Email Deliverability Playbook:
3 Must-Know Takeaways for Small Businesses

Why Inbox Success Starts with Three Simple Takeaways

Email remains one of the most powerful ways to connect with customers — but only if your messages are actually **delivered, opened, and drive action.**

That's where strategy comes in. Success isn't just about hitting "send." It's about building a system that gets your emails into inboxes, keeps your audience engaged, and saves you time along the way.

In this playbook, we'll cover the **three takeaways** that determine whether your emails help your business grow:

1. **Deliverability** – making sure your emails land in the inbox.

2. **Engagement** – keeping customers clicking, replying, and coming back.

3. **Automation** – saving time by working smarter, not harder, with consistent results.

This guide will show you how to:

✓ **Takeaway 1: Deliverability Is The Foundation**

✓ **Takeaway 2: Engagement Keeps You Out of Spam**

✓ **Takeaway 3: Automation Protects Your Time (and Reputation)**

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Deliverability Is The Foundation

If your email doesn't make it past spam filters, the rest of your strategy won't matter. Deliverability is all about protecting your reputation as a sender and ensuring that internet service providers (ISPs) trust you.

Why Deliverability Matters

Bounces hurt your reputation.

- *Hard bounces* mean the email address doesn't exist — these are permanent. It's best to **keep your hard bounce rate below 5% per email provider** to avoid permanent damage to your deliverability rate.
- *Soft bounces* happen when inboxes are full, messages are too large, the subscriber has an auto-reply enabled, or servers are down.
- Too many bounces tell ISPs you're not maintaining a clean list.

Your reputation works like a credit score.

ISPs track whether people open, click, or mark your emails as spam. Too many issues lower your score, pushing more of your emails into junk folders. To help build trust between you and ISPs, consider the following metrics:

- **Spam complaint rate:** Keep it below 0.1%.
- **Bounce rate:** Acceptable ranges are less than 2-5%.
- **Engagement (opens, clicks, folder moves):** Higher engagement improves reputation, and save-to-folder or "this is not spam" actions are positive indicators.
- **Spam traps:** Avoid accidental sends to ISP-embedded traps to avoid getting blocked.

Business domains versus personal emails build trust.

Sending from Gmail or Yahoo? That's a red flag for spam filters.
A business domain (like you@yourbusiness.com) instantly boosts credibility.

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Pro Tips for Strong Deliverability

Regularly clean your list to remove invalid or inactive addresses.

Use double opt-in so subscribers confirm they want your emails.

Keep your sending frequency consistent (not bursts followed by silence).

The More You Know: Delivery rate is the percentage of emails that successfully reach the destination's network, ex. Gmail, Yahoo, etc. – but not necessarily into the inbox or even spam/promotional folders.

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Engagement Keeps You Out of Spam

Internet providers don't just check whether your email address is valid – they measure how people react to your emails. High engagement tells them your messages are wanted, which keeps you out of spam folders.

Why Engagement Matters

Spam complaints are killers.
Even a handful of people clicking "This is spam" can cause long-term damage. The goal is to keep spam rates under 0.1% (1 complaint per 1,000 unique email addresses). Below are common causes of complaints:

- **Lack of Permission:** Make it clear that subscribers are signing up for email marketing from your business. It's best to use a checkbox and a double opt-in sequence to ensure permission has been granted.
- **Poor Expectations:** Set your emails up for success by providing subscribers with expectations as to what, when, and how often, and from whom they will be receiving emails.
- **Inconsistent Branding:** Make sure your branding is consistent from the signup page to the email so subscribers recognize who sent the email, lowering the likelihood that you'll be reported as spam.
- **Hiding Unsubscribe Link:** This is not only illegal and a violation of acceptable use policies, but it also causes more spam complaints, leaving subscribers no other options to opt out.
- **Spammy Subject Lines:** Describe clearly and directly what you are sending, being specific and relevant to your content.

Low opens and clicks signal irrelevance.
ISPs assume your messages aren't wanted and may filter you out. Medium to high open rates and keeping spam rates low are a great way to show ISPs that you are a responsible email sender and that your emails are wanted and expected by subscribers.

Best Practices to Boost Engagement

Subject lines that get opened
Be clear, personal, and value-driven with subject lines that:

- **Drive curiosity:** "You've been invited.", "The feature you've been asking for has arrived."

- **Retargets:** "Forget something?", "One more thing..."

- **Provide personalization:** "Stephanie, here's our latest article about corgis!", "Nicole, have you seen our latest font options?"

Did You Know? Emails with personalized subject lines are 26% more likely to be opened.
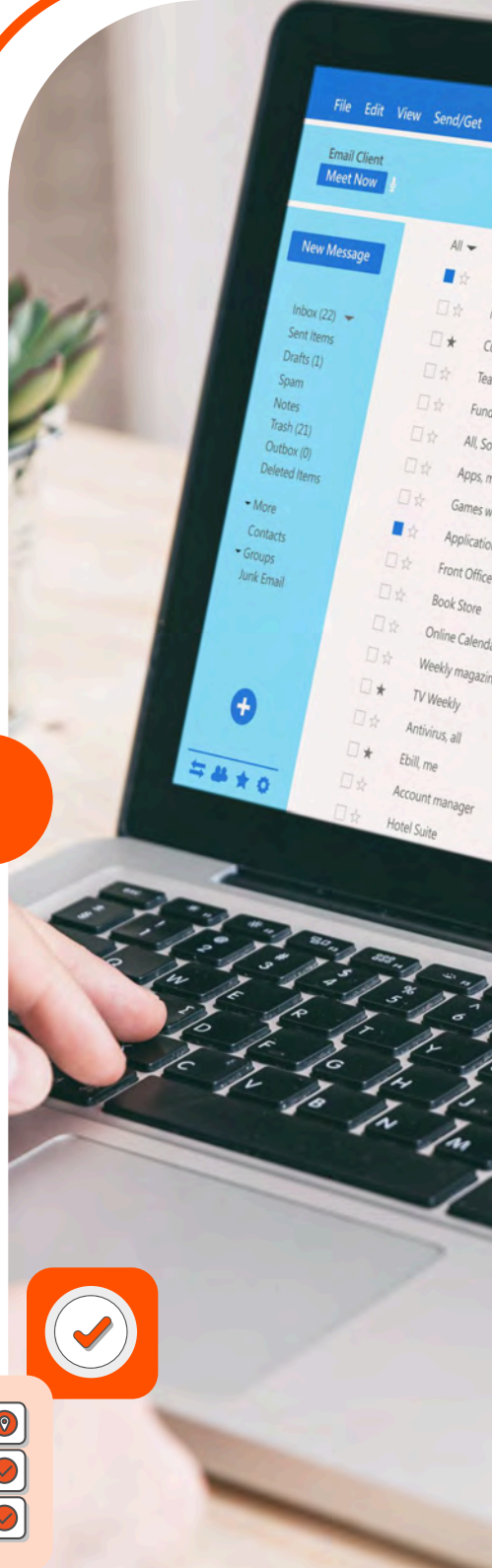
Content that gets read
Share useful resources, timely offers, or appointment reminders.

Example: "October company update video is here", "Register by November 3!", "Reminder: Your Appointment with..."

Calls-to-action that get clicks
Use bold buttons and a single, clear next step.

Examples: Book Now, Claim Offer, Leave a Review

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Segmentation = Engagement

Not every subscriber needs the same message. Segment your list by service, behavior, or location to make emails more relevant. Here are three easy steps to help segment your email lists:

1. **Format your buyer persona research in a compelling way**
   Group your list of clients by broad categories (i.e. industry, role, needs, region, etc.). Once you identify your clients, think about:

   ☑ **Goals:** What are your client's main objectives?

   ☑ **Challenges:** What challenges do people on your list regularly face?

   ☑ **Take Action:** How can you help clients achieve their goals or overcome challenges?

   ☑ **Common Objectives:** Why wouldn't they buy your product or service?

   ☑ **Marketing Message:** How should you describe your solution to your client? Tailor the language and pain points to their segment of interest.

   ☑ **Elevator pitch:** Sell your client on your solution and how it will save them time, money, and cost, again using language and topics specific to their segment.

2. **Set up your mousetraps**
   Create a unique landing page for each client group.

3. **Piece it together**
   Now it's time to set up each of your emails. For each email, map the call-to-action button or text to a link ot the unique sales page. This will allow you to track the number of emails that are sent out, who opened them, and who opted in for your offer.

The goal is for your client to receive your email and feel like you are talking to them because you took the time to identify who they are, what they want, and how you can help them out.

Pro Tip to Drive Engagement
Only send marketing emails to contacts who have engaged within the last 90 days.

The More You Know: Inbox providers track subscriber actions — opens, clicks, and replies. Low engagement signals your emails are unwanted, which increases the chance of being routed to spam.

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Automation Protects Your Time (and Reputation)

Consistency is key to email marketing – but sending everything manually is stressful and error-prone. Automation ensures the right message goes out at the right time, every time.

3 Simple Automations to Start With

1. **Welcome Email** – sent immediately after signup. Sets expectations and builds trust.
   Example: "Thanks for joining! We'll send you one helpful tip each month."

2. **Follow-Up After Service** – sent 2–3 days after a purchase or appointment. Builds loyalty and encourages reviews. Use call-to-actions (CTAs) in your follow-up emails to provide a sense of direction for recipients.
   Examples: "If you want to learn more, please call me.", "For more details, please visit our website.", "If I can answer any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out.

3. **Appointment Reminders** – sent 24–48 hours before an appointment. Reduces no-shows by 20-40%.
   Examples: "Friendly Reminder: Nancy, Your Meeting is at 11:00 am."

Why Automation Helps Deliverability

- Sends at **consistent intervals** instead of unpredictable blasts.

- **Reduces errors** (like sending to the wrong group).

- Keeps **engagement steady**, which boosts your reputation with ISPs.

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Pro Tips for Smarter Automation

- Update your **lists for quality** by sending only to contacts who expect and want your emails.

- Add a **win-back email** after 60-90 days of no activity: "We miss you! Here's a special offer just for you."

Reengagement Example Email

From John Doe

J Jane Doe ✕

Cc Bcc

Subject Line Options:
- *"Hey [Name], remember us? We miss you!"*
- *"We miss having you around, [Name]!"*

Body:
We've noticed it's been a while since you last engaged with us, and we just wanted to check in. We value your time and would love to reconnect. Is there anything we can help with?

Call to Action (CTA):
- *"Click here to visit our website"*
- *Use birthday or anniversary emails for a personal touch that drives loyalty.*

Send ▾

Special Offer Example Email

From John Doe

To J Jane Doe ✕

Subject Line Options:
- *"A little something to say Happy Birthday, [Name]"*
- *"Special offer just for you, [Name]"*

Body:
We wanted to celebrate your birthday with something special — just for you. Come back and enjoy [insert offer or discount].

CTA:
"Redeem your offer here"
"Start shopping now"

Send ▾

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Adjusting the Timeline Based on Send Frequency

Be aware of your send frequency, too many emails – even with great content – can lead to email fatigue and opt-outs.

Unengaged contact handling should be based on how often you email them, not just how long ago they opted in. Here's a recommended approach based on email volume per contact:

Contact Lifecycle by Email Count
- Emails 1–4: Regular marketing content
- Emails 5–6: Send re-engagement messages
- Emails 7–8: Send double opt-in emails to confirm continued interest
- No confirmation within 10 days of Email 8, Opt the contact out and stop sending email

Below is an example of cadences you should consider to re-engage contacts:

Emails/Month	Re-engagement	Double Opt-In	Opt-out If No Confirmation
1/month	Month 4-5 (Email 4-5)	Month 6-7 (Email 6-7)	After 10 days from Email 7
2/month	Month 3 (Email 5-6)	Month 4 (Email 7-8)	After 10 days from Email 8
4/month	Month 2 (Email 5-6)	Month 2 (Email 7-8)	After 10 days from Email 8
5-7/month	Month 1 (Email 5-6)	Month 1-2 (Email 7-8)	After 10 days from Email 8
8+/month	Month 1 (Email 5-6)	Month 1 (Email 7-8)	After 10 days from Email 8

The More You Know: Consistent engagement through automated campaigns (welcomes, reminders, follow-ups) helps maintain a healthy sender reputation by avoiding sudden spikes or drop-offs in activity.

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Deliverability + Engagement + Automation = Email Success

Think of email success as a chain:

- ✅ **Deliverability** gets you into the inbox.
- ✅ **Engagement** keeps you out of spam.
- ✅ **Automation** ensures you show up consistently without the daily hustle.

When you put all three together, your emails don't just get delivered — they get read, clicked, and acted on. That's the real win.

Put these takeaways into action by **scheduling a demo.**

Our all-in-one platform powers your email, automation, CRM, scheduling, and payments so your communications run consistently – and your reputation stays strong.

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