for delivery. If Sally checks her email in the morning and Frank checks at lunch, your emails will be at the top of their inboxes at that time. And that's important amidst the growing competition in the inbox.

We also asked people to estimate the number of emails they receive on a typical day. **35.3% of respondents selected a range of 11 to 20 emails per day**, which was the most common answer. Another 26.6% estimate they get 21 to 50 emails per day, and a combined 11% of consumers say they get more than 50 messages to their personal email addresses on a typical day.

Approximately how many emails do you think you receive in your personal inbox on a typical day?

	0-10	11-20	21-50	51-100	100+
	27.0%	35.3%	26.6%	8.4%	2.7%

No matter the total number of emails a consumer receives in a day, many of them will come from brands sending offers, updates, and information. We asked participants to tell us how many emails from brands they typically open daily.

49.2% of consumers say they only open a few emails from brands on any given day. Less than a quarter (23.6%), claim to open around half of the emails they get from brands. A combined 19.2% reported opening most or all of those emails, and 8% said they do not open any at all.

How many emails (from brands only) do you open on a typical day?
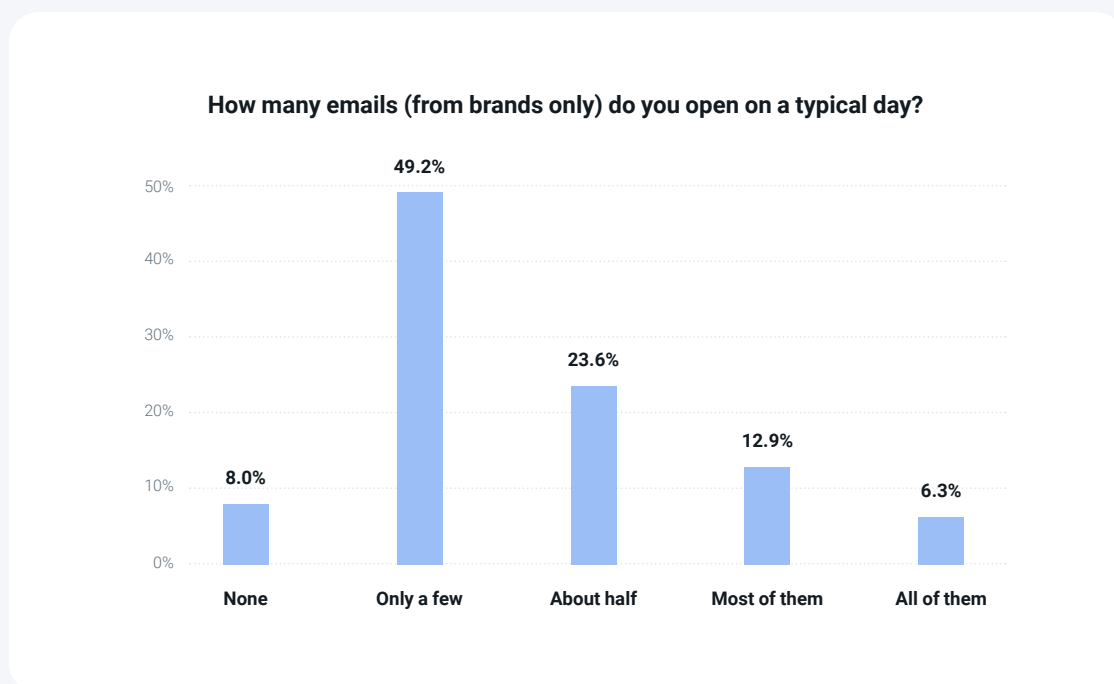
We'll take a closer look at what prompts consumers to open emails in the next chapter. However, it's also important for senders to realize there are connections between open rates and email deliverability, so strategically segmenting lists by engagement is a smart practice for senders.

Close to half of consumers report only opening a few emails from brands per day. Yet more than 19% will open most or all those emails. Segment your list by engagement and allow subscribers to select email sending frequency to support an ideal customer experience.

Strategic segmentation and email preference centers

Mailbox providers take notice when their users do or do not open emails coming from your sending domains and IP addresses. **Low open rates are a signal that your messages are unwanted, which makes it more likely they'll be filtered into spam.**

Smart senders often strategically segment their lists based on email engagement. This basically means contacts who open and click more often receive more emails than those who don't. Customers who are unengaged email subscribers can still receive transactional messages, but their lack of interest in other emails won't drag down engagement metrics. The least engaged subscribers can even be proactively unsubscribed from certain communications.

Perhaps the best way to ensure your email-sending frequency matches customer expectations is to let people tell you what they want. This can be done with an email preference center where subscribers choose the types of emails they want to receive and how often they want to hear from your brand.

PART 2

Inbox experience insights

A customer's experience with your company through email has a long arc. It starts with signing up and could end with unsubscribing (along with plenty of touchpoints in between).

Let's take a closer look at what consumers say motivates them to take different actions related to email and the customer experience.

Why do consumers sign up for emails?

There are plenty of reasons for subscribing or opting-in to email communications. We wanted to know what is most likely to convince consumers that giving an organization their email address and other data is worth it.

More than half of the consumers in our survey said the primary reason they opt-in is for either special offers or exclusive discounts. That includes both 32.7% who primarily sign up for emails to regularly receive special offers and 23.6% who subscribe to get a one-time discount.

15% of consumers sign up for emails to stay informed about product updates and new releases. Just under 14% subscribe to receive emails that are more transactional and informational. That includes appointment reminders, auto-shipment notifications, and the chance to provide customer feedback.

What is the *primary reason* you sign up to receive emails from brands?

To regularly receive special offers	32.7%
To get a one-time discount	23.6%
To hear about the latest updates	15.0%
To receive important reminders	13.9%
To get personalized recommendations	8.4%
To receive new articles, videos, and other content	4.9%
Other	1.4%

Most types of truly transactional emails do not require consumer consent. So, customers wouldn't need to sign up for those messages. However, privacy laws such as HIPAA require that these email recipients have a way to opt out from reminders if desired. As we'll see in the next section, there can be some crossover between transactional and marketing emails.

Fewer consumers claimed they'd sign up for emails to get personalized recommendations (8.4%) or to receive links to content such as articles and videos (4.9%). Many of the survey respondents who selected Other (1.4%) for this question wrote in answers indicating they would not sign up for emails from brands.

Why do consumers open emails from brands?

Once consumers have subscribed, how can you increase the chances they'll open your emails when they arrive? Compelling subject lines from smart email marketers in your organization are important when deciding what to open. But other factors come into play when deciding whether opening an email is worth a person's time.

Respondents indicated a significant factor is recognizing the sender's name or brand name in their inbox. An impressive 94.5% of consumers called that recognizability important. In fact, nearly two-thirds (65.2%) described it as **Very Important**.

When deciding whether to open an email, how important is…

Recognizing the sender name or brand name?
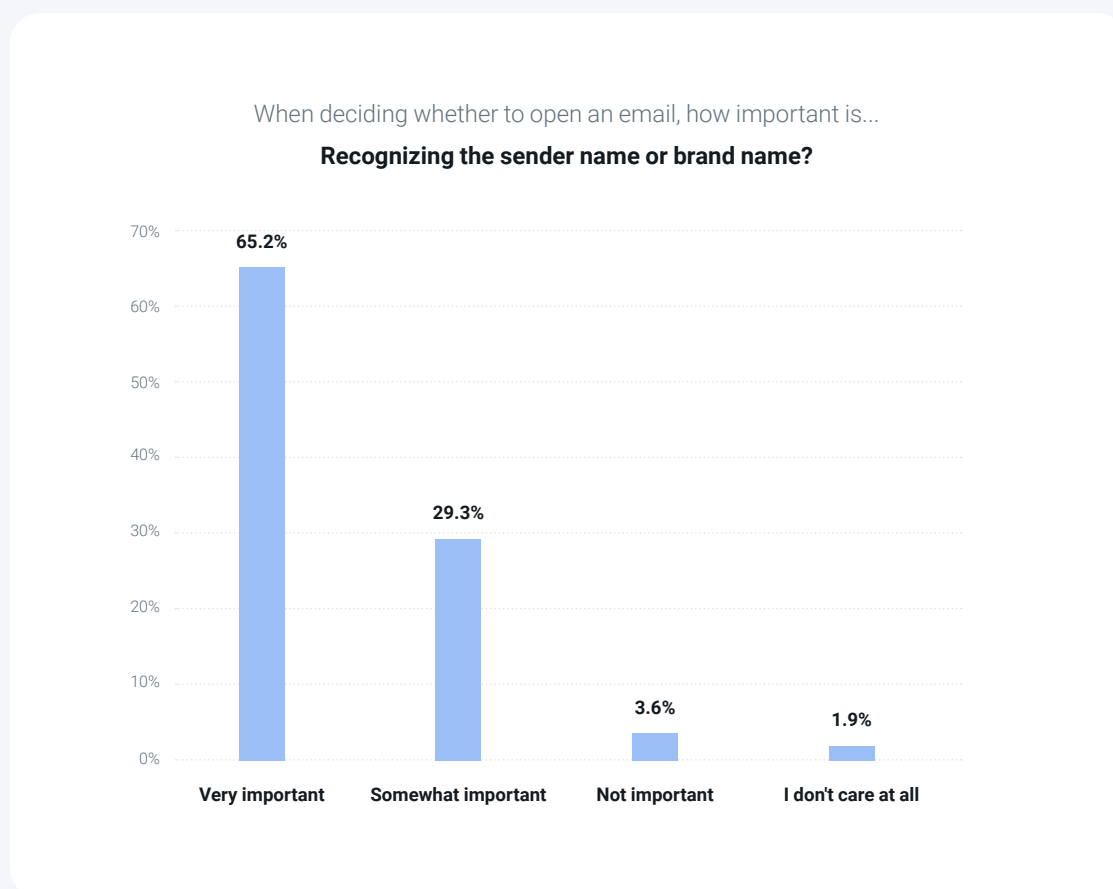
Strategically, senders should think carefully about what they choose to use as the "From name." Excluding the brand name or including it at the end of a so-called "friendly-from" (where it may be truncated) could hurt your open rates.

Recognizing the brand is important to email recipients because it's a signal that the message is from a company they know and trust. Scammers often try to impersonate well-known brands through a phishing tactic known as email spoofing. Essentially, a bad actor sends an email that looks like it's from your brand, but there is malicious intent.

Protecting your brand and customers

To stop spoofing, senders use strong email authentication, including the use of SPF (Sender Policy Framework), DKIM (DomainKeys Identified Mail), and DMARC (Domain-based Message Authentication and Reporting). Bulk senders are required to use all three protocols in 2024. When a sender enforces a DMARC policy of quarantine or reject, they are also eligible to have what's known as a BIMI logo.

BIMI stands for Brand Indicators for Message Identification. Organizations that implement BIMI correctly can have a trademarked logo appear next to their messages in the inbox. As you can imagine, this visual element is very recognizable and could improve open rates while establishing the trustworthiness of an email.

Guide - Email security and compliance

Get Sinch Mailgun's exclusive content on how to thwart email threats in your organization. Plus, learn more about email authentication, find out how our team fights bad actors, and get advice on choosing trustworthy technology partners.

Download Now

Another factor that consumers ranked as important is the promise made in the subject line. As we previously noted, our survey found more than half of consumers say they opt in to emails for promotions and discounts. So, it's no surprise that consumers see a mention of a discount or offer in the subject line as a key reason to open an email.

While 49.5% of respondents say offers and discounts in the subject line are Somewhat Important, another 29.2% say they are Very important. Only 5.5% said they didn't care about offers in the subject line at all.

When deciding whether to open an email, how important is…

A subject line promising a discount or time-sensitive offer?

50%	
40%	49.5%
30%	29.2%
20%	15.9%
10%	5.5%
0%	
Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	I don't care at all

Note that our question specified "time-sensitive offers." Using subject lines to create a sense of urgency is an effective way to convince customers to open emails now — before they get buried in the inbox.

Many organizations are personalizing marketing and the customer experience. But are your customers impressed by subject line personalization?

Of all the factors presented to survey respondents, seeing their name in the subject seemed least important in comparison. **Although a majority (61.2%) called subject line personalization somewhat or very important, 28.4% said it was Not Important and 10.4% chose I don't care at all.**

When deciding whether to open an email, how important is...

Seeing your name in the subject line?
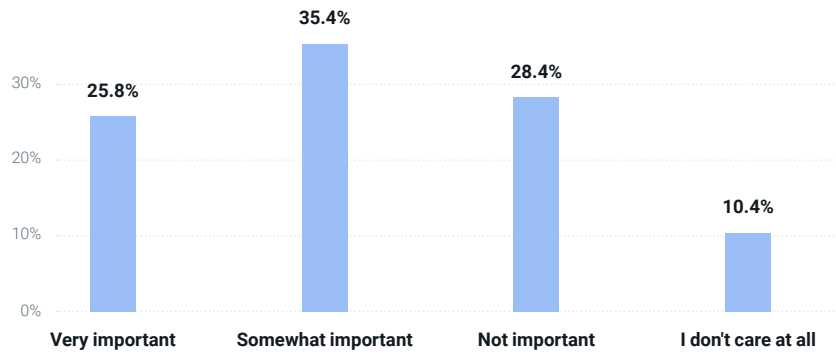
These results do not necessarily mean that personalizing a subject line with your customers' names is ineffective or a bad idea. It may suggest, however, that this sort of personalization is now so common among email senders that it no longer helps you stand out in the inbox as much.

There are more advanced ways to personalize emails that may lead to better performance. **When we asked consumers about email content that is personalized to their interests, a combined 80.8% said it was either Somewhat Important or Very important.**

When deciding whether to open an email, how important is...

Content that is personalized to my interests?
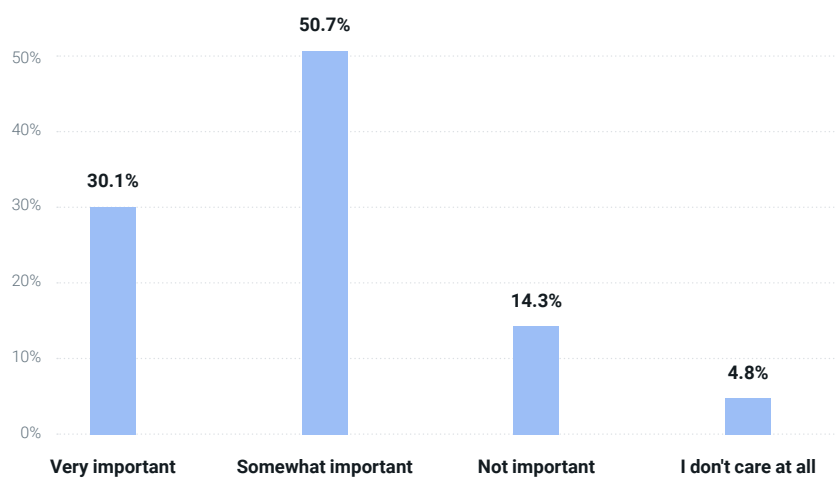
Senders can deliver content that is more relevant to individual customers and subscribers through segmentation and advanced personalization. A list that is segmented by consumer interests or demographics lets you deliver targeted messaging and recommendations. Consumer data such as purchase history and web page visits can help brands automate personalized content for individual customers.
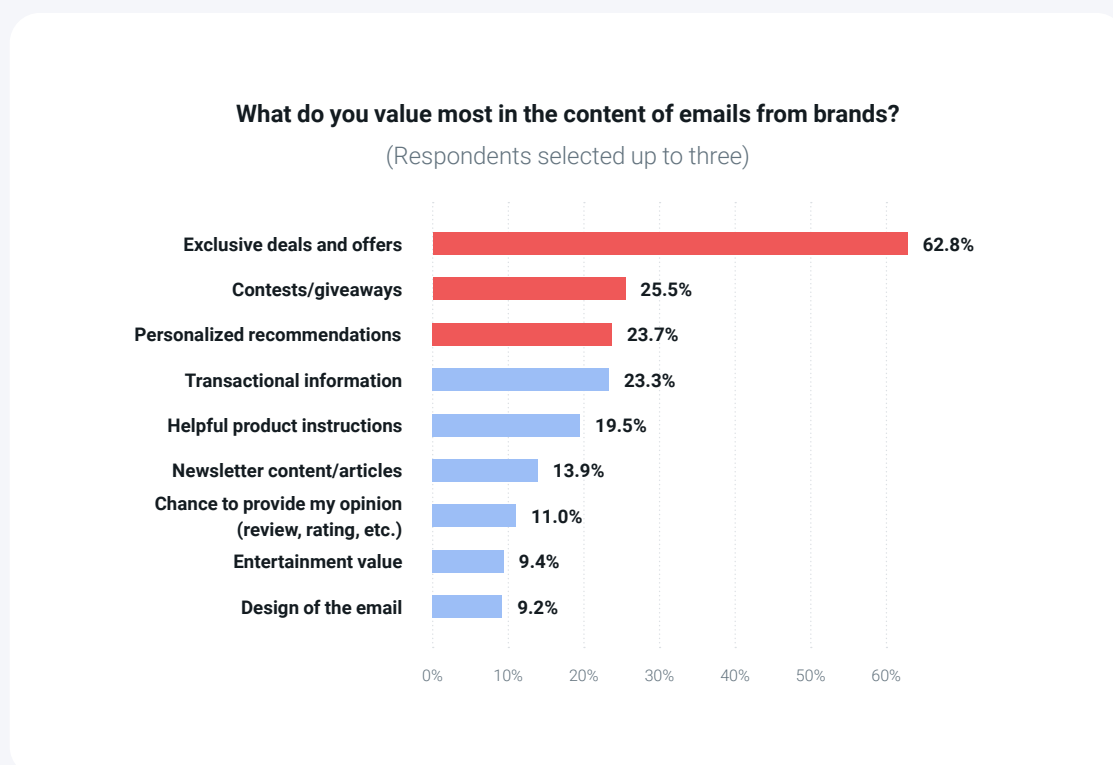
What do consumers value most about email?

By definition, consumers are individuals who purchase goods and services. So, is it any wonder that what they value most in emails are the things that enhance their purchasing power and the ability to find products and services they need and want?

When we asked survey participants to select up to three factors that they value most about the emails they receive from brands, the top choices represented benefits to their experience as consumers:

1. **Exclusive deals and offers** (62.8%)
2. **Contests and giveaways** (25.5%)
3. **Personalized recommendations** (23.7%)

Receiving *exclusive* offers from a brand garnered more than twice as many selections as any other option. This suggests your customers see their inbox as a place to receive insider information and deals that may not be available to everyone.

What do you value most in the content of emails from brands?
(Respondents selected up to three)

Exclusive deals and offers	62.8%
Contests/giveaways	25.5%
Personalized recommendations	23.7%
Transactional information	23.3%
Helpful product instructions	19.5%
Newsletter content/articles	13.9%
Chance to provide my opinion (review, rating, etc.)	11.0%
Entertainment value	9.4%
Design of the email	9.2%

Transactional information (23.3%) narrowly missed the top three most valuable benefits of emails from brands. Many transactional messages are important to consumers. They include multi-factor authentication emails, password resets, security notifications, and a host of other messages that aren't marketing-related, but they may be needed.

If these kinds of emails were to go missing, it would be very problematic for the customer experience. However, email is such a reliable channel for this type of communication that consumers are likely to see transactional communications as an expectation rather than adding value. We'll take a closer look at the importance of transactional emails in the next section.

It would be a mistake to assume the factors that landed lower on this list do not provide value to consumers. Take a peek inside any consumer's inbox and you'll see dozens of brands delivering exclusive deals and offers. If the goal is to stand out and differentiate your brand, then it could be the little things that make a difference in the customer experience.

62.8% of consumers say deals and offers provide the biggest benefit to the email experience. However, factors such as helpful content, entertainment value, giving customers a voice, and design choices will set your brand's emails apart.

So, what makes recipients click on the emails they receive? We asked consumers to identify up to three reasons they'd click in an email to visit a sender's website. Based on what consumers said they find valuable in brand communications, it's no surprise to see deals and coupons as the main driver of clicks.

These were the most popular options:

1. **To claim a deal or use a coupon code** (45.7%)
2. **To learn more about an offer or topic** (36.3%)
3. **To view featured products** (28.2%)

The top reason for clicking reflects the primary reason many consumers sign up for emails from brands – deals and discounts. Learning more about something or viewing featured products also points to something else – curiosity.

**Out of the following options, when are you most likely
to click on an email to visit a brand's website?**

(Respondents selected up to three)

To claim a deal or use a coupon code	45.7%
To learn more about an offer or topic	36.3%
To view featured products	28.2%
To check notifications and status updates	22.4%
To view content (articles, videos, etc.)	21.1%
To unsubscribe	20.9%
To return and complete a purchase (items in cart)	20.0%
To change my email preferences	10.6%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

Still, email is much more than a teaser. It is a bridge between your customers and your brand that facilitates many ways to provide value and build a strong relationship.

Why do consumers unsubscribe?

Sometimes relationships come to an end, though. In the world of email, that means unsubscribing. Understanding why people no longer wish to receive emails can show you how to deliver a better customer experience.
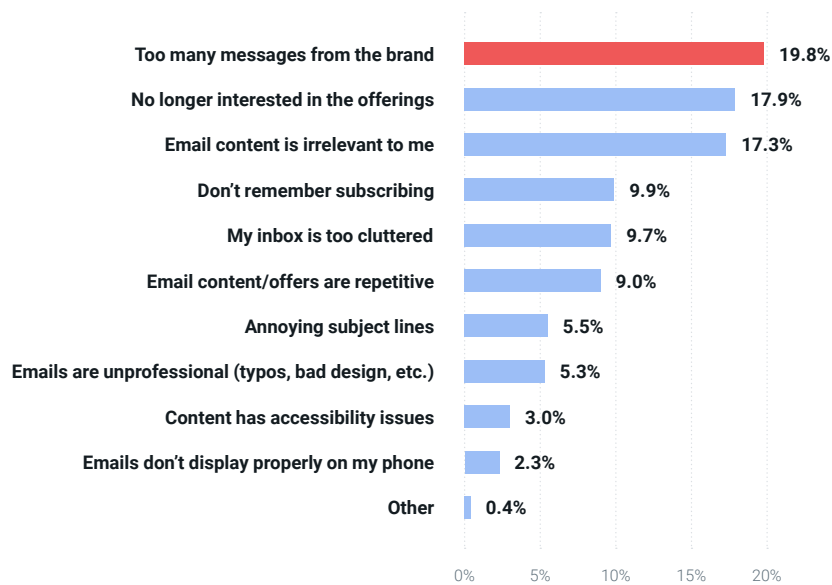
When we asked consumers why they unsubscribe, three main reasons rose to the top of the results:

1. **Too many messages from the brand** (19.8%)

2. **No longer interested in the offerings** (17.9%)

3. **Email content is irrelevant to me** (17.3%)

Making the unsubscribe process easy for consumers is part of providing an ideal customer communication experience. **The latest bulk sender guidelines from Gmail and Yahoo require a way for recipients to unsubscribe from all marketing emails with one click on a link in the body of the message.**

What is the most common reason you choose to unsubscribe from a brand's emails?

Reason	%
Too many messages from the brand	19.8%
No longer interested in the offerings	17.9%
Email content is irrelevant to me	17.3%
Don't remember subscribing	9.9%
My inbox is too cluttered	9.7%
Email content/offers are repetitive	9.0%
Annoying subject lines	5.5%
Emails are unprofessional (typos, bad design, etc.)	5.3%
Content has accessibility issues	3.0%
Emails don't display properly on my phone	2.3%
Other	0.4%

To avoid annoying customers who'd prefer fewer touchpoints in their inbox, offer an email preference center where they can customize frequency and interests. You also can prevent unsubscribes from irrelevant content when you segment your list and build campaigns in which your messages match the intended audience.

There will be customers and subscribers who simply lose interest in hearing from your company. It's okay to let these people go.

Unlike the factors that provide the most value to a consumer's experience with email, there's no clear winner when it comes to unsubscribing. If you want to avoid losing subscribers, the best advice is to show respect. Don't overwhelm your customers with emails and be sure to send them content and offers that will resonate with your list.

PART 3

Promotional and transactional experiences

You can split emails from brands into two main buckets: Promotional and transactional. Let's briefly define these types of messages so we're clear.
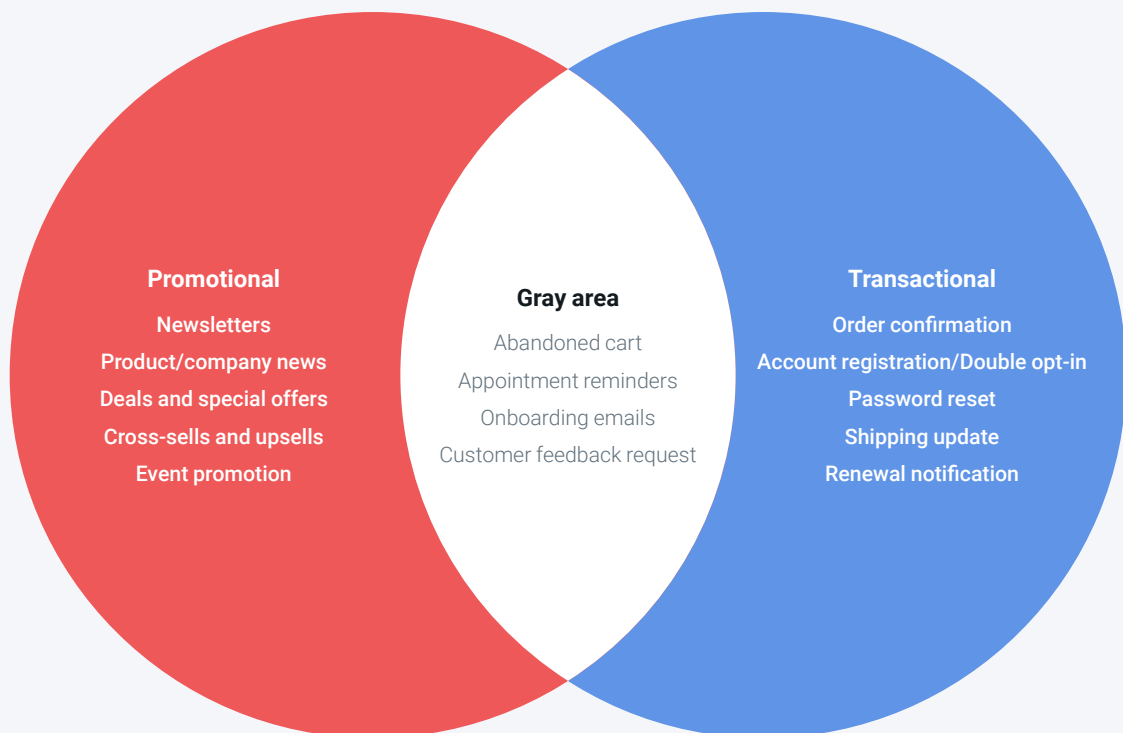
Promotional emails: Messages that prompt recipients to take specific actions. They are a form of direct marketing, but their intent is not always to sell. Promotional emails may also point recipients to other forms of digital content, deliver company news, or provide information on how to use a product/service. Promotional emails are sent to a list of contacts.

Transactional emails: Messages that are automatically sent in response to an action the recipient has taken. This could include confirming an online order with an email receipt, providing a link for a password reset, reminding a customer of an upcoming renewal, and much more. Transactional emails are sent to individual customers/users.

There will be situations in which the lines between marketing messages and transactional emails seem to blur. In the "gray area" below, there are emails that may be sent to an individual recipient, but they may also contain promotional messaging and their intent could extend beyond providing information.

Promotional

Newsletters
Product/company news
Deals and special offers
Cross-sells and upsells
Event promotion

Gray area

Abandoned cart
Appointment reminders
Onboarding emails
Customer feedback request

Transactional

Order confirmation
Account registration/Double opt-in
Password reset
Shipping update
Renewal notification

Sinch Mailgun experts say some of these message types in the middle could easily fall into the category of promotions and marketing. Senders should look at both the content and the goals applied to the email. Is it purely transactional, or does the motivation go beyond delivering information? Mailbox providers will take notice and filter your emails accordingly.

"Customer feedback emails and appointment reminders should stay on topic so that mailbox providers classify them correctly. Onboarding emails sent after signup need to focus on information that is specific to the product or service. Abandoned cart emails are the easiest to call promotional. Those messages should only be sent when there is a confirmed opt-in for marketing emails."

Jonathan Torres, TAM Team Manager, Sinch Mailgun
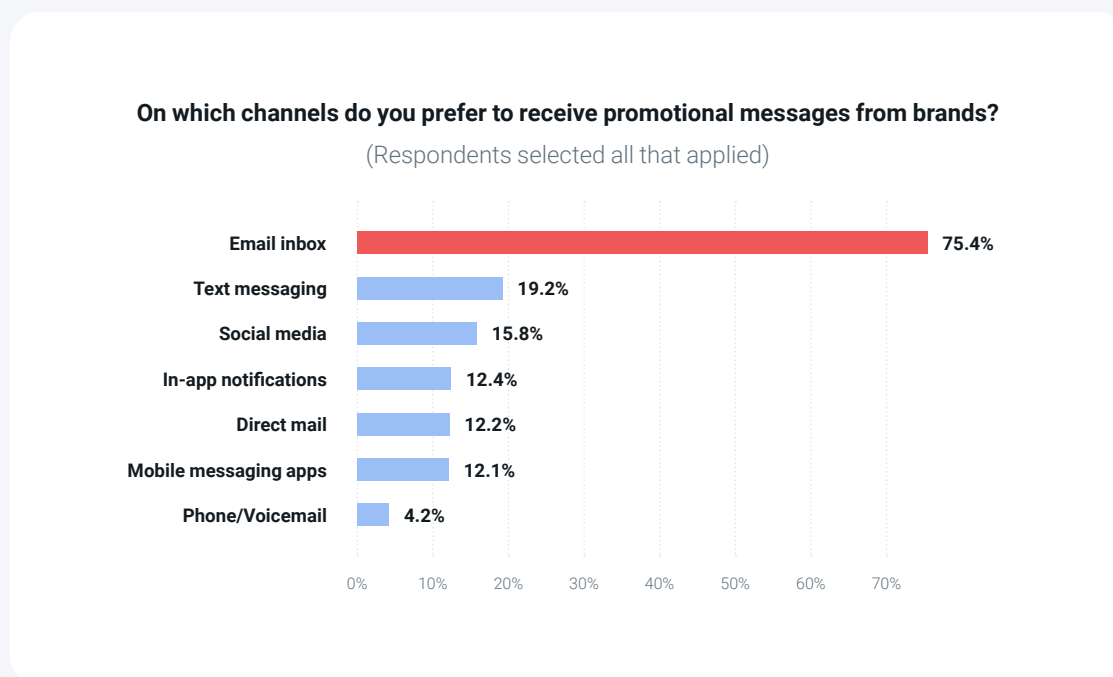
Consumer opinions on promotional emails

In the digital age, there is no shortage of ways to reach consumers with promotional messages. But how do people *prefer* to hear from brands?

When we asked consumers in the U.S., UK, France, Germany, and Spain about their preferences for receiving marketing messages, the choice was clear. **More than 75% of those surveyed chose the Email inbox as a preferred channel for promotional messages.** In this question, respondents could select as many channels as they wanted, and email still far exceeded other options.

Text messaging (19.2%) and **Social media** (15.8%) were the next most preferred channels for receiving promotions.

On which channels do you prefer to receive promotional messages from brands?

(Respondents selected all that applied)

Channel	Value
Email inbox	75.4%
Text messaging	19.2%
Social media	15.8%
In-app notifications	12.4%
Direct mail	12.2%
Mobile messaging apps	12.1%
Phone/Voicemail	4.2%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

Email may be preferred because it is a *familiar* place to receive promotional messages. Consumers are accustomed to receiving marketing emails. It's even a place where they may actively look for the latest offers from brands they follow.

Promotions via text and messaging apps may still feel *unfamiliar* to some consumers. These channels have traditionally been used most often for person-to-person communications. However, they also represent an opportunity to reach people in new ways.

More than 75% of consumers call their inbox a preferred channel for promotional messages and more than 22% want to receive marketing emails from brands daily.

Preferences for promotional email frequency varied widely among survey respondents. **More than 22% of consumers want to hear from brands in their inbox every day.** More than a quarter would prefer a weekly promotional email. Another quarter of consumers we surveyed only want an email once or twice each month (combining monthly and twice per month).

How often do you want or expect to receive promotional emails from brands?
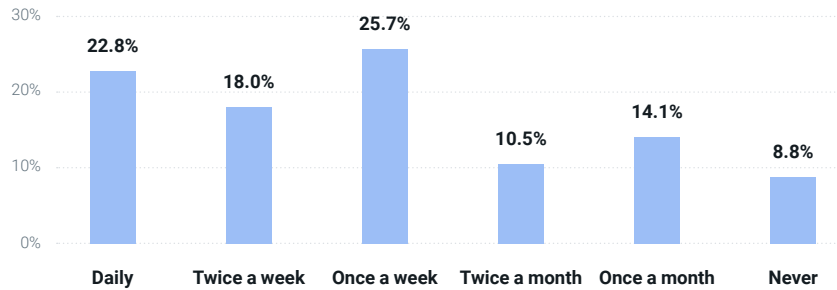
There are, of course, some people who prefer not to hear from brands at all. These are the customers you can feel free to let unsubscribe. They'll still be able to receive transactional messages. To accommodate customers with different appetites for promotional emails, a preference center will let them customize the ideal experience.

Even though promotional emails are filtered into separate tabs for customers using services like Gmail, these messages still matter to consumers. **More than half of people with tabbed inboxes check out promotions daily, and the same can be said of those with separate accounts for marketing emails.**

How often do you check the Promotions tab in your email inbox?
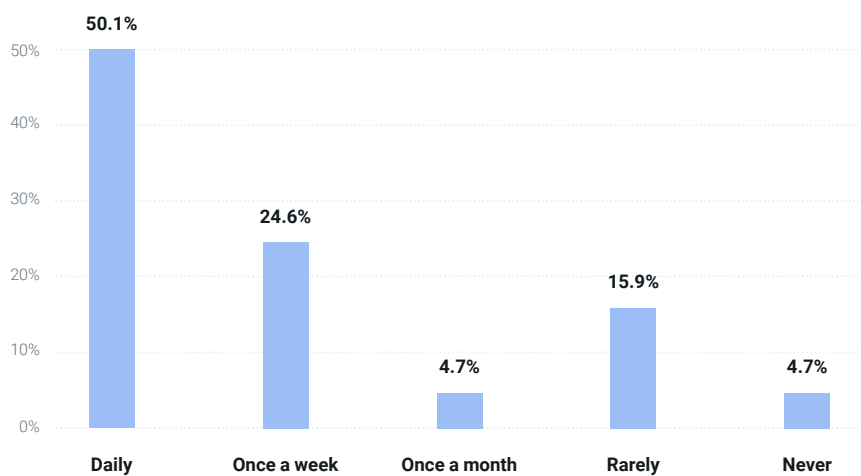
How important are promotional emails to the customer experience? According to survey results we've already examined, they're a pretty big deal.

What consumers say about email

56.5%	**78.7%**	**62.8%**
of consumers opt in to emails for special offers or to receive a one-time discount.	of consumers say offers in the subject line are somewhat or very important.	of consumers say they get the most value from emails with exclusive deals.

Finally, let's not forget that **the top three reasons for clicking in an email also relate to promotions**. Those reasons include using a coupon code, finding out more about an offer, or clicking through to learn about product features in an email.

Consumer opinions on transactional emails

Transactions are undeniably part of the customer experience.

There are many types of transactional messages. Account registration, multi-factor authentication, and password resets give customers access to websites and applications. Shipping updates, reminders, and security notifications keep customers informed.

These communications ensure the customer experience is smooth and seamless. Not only do they benefit consumers, but they also keep businesses running efficiently. **Reliable transactional emails from brands are not an enhancement to the customer experience, they're an expectation and a necessity.**
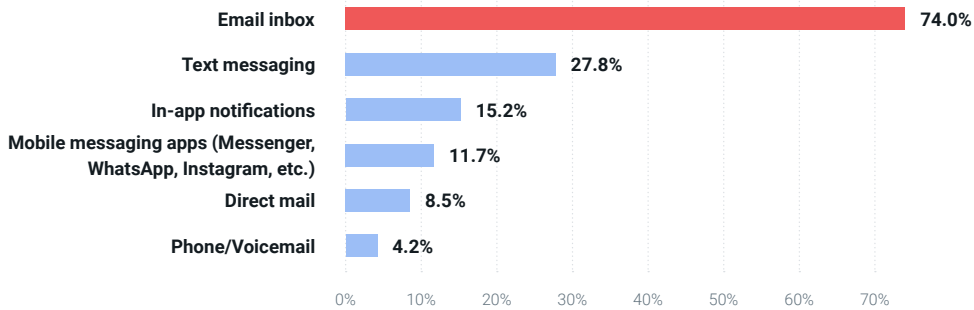
As consumers moved away from brick-and-mortar stores to online shopping, email became the primary channel for finalizing and following up on purchases. Today, many retailers provide the option to email you a receipt even when you shop in-person.

Email is a convenient channel for saving and organizing transactional information such as receipts and invoices. **74% of the consumers we surveyed chose the Email inbox as a preferred channel for transactional messages.**

On which channels do you prefer to receive transactional messages from brands?

(Respondents selected all that applied)

Email inbox	**74.0%**
Text messaging	**27.8%**
In-app notifications	**15.2%**
Mobile messaging apps (Messenger, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.)	**11.7%**
Direct mail	**8.5%**
Phone/Voicemail	**4.2%**

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

SMS has become an increasingly common way for brands to deliver transactional messages as well. Our research found 27.8% of consumers call **Text messaging** a preferred channel for this purpose, making it the second most popular option. Texts were also the second most popular channel for promotional messages at 19.2%.

What happens when transactional messages are more important than normal, and what happens when a transactional email goes missing because it ended up in spam?

The holiday shopping season is a busy time for brands and consumers. Our survey asked respondents about the importance of transactional messages this time of year. 42.3% called them **Very important** and another 38.1% said they are **Somewhat important**. Combined, **80.4% of consumers say transactional messages are important to them over the holidays**.
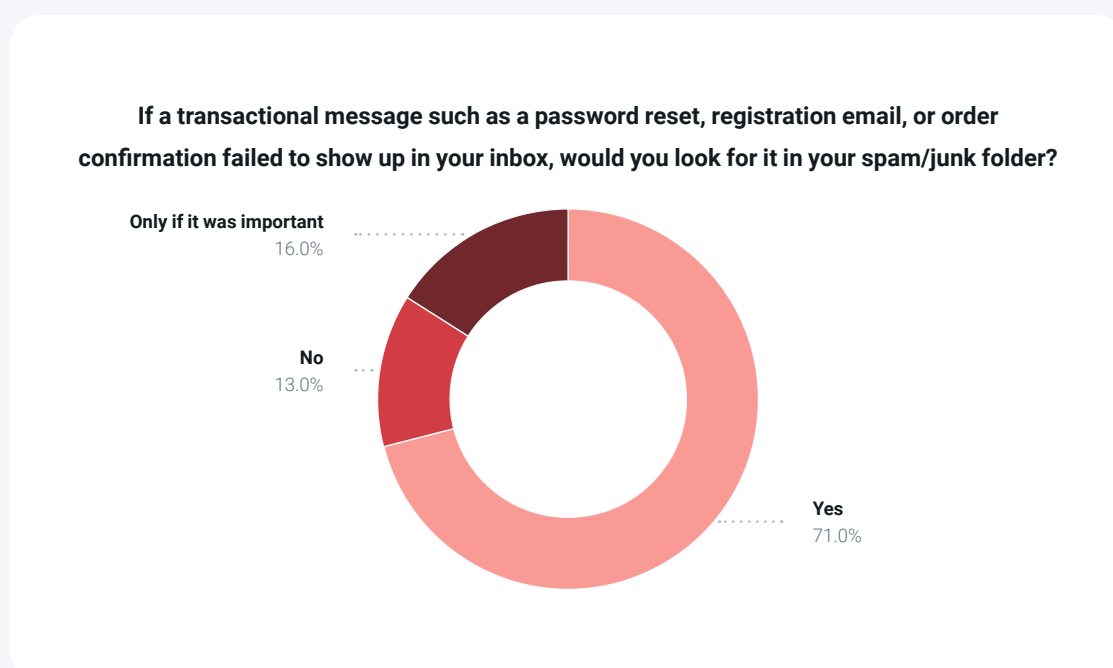
During the holiday shopping season, how important are transactional messages such as order confirmations and shipping updates?

Not important at all
6.8%

Not very important
12.8%

Very important
42.3%

Somewhat important
38.1%
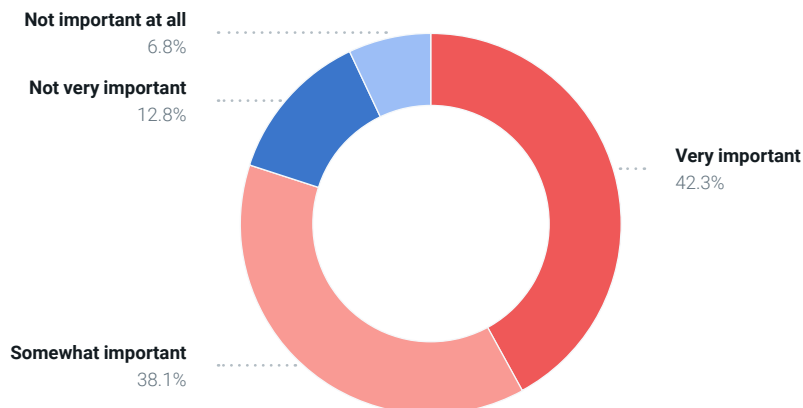
Keeping track of purchases and shipping is a necessity for consumers as they manage budgets, cross items off their gift lists, and try to make sure everything arrives on time. That's why reliable emails support customer satisfaction over the holidays.

If anticipated transactional emails don't land in the inbox, it ruins the customer experience. Imagine forgetting your password for an application and the reset email doesn't arrive when expected. How would you feel if an email notifying you of a security concern with your credit card or bank account got lost in spam?

We asked consumers what they do when an expected transactional message fails to show up in their inbox. **71% of respondents said they would look for it in their spam folder and another 16% would do so if the email was important.**

If a transactional message such as a password reset, registration email, or order confirmation failed to show up in your inbox, would you look for it in your spam/junk folder?

Only if it was important
16.0%

No
13.0%

Yes
71.0%

This kind of behavior speaks to the importance of transactional email. However, it may not be the way consumers immediately behave. When someone expects a transactional message to arrive almost immediately, their first instinct usually isn't to check their junk folder.

Staying out of spam needs to be a priority, especially for transactional communications. In the next chapter, we'll explore how email deliverability impacts the customer experience.

74% of consumers chose email as a preferred channel for transactional messages, and at least 71% would check their spam folder if these messages didn't land in their inbox.
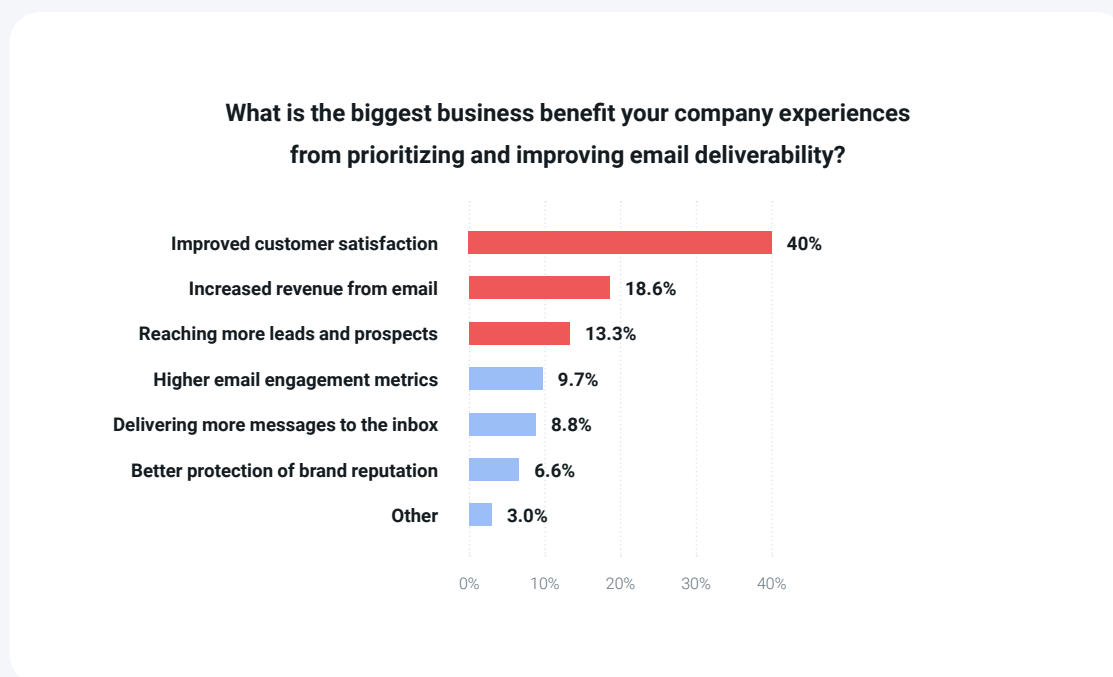
PART 4

Spotlight on deliverability

In July of 2023, Sinch Mailgun surveyed senders around the world to find out more about how they approach email deliverability. Put simply, deliverability is a set of best practices that are followed to improve the chances of landing in the inbox and avoid being filtered to spam or blocklisted.

Our report, The state of email deliverability 2023, found that, among senders who prioritize deliverability, **the biggest benefit is a better customer experience**. The top response was **Improved customer satisfaction** (40%). That advantage was more than double the percentage of senders who chose **Increased revenue from email** (18.6%) as a benefit of improving email deliverability.

What is the biggest business benefit your company experiences from prioritizing and improving email deliverability?

Improved customer satisfaction	40%
Increased revenue from email	18.6%
Reaching more leads and prospects	13.3%
Higher email engagement metrics	9.7%
Delivering more messages to the inbox	8.8%
Better protection of brand reputation	6.6%
Other	3.0%

Consistently reaching the inbox is vital to the customer experience. That includes the deliverability of both transactional and marketing emails.

We've established that common reasons for subscribing to emails, opening them, and engaging with email marketing campaigns are the special offers and discounts consumers receive from brands. If these campaigns are filtered into spam, not only will your organization lose potential revenue, but it also robs customers of an opportunity to save.
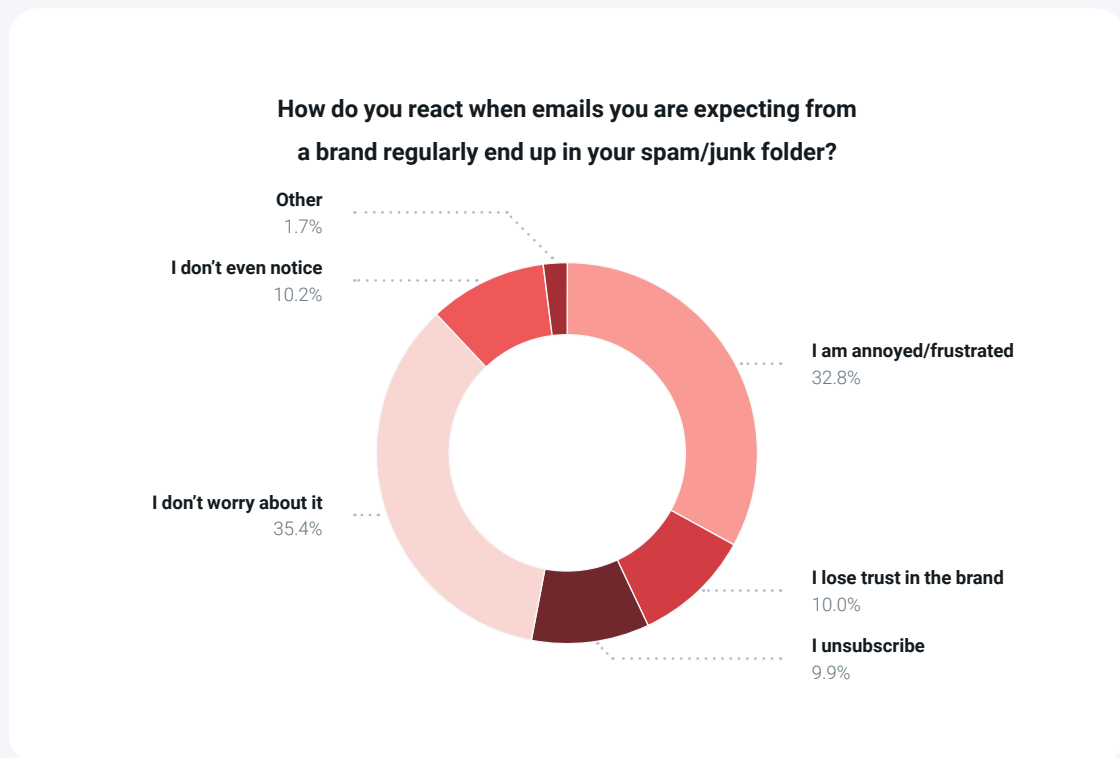
"Email is a great source for revenue generation, but when messages end up in spam, people are extremely unlikely to take action. It doesn't matter how cost-effective email is. If your campaigns aren't reaching people, your ROI is zero."

Kate Nowrouzi, VP, Deliverability and Product Strategy, Sinch Mailgun

The impact of landing in spam

Our survey also found that more than 70% of consumers would look for a missing transactional email in their spam folders. However, what is the impact of forcing your customers to do that?

We asked survey respondents how they'd react if emails from a brand regularly ended up in spam. **Nearly one-third (32.8%) said they'd find the experience annoying or frustrating.** 10% of consumers said they'd lose trust in the brand if emails were landing in spam, and about the same number said they'd actually unsubscribe.

How do you react when emails you are expecting from a brand regularly end up in your spam/junk folder?

Other
1.7%

I don't even notice
10.2%

I am annoyed/frustrated
32.8%

I don't worry about it
35.4%

I lose trust in the brand
10.0%

I unsubscribe
9.9%

The bottom line? If we combine the responses of consumers who'd be annoyed/frustrated, lose trust in a brand, or unsubscribe, more than half of respondents (52.7%) would have a negative reaction to poor email deliverability.
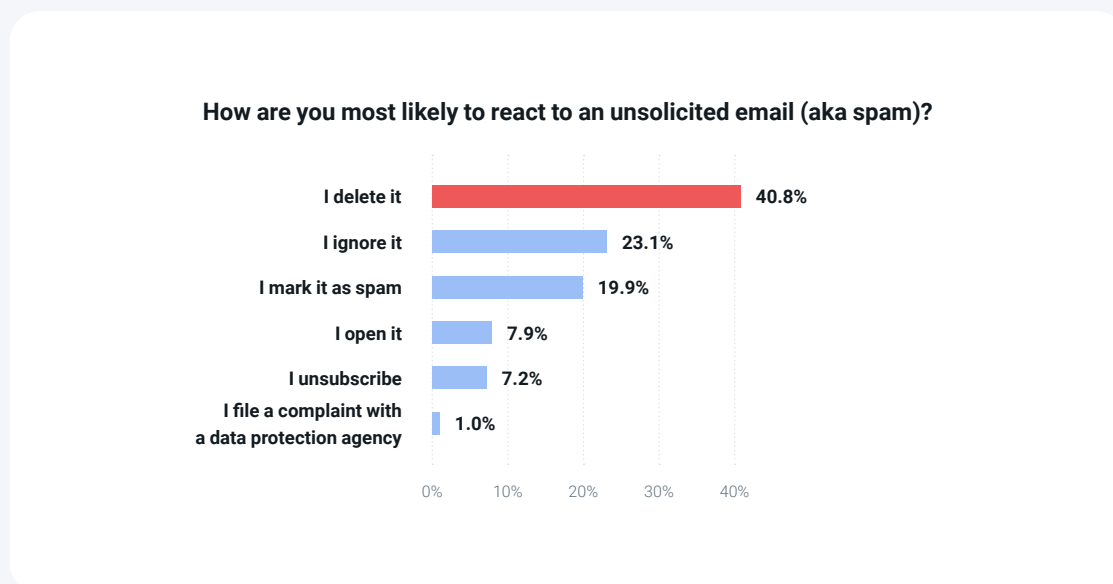
When emails from a brand regularly land in spam, 52.7% of consumers say they would either feel frustrated, lose trust, or unsubscribe as a result.

Unsolicited email and consumer behavior

Sinch Mailgun's report on deliverability revealed that while most senders behave responsibly when building their contact list, there are others conducting some questionable list-building practices. **The sender survey found around 10% of respondents had scraped the web for email addresses and 12.5% had purchased contacts to build their list.**

Emailing consumers without their consent is the definition of spamming. Any organization that does so will risk damaging its reputation with mailbox providers and could be violating privacy laws such as the GDPR and CCPA. Unsurprisingly, consumers don't like spam very much either...

More than 40% of consumers say they delete unsolicited emails from brands and another 23% would ignore those messages. That's not exactly the kind of engagement you want, and there's no chance these recipients will become your customers.

How are you most likely to react to an unsolicited email (aka spam)?

Response	Percentage
I delete it	40.8%
I ignore it	23.1%
I mark it as spam	19.9%
I open it	7.9%
I unsubscribe	7.2%
I file a complaint with a data protection agency	1.0%

The most damaging thing an email recipient could do is make an official complaint with a data protection agency, which only 1% indicated they'd do. However, simply marking an email as spam will quickly prove to mailbox providers that a sender is up to no good. **Nearly 20% of consumers indicated they would mark unsolicited emails as spam.**

If your spam complaint rate rises, mailbox providers will quarantine or block your messages. Even the legitimate emails you're sending to real customers and subscribers who've actually opted in could end up in spam.

In 2024, Gmail and Yahoo announced the implementation of spam complaint thresholds. Bulk senders must keep spam rates consistently below 0.1% and avoid hitting spikes of 0.3%. Other deliverability changes from these mailbox providers include required email authentication and one-click unsubscribe functionality in non-transactional emails.

Email deliverability essentials

Most senders aren't trying to spam people, but your organization may still encounter issues with inbox placement. Here's some basic advice for supporting strong deliverability.

The advice	How it can help
Send transactional and marketing emails from different domains or IP addresses.	Mailbox providers view transactional and promotional emails differently. Separating these types of messages on their own sending domains or IPs makes it clear how they should be filtered. It also improves inbox placement for transactional communications as promotions are more likely to be filtered into spam.
Set up strong email authentication including SPF, DKIM, and DMARC.	Strong email authentication is a sign of a responsible sender. Gmail and Yahoo Mail now require SPF, DKIM, and DMARC authentication for all bulk senders.
Place a priority on email list hygiene.	Outdated contacts, invalid email addresses, and unengaged subscribers can drag down deliverability. Email validation, sunset policies, and double opt-in processes help keep contact lists clean.
Conduct inbox placement testing.	The best way to understand email deliverability is to review inbox placement reports, which are generated through seed testing. It's the only way to predict where emails are likely to land so you can address issues before they hurt your business.
Monitor and manage your sender reputation.	Mailbox providers like Gmail and Outlook assign scores to sending domains based on various factors, including whether subscribers engage with your communications. Monitor your sender reputation with Postmaster Tools and Microsoft SNDS, and work to keep your list engaged.

To dive deeper into these topics, check out our article on understanding the complexities of email deliverability.

Forcing people to look through spam to find your brand's emails is like having them dig through their garbage to get mail from the postal service. Imagine sifting through rotten banana peels and dirty diapers to get your mail. Have you seen the stuff in spam folders? It's pretty scary. That's not the experience you want your customers to have.

Many consumers would react negatively if emails from a brand were consistently filtered into the spam folder. That's one reason why 40% of senders who prioritize email deliverability say the biggest benefit is improved customer satisfaction.

Reseearch Report - The state of email deliverability

Discover even more about email deliverability. Dive into Sinch Mailgun's report featuring global survey results and expert advice on achieving inbox placement. Find out how to stay out of spam and deliver a better experience.
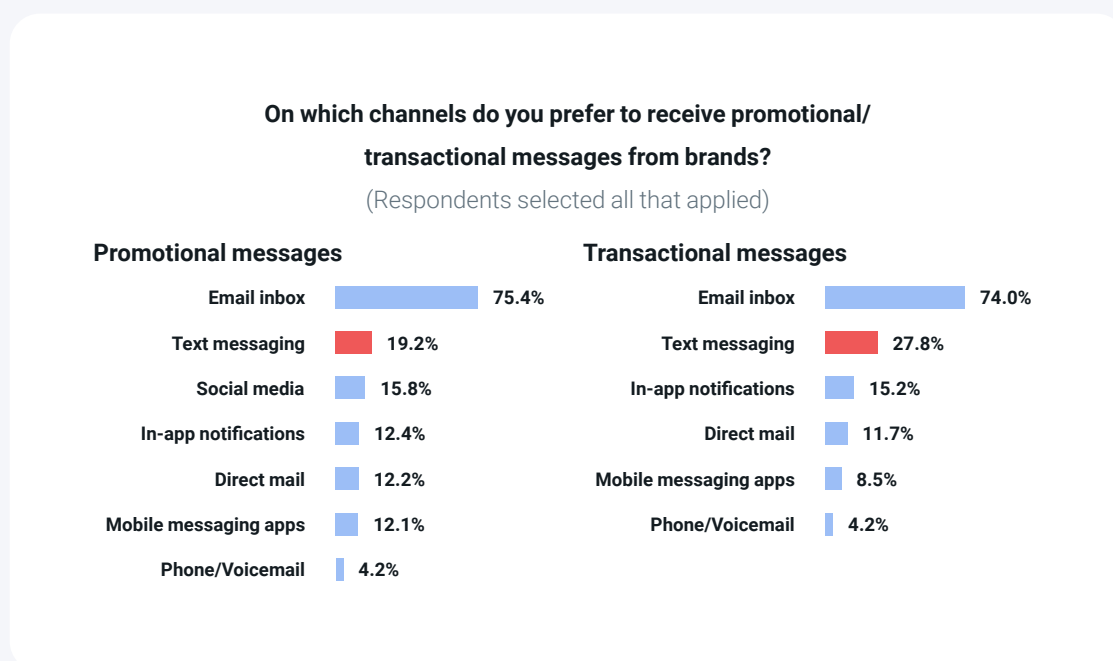
Download Now

Beyond the inbox:
Email, SMS, and omnichannel

The customer communication landscape is changing. While the email inbox still provides a crucial place to connect with customers, there are huge advantages for those who expand their strategy to other channels.

The most obvious avenue to begin exploring is SMS. In Part 3 of our report, we showed you that text messaging was the second most preferred channel for both transactional and promotional communication with brands. When you compare preferences for these two types of messages, it's clear that transactional SMS has a bit of an edge.

**On which channels do you prefer to receive promotional/
transactional messages from brands?**

(Respondents selected all that applied)

Promotional messages		Transactional messages	
Email inbox	75.4%	Email inbox	74.0%
Text messaging	19.2%	Text messaging	27.8%
Social media	15.8%	In-app notifications	15.2%
In-app notifications	12.4%	Direct mail	11.7%
Direct mail	12.2%	Mobile messaging apps	8.5%
Mobile messaging apps	12.1%	Phone/Voicemail	4.2%
Phone/Voicemail	4.2%		

By now, it's safe to assume most consumers have already received a transactional SMS from a company they do business with. It could be their financial institution, an airline, a food delivery service, or any B2C organization that needs to reach its customers in a timely, efficient manner.

Transactional text messages have become a simple and effective way to make the customer experience more convenient. Kate Gerwe of Sinch explains that there are specific situations when SMS provides a lot of value to the message recipient.
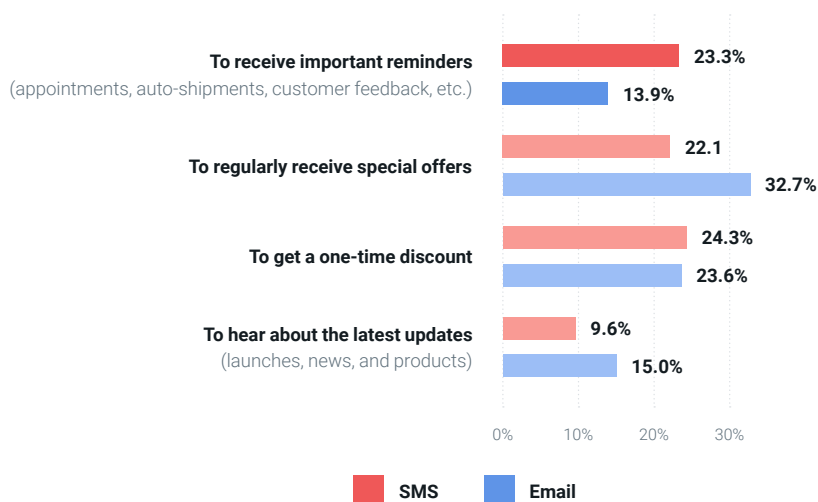
"A good rule of thumb when thinking about when to use SMS is when the communication is personal, timely, and relevant to the customer."

Kate Gerwe, CMO, Sinch SaaS

Personal, timely and relevant: These words perfectly describe transactional SMS. Text messages are one-to-one communications, they are expected in a timely manner, and they contain information that is very relevant to the consumer.

Our survey found some differences in the reasons consumers sign up for emails versus text messaging. While the opportunity to receive a one-time discount topped the list for SMS signups, respondents were much more likely to report opting in to get texts for things such as reminders and notifications. **More than 23% of the consumers surveyed cited important reminders and notifications as the primary reason for signing up for SMS.** Less than 14% of consumers chose email for the same thing.
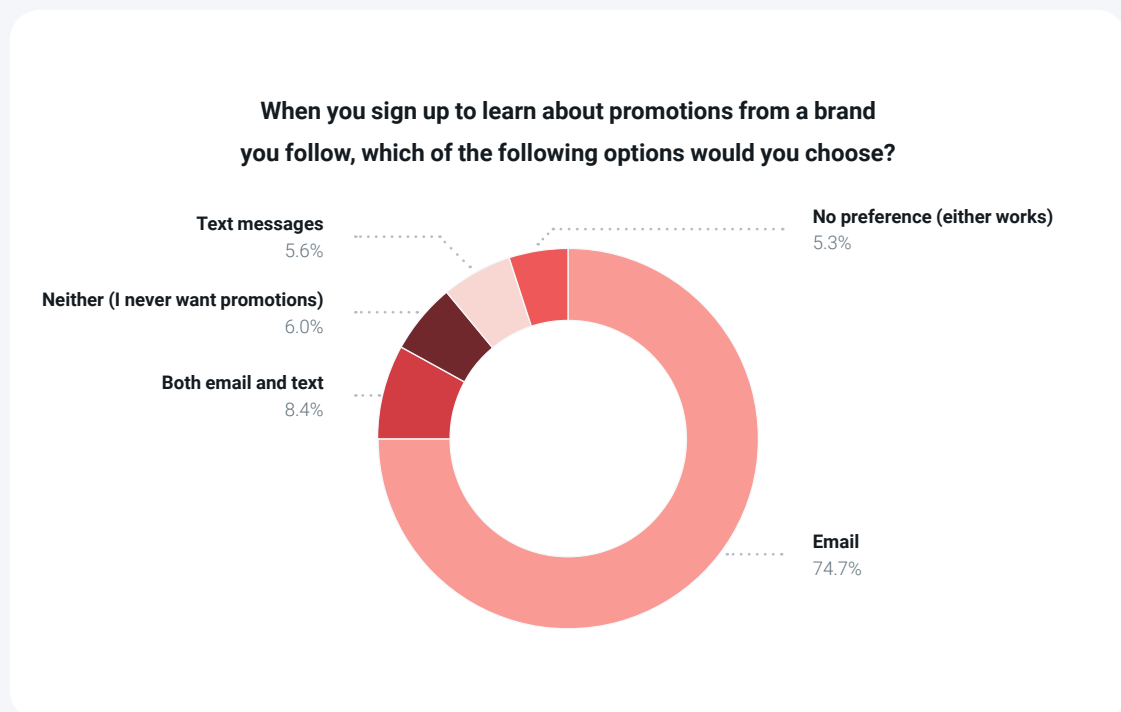
Email vs. SMS: Top reasons consumers opt-in for messages

To receive important reminders
(appointments, auto-shipments, customer feedback, etc.)
SMS: 23.3%
Email: 13.9%

To regularly receive special offers
SMS: 22.1
Email: 32.7%

To get a one-time discount
SMS: 24.3%
Email: 23.6%

To hear about the latest updates
(launches, news, and products)
SMS: 9.6%
Email: 15.0%

■ **SMS**   ■ **Email**

In many cases, consumers are given the option of choosing to receive email and/or SMS notifications from a company. We asked survey respondents to tell us what they'd choose in those situations if it involved *promotional* messages.

As with similar questions, nearly 75% of consumers indicated they'd choose email for promotional messages from brands. Here's how the other options for receiving promotions fared:

- **Both email and text** (8.4%)
- **Text messages** (5.6%)
- **No preference** (5.3%)
- **Neither** (6%)

**When you sign up to learn about promotions from a brand
you follow, which of the following options would you choose?**

Text messages
5.6%

No preference (either works)
5.3%

Neither (I never want promotions)
6.0%

Both email and text
8.4%

Email
74.7%

If we exclude respondents who said they don't want to receive promotional messages at all, it's clear that there's a significant segment of consumers who see value in text messaging campaigns. **If we combine all the results that include text (either SMS on its own or combined with Email), we see that 19.3% of respondents are open to receiving promotions via text.** That's nearly 1 out of 5 consumers.

That sentiment was even stronger when our survey questioned consumers about how often they would want or expect to receive promotional SMS campaigns. Even though 36% of respondents indicated they never want to hear from brands via text at all, **a total of 64% are open to SMS promotions at least once per month.**

How often do you want or expect to receive promotional text/SMS messages from brands?
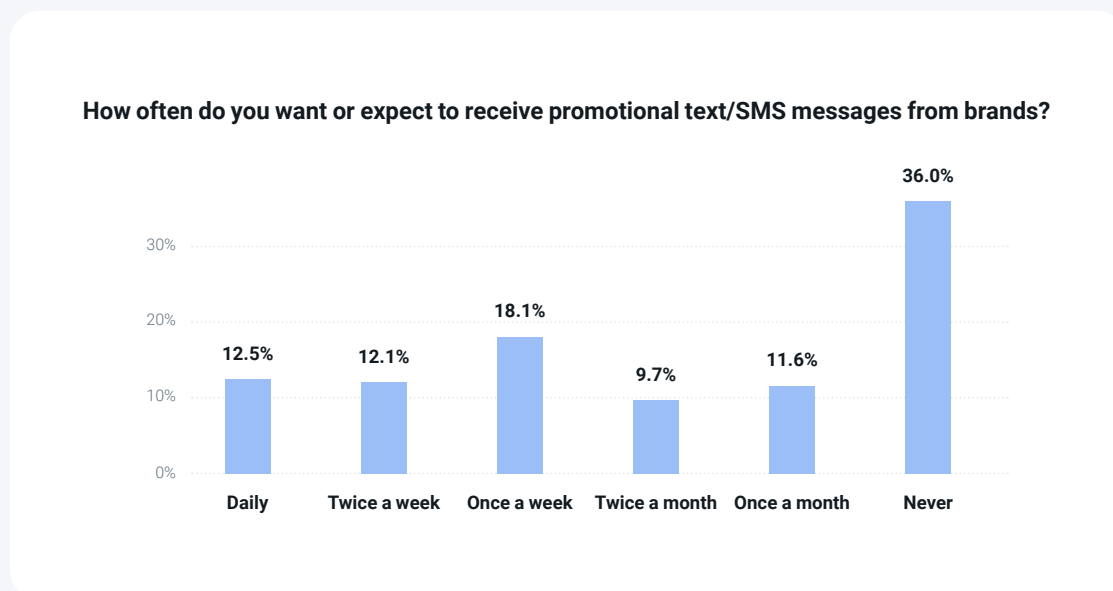
Cutting-edge brands are exploring new ways to provide engaging promotional experiences to customers via messaging. This includes MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) and RCS (Rich Communication Service). To the average consumer, anything that comes through their texting app is a text message. However, many consumers have yet to experience receiving an eye-catching, interactive campaign through their messaging apps.

The MMS and RCS experience

With MMS, brands can send personalized promotions to consumers with images, videos, and links while allowing customers to reply and act on the messages. RCS can take things even further, enabling dynamic content and interactive experiences within the messaging app. Previously, RCS was only available on Android devices. However, Apple says RCS support is coming to iPhones in 2024.

Example of an MMS promotion

Personalized .... Maria, we have some new styles for the season based on the fashions you love.

Compelling, clear imagery ....

Lifestyle Labels: Stop by our Main Street store to get ready for the season.
Book your personalized fitting today:
https://www.lifestylelabels.com/storefittings
.... **Concise, direct, and branded message**
.... **Clear CTA**

Clear opt-out .... Reply STOP to opt out.

Once a customer sees that a brand uses text messaging to add value, they'll be more likely to accept and engage with promotions. To start, brands can use SMS and MMS to offer support and guidance before delivering marketing messages, which builds trust.

Sinch has conducted extensive research into messaging and its potential benefits. In 2022, Sinch found the real power of messaging applications is in improving the customer experience with stronger communication

What consumers want from messaging

89%
want two-way conversations with brands via messaging applications.

90%
want to ask follow-up questions and get support via text.

89%
want to use messaging to handle refunds, returns, and exchanges.

Sinch's research also found that consumers find certain types of rich content valuable to their experience. 83% of consumers in Sinch's survey would find a video tutorial on a recent purchase to be useful. Another 76% see value in a personalized buyer's guide based on their past purchases.

As the number of communication channels and customer touchpoints expands, brands need a strategy to manage and monitor all of these conversations and campaigns. That's where omnichannel communication comes into play.

Moving toward an omnichannel strategy

There are plenty of organizations with a multichannel approach to customer communications. But that's not the same as an omnichannel strategy.

A multichannel customer experience allows customers to hear from and communicate with brands in more than one way – such as email and SMS. Omnichannel differs from this in that it allows brands and consumers to connect anywhere the customer prefers. Plus, with omnichannel the customer experience is seamless and cohesive when switching between channels.

In other words, everything is connected in an omnichannel strategy.
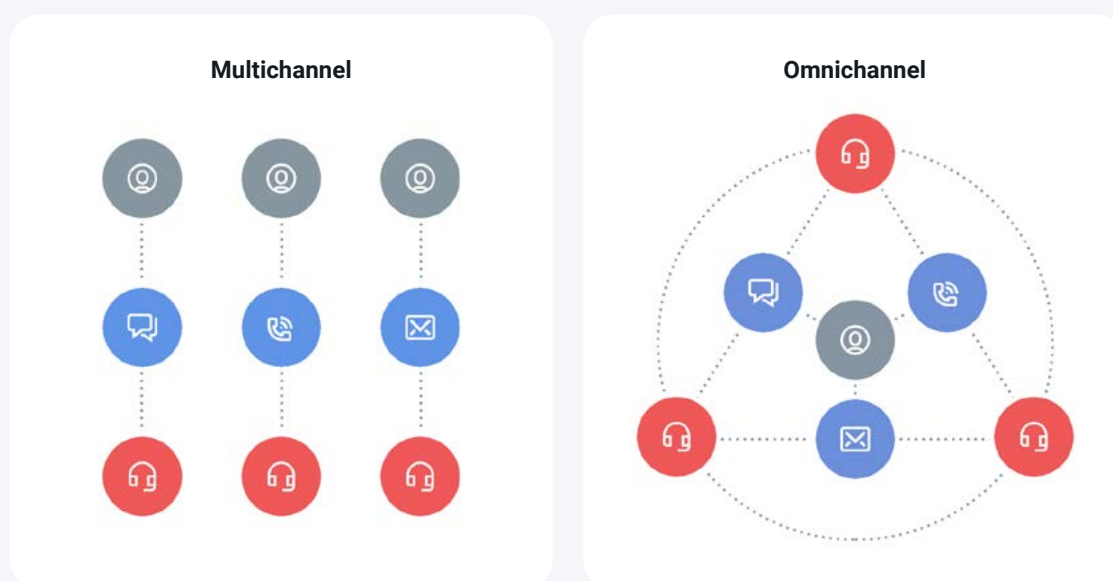
In an omnichannel experience, for example, a conversation about a purchase that starts with automated replies via SMS can continue with a phone call to customer service. The customer's data, including personal information, purchase history, and the problem they're trying to resolve, is centralized. This makes communication more efficient and effective for both customers and the business.

To support omnichannel experiences, enterprise organizations are implementing a cloud-based solution known as Communication Platform as a Service (CPaaS**).** With CPaaS, it's possible to integrate various communication channels into a central application using APIs.

The opportunities to improve customer experiences with a CPaaS solution are impressive. Sinch mentions some key CPaaS trends and innovations that can benefit B2C companies:

- **Online to Offline (O2O) retail:** Picking up online purchases at a physical location is a growing consumer trend. Also known as "click and collect", CPaaS enables this type of order fulfillment by connecting online and in-store systems for streamlined inventory management and a hassle-free customer experience.

- **Conversational commerce:** Cutting-edge brands are using artificial intelligence (AI) to develop friendly chatbots that enhance the customer experience, automating interactions and driving engagement across messaging applications. Yet, these experiences also support the possibility of transferring customers to human representatives when needed.

- **Personalized digital experiences:** CPaaS enables a consistent, personalized experience on all channels. Integrated communication solutions make it easier to leverage consumer data for personalization.
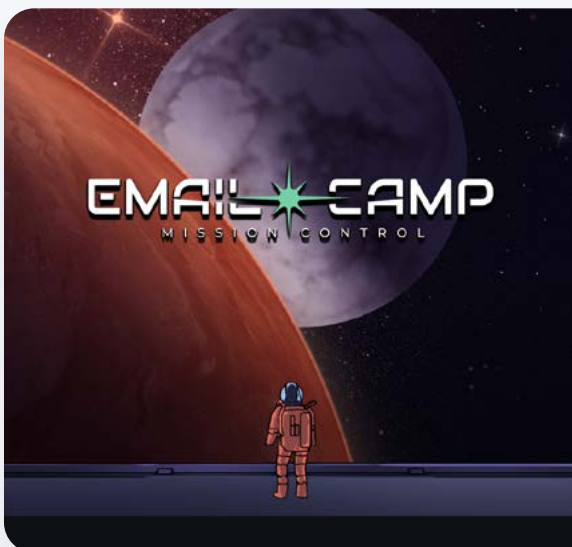
Webinar - Going beyond email

Join Sinch marketing leaders, Kate Gerwe and Julie Neumann as they discuss opportunities to diversify your communication strategy. View an on-demand Email Camp presentation of "Beyond email: Navigating customer communications in an omnichannel universe."

Watch Now

CONCLUSION

The final word on customer communication and email

Email is an indispensable channel that consumers feel comfortable using and often prefer, but technology and consumer preferences change quickly. Organizations that are prepared to meet customers wherever they are on whatever channel makes the most sense will be poised for success.

Your company's situation and customer base are unique. The findings in this report serve as a starting point for making decisions around communication strategy. Use your own data and customer feedback to create an experience that puts the people you serve at the center of all communications.

Email will continue to serve as a cornerstone of the customer experience. If you are leading digital transformation projects involving communications, email must be part of the plan. However, meeting the evolving expectations of consumers requires agility and scalability as well as expertise and empathy.

Email senders have a responsibility to the people they call "customers." When you deliver inbox experiences that are relevant to your customers, they will engage. If you only email people who've opted in, you'll avoid damaging your reputation with both consumers and mailbox providers. And when you prioritize an email program that meets your customers' needs, you'll see the greatest return on your investment in this channel.

"It's one thing to land in the inbox, it's another to send quality email campaigns to consumers that lead to conversions and meaningful connections. Whether it's transactional or promotional, email communication strengthens and enhances the customer experience. But that requires putting the customer first. Understand their needs and expectations, respect their privacy, and support a safer inbox experience through authentication. That's how you build trust and loyalty with email."

Kate Nowrouzi, VP of Deliverability and Product Strategy, Sinch Mailgun

How we can help

Sinch Mailgun provides versatile and highly scalable solutions for email senders who need to deliver important customer communications to the inbox. Here's how Sinch Mailgun helps enterprise businesses build connected experiences:

Mailgun Send

Our email-sending platform is built on reliable infrastructure and offers the most powerful email API in the industry as well as cloud-based SMTP services. Mailgun Send excels at delivering high volumes of email while providing trustworthy security and compliance along with in-depth analytics that track campaign performance.

Start Using Mailgun Send For Free

Mailgun Optimize

Take control of email deliverability and improve inbox placement with Mailgun Optimize. This suite of deliverability solutions includes tools to monitor sender reputation, preview emails on 100+ clients/devices, and validate contact data. Inbox Placement Testing gives you unparalleled insights into how mailbox providers filter your messages. Use Mailgun Optimize with any email service provider.

Start With Mailgun Optimize Today

Mailgun Validate

Make email list hygiene a priority. Our Email Validation API lets senders integrate address verification into online forms, validating new contacts at the point of collection. Make sure your list is healthy before the marketing team hits send on the next big campaign. Use List Validation to identify and remove invalid addresses from your entire database using real cached data instead of broken SMTP handshakes.

Find Out More About Mailgun Validate

Explore omnichannel solutions from Sinch

We are proud to be part of the Sinch family of communication solutions. In 2023, Gartner® named Sinch a Leader in its Magic Quadrant™ for CPaaS providers. With access to every mobile phone on the planet, Sinch gives its customers incredible reach. Use the flexible APIs from Sinch to manage the customer experience across Voice, Messaging, and Email.

Find Out More About Sinch

About the survey

Sinch Mailgun worked with the team at Alchemer to access a custom panel of consumers in the U.S., UK, France, Germany, and Spain. The survey was conducted on September 26 and 27, 2023, and garnered responses from 2,072 participants. Due to rounding, the sum of percentages in certain survey results may exceed or fall short of 100% by a difference of 0.1%.

Country

- United States: 28.9% (599)
- United Kingdom: 20.4% (429)
- France: 16.8% (349)
- Germany: 16.9% (351)
- Spain: 16.9% (350)

Gender

- Female: 57.8% (1,197)
- Maile: 40.6% (842)
- Non-binary: 1.2% (24)
- Prefer not to answer: 0.4% (9)

Age

- 19 or younger: 2.4% (50)
- 20 to 29: 12.2% (253)
- 30 to 39: 22.4% (465)
- 40 to 49: 23.8% (493)
- 50 to 59: 19.4% (403)
- 60 or older: 19.7% (408)

SINCH
Mailgun

Over 100,000 companies worldwide use Sinch Mailgun to create elegant email experiences for their customers through world-class infrastructure. Brands like Microsoft, Lyft, and Etsy trust Mailgun's innovative technology and reliable infrastructure to send billions of emails every year. Built with development teams in mind, Mailgun makes sending, receiving, and tracking emails effortless for email senders of all sizes.

Mailgun was founded in 2010 as a response to the lack of developer-friendly, API-based email services. Since then, Mailgun has joined **Sinch**, a leading Communication Platform as a Service (CPaaS) provider, to become the developer-first email solution for their global customer base. GDPR, HIPAA, and SOC I & II compliant, Mailgun aims to provide the best email service possible with the utmost security and privacy.

For more information, please visit **mailgun.com**.

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