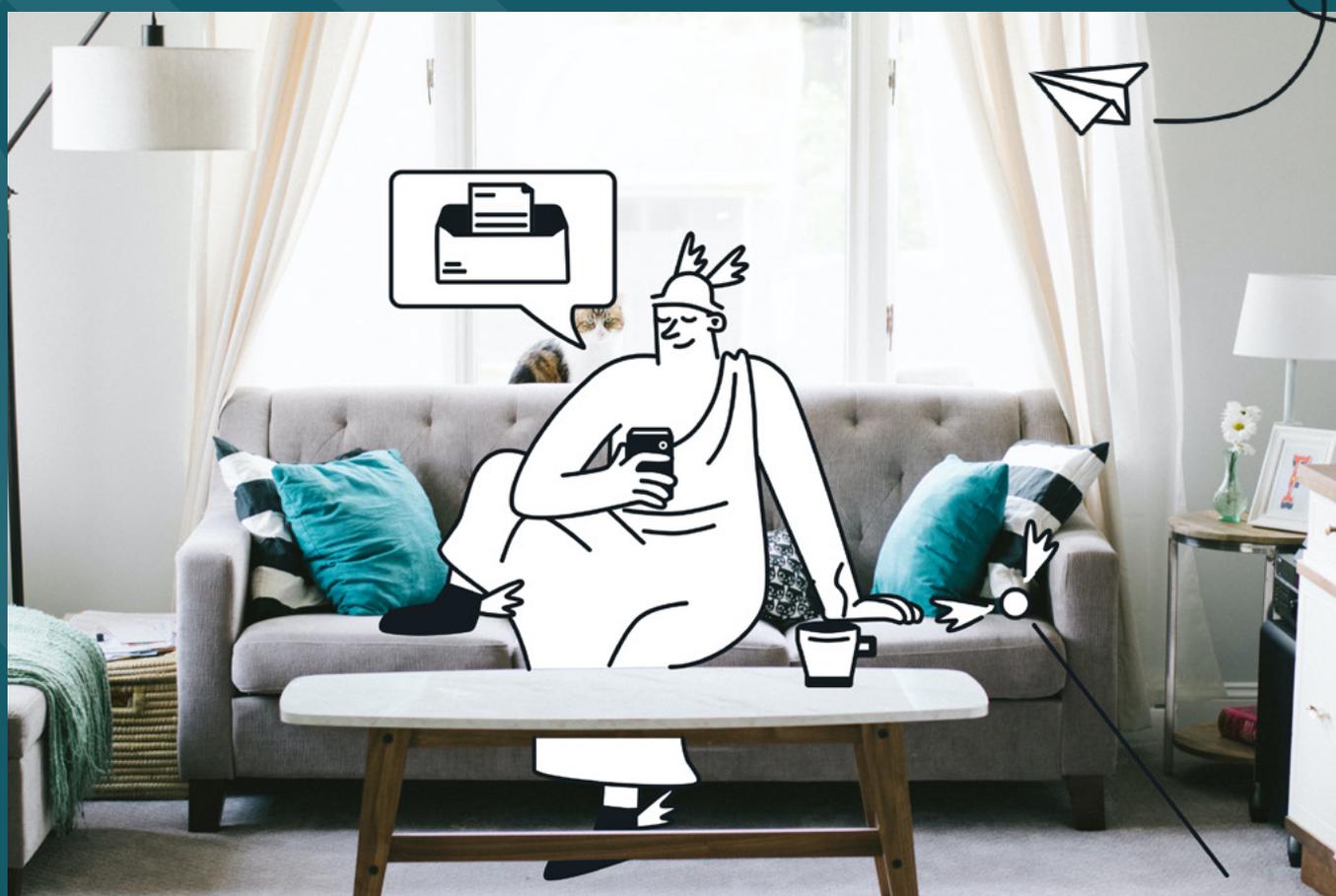


# The path to email engagement in 2021

Uncovering how users interact with email to help brands build meaningful connections.



---

We asked 2000 respondents around the world to tell us how they interact with their personal inboxes. Take a look at the trends and discover key learnings to effectively optimize your email strategy in 2021.

# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Uncover the basics of personal email addresses</b> .....	<b>4</b>
How many email addresses do people have? .....	4
What are the top webmail clients used for personal email accounts? .....	5
What email applications are people using to check emails? .....	7
How much do people use Gmail Tabs? .....	9
Key learnings .....	9
<b>2. Uncover habits around checking email</b> .....	<b>10</b>
How often do users check their personal inbox? .....	10
How often do users check email addresses dedicated to receiving promotional emails? ...	14
How often do users check Gmail's Promotions tab? .....	15
How often do users check the spam folder? .....	16
What time of day do people usually check their emails at? .....	17
Key learnings .....	19
<b>3. Uncover what gets emails opened and read</b> .....	<b>20</b>
How do people look at their inboxes? .....	20
How many emails do users receive every day? .....	21
Why do people open emails? .....	22
Key learnings .....	24
<b>4. Uncover subscribes and unsubscribes</b> .....	<b>25</b>
How often do people want to hear from brands? .....	25
Why do people sign up to receive emails from a brand? .....	27
How do people react to unsolicited emails? .....	29
What are the top reasons for unsubscribing from a brand's email program? .....	31
Key learnings .....	32
<b>5. Uncover email efficacy</b> .....	<b>33</b>
How do people interact with common B2C emails? .....	33
When is SMS preferred over email? .....	36
Key learnings .....	38
<b>About this survey</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>About Pathwire</b> .....	<b>41</b>



# Introduction

In December 2020, we surveyed 2000 people around the world to understand how users interact with their personal emails and what type of communications they prefer to receive from brands.

Their responses reveal a strong desire to connect with brands and the role email plays in building those powerful connections between brands and consumers, especially in the current climate. But the research also exposes how cluttered personal inboxes are, underscoring the need for senders to really understand these email engagement habits and preferences in order to effectively utilize the power of email communications.

Over the past year, email has played a key role in helping brands stay in touch with customers throughout a period of unprecedented challenges and uncertainty. With an increase of emails in contacts' inboxes, maintaining good email engagement levels requires careful monitoring and dedication.

"Now more than ever, senders need to be mindful of people's inboxes and to ensure they are sending emails their subscribers really want to receive. Understanding how users interact with email, adapting their sending frequency, and ensuring campaigns balance valuable offers with legitimate customer benefits can help brands prevent email fatigue and build stronger connections with their contacts."

**Kate Nowrouzi, VP of Deliverability at Pathwire.**

**Read the full report to discover what email engagement looks like in 2021 and how you can leverage these findings to optimize your email strategy.**



PART 1

# Uncover the basics of personal email addresses

For B2C email senders, understanding how users interact with their personal inboxes is key to creating and delivering effective emails. But before we even look into how people react to incoming messages, we need to examine how customers build their own personal email accounts. How many email addresses do they have? What devices do they normally use to check their emails?

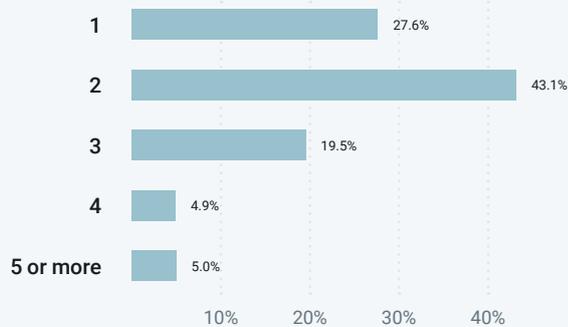
**We asked respondents to tell us what their personal email experience looks like. Learn more about their favorite email clients and apps to improve their email experience.**

## How many email addresses do people have?

We asked respondents to share how many personal email addresses they have and if they have specific email addresses for promotional messages.

### Personal email addresses

72.5% of respondents claim to have more than one personal email address, and 29.4% have three or more. Out of those with multiple personal email addresses, 31.7% admit to having a dedicated address for promotional emails.



Global - Respondents from United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.



**31.7%**

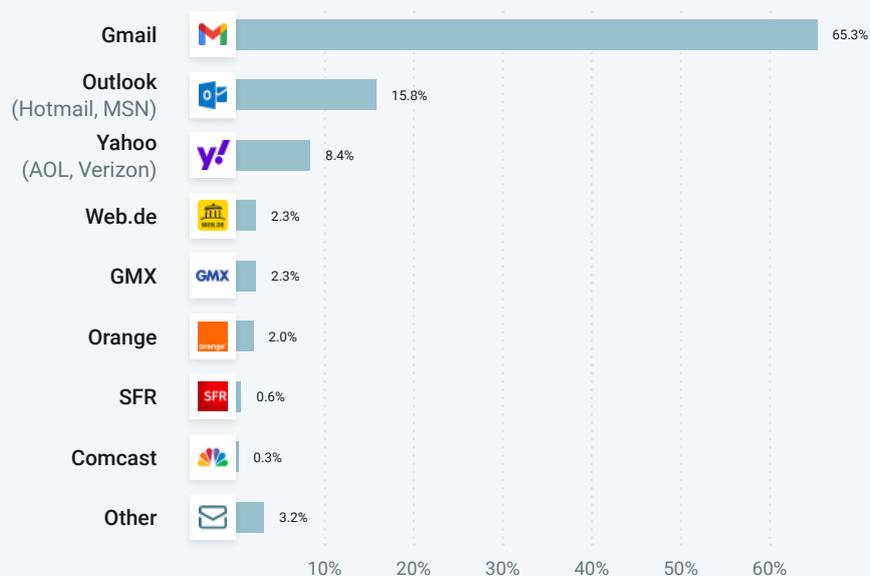
of respondents have a dedicated email address for promotional emails.

## What are the top webmail clients used for personal email accounts?

We asked respondents to share which email client they use for their personal email addresses.

### Global

Gmail has the largest market share for personal email addresses by far. 65.3% of users globally reported having a Gmail email account.



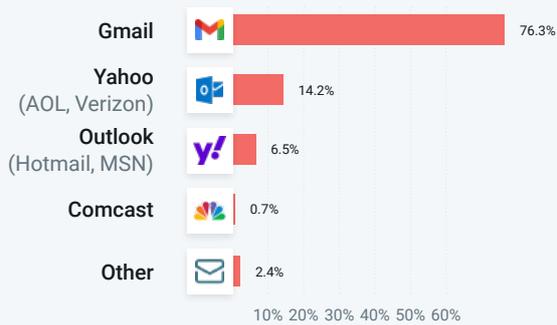
Global - Respondents from United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.



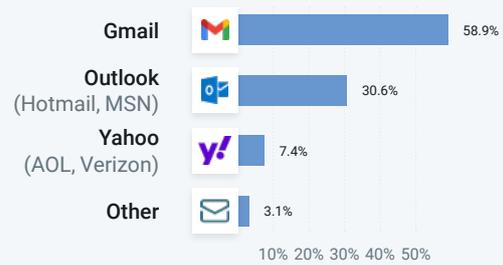
## By country

While Gmail was the most popular email client in the five countries surveyed, there were some slight differences depending on where people live. Yahoo is the second option in the United States, while Outlook is a more popular choice in Europe.

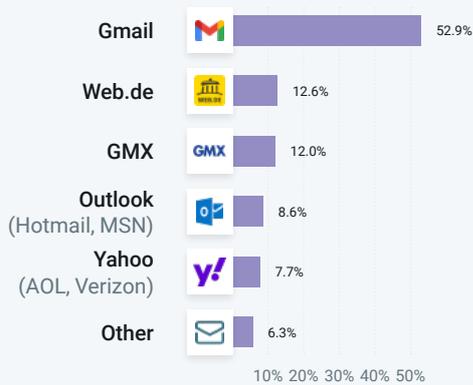
### USA



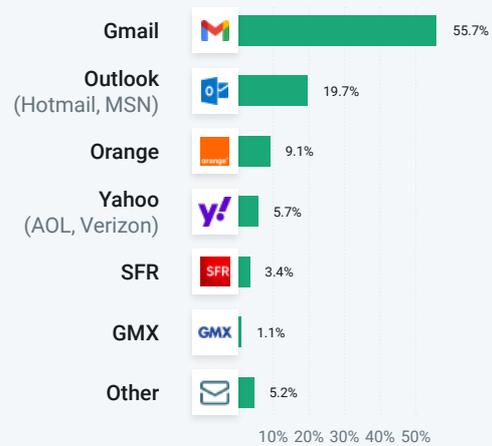
### UK



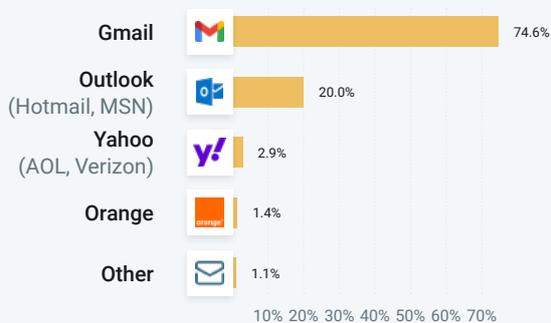
### Germany



### France



### Spain

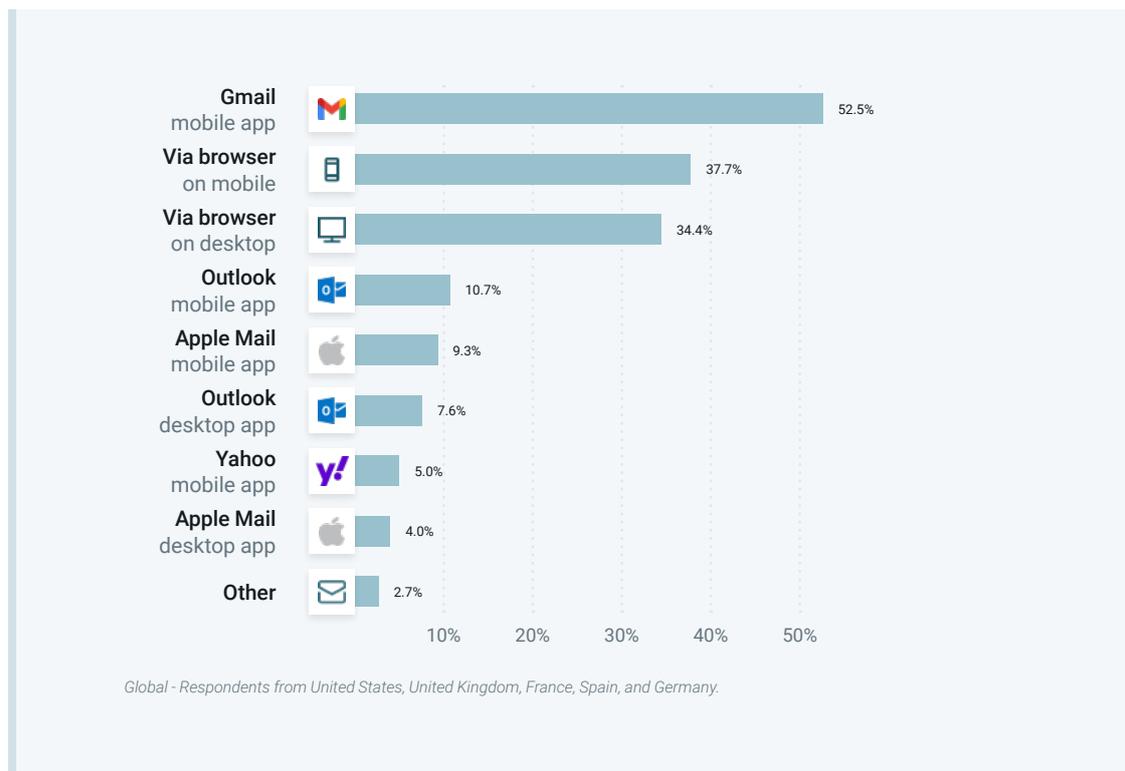


## What email applications are people using to check emails?

We asked respondents to share which email apps and devices they used to check their personal emails.

### Global

52.5% of respondents use the Gmail mobile app to check their emails. This was the most popular choice for respondents across all countries surveyed.



### By country

Gmail mobile app was also the first choice across all countries surveyed. The Gmail mobile app is most popular in the United States and Spain – 62.8% of American respondents and 59.4% of Spanish respondents use it to check their emails.



## How much do people rely on Gmail Tabs?

Nearly two-thirds of respondents have a Gmail account for their personal email. We asked these respondents whether they had the Gmail Tabs feature active.

### Gmail Tabs adoption

With 65.3% of people reporting that they use Gmail for their personal email address, senders need to consider the adoption of the Gmail Tabs feature. However, only 53.3% of people with Gmail accounts use the Gmail Tabs feature to sort their incoming email.

**53.3%**

of Gmail users have Gmail Tabs active on their accounts.



## Key learnings

These takeaways will help you create better emails to improve the user experience across different providers and devices:

- It's not unlikely for people to have more than one personal email address. In fact, 72.4% have two or more, and 31.7% of respondents admit to having a dedicated email address for promotional messages.
- Gmail is the most popular webmail provider overall (65.3%), and this is consistent across all the countries surveyed. Out of those with Gmail accounts, only about half (53.3%) use the Gmail Tabs feature.
- In the United States, Yahoo is the second option for personal emails, while in Europe, Outlook is a more popular choice.
- Mobile is still the most popular way to check personal emails. Most people use email apps or the browser on their mobile devices to check their messages. But with more people staying at home this year because of COVID, it's not surprising to see many respondents saying they check their personal email on desktop too, especially through the browser.



## Learn more about sending emails for different email clients and devices:

[Guide: How to create responsive email templates](#)

[The science and art of Gmail deliverability](#)

[Inbox Preview: Send perfectly displayed emails for better results](#)



PART 2

# Uncover habits around checking email

Creating the perfect email means nothing if it's not getting opened. For a long time, email senders have tried to decipher the perfect time to send an email. We asked respondents to share their habits around checking email, including how often they interact with their personal inbox and spam folders and at what times throughout the day they normally check their emails.

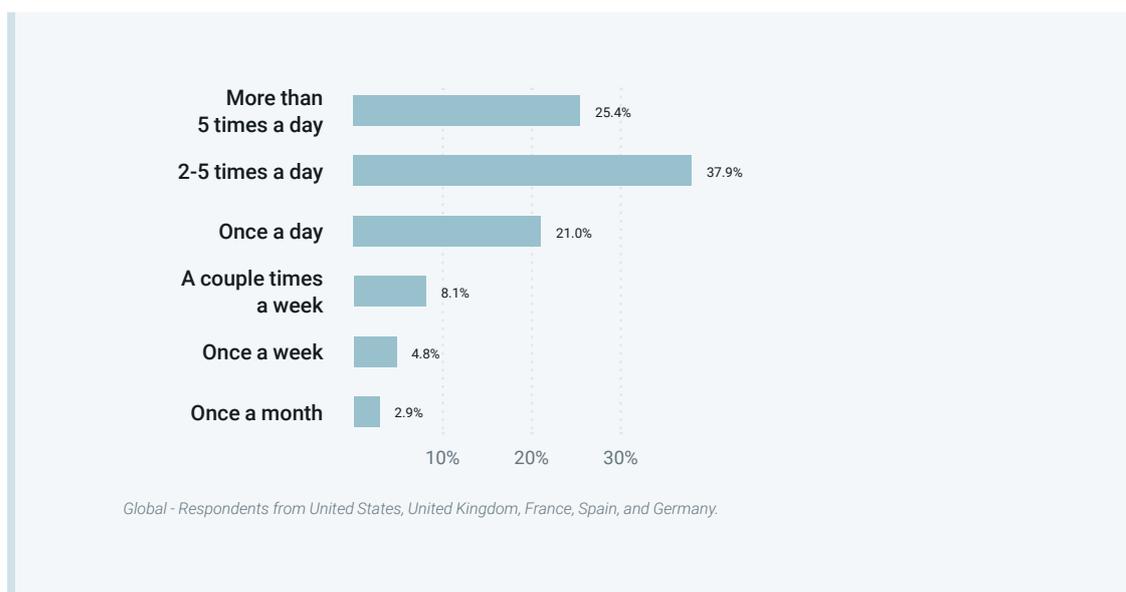
**Learn more about when and how often people check their email to optimize your sending.**

## How often do users check their personal inbox?

*We asked respondents to share how often they interacted with their personal inboxes throughout the day.*

### Global

Overall, 84.3% of respondents check their email at least once a day. In fact, 63.3% check their personal inboxes more than once, with 25.4% interacting with their personal email five times a day or more.

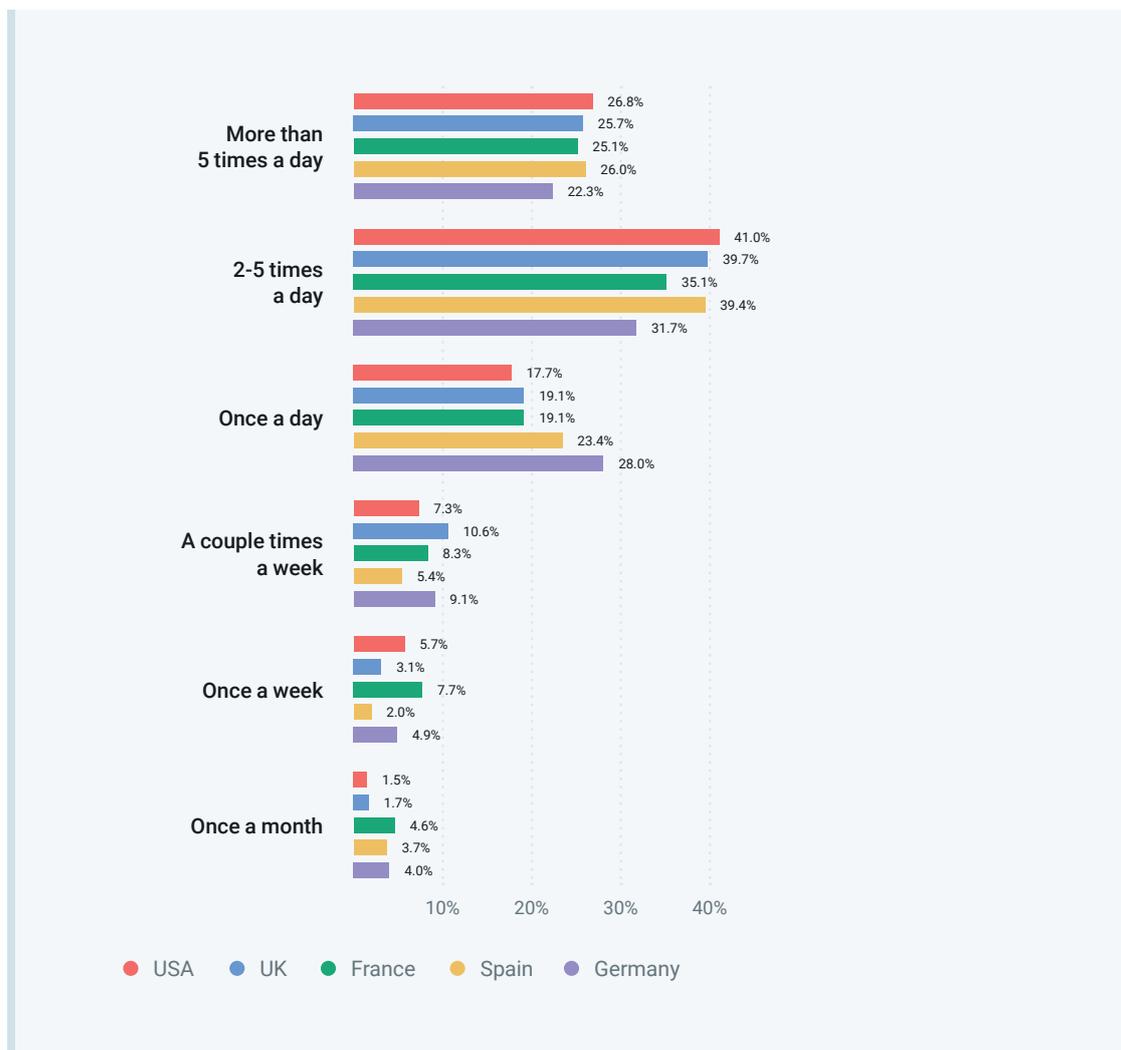


**63.3%**  
of respondents check their emails **at least twice** a day.

**25.4%**  
of respondents check their emails **more than five times** a day.

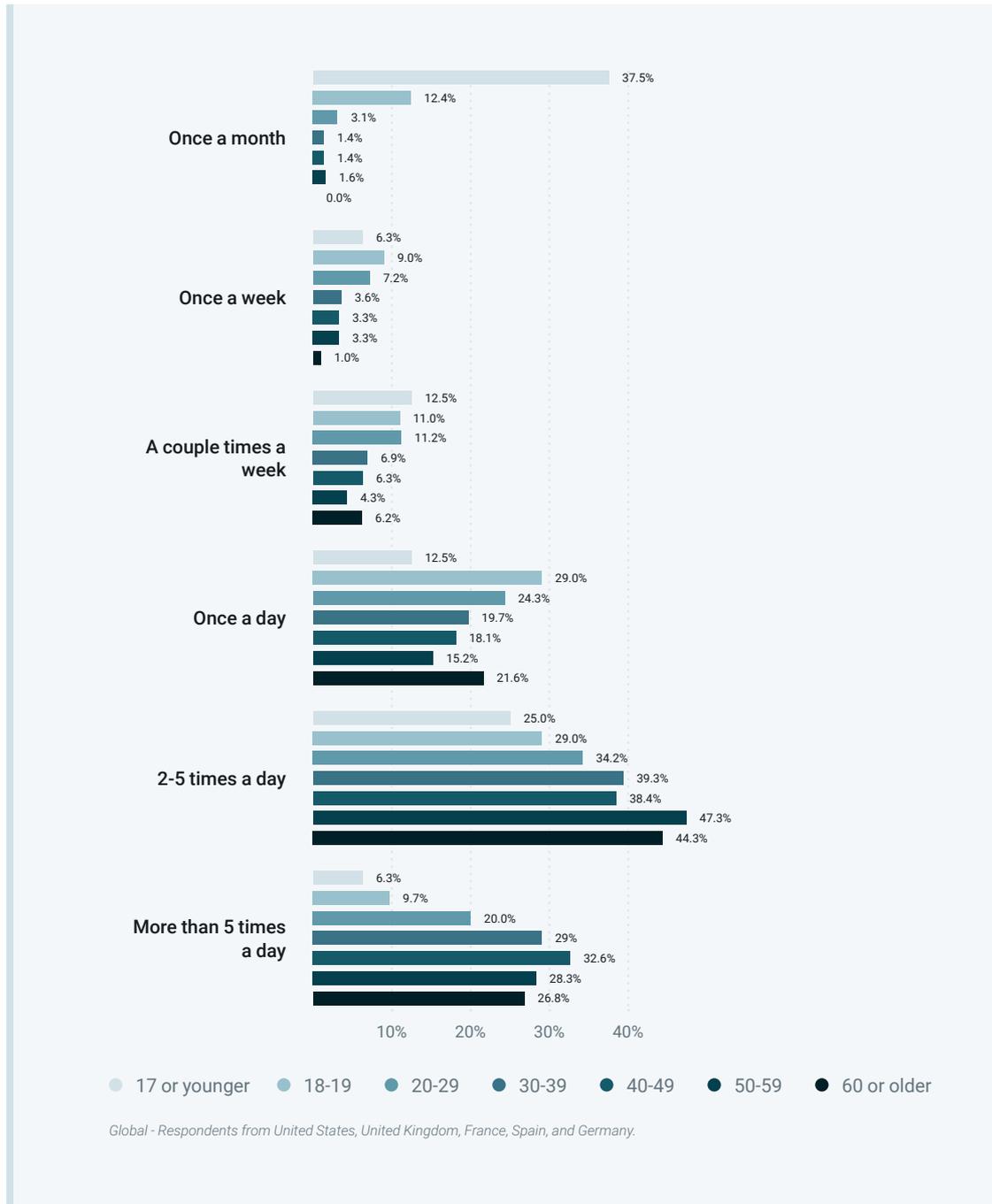
**By country**

The number of times people check their personal email throughout the day varies very little across different countries. In European countries, it is slightly more common to check emails only once a day, especially in Germany.



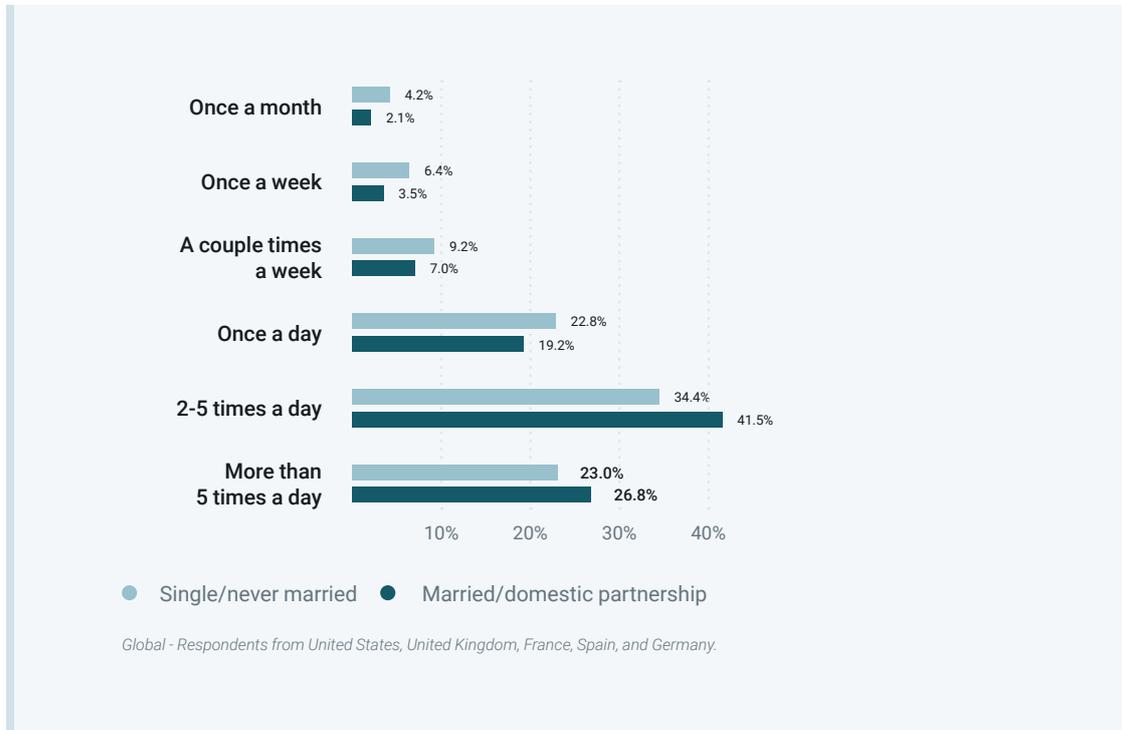
**By age group**

People in their 50s and 60s check their email more often than those under 40.



### By marital status

Married people interact with their personal inboxes more than single users.



### By gender

Differences in email habits between male, female, and non-binary users are almost non-existent, both in how often they check emails and at what times they interact with their inboxes.

Differences in email habits based on gender are almost non-existent.



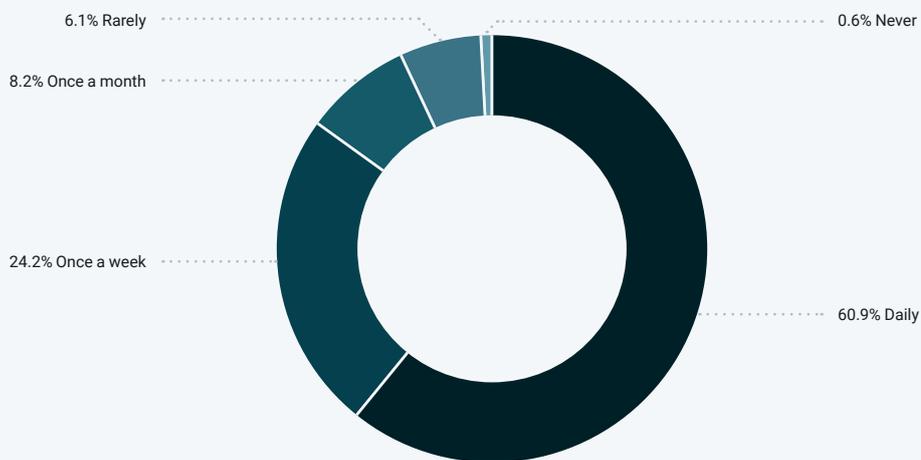
## How often do users check email addresses dedicated to receiving promotional emails?

Nearly a third of all respondents have a dedicated email address for promotional emails. We asked them to share how often they interact with this inbox.

### Frequency

31.7% of respondents have a specific email address dedicated to receiving promotional emails, but they still check it frequently. 85.1% of users interact with this inbox once a week and up to 60.9% check these emails daily.

**31.7%**  
of respondents have a dedicated email address for promotional emails.



Global - Respondents from United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.



## How often do users check Gmail's Promotions tab?

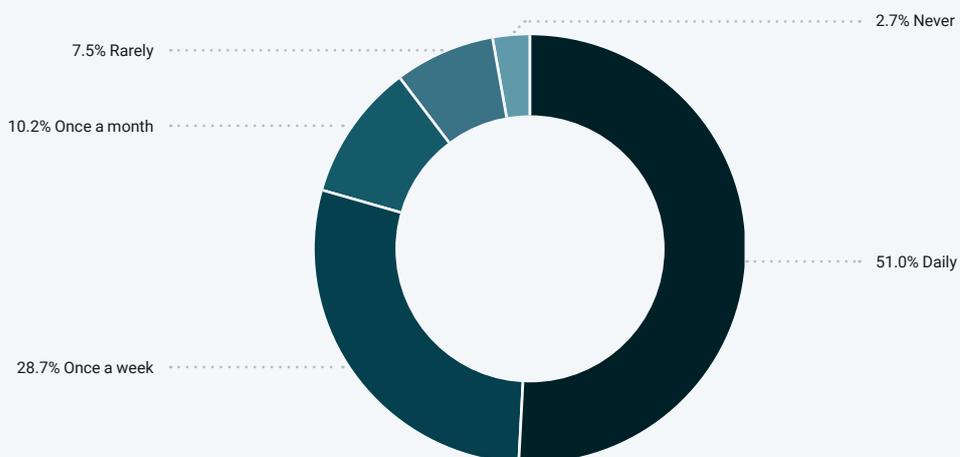
Gmail is the top provider worldwide, and around half of Gmail users have the tab feature active on their account. We asked these respondents how often they check the Promotions tab.

### Frequency

53.3% of people with Gmail accounts use the Gmail Tabs feature. Out of those, 79.7% check the Promotions tab at least once a week, and 51% do this daily.

**53.3%**

of Gmail users have Gmail Tabs active on their accounts.



Global - Respondents from United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.

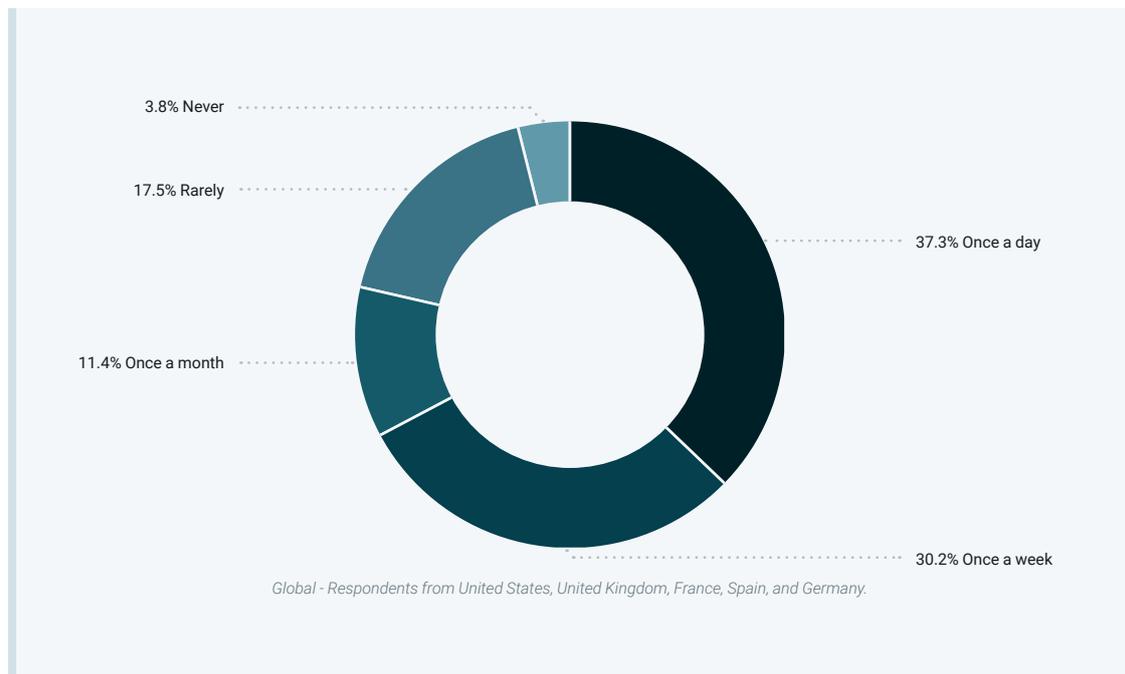


## How often do people check the spam folder?

No matter how hard we try, some emails might end up in spam. That's why we ask people to share how often they check this folder.

### Frequency

Overall, people check their spam folder more than you might expect. 67.5% of users check it at least once a week, and up to 37.3% interact with spam email once a day.



**37.3%**

of respondents check their spam folder once a day.

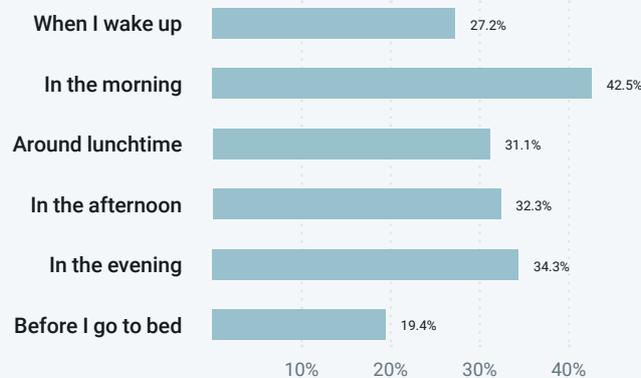


## What time of day do people usually check their emails?

We asked respondents to tell us at what points throughout their day they usually interact with their personal email.

### Global

There's no one right time to send B2C emails. Although the morning is the most popular time to check email, most people interact with their personal inboxes throughout the day. These habits vary very little across different demographics.



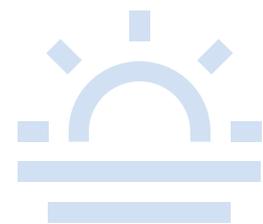
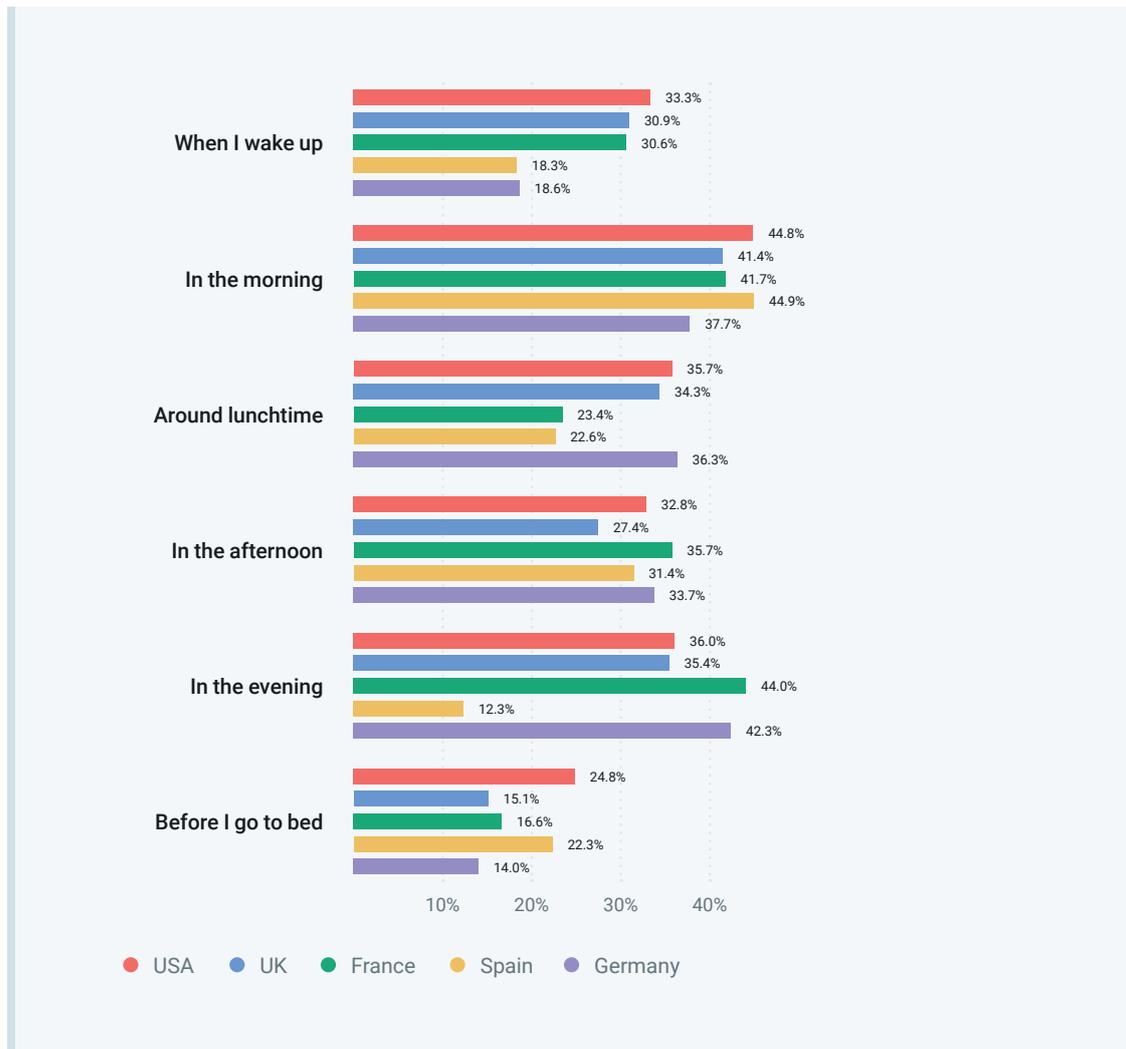
Global - Respondents from United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.

Most people interact with their personal inboxes throughout the day.



### By country

By country, the morning and the evening are the most common times for users to check their personal emails. If you're sending to Spain, though, you might want to avoid the evening, as only 12.3% of respondents admitted to interacting with their inboxes at that time.





## Key learnings

These are the main insights to remember when thinking about your email sending frequency and sending time:

- People check their emails multiple times a day: 63% of people check their personal email more than once a day, and up to 25% interact with it more than five times a day. Of those who have a dedicated email address for promotional emails, 60.9% check it once a day.
- While we never want our messages to land in the spam folder, it's interesting to see that users check it more often than we might think: 67.5% check their spam emails at least once a week, and 37.3% do it once a day. Checking the Promotions tab on Gmail is even more common – 79.7% of people using Gmail tabs feature check the Promotions tab at least once a week, and 51% do this daily.
- The morning is the most popular time for users to check their personal emails, but there really isn't one right time to send B2C emails as most users interact with their inboxes throughout the day. In Spain, however, there is a notable drop in the evening compared to other markets.
- There are no significant differences in the way male, female, and non-binary users interact with their inboxes, so gender is not a factor worth considering when trying to find the best time to send emails.



## Learn more about finding the right time to send your emails:

[The best time to send emails: Cracking the code](#)

[Send Time Optimization: Automatically send emails at the right time](#)



PART 3

# Uncover what gets emails opened and read

Email is one of the most popular ways to build relationships with customers. But for email to be effective, it needs to be opened and read. We asked respondents to share how they look at their inboxes, how cluttered these really are, and what drives them to open an email.

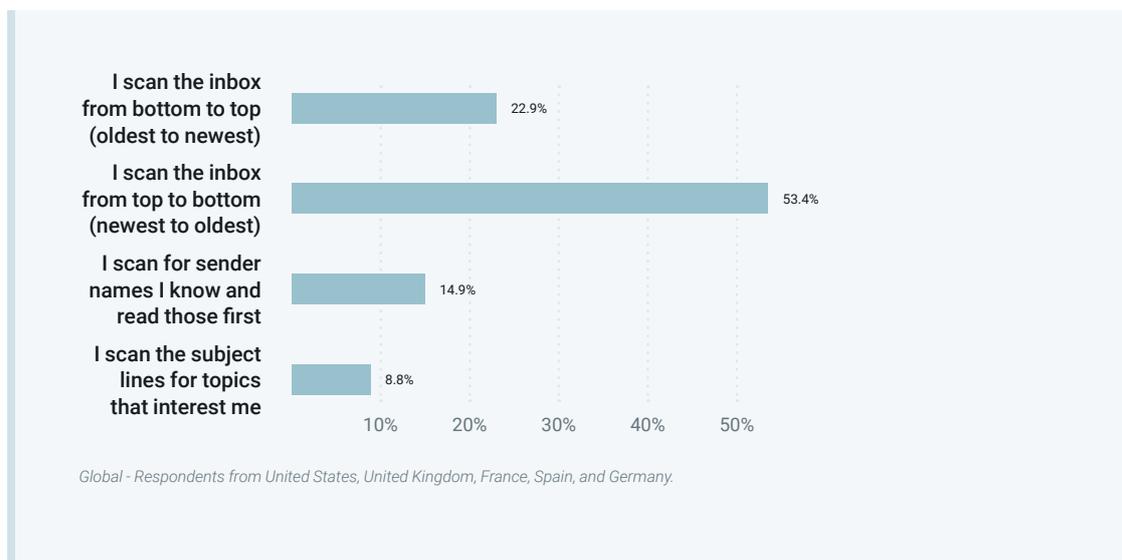
**Discover how people interact with their personal email and what matters when it comes to getting your messages opened and read.**

## How do people look at their inboxes?

*We asked respondents how they typically look at their inbox to help determine what message would be more likely to get their attention.*

### Inbox scanning methods

More than half of respondents (53.4%) claim they look at their inbox from top to bottom (newest to oldest). These habits vary very little across different demographics.



**53.4%**

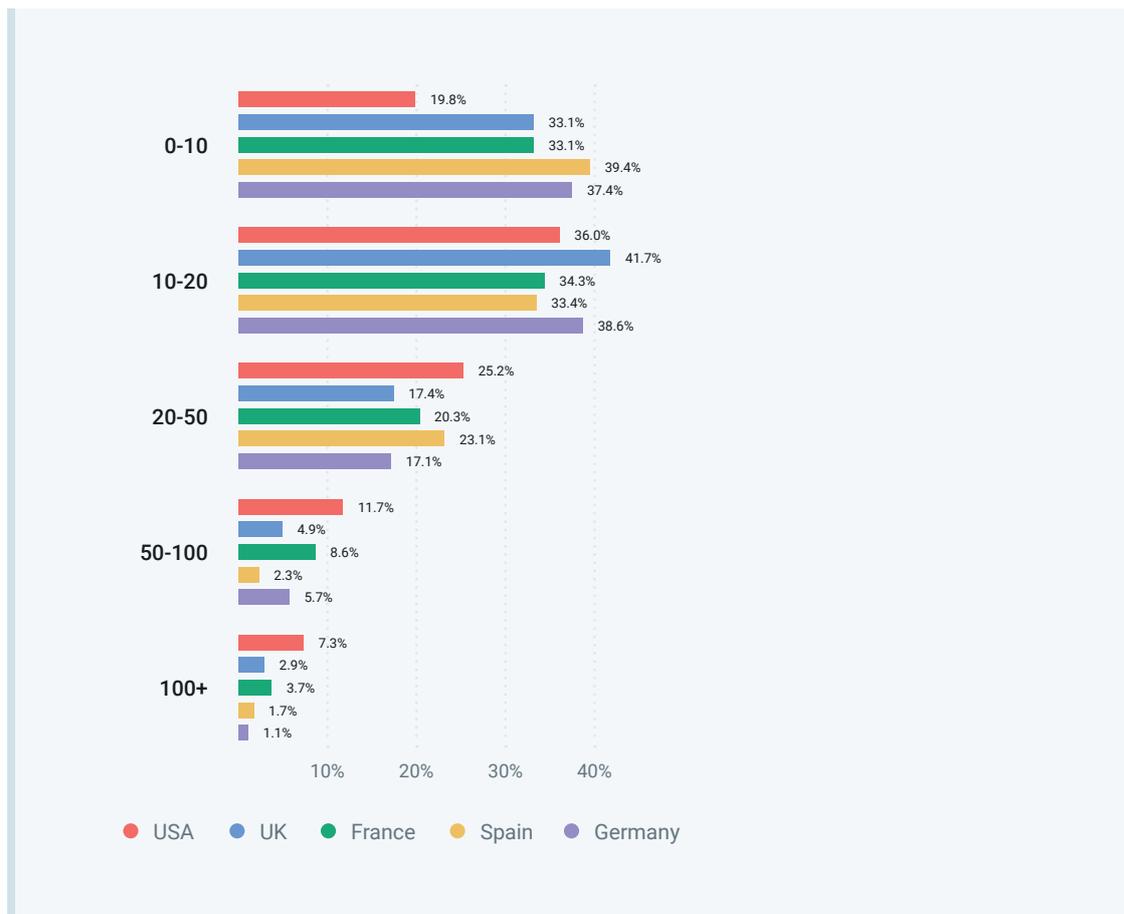
of respondents scan their inbox from top to bottom.

## How many emails do users receive every day?

We asked respondents how many emails they usually received in their main personal email throughout the day.

### By country

Inboxes in the United States are more cluttered, with 19% of Americans receiving 50+ emails a day. In European countries, people are more likely to receive up to 20 emails a day.



**19.0%**

of American respondents receive over 50 emails a day.

## Why do people open emails?

*With so many emails, we wanted to know what drives users to open messages. We asked respondents to share what they care about the most when deciding whether or not to open an email.*

### Main reasons

Inboxes in the United States are more cluttered, with 19% of Americans receiving 50+ emails a day. Recognizing the sender is the most important factor in determining whether or not a recipient opens an email. 88.7% of respondents say this is “somewhat important” or “very important” for them. Having time to read the email was the second most important factor.

**88.7%**

of respondents say **recognizing the sender** is an important factor in determining whether to open an email.

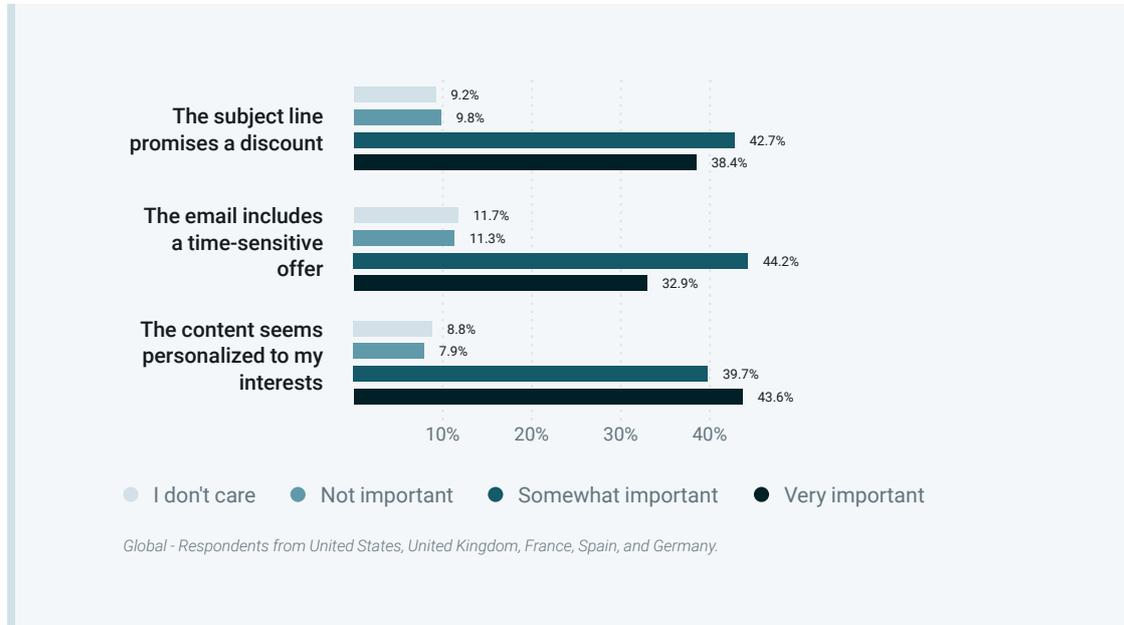
**86.4%**

of respondents say having **time to read** an email is an important factor in determining whether to open it.



### Types of content

When it comes to the email content, a subject line that suggests the message is personalized to the recipient's interests matters more than discount codes or sales.



### Generational differences

People over the age of 60 are not as motivated by discounts and time-sensitive offers as those in younger generations.

**37.1%**

of respondents over 60 say that **special offers** are not important in determining whether to open an email.

**38.2%**

of respondents over 60 say that **time-sensitive offers** are not important in determining whether to open an email.





## Key learnings

These takeaways will help you understand how users interact with their inboxes so you can increase your chances of getting your emails opened:

- Most people (53.4%) scan their inboxes from top to bottom when checking email, looking at newer emails first. This method was the most popular one across all the countries surveyed.
- However, the number of emails received daily varied significantly across regions. Inboxes in the United States are more cluttered than they are in Europe. Nearly 20% of Americans receive 50+ emails a day, while in European countries, people are more likely to receive up to 20 emails a day.
- The most important factor in determining whether an email gets opened or not is recognizing the sender. 88.7% of respondents said this was “somewhat important” or “very important”. People also prefer personalized content over special deals or offers.



## Learn more about getting your emails opened and read:

[What is BIM!?](#) More than a funny name

[What is a good open rate and how to improve it](#)

[Dynamic content blocks to level up your email personalization](#)



PART 4

# Uncover subscribes and unsubscribes

Building and maintaining an engaged list of contacts is hard, and sometimes senders are tempted to rent or purchase email databases to do so. However, these types of practices put your deliverability at risk and are not effective in generating engagement and driving conversions. We asked respondents to share what motivates them to join and, conversely, opt out from an email list to help you grow yours organically.

**Find out what drives people to subscribe and unsubscribe so you can build and maintain an engaged email list.**

## How often do people want to hear from brands?

*We asked respondents how often and through what channels they want to hear from the brands they love to help you build an effective email strategy.*

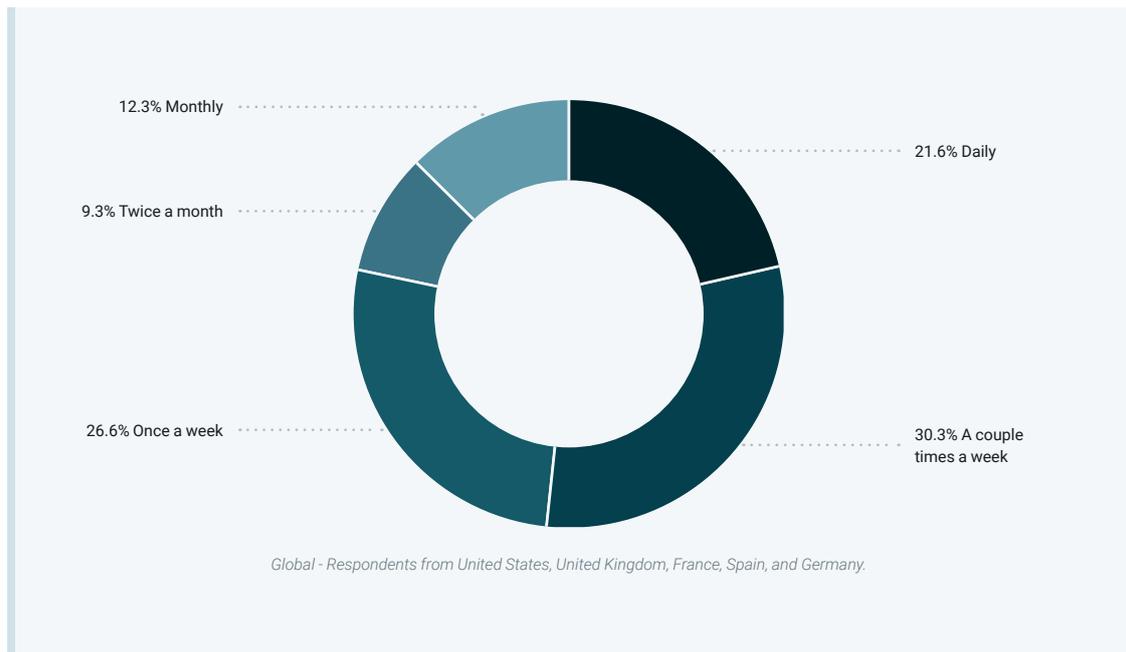
### Frequency

78.5% of respondents want to hear from the brands they love at least once a week, and 51.9% of them actually prefer receiving brand communications more than once a week.

**78.5%**  
of respondents want to hear  
from brands **at least once**  
**a week.**

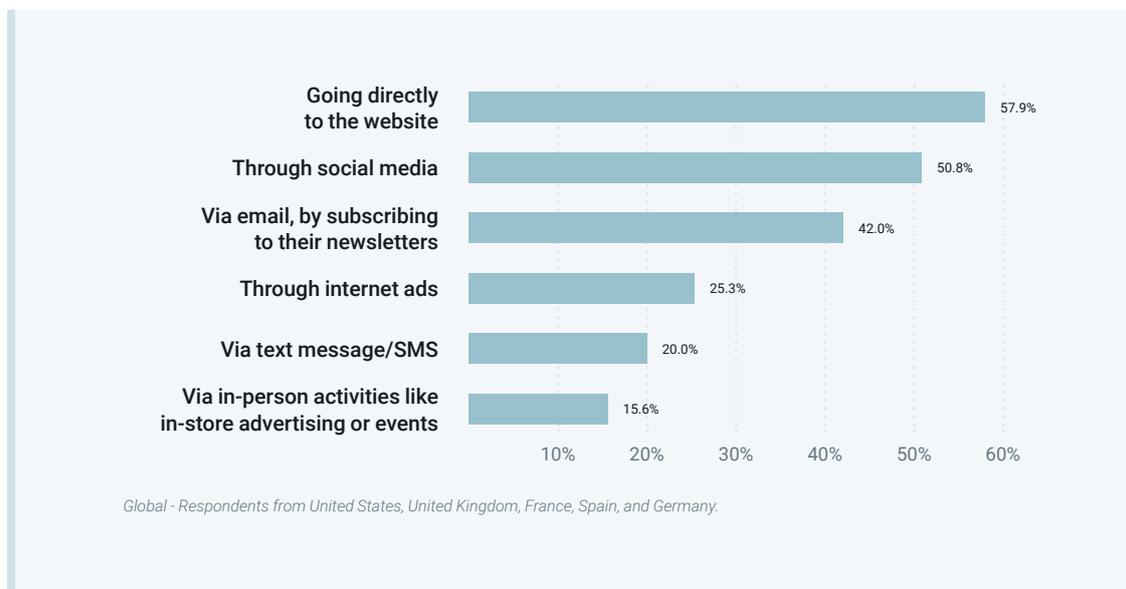
**51.9%**  
of respondents want to hear  
from brands **more than once**  
**a week.**





### Preferred channels to hear from brands

People typically prefer going straight to a brand's site, connecting through social, or receiving an email to hear from the brands they love.

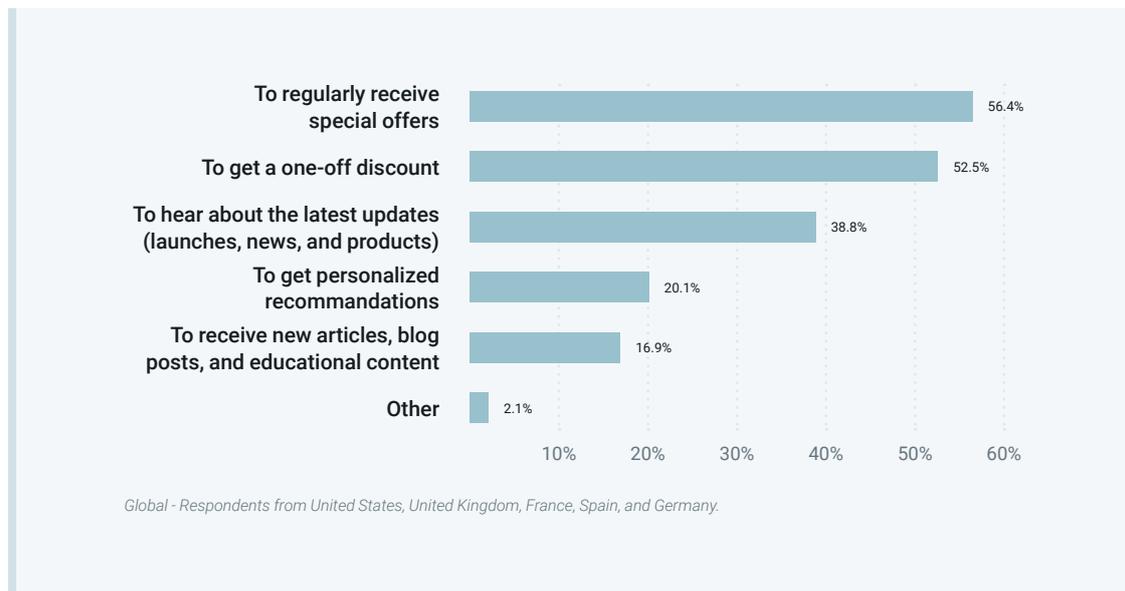


## Why do people sign up to receive emails from a brand?

We asked respondents what motivated them to sign up to receive email communications from a brand and what they liked the most about these messages.

### Driving subscriptions

The majority of people sign up for emails in order to get special offers. 56.4% of respondents say they subscribe to regularly receive special offers, and 52.5% sign up to newsletters to receive a one-off discount.



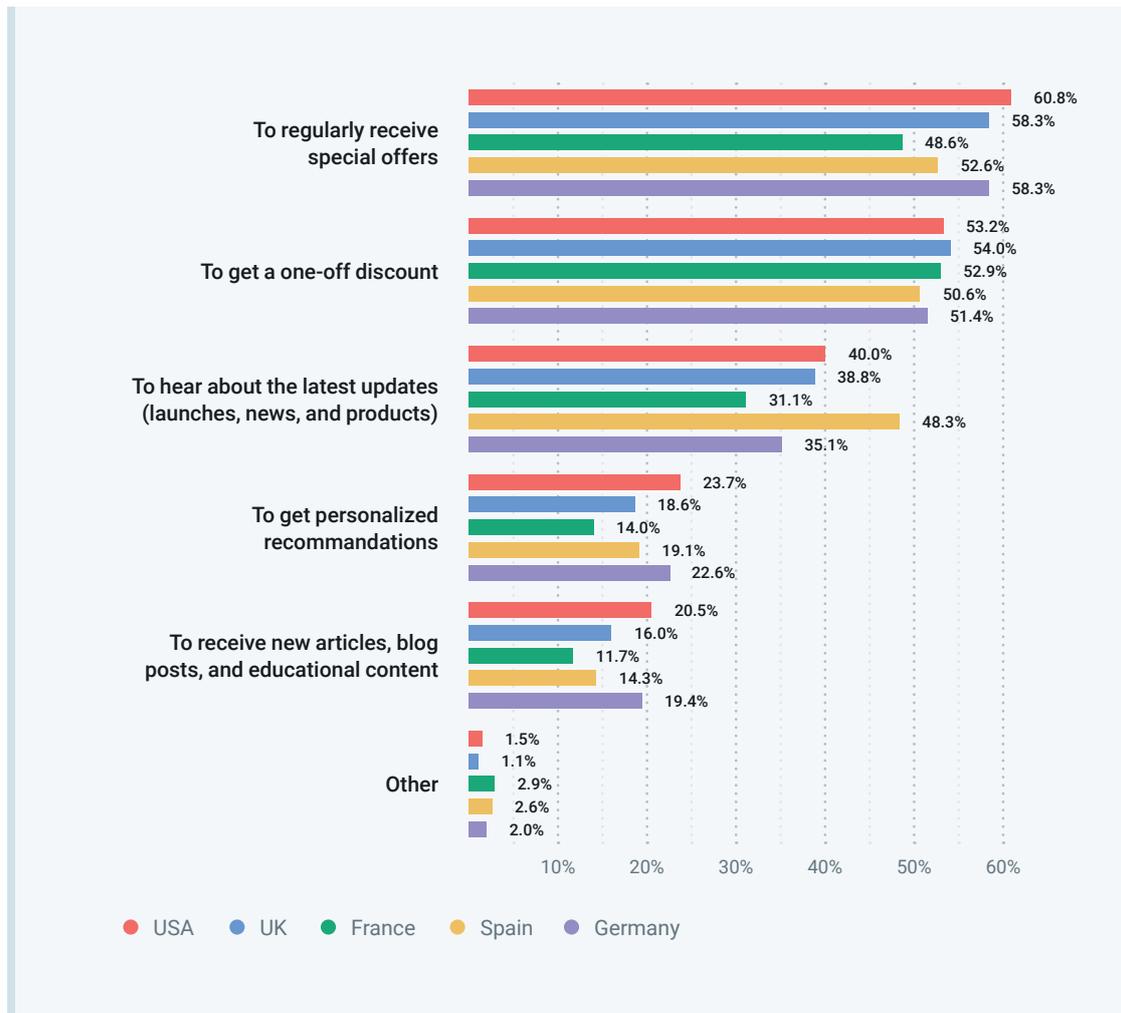
**56.4%**  
of respondents sign up for emails to receive **special offers**.

**52.5%**  
sign up to for emails to receive a **one-off discount**.



### By Country

In France, getting a one-off discount is the most popular choice – 52.9% of respondents say they sign up for emails for this reason. For 48.3% of Spanish respondents, hearing about a brand’s latest updates is also a main driver when it comes to subscribing to a newsletter.



## Favorite email content

Valuable email content like deals, personalized recommendations, or useful information matters more to people than the design of the email itself or the tone of voice used in the copy.

### What do people value the most in brand emails?

- 1 Deals and special offers
- 2 Personalized recommendations
- 3 Useful content (posts, videos, infographics)
- 4 The tone of the email/brand personality
- 5 Design of the email

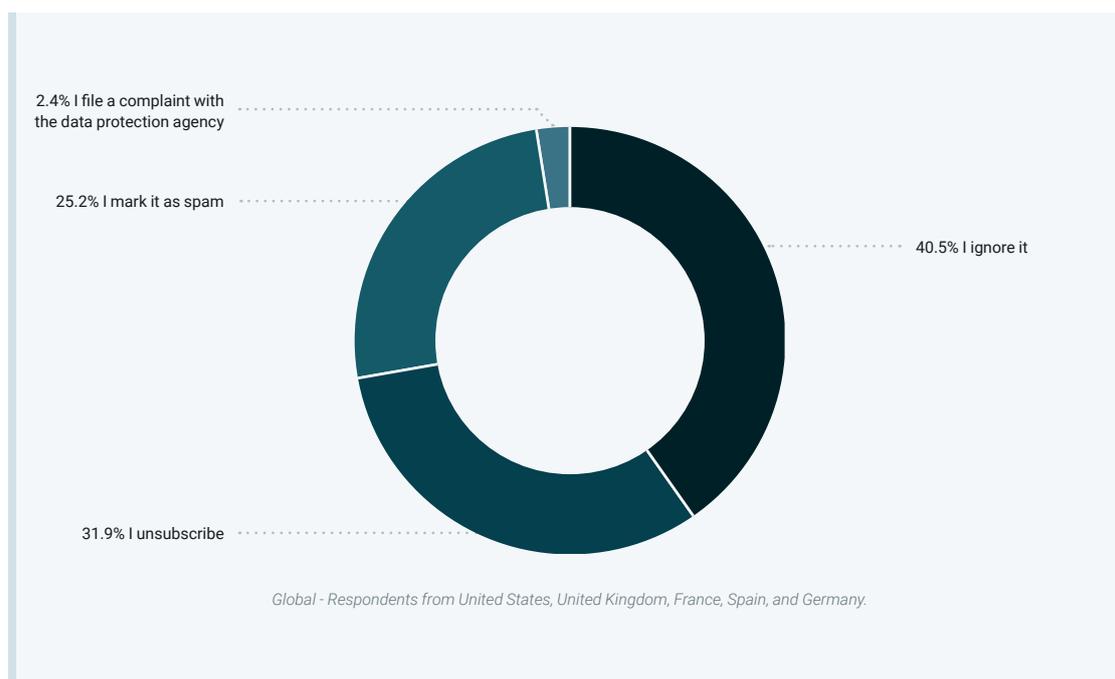
*Global - Respondents from United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.*

## How do people react to unsolicited emails?

We asked respondents what they do when they get an unsolicited promotional email from a brand.

### Global

57.1% of people unsubscribe or mark a message as spam when they receive an unsolicited promotional email from a company, while 40.5% just ignore it.

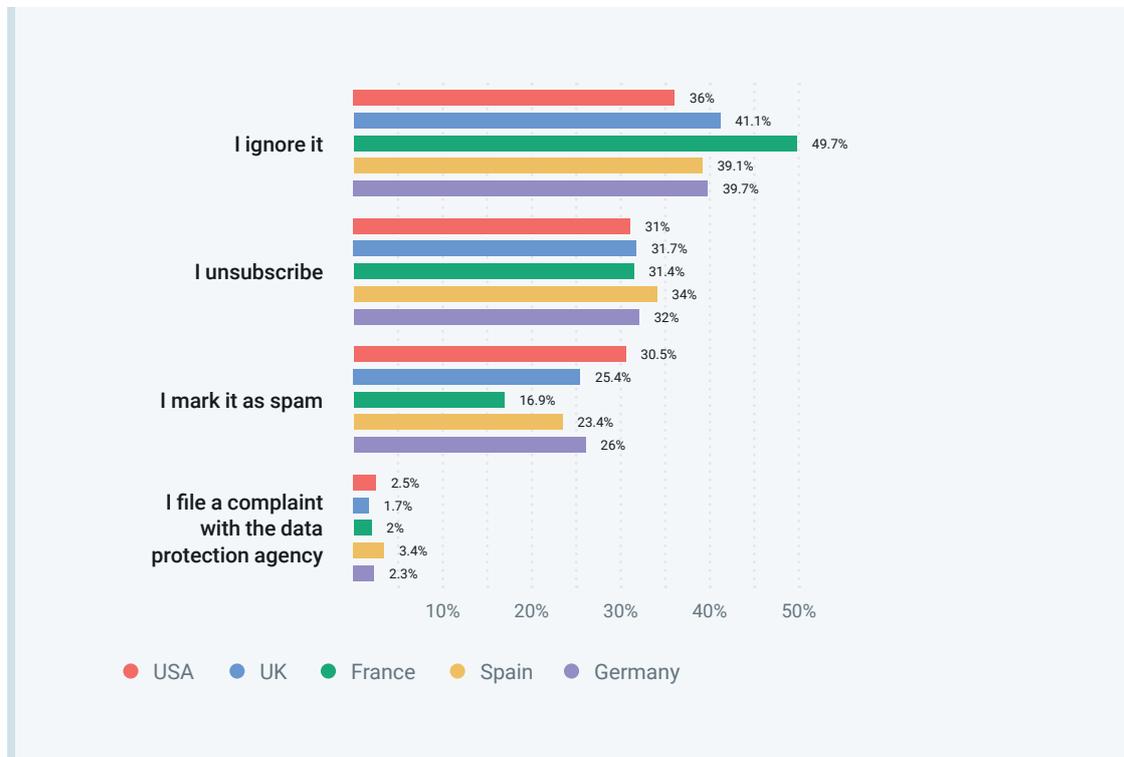


**57.1%**

of respondents unsubscribe or mark unsolicited emails as spam.

### By country

The French are 27.5% more likely to just ignore an email they didn't sign up for than others, while Americans are 33% more likely to mark as spam.



## What are the top reasons for unsubscribing from a brand's email program?

We asked respondents to rank how important different factors are in determining whether to unsubscribe from an email program they previously signed up for.

### Main reasons

For 54.9% of respondents, an unrecognizable sender name is a very important factor in their decision to unsubscribe from a brand's email list, while 53.8% also rank irrelevant content as a very important reason to opt out.

**54.9%**

of respondents say an **unrecognizable sender name** is a very important factor in their decision to unsubscribe from a brand's email list.

**53.8%**

of respondents say **irrelevant content** is a very important factor in their decision to unsubscribe from a brand's email list.





## Key learnings

These are the main insights to keep in mind when creating a strategy to build and maintain an engaged email list:

- 78.5% of people want to hear from the brands they love at least once a week, while 25.4% prefer to hear from them twice a week or more. Their favorite ways to stay in touch with brands are by going straight to their site, connecting through social, or receiving an email from them.
- Even though discount codes matter less to whether or not an email gets opened, the majority of people are still signing up for emails in order to get special offers. Over 50% of respondents say they subscribe to an email list to get regular or one-off discounts.
- 57.1% of respondents will either unsubscribe or mark as spam unsolicited promotional emails they receive. However, two fifths of people (40.5%) will just ignore it. Americans are more likely to mark these messages as spam, while French people are more likely to ignore them.
- A sender name they don't recognize and irrelevant content are the two most important factors in people's decision to unsubscribe from an email list.



## Learn more about growing and maintaining an engaged contact list:

[How to build an email list the right way](#)

[Ideas to increase your email list](#)

[Unsubscribe link: Why you need it in your marketing emails](#)



PART 5

# Uncover email efficacy

Email is the best performing marketing channel, with an ROI of \$35 for every \$1 spent in 2020 according to the DMA. But not all campaigns generate the same interest or are as effective in driving conversions and improving the customer experience. We asked respondents to think about some common B2C campaigns and tell us how they had interacted with them in the past. We also asked them to consider situations when they would prefer an SMS message over an email.

**Discover how people claim they interact with common B2C email campaigns and when they prefer SMS over email to increase the performance of your brand communications.**

## How do people interact with common B2C emails?

*We asked respondents what they do when they receive discount emails, birthday messages, personalized emails, or abandoned cart reminders.*

### Common B2C emails

Discount emails are less likely to be ignored. Up to 50.2% of respondents say they would click-through to learn more about the offer or use the promo code, while only 21.1% of respondents would do the same thing with abandoned cart emails.

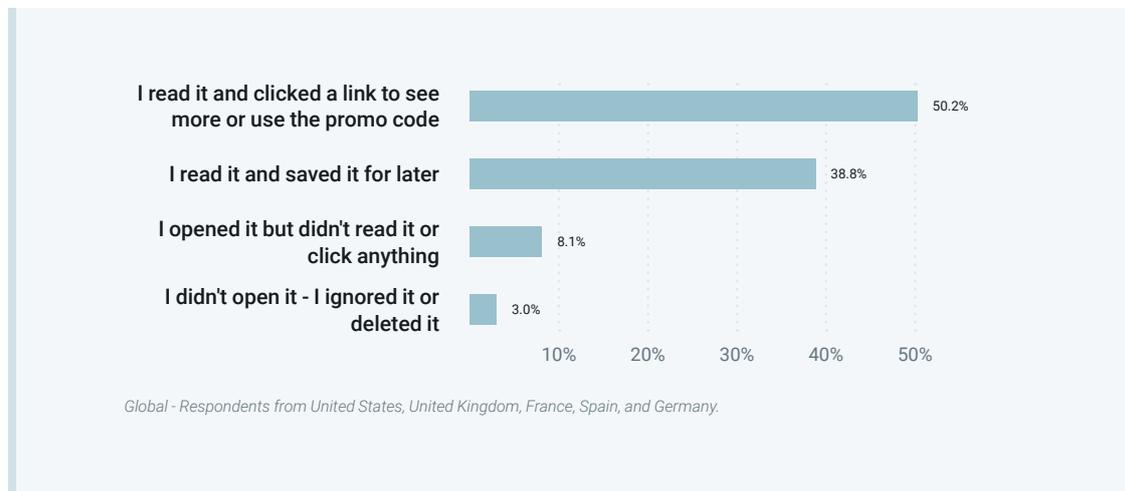
**50.2%**

of respondents say they would click-through to learn more about the offer or use the promo code on a discount email.



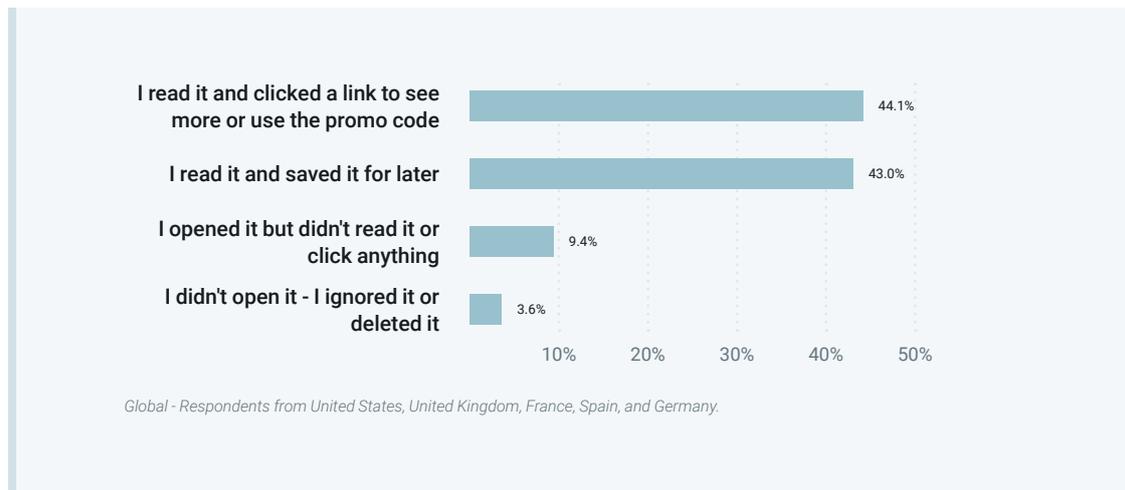
### Discount emails

This is what respondents say they did when they received discount emails from brands.



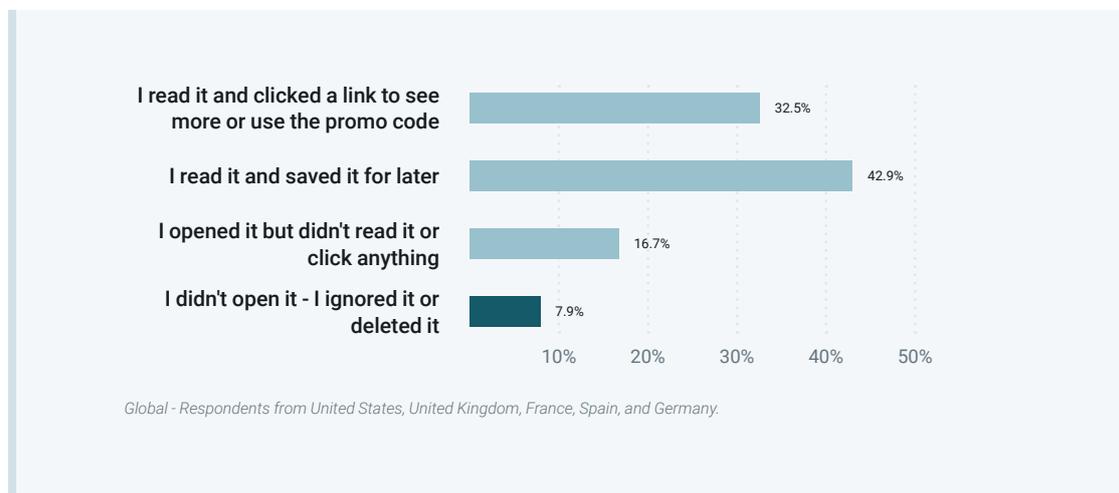
### Birthday emails

This is what respondents say they did when they received birthday emails from brands.



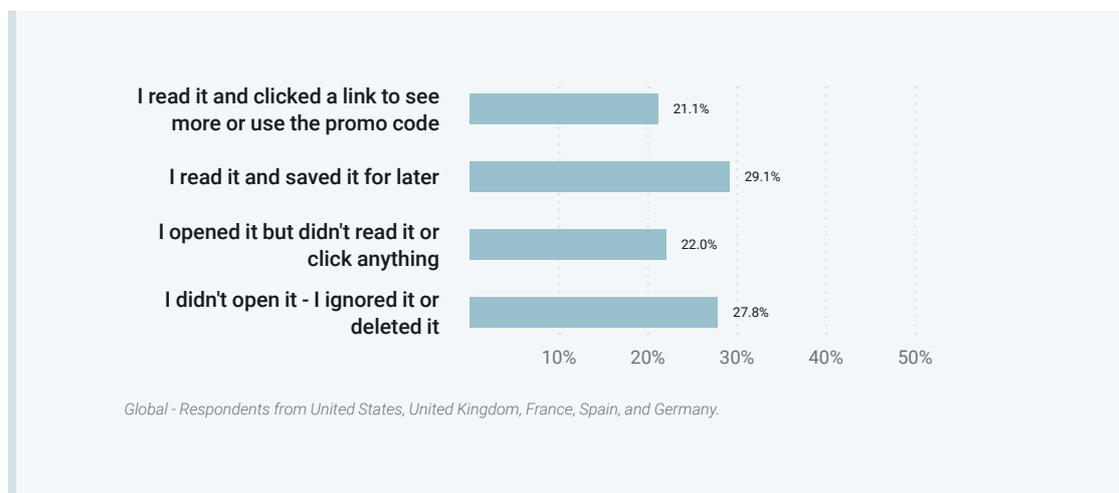
### Personalized emails

This is what respondents say they did when they received personalized emails from brands.



### Abandoned cart emails

This is what respondents say they did when they received abandoned cart emails from brands.

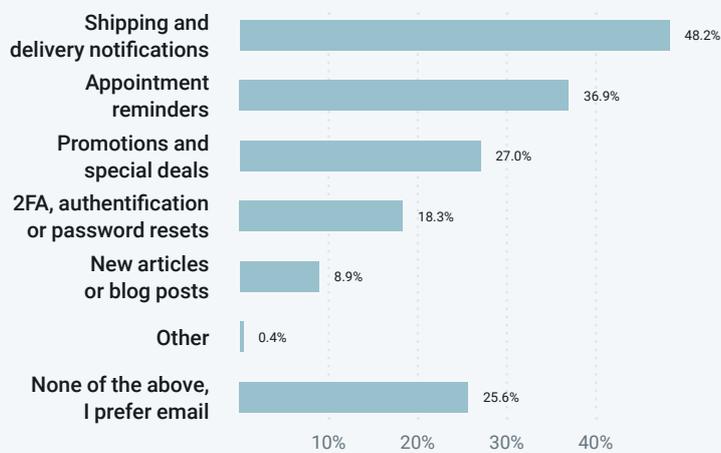


## When is SMS preferred over email?

We asked respondents when they would prefer to receive a text message instead of an email for different types of notifications from brands.

### Global

48.2% of people would prefer to receive shipment notifications by text instead of email and 36.9% would prefer them over appointment reminder emails. However, email is still the preferred channel for all these brand notifications.



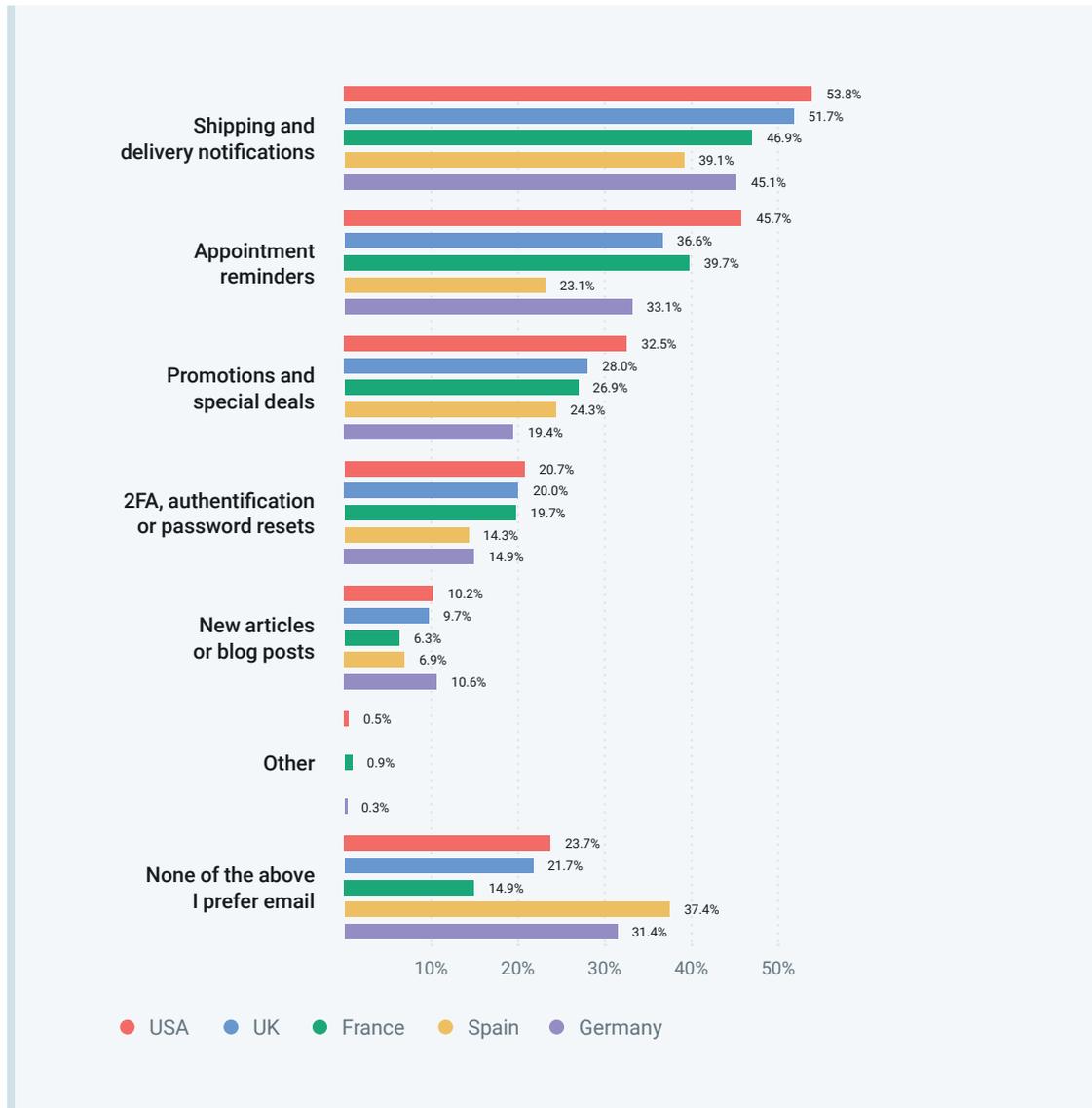
Global - Respondents from United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.

Email is still preferred over SMS for all types of brand communications.



**By country**

SMS is the preferred choice for shipping and delivery notifications in the United States and the United Kingdom – 53.8% of American respondents and 51.7% of British respondents say they prefer to receive a text message over an email for this type of alerts. In France, Germany, and Spain, email is preferred over SMS for all brand communications.





## Key learnings

These takeaways will help you understand how users interact with different types of emails and improve your customer experience:

- Among several types of emails, those with discounts were the least likely to be ignored or deleted without getting opened. Abandoned cart emails seem to drive the least engagement, but 21.1% of respondents still claimed they would click through to see more or use the promo code.
- While SMS is gaining ground, email still reigns supreme. Shipping and delivery notifications (48.2%) and appointment reminders (36.9%) are the most popular messages people would prefer to receive via SMS, but 25.6% of respondents still prefer emails over SMS in all these cases.



## Learn more about improving email efficacy:

[10 email campaigns every company should start with](#)  
[3 ways transactional SMS will take your email even further](#)  
[Guide: Email marketing for ecommerce](#)



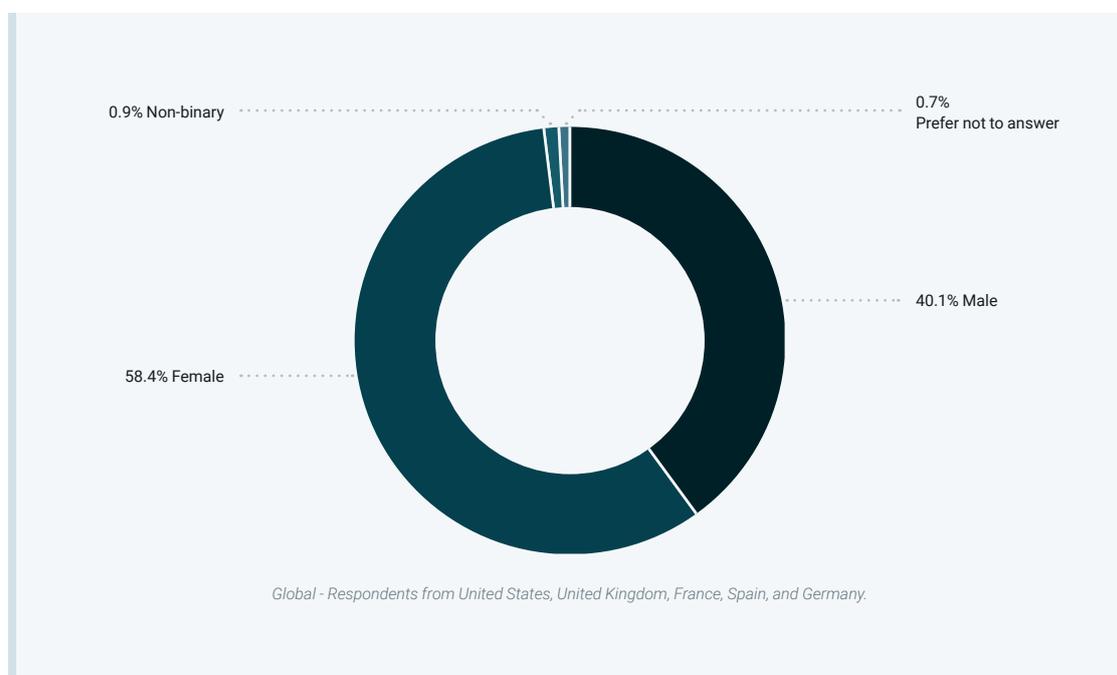
# About this survey

In December 2020, Pathwire surveyed 2000 people around the world to understand how users interact with their personal email inbox. The survey included 30% of respondents from the United States and 70% of respondents evenly distributed across four European countries: United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.

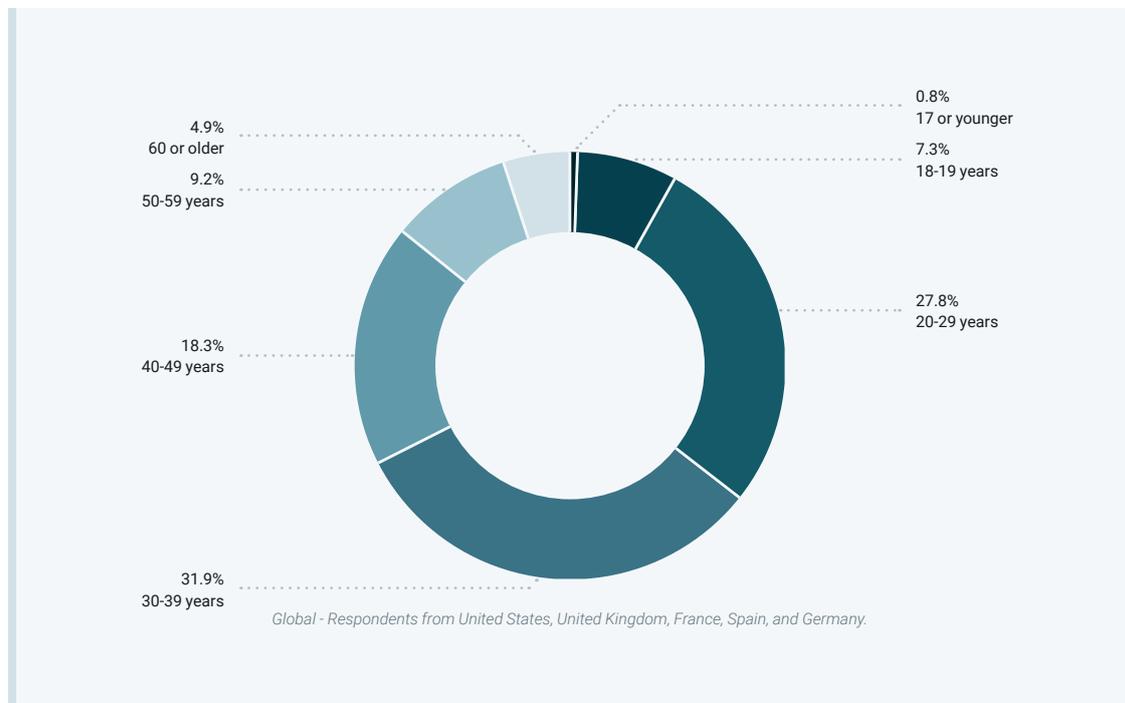
## Demographic breakdown

Below is the breakdown of respondents based on their gender, age, marital status, and employment status.

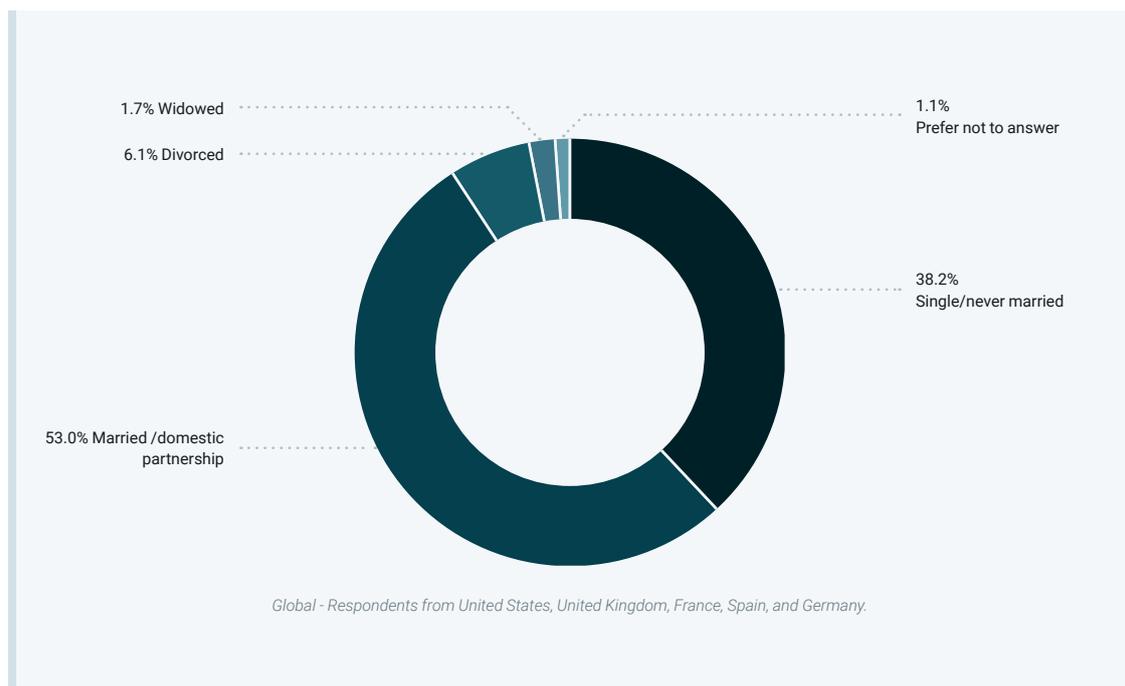
### Gender



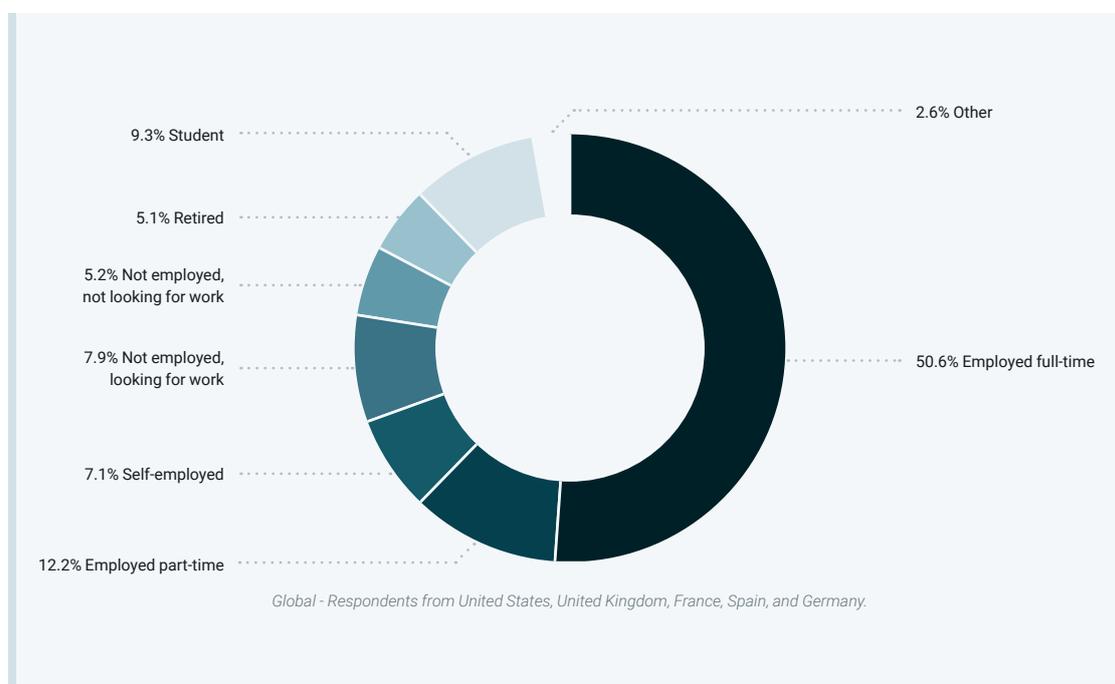
## Age



## Marital status



## Employment status



## About Pathwire

Pathwire empowers 400,000 companies around the world to solve complex communication problems. Through its powerful email API and intuitive email marketing solutions, Pathwire delivers over 250 billion emails a year for companies like DHL, Wikipedia, Toast, Lyft, and Microsoft.

The company provides reliable, cloud-native infrastructure, local expertise, and smart solutions based on machine learning so companies can more easily reach their customers and build connected experiences.

Pathwire has offices worldwide including in the UK, Spain, France, Germany, and the US.

For more information, please visit [www.pathwire.com](http://www.pathwire.com).



# PATHWIRE



Created by Pathwire

[www.pathwire.com](http://www.pathwire.com)