2021 State of Email Report

The latest email marketing data & trends

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Introduction

It's an exciting time for email marketing.

The rate at which email volume grows has nearly tripled since the pandemic began.[1] Yet, email engagement remains high—if not higher than before—resulting in a projected $8.49 billion in email marketing revenue worldwide by the end of 2021.[2]

Nearly 400 marketing professionals around the world weighed in on what's driving their email strategies and what they think the future of email looks like. Respondents included email and marketing specialists, team leads, managers, directors, VP-level executives, and C-level executives all in the marketing field. Nearly half of respondents hold leadership positions while 49% are entry-level to senior-level individual contributors.

Let's find out what their responses reveal about the state of email marketing today (and how to keep its future bright).

Meet Litmus

Here at Litmus, we're passionate about email marketing and helping brands send better emails, faster. We share best practices and trends to help your team stay at the forefront of the industry through our **blog**, **Litmus Live conferences**, **ebooks**, **webinars**, and more.

Another thing we're into? Software that makes creating high-performing emails easy. Marketers pair Litmus with existing ESPs to ensure a consistently great brand experience for every subscriber, work more efficiently, accelerate campaign performance, reduce errors, and stay out of the spam folder. With Litmus by your side, you'll have the tools and insights you need to provide your customers with an incredible email experience—and an incredible ROI.

1 Campaign Monitor: 2021 Email Benchmarks Report

2 Statista: E-mail marketing revenue worldwide from 2020 to 2027

5 monumental shifts about email for today and beyond

We uncovered several key findings in our survey revealing how marketers use email today, how they're making it more effective going forward, and the roadblocks that still present challenges.

Shift #1	Email marketing is increasingly critical to business success. There's no question: Email has always been important. But now? It's essential.
Shift #2	Personalization and automation are must-haves. While not new, personalization and automation are no longer nice to have someday. The time is now.
Shift #3	Privacy measures are forcing strategies to change. Industry trends to protect privacy are impacting marketing's ability to do personalization well.
Shift #4	Brands are looking to agile marketing to meet email demand. Production cycles are getting longer while volume is increasing. Burnout is real.
Shift #5	Marketing must embrace the state of the world. Email programs are adjusting and even joining the conversations with world events, tragedies, and changes.

Be at the top of your email game

Join your fellow email marketing pros who rely on Litmus for expert advice and analysis. Sign up for our emails to get the Litmus newsletter, notifications of new reports and executive summaries, announcements of upcoming webinars and events, and more.

Stay on top of email data and trends

SHIFT #1

Email marketing is increasingly critical to business success

In a world turned upside down by COVID-19, brands have been forced to either go online for the first time or strengthen their already existing digital presence in order to keep their businesses afloat. This past Black Friday and Cyber Monday alone, foot traffic decreased 52.1%[3] compared to 2019 while online-only shoppers increased by 44%.[4]

Fueling this digital demand is email.

"Because of the pandemic, much of the in-person interactions and conversions for both B2B and B2C have shifted to digital. Any time digital interactions take place, email is often the orchestrator and/or byproduct of the experience. While some in-person engagement will return post-pandemic, consumers are not likely to fall back to their pre-pandemic habits because of the convenience it affords. This means email has some strong tailwinds as we look to 2022 and beyond."

April Mullen
Director of Brand and Content Marketing, **SparkPost**
Co-Founder and Board Member, **Women of Email**
Follow April on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**

More than 90% of survey respondents say email marketing is at least somewhat critical to the overall success of their company. 41% say it's *very* critical—up nearly 30% since before the pandemic in 2019.
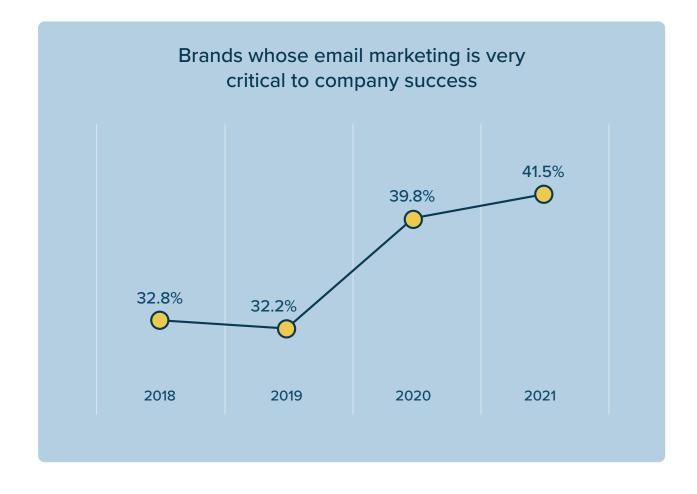
Email marketing is very critical to company success for 30% more marketers now than before the pandemic.

Tweet this →

3 *Business Wire: Sensormatic Solutions Releases Black Friday Results From Shopper Insights Traffic Analytics*

4 *National Retail Federation: Holiday Shoppers Take Advantage of Early, Thanksgiving Weekend Deals*

Brands whose email marketing is very critical to company success

2018	2019	2020	2021
32.8%	32.2%	39.8%	41.5%

This doesn't mean it wasn't critical before, but it's likely the pandemic has made marketers and businesses more aware of how important email marketing truly is.

"Email should be at the heart of any customer experience strategy. Email is still the number one touchpoint for reach and relevance with customers and the gateway for customer activation in other channels."

Bruce Swann
Principal Product Marketing Manager, Customer Journey Management, **Adobe**
Follow Bruce on **LinkedIn**

Why the shift?

Email marketing's essential status can be boiled down to three reasons, as outlined by Tabish Bhimani:

"**Less cluttered inboxes equals more attention**. Basically, someone who has recently started shopping online and discovering its benefits has an untapped inbox where your email is not competing for too many eyes. [Editor's note: On the flip side, experienced online shoppers have even more emails in their inbox now, making it critical for marketers to stand out.]

Additionally, our current customers are looking more toward email marketing to help them **make up revenue when ad costs are unfathomably high** or swing several times during the week thanks to first-party cookie blocking.

Acquisition is still important, yes, but **retaining customers and increasing their lifetime value** is where the real dollars are going to come from. Retention has always been a pertinent yet oft-overlooked part of revenue generation thanks to the quick wins that Facebook ads afforded advertisers. But that's not what helps businesses scale."

Tabish Bhimani
Founder and Principal Strategist, **Mastrat Digital**
Follow Tabish on **LinkedIn**

As such, email tops the list of most effective channels for marketing, and **79%** of marketers put it in their **top 3**.

Top marketing channels by effectiveness

1. Email marketing
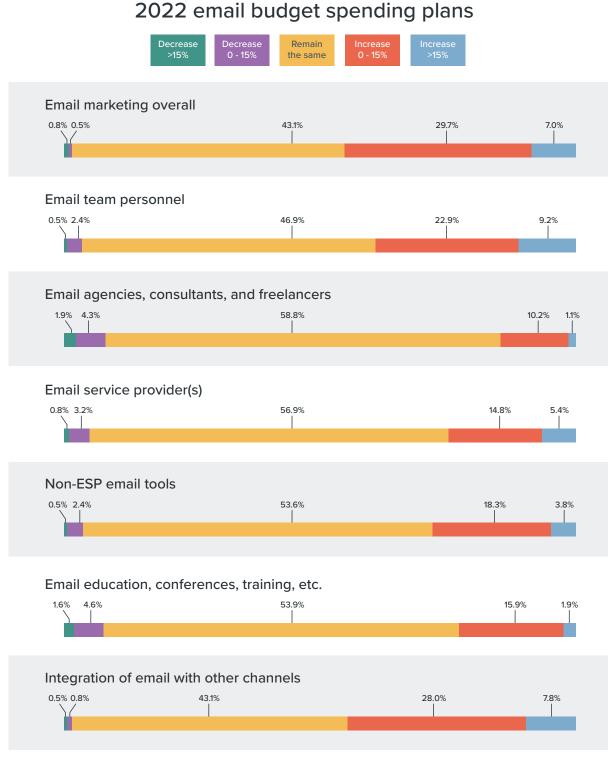2. Paid search/ads
3. Organic search
4. Social media

5. Events
6. Direct mail
7. SMS or push
8. Video

9. TV or radio
10. Outdoor media
11. Podcast/voice

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Budgets are following suit

Because of email's growing priority, nearly 37% of companies intend to increase their investment in email overall in 2022. Only 1.3% plan to decrease their email budget. This is a stark difference from the beginning of the pandemic, when 11% increased budgets and 35% decreased them.

2022 email budget spending plans

Decrease >15% | Decrease 0 - 15% | Remain the same | Increase 0 - 15% | Increase >15%

Email marketing overall
0.8% 0.5% 43.1% 29.7% 7.0%

Email team personnel
0.5% 2.4% 46.9% 22.9% 9.2%

Email agencies, consultants, and freelancers
1.9% 4.3% 58.8% 10.2% 1.1%

Email service provider(s)
0.8% 3.2% 56.9% 14.8% 5.4%

Non-ESP email tools
0.5% 2.4% 53.6% 18.3% 3.8%

Email education, conferences, training, etc.
1.6% 4.6% 53.9% 15.9% 1.9%

Integration of email with other channels
0.5% 0.8% 43.1% 28.0% 7.8%

Remainder of responses not shown here were marked "Not sure"

37% of brands are increasing their email budget in 2022, and only 1.3% are making cuts. This was nearly the opposite at the start of the pandemic.

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Where are the biggest investments being made next year? Integrating email with other marketing channels and growing the email team.

A search of email marketing jobs on Indeed in the United States alone pulls up over 50,000 open roles. And specialized job boards like **EmailJobs.io** and **Emailtribe.io** are booming as great places to post email-related positions and attract top talent.

And we've been saying for some time now: **Email marketing shouldn't live in a silo**. It's nice to see more brands investing in cross-channel efforts with email, especially since you can very quickly learn from email and apply what works elsewhere for maximum marketing effectiveness.

"Once again, email has proved just how important it is. Using the channel the right way, however, is essential. I will always fly the flag for email, but we need to protect it. Team it up with other channels like SMS, WhatsApp, social, and chat for a fully immersive experience. A multi-channel approach will drive much more engagement and revenue."

Gavin Laugenie
Global Head of Content, **dotdigital**
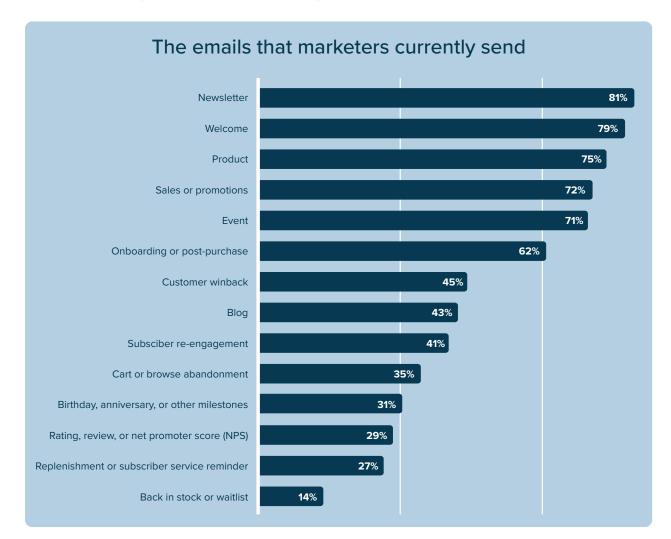Follow Gavin on **LinkedIn**

Budget cuts will be almost nil, but if they're being made, then external email support and training budgets are first to go. This is likely due to internal teams growing and much of training opportunities like conferences still remaining largely virtual. Meaning, no travel and lodging expenses to contend with.

But again, those decreases are minimal, and in fact, budgets in those areas (like all areas of email marketing) are much more likely to stay the same or increase.

Two email cornerstones

Email marketing owes its success to many factors, but two key players are the welcome email and newsletter. One sets the stage for the entire email marketing program and the other nurtures and retains the subscriber relationship.

So it's no surprise they're the top two emails used by marketers today.

The emails that marketers currently send

Email type	Percentage
Newsletter	81%
Welcome	79%
Product	75%
Sales or promotions	72%
Event	71%
Onboarding or post-purchase	62%
Customer winback	45%
Blog	43%
Subsciber re-engagement	41%
Cart or browse abandonment	35%
Birthday, anniversary, or other milestones	31%
Rating, review, or net promoter score (NPS)	29%
Replenishment or subscriber service reminder	27%
Back in stock or waitlist	14%

But if almost everyone is sending newsletters, how can you make yours stand out? Learn from **how we validated some newsletter tips** and made Litmus Weekly even better and beloved than before. And be sure to check out our **Ultimate Newsletter Toolkit** to breathe new life into your email newsletter program.

Newsletters have become so successful that we're even seeing a rise in paid newsletters. That's right, people are actually paying money to get newsletters with exclusive, original content. Paid writers typically see a 5-10% conversion rate from their free list, with subscribers willing to pay $5-15 per month.[5]

5 Mailchimp Courier: Is this a model for success? Paid newsletters

Make a great first impression

Welcome emails are the second most popular email sent. Ensure your subscribers want to come back for more—with these helpful resources:

[How To Hello: These Are The Welcome Emails You Need](#)

[5 Tips for Creating Great Welcome and Onboarding Emails](#)

[Live Optimization Notebook: Welcome & Onboarding Emails](#)

[Webinar Recording: Supercharge Your Onboarding Emails](#)

"The email marketer in me is doing a little victory dance here. It's so gratifying to see more and more brands recognize the value of email. And while weekly newsletters and welcome emails are a great start, brands would achieve even more (with very little effort) if they focus on abandoned-cart and post-purchase emails next."

Samar Owais
Email Conversion Strategist
Follow Samar on **Twitter**

Email's value is clear—but still hard to pinpoint

Though it's clear email is driving results, exactly how much remains a question. Visibility into return on investment (ROI) continues to be a struggle. 61% of marketers don't have a clear view into their email marketing ROI. And many of those who thought they did, weren't able to accurately share their ROI.

This may be because of the changing email landscape, growing number of brands new to email marketing, and/or uncertainty of how to even calculate ROI in the first place.

Last year, just a few months into the pandemic, survey respondents were able to confidently tell us their average email marketing ROI was 36:1 (and we dove deeper into **what leads to better returns**). However, this year, there isn't enough confidence for us to share an updated ROI with you. That being said: Based on email marketing's increasing popularity and budget, we wouldn't be surprised if ROI is much higher than 36:1 today.

Knowing ROI requires insight into the following, which you may not have if you don't manage your company's email marketing budget or have a way to accurately track sales growth:

- Revenue from email marketing
- Cost of email marketing tools
- Cost of in-house email team
- Cost of outsourced support

If you do have insight into all of the above, the ROI formula is simple:

$$ROI = \frac{Revenue - Costs}{Costs}$$

For example: If in one year, your email marketing drives 10 million dollars in revenue, your ESP costs $100,000, and you have one email marketing manager with a $100,000 salary, then your formula would look like this:

(10,000,000 - 200,000) / 200,000 = 49

Meaning, your email marketing return would be $49 for every $1 spent. In other words, a 4900% ROI.

"Email is a fantastically powerful, flexible, and measurable marketing channel. Leveraging your email marketing data through actionable reporting is key to making smarter decisions, driving conversions, and maximizing your investments."

Dr. Ada Y. Barlatt
Founder and Data Scientist, OperationsAlly
Follow Ada on LinkedIn

SHIFT #2

Personalization and automation are dire to standing out and scaling

At the heart of email marketing's boom is personalization. More emails mean more competition in the inbox, making it harder for marketers to catch their audience's attention. One way to stand out? Personalization. That's why it's top of mind for email—55% of marketers are making boosting personalization a priority for their email program—and all of marketing everywhere.

- 9 in 10 marketers believe personalization is imperative to overall business strategy.[6]

- 80% of customers are more likely to make a purchase from a brand that provides personalized experiences.[7]

- 83% of customers are willing to share their data to create a more personalized experience.[8]

- 76% of buyers expect more personalized attention from marketers to develop an intimate relationship with your brand.[9]
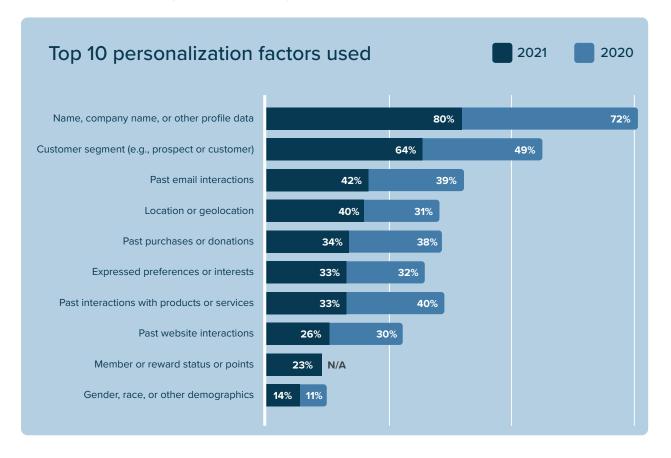
"Segmenting your data and personalizing your messages has always been the name of the game. We all want to feel special as if we are receiving a unique experience from the brands we choose to share our data with. Asking for and using that relevant data enables us marketers to deliver that offline one-to-one experience that we all know and love to our customers online. Not bombarding or overwhelming recipients but being useful, delivering messages at the right time for each user depending on where they are on their journey with us."

Gavin Laugenie
Global Head of Content, **dotdigital**
Follow Gavin on **LinkedIn**

6 Forrester and IBM: Personalization Demystified

7 Epsilon: The power of me: The impact of personalization on marketing performance

8 Accenture: 2018 Personalization Pulse Check

9 Demand Gen Report: 2020 B2B Buyer Behavior Study

Top ways to personalize emails

Here's how emails are being personalized today.

Top 10 personalization factors used

2021 **2020**

Factor	2021	2020
Name, company name, or other profile data	80%	72%
Customer segment (e.g., prospect or customer)	64%	49%
Past email interactions	42%	39%
Location or geolocation	40%	31%
Past purchases or donations	34%	38%
Expressed preferences or interests	33%	32%
Past interactions with products or services	33%	40%
Past website interactions	26%	30%
Member or reward status or points	23%	N/A
Gender, race, or other demographics	14%	11%

80% of marketers personalize emails with profile data, and 64% personalize by customer segment.

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More brands are personalizing in more ways almost across the board since last year. However, less brands are using past purchases and past interactions with their website, products, or services as a way to personalize emails this year. This may be because companies are preparing for life after the loss of third-party cookies (more on that covered in the next section).

Personalize beyond first name

There are near endless ways to personalize emails. Ensure you deliver relevant—but not creepy—content with these helpful resources:

[The Secrets to Really Good Email Personalization](#)

[Building Relationships With Personalized Emails](#)

[Using Data to Drive Personalized Email Templates](#)

It's great to see marketers eager to get more from their email programs through personalization—along with a stronger set of data to allow for that. 35% of marketers are prioritizing enriching their customer profiles.

"I hope that with the changing privacy landscape, more brands will lean into transparency on how data is used and will be more forthcoming in asking for customers to tell them what they want. Tactics like progressive profiling done in creative and interactive ways will go a long way in data gathering and also understanding who your active subscribers are once opens disappear for around half of all email subscribers."

April Mullen
Director of Brand and Content Marketing, **SparkPost**
Co-Founder and Board Member, **Women of Email**
Follow April on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**

"A robust customer profile continuously updated with preferences, first-party data, and permission-based data is the key ingredient to a digital strategy. It fuels an understanding of the customer and anticipating what they are likely to do next."

Bruce Swann
Principal Product Marketing Manager, Customer Journey Management, **Adobe**
Follow Bruce on **LinkedIn**

"Robust subscriber profiles that merge together past actions, purchases, and form responses are a treasure trove!

I love analyzing subscriber data to find commonalities and patterns. These powerful insights help craft personalized campaigns and automations that drive conversions.
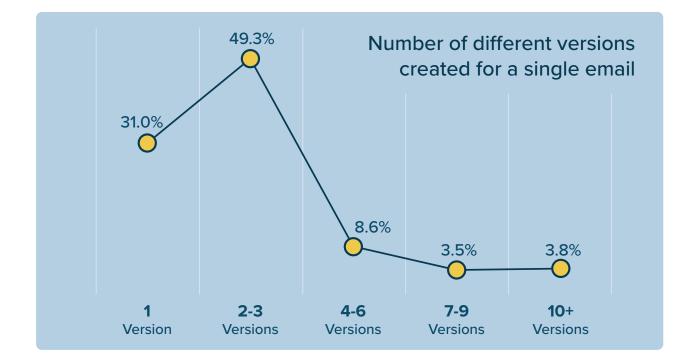
If you haven't started yet, now is a great time to audit your existing subscriber profiles, merge the information you have across data sources, and identify new first-party data to collect."

Dr. Ada Y. Barlatt
Founder and Data Scientist, **OperationsAlly**
Follow Ada on **LinkedIn**

Segmentation drives personalization

With all the data available to marketers, they're creating more email versions to target content to different audiences within the same email. As personalization and segmentation continue to drive optimization, the need for additional versions of emails goes up significantly.

More than 65% of marketers are creating at least 2 versions of an email on average. Nearly 16% are creating 4 or more.

Number of different versions created for a single email

31.0%	49.3%	8.6%	3.5%	3.8%
1 Version	**2-3** Versions	**4-6** Versions	**7-9** Versions	**10+** Versions

"Conditional content is becoming more important. And this content has to provide value. For example, we now show a customer's points balance in every email if they have accumulated them. If not, we conditionally show them a module that encourages them to sign up.

Some customers have taken a quiz that allows us to segment better for our clients. But we will hide those quiz modules for those that recently took them.
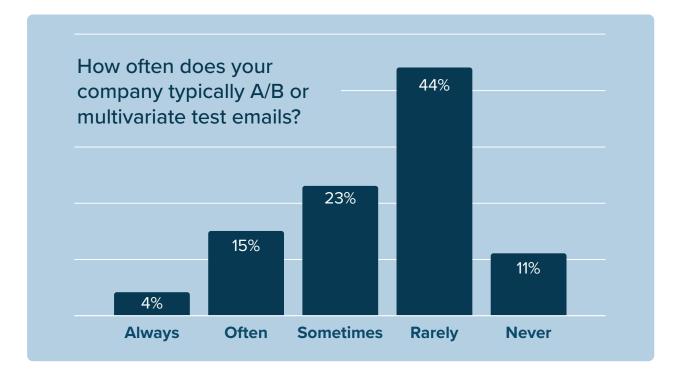
By the same token, for someone who has not subscribed to a subscription product, we show conditional modules to encourage them to do so by leaning into the benefits in the copy. If they're already on a subscription, we give them the option to manage their subscription instead."

Tabish Bhimani
Founder and Principal Strategist, **Mastrat Digital**
Follow Tabish on **LinkedIn**

We're not going to lie: Personalizing emails per audience segment can take a lot of work. While it pays off, you'll need to **balance the time and effort for personalization** with your team's priorities and level of resources.

Get to know subscribers with A/B testing

Another way to learn more about your subscribers so you can create more personalized, optimized experiences? A/B testing. But, this is harder to pull off than it seems, with 55% of marketers rarely or never A/B testing.

How often does your company typically A/B or multivariate test emails?

Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4%	15%	23%	44%	11%

55% of marketers are missing out by rarely or never A/B testing.

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Why aren't marketers A/B testing more often? With changing demographics in fast-growing email lists, A/B testing has been especially challenging. Who you think your subscribers are and what you think they want could change in days. And with smaller lists, statistical significance has been all but impossible to achieve.

So if you want to make a difference, you've got to swing big. Test more significant changes rather than subtle differences.

"Take advantage of subscriber personalization in your email campaigns, even if all you have is their first name. Don't think it works? Run an A/B test with your subscribers, with and without personalization, then look at your analytics to see how subscribers engage with both emails. Also, don't limit personalization only to the subject line; add personalization to your email copy as well."

Ali Fuller, CPACC
Marketing Automation Manager, **Fiveable**
Follow Ali on **Twitter** and **LinkedIn**

A/B test your way to success

Here are some helpful resources to get you started on the right foot:

How to Set Yourself Up For A/B Testing Success

How to Do Email A/B Testing Right (+ 10 Easy Ideas to Start Now)

How the World's Best Email Brands Run A/B Tests

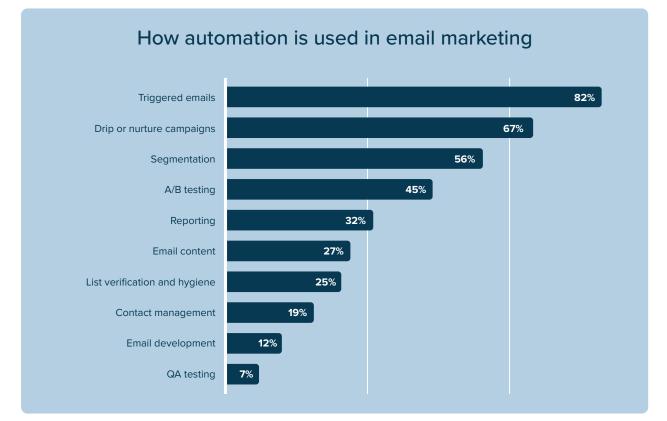**13 Email A/B Testing Mistakes that Limit Your Success**

Scale personalization with automation

In an effort to personalize and scale, automation and artificial intelligence (AI) is going to become evermore critical to an efficient and effective email program. About 59% of marketers have made expanding automation a priority for their email program. Why? It's all about pursuing sending the right content to the right audience at the right time.

The top priority for email marketing programs is automation.

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79% of respondents said they use automation. Of those, over half use it for triggered emails, drip or nurture campaigns, and segmentation.
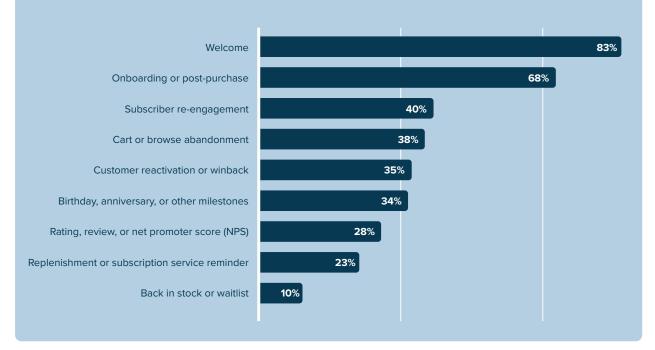
How automation is used in email marketing

Category	Percentage
Triggered emails	82%
Drip or nurture campaigns	67%
Segmentation	56%
A/B testing	45%
Reporting	32%
Email content	27%
List verification and hygiene	25%
Contact management	19%
Email development	12%
QA testing	7%

> "For smaller businesses that can't afford to spend a significant amount on email marketing, automations will become key to doing more with less. But even our big clients have scaled primarily due to the function that automations serve."
>
> **Tabish Bhimani**
> Founder and Principal Strategist, **Mastrat Digital**
> Follow Tabish on **LinkedIn**

Taking a closer look at emails that are automated, the most popular to automate are the welcome series, onboarding or post-purchase emails, and subscriber re-engagement.

Emails, journeys, or sequences that are automated

Category	Percentage
Welcome	83%
Onboarding or post-purchase	68%
Subscriber re-engagement	40%
Cart or browse abandonment	38%
Customer reactivation or winback	35%
Birthday, anniversary, or other milestones	34%
Rating, review, or net promoter score (NPS)	28%
Replenishment or subscription service reminder	23%
Back in stock or waitlist	10%

"Yes (or rather Yasss) to all of this! And while losing access to certain metrics might feel like a big deal, brands can get around that by focusing on mapping out their subscribers and customers' email journeys. This way, you're not thinking about which email to send based on when an email was last opened. You're thinking about which email to send based on where they are in their customer or subscriber journey."

Samar Owais
Email Conversion Strategist
Follow Samar on **Twitter**

"Building email programs through automation not only saves time for the email marketer but also creates opportunities for more conversions when we're not actively sending single-email broadcasts. For example, you can set up an automation campaign that offers personalized coupons to those who abandoned their shopping cart, or create an automated email that instantly goes to their Inbox when they request specific information from your website. All of this data can then be collected and automated to help you create unique customer profiles.
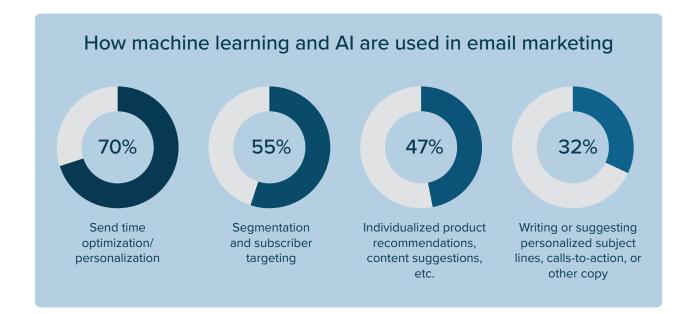
My bonus tip? Create personalization from the very beginning through an automated welcome series. Ask new subscribers what categories or topics they'd like to learn about. Create a personalized preference center for subscribers to choose which emails they'd like to receive. This not only helps your campaigns stand out in their Inbox but also helps reduce unsubscribes."

Ali Fuller, CPACC
Marketing Automation Manager, **Fiveable**
Follow Ali on **Twitter** and **LinkedIn**

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AI is important—but slower on adoption

When it comes to machine learning and AI, adoption is much lower. 33% of marketers use AI in marketing in general, and 39% plan to in the future.[10] However, our research shows only 14% using it specifically in email marketing today—and they mostly use it for send time optimization.

How machine learning and AI are used in email marketing

70%	55%	47%	32%
Send time optimization/ personalization	Segmentation and subscriber targeting	Individualized product recommendations, content suggestions, etc.	Writing or suggesting personalized subject lines, calls-to-action, or other copy

The **state of AI in marketing** still has a way to go with great potential to dramatically elevate your marketing program and help you:

- Identify potential customers more quickly and accurately.

- Deliver personalized content and product recommendations.

- Drive higher engagement with your brand through relevant moments that matter.

10 eConsultancy: Experience Index: 2020 Digital Trends

"As a marketing leader in an email martech company, I'm constantly thinking about new ways to create relevant moments of engagement with our prospects, customers, and partners. I'm not alone. Marketers listed automation, personalization, and customer profile data enrichment as their top three email marketing priorities in 2022.

What's interesting to me is that to deliver true, personalized, one-to-one engagements with customers, marketers must effectively address all three of these areas in an accurate, systematic, and scalable way. To deliver on this, in 2022, I expect to see more marketing organizations using AI and machine learning (ML) to quickly and easily analyze large amounts of disparate information to generate millions of personalized communications and offers—one for each customer."

Melissa Sargeant
Chief Marketing Officer, **Litmus**
Follow Melissa on **LinkedIn**

While the science behind AI is complicated, getting started doesn't have to be.

Roll out AI selectively by addressing tightly-defined and measurable use cases. Focus on enhancing existing programs where engagements are well understood, processes are defined, and outcomes benchmarked to fully monitor how the AI is working and driving value over traditional approaches. Programs such as dynamic email content and email subject-line optimization are great places to start your initiative.

SHIFT #3

Privacy measures are forcing marketers to rethink current strategies

While personalization drives results, and customers want it, we need their data to make it happen. That being said, privacy has been a hot topic recently with the impending **loss of third-party cookies** and now **Apple's Mail Privacy Protection** (MPP), which prevents marketers from seeing accurate data around email opens, devices, and geolocation from their Apple Mail audience.

In fact, marketers are more worried about MPP than losing third-party cookies.

Which do you think will affect your email program more? 👇

Loss of third-party cookies 🍪	37%
Apple's ✉️ Privacy Protection ✅	63%

204 votes

Source: Litmus poll on LinkedIn

"The tailwinds are behind email as we look toward 2022. Yes, we're losing open tracking on nearly half of email users from Apple's Mail Privacy Protection. And I do have concerns on what that will do to list hygiene practices and eventually deliverability, but this isn't totally tragic.

We will innovate and overcome the challenges that will inevitably come as a result of the loss of opens. I'm optimistic that we'll see more brands embracing privacy as a brand differentiator and putting privacy policies and data collection points in plain or even conversational language. I'm looking forward to seeing the creativity that is sure to come from brands that will explicitly ask their customers what they want from them.

Lastly, the advertising or acquisition end of the ecosystem is dealing with much bigger blows to their data with IDFA and third-party cookies going away. As a result, we'll likely see retention programs, largely driven by email, get their proper resourcing and budgets. It'll be much harder to acquire new audiences, so once a customer has been acquired, they'll be treated as the precious asset that email pros have always known them to be. Let's get the investment our channel deserves to truly drive lifetime value!"

April Mullen
Director of Brand and Content Marketing, **SparkPost**
Co-Founder and Board Member, **Women of Email**
Follow April on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**

The effects of Mail Privacy Protection

So what are marketers doing to address the changes brought by MPP? Tabish offers a perspective from his agency work:

"At first, we were concerned that the KPIs that we used to benchmark our performance will no longer be accurate. Our concern was really demonstrating ROI to clients. We're going back to the basics with MPP and recommitting to focusing our sending strategy on more than just opens. We won't get this right immediately, but we've been around the block with this one and know that ultimately, the business' KPIs and email KPIs need to align for any program to be successful. You have to honestly take a look at your email program and see if it's benefiting the business, not just saying, 'Open and click rates look good, so we're doing our job.'"

Tabish Bhimani
Founder and Principal Strategist, **Mastrat Digital**
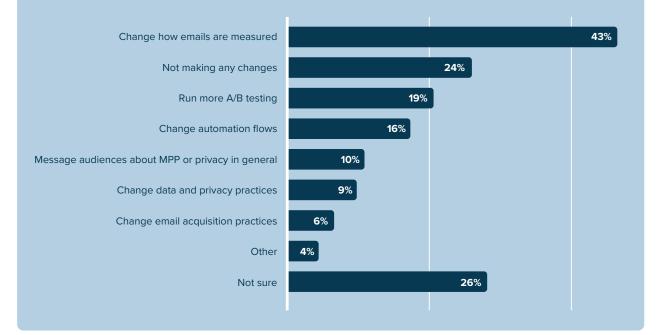Follow Tabish on **LinkedIn**

And he's not alone. About 43% of marketers are changing how they measure email performance—by far the most popular tactic for navigating the changes brought about from MPP.

43% of marketers are changing how they measure email performance because of Apple's Mail Privacy Protection.

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How Mail Privacy Protection affects email marketing programs

Change how emails are measured	43%
Not making any changes	24%
Run more A/B testing	19%
Change automation flows	16%
Message audiences about MPP or privacy in general	10%
Change data and privacy practices	9%
Change email acquisition practices	6%
Other	4%
Not sure	26%

"As the privacy landscape continues to change, brands must also change. It's time to look beyond staple email metrics like open rates and adapt other powerful KPIs to understand your customer behavior. Consider how you can maximize your email strategy to identify and connect with your best customers, using a foundation of actionable insights to see your customers' engagement across channels to activate behavior-driven personalization."

Kara Trivunovic
Managing Director, Messaging, Epsilon
Follow Kara on LinkedIn

"The email open rate has always been a 'noisy' metric, so it's great to see that brands are adjusting the way in which they measure success for an email campaign. This will mean more emphasis on collecting zero-party data and using first-party cookies to understand user intent and make communications more relevant."

Gavin Laugenie
Global Head of Content, **dotdigital**
Follow Gavin on **LinkedIn**

Unfortunately, the second most popular response to MPP is making no changes at all (24% of respondents). At least in the short term.

"The good news is that most email service providers will make platform changes that will minimize the impact of some aspects of Mail Privacy Protection, most notably by filtering out fake opens from Apple and adjusting send time optimization algorithms.

However, the majority of marketers will need to make changes on their end, such as adjusting their re-engagement strategies and progressive profiling strategies. Many brands will be playing catchup on implementing these changes in the first quarter of 2022 after the holidays."

Chad S. White
Head of Research, Oracle Marketing Consulting
Author of *Email Marketing Rules*

Get your step-by-step action plan

Want more details on MPP and how to thrive without opens? It's not too late to take action. Check out The Mail Privacy Protection Survival Guide for Marketers to learn what MPP is, its impact on email marketing, and steps you need to take to flourish.

Grab the guide

Email metrics aren't the only thing that's pivoting. A small but mighty few are doing everything they can to transform their email marketing program now and essentially "privacy proof" it. This way, they won't have to worry when other email clients or inbox providers follow Apple's lead.

"The thing with privacy is consent—something which has been traditionally missing in email, unfortunately. The 6% of brands that'll be focusing on changing email acquisition practices have got it right. Focus on getting your subscriber to voluntarily give their information to you. That could be done through quizzes or multi-step opt-in forms. Tools like Octane take away the creep factor of asking intrusive questions and make info-giving fun for the subscriber."

Samar Owais
Email Conversion Strategist
Follow Samar on **Twitter**

Even if you move away from open rates, open data is involved in many aspects of email marketing programs, such as monitoring email deliverability and disengagement. But it's encouraging to see a greater focus on **subscriber re-engagement campaigns** and retention in general, fueled by both MPP and rising acquisition costs due to the impending loss of third-party cookies. Although 41% currently send re-engagement emails, 25% don't—but plan to. It's the second most popular choice for future email plans, just barely behind **milestone emails** (another great retention tactic).

And the ongoing dance between gathering the data we need to personalize messages and making sure our audience wants us to have that data continues.

"Customer data is an asset. Marketers must manage it accordingly. No longer is it appropriate or acceptable to guess what information or offers the customer wants. In fact, it is destructive to the customer relationship. Consumers expect to be served, not sold. When companies make the commitment to understanding individual customer needs and interests, and using that insight to deliver content that is timely, relevant and useful, they not only sell more, they create a community of brand advocates who become some of the company's most effective marketers."

Guilda Hilaire
Director, Product Marketing, **Salesforce**
Follow Guilda on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**

Defining the four types of data

With all this talk about data and privacy, let's quickly go over the different types of data.

	Definition	Examples
Zero-party data	Individual-level data explicitly given to you directly from your audience	• Email preferences • Topic or product interests • Account preferences
First-party data	Individual-level data collected from your audience on your own channels	• Email engagement • Website activity • Purchase history
Second-party data	Individual-level data acquired from a trusted partner aka someone else's first-party data	• Co-marketing efforts • Customer reviews • Loyalty programs
Third-party data	Aggregate data collected from one or more sources	• Browsing activity (via cookies) • Demographics • Survey responses

The lower the data type, the closer you are to your audience but the narrower your reach. So, zero-party data is like talking directly with your customers. On the other hand, third-party data is like shouting into a stadium full of people. Your reach is greater, but you don't know exactly who you're talking to (and it can come off creepy since consent is not explicit).

Because of growing privacy concerns, you'll want to lean more heavily into your zero-party and first-party data.
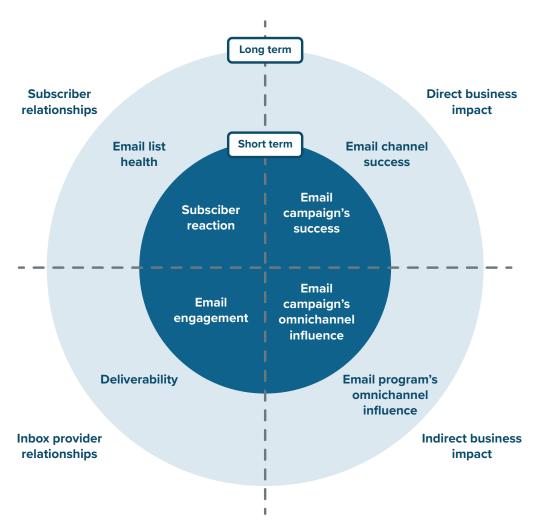
"Improving your use of first-party data is a great way to adapt your strategies to these new privacy measures. First-party data can be used to find valuable patterns in your subscribers' actions and improve your program's performance."

Dr. Ada Y. Barlatt
Founder and Data Scientist, **OperationsAlly**
Follow Ada on **LinkedIn**

An easy way to get started with zero-party data is to **create a preference center**—or optimize your existing one to make sure you're capturing the information you need to deliver an excellent subscriber experience.

litmus

When it comes to first-party data? There's a lot to consider beyond email opens to inform your email strategy and tactics, so be sure you're looking at holistic email metrics to see the whole picture. Not doing so can have you incorrectly analyzing emails—and send you down the wrong path.

Holistic email metrics matrix
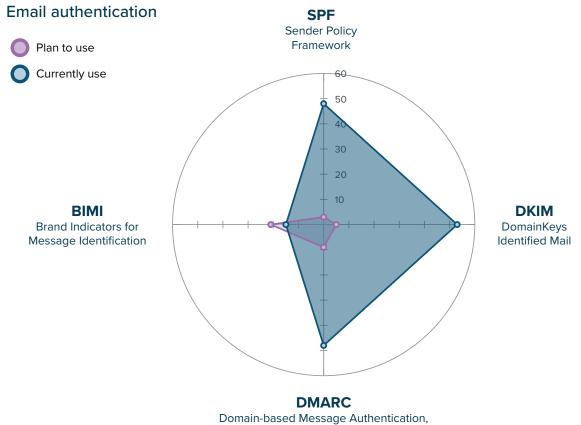

Establish trust with email authentication

Another way to gain your audience's trust is through email authentication. Basically, ways to prove you are who you say you are to help people and inbox providers recognize you and prevent email fraud and spoofing. About half of marketers use some form of email authentication today.

The newest kid on the authentication block is BIMI (Brand Indicators for Message Identification), which verifies brands by showing their logo next to their sender name in the inbox. BIMI has been shown to increase open rates by 21%, increase average purchase likelihood by 34%, increase brand recall by 18%, and increase confidence in email by 90%.[11]

11 Red Sift and Entrust: Consumer Interaction with Visual Brands in Email

Only 15% have implemented BIMI so far, but 21% plan to. And with the recent **Gmail + BIMI announcement**, we expect these numbers to go up drastically into the next year or two.

Email authentication

- ● Plan to use
- ● Currently use

SPF
Sender Policy
Framework

DKIM
DomainKeys
Identified Mail

DMARC
Domain-based Message Authentication,
Reporting & Conformance

BIMI
Brand Indicators for
Message Identification

"We've implemented BIMI for our clients even before BIMI was trending. We always knew a Verified Mark Certificate would eventually be required, but we set up BIMI because it helps with deliverability. As an aside, our email marketing agency first sets up the sending infrastructure before sending any emails. This is a best-in-class practice we've implemented that has helped us grow smaller and medium sized accounts properly because they haven't always followed best sending practices."

Tabish Bhimani
Founder and Principal Strategist, **Mastrat Digital**
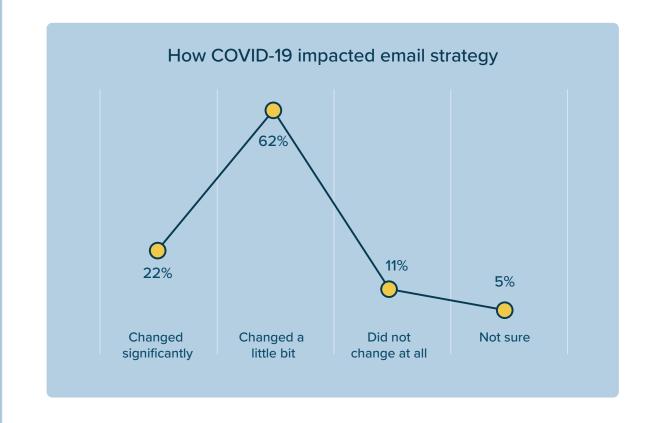Follow Tabish on **LinkedIn**

Want to set up BIMI for your company's emails?

Check out our blog post: **How to Set Up BIMI for Brand Recognition in the Inbox**

SHIFT #4

Brands are looking to agile marketing to meet their growing email demand
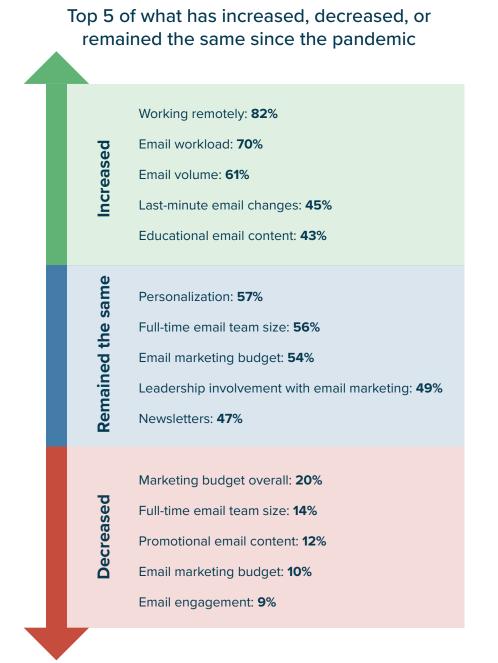
It's been over a year since the COVID-19 pandemic began. How have brands had to pivot since then? 84% have had to change their email marketing strategy at least a little bit—whether for better or worse. 11% have so far made it through unchanged.

How COVID-19 impacted email strategy

Changed significantly	Changed a little bit	Did not change at all	Not sure
22%	62%	11%	5%

Email workload is going way up

Diving deeper into comparing before the pandemic to now, email teams and budgets have mostly stayed the same while the workload has increased.

Top 5 of what has increased, decreased, or remained the same since the pandemic

Increased

Working remotely: **82%**

Email workload: **70%**

Email volume: **61%**

Last-minute email changes: **45%**

Educational email content: **43%**

Remained the same

Personalization: **57%**

Full-time email team size: **56%**

Email marketing budget: **54%**

Leadership involvement with email marketing: **49%**

Newsletters: **47%**

Decreased

Marketing budget overall: **20%**

Full-time email team size: **14%**

Promotional email content: **12%**

Email marketing budget: **10%**

Email engagement: **9%**

Before the pandemic vs. now: 70% of brands have increased email marketing workload but budgets haven't changed (yet).

Tweet this →

That may feel glum, but it's a hot market for email marketing right now—a sign that brands recognize the value of the email channel and want to invest in it to keep up with their growing needs (as evidenced in Shift #1).
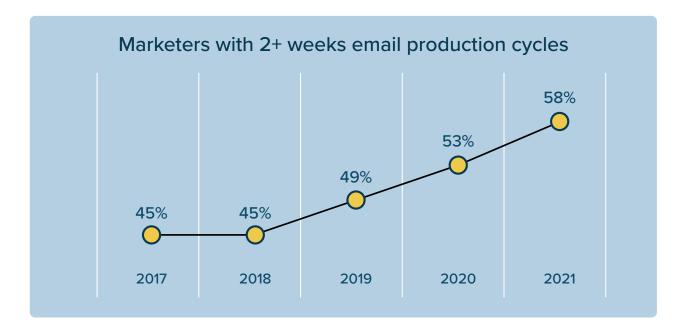
"Ouch. Email talent was already stretched thin before, and email pros showed themselves to be real team players during the unforeseen events of 2020. But if brands want to continue the trend of leaning heavily into the email channel, resource allocation needs to follow suit. The demand for email expertise (as well as competitive compensation) is at an all-time high, and pros who are frustrated by increased demands without adequate support will be tempted to go elsewhere."

Jen Capstraw
President & Co-Founder, **Women of Email**
Follow Jen on **LinkedIn**, **Twitter**, and **Instagram**

Solving for longer lead times

Unfortunately, production cycles or turnaround time is getting longer while volume is increasing. The number of marketers spending 2 weeks or more on a single email has gone up by more than 28% since 2017.

Marketers with 2+ weeks email production cycles

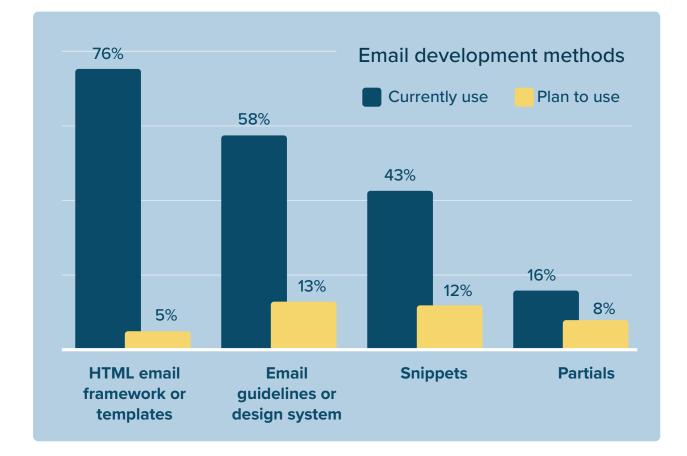| 2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
45%	45%	49%	53%	58%

So while companies are hiring more, they're also looking for more agile ways to work.

"With email production cycles getting longer and so many emails in flight on any given day, marketers must be agile in how they work. Think about collaboration, goal alignment, and change management with the cross-functional teams they work with."

Bruce Swann

Principal Product Marketing Manager, Customer Journey Management, **Adobe**

Follow Bruce on **LinkedIn**

Email workflows are being streamlined through the use of modular design systems and reusable components such as snippets and partials. Email snippets and partials give brands the most flexibility and creativity when it comes to building emails while still maintaining brand integrity. 43% use them today but another 12% plan to, and we expect adoption to continue to go up.

Email development methods

- Currently use
- Plan to use

Method	Currently use	Plan to use
HTML email framework or templates	76%	5%
Email guidelines or design system	58%	13%
Snippets	43%	12%
Partials	16%	8%

Let's get modular

Speed up and add flexibility to your workflow with modular emails.

Whip your emails into tip-top shape—with these helpful resources:

[10-minute Emails: How I Save Time On Development](#)

[6 Steps to a Powerful Email Design System Your Team Will Love](#)

[Email Modules: How to Actually Scale Unique Emails with Confidence](#)

[Ultimate Guide to Email Templates](#)

[The Ultimate Guide to Using Snippets in Email Design](#)

[Create and Manage Dynamic Code Blocks Easily with Email Partials](#)

[Examples of Partials and Snippets to Steal](#)

"Many of our clients have turned to modular email architecture to reduce their email production times. On average, our clients have been able to reduce email production times by 25% to 40% by switching to a modular build system from a traditional template-based system.
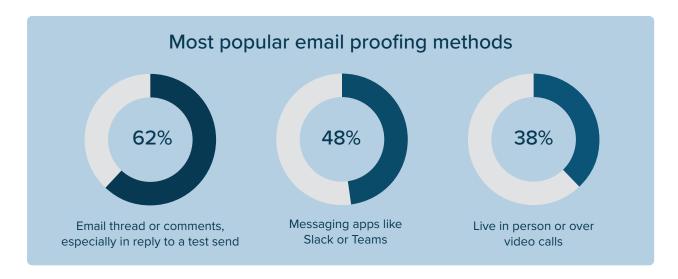
In the current environment—where business disruptions seem routine, consumer attitudes are evolving quickly, and marketing teams are lean—this extra nimbleness is an incredibly valuable asset."

Chad S. White
Head of Research, **Oracle Marketing Consulting**
Author of *Email Marketing Rules*

But no matter how fast an email is built, the feedback process is overburdened and slowing things down. As cumbersome as email threads can be, it's still the most popular with 62% of marketers going that route for reviewing and approving emails. Fortunately, that's 10% less than last year. Perhaps we can attribute that to the rise of remote work and asynchronous communication—and the tools that support them.

Most popular email proofing methods

62%
Email thread or comments, especially in reply to a test send

48%
Messaging apps like Slack or Teams

38%
Live in person or over video calls

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"We always talk about eliminating silos, whether it be data silos, technical silos, or team silos. But instead of focusing on removing silos, email marketers should focus on eliminating the problems they cause, like bottlenecks associated with stalled approval processes, inefficient production cycles, and misalignment on objectives."

Bruce Swann
Principal Product Marketing Manager, Customer Journey Management, **Adobe**
Follow Bruce on **LinkedIn**

"Increased demands on email marketing combined with flat budgets and email team resources opens the door for agile marketing to help organizations adapt to changing priorities, improve productivity, and accelerate delivery of campaigns and programs. Optimizing campaign delivery is critical for every modern marketing organization, especially in bringing email campaigns to life.

In fact, the majority of marketers shared this sentiment with us in our annual State of Email survey. 76% are using frameworks or templates and 58% are using email guidelines or design systems to find more agile ways to work. While design systems, snippets, and partials accelerate email production, the feedback and proofing process continues to hamstring the workflow, potentially nullifying the gains achieved in email design and development.

That's why the time is right for the industry to transform and make agile marketing practices the new normal in email marketing."

Melissa Sargeant
Chief Marketing Officer, **Litmus**
Follow Melissa on **LinkedIn**

Easily achieve agile email marketing

Speed up your email workflow—without sacrificing quality. Learn how with agile email marketing. Discover the micro-efficiencies so easy to adopt, even your most stubborn stakeholders can't resist.

Go agile

SHIFT #5

Marketing must embrace the state of the world—brand purpose matters

On top of the pandemic, we've also experienced social and economic strife, bringing the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) to the forefront. In a world that is deeply suffering, empathy is more important than ever.

"Consumers expect brands to take a stance on issues affecting society. Anyone in your email database has given you their valuable data. A value exchange of trust has taken place. As a result, these consumers expect transparency on the stance of brands they're closest to. It's no longer acceptable to stay quiet and neutral. This means email teams are going to be tasked with leaning into the hard conversations inside their companies to convey the right message externally."

April Mullen
Director of Brand and Content Marketing, **SparkPost**
Co-Founder and Board Member, **Women of Email**
Follow April on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**

62% of marketers at least sometimes change the tone of an email in reaction to what's happening around the world.
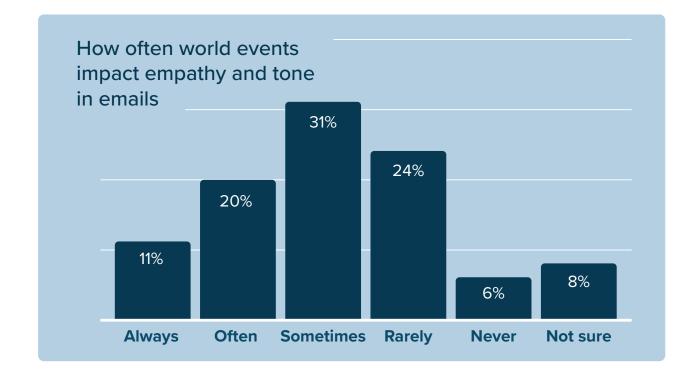
"Understanding the needs of our audience is paramount. It's no longer viable to just sell to individuals. Brands need to consider their feelings and stance on worldly matters. Building trust through displaying your brand's position on environmental and ethical affairs and being a more responsible marketer is how you differentiate yourself from the competition and gain a competitive advantage.

But a word of warning, your customers can see through a veil of lies, so it's important not just to appear more responsible, but to walk the walk, too."
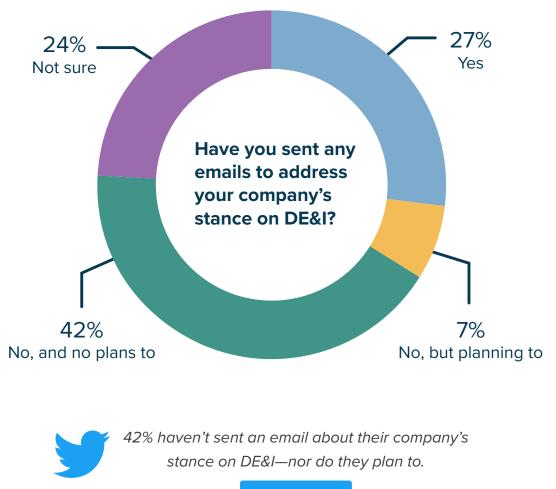
Gavin Laugenie
Global Head of Content, **dotdigital**
Follow Gavin on **LinkedIn**

How often world events impact empathy and tone in emails

Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not sure
11%	20%	31%	24%	6%	8%

Marketers are cautious of DE&I messaging

But when it comes to addressing DE&I head on, 42% haven't sent an email about their company's stance on DE&I—nor do they plan to. That's more than the marketers who already have or will (34%). And it's a sensitive issue that many can and have gotten wrong, which explains why 24% just aren't sure.

Have you sent any emails to address your company's stance on DE&I?

- 27% Yes
- 7% No, but planning to
- 42% No, and no plans to
- 24% Not sure

42% haven't sent an email about their company's stance on DE&I—nor do they plan to.

Tweet this →

"Bo Burnham poked fun at woke marketing on his Netflix special, 'Inside,' earlier this year. But the objective behind today's DEI-centric messaging is actually nothing new: It aims to build a sense of solidarity with audiences and elicit an emotional connection. That's a strategy marketers have been harnessing for decades, most notably, the iconic Coca-Cola Company's 'Buy the World a Coke' campaign in 1971, which offered a message of tolerance and hope during a conflict-plagued moment in time.

History is simply repeating itself.

Many brands consider DEI messaging risky. And it is! Right or wrong, some audiences find it offensive or inappropriate. Even champions of DEI may accuse a brand of virtue signaling when they join this trend. It's easy to get wrong. But intentionally skirting the topic could have repercussions as well in this moment of hyper-awareness."

Jen Capstraw
President & Co-Founder, **Women of Email**
Follow Jen on **LinkedIn**, **Twitter**, and **Instagram**

Address DE&I with great care

Both the risk and reward of DE&I messaging are great. So what should you do? Experts weigh in.

"Brands that don't enter the conversations their customers are having or aren't empathetic about the issues their customers are facing lose more than just an opportunity to build brand loyalty. Consumers are smart. They can smell lip service from an email's subject line.

So before hitting send on a DE&I email, brands need to come up with a company-wide policy on how to handle the issues affecting their customers. If you don't have a plan, strategy, or process, they'll end up sending an 'In these unprecedented times' email—and we all know how those are perceived."

Samar Owais
Email Conversion Strategist
Follow Samar on **Twitter**

"Ecommerce businesses that have virtually started and grown into large organizations overnight have never thought about DE&I simply because they haven't had to, or weren't expecting to. They've never had to contend with finding their voice in the conversation.

Some also are scared of alienating their subscriber base by openly expressing support for specific movements such as Black Lives Matter or International Women's Day. They ultimately support both these movements—and more—but don't know how to tread through this.

If I lean on my public relations training, I can say that it is up to email marketers to do their part on getting buy-in from the C-suite to:
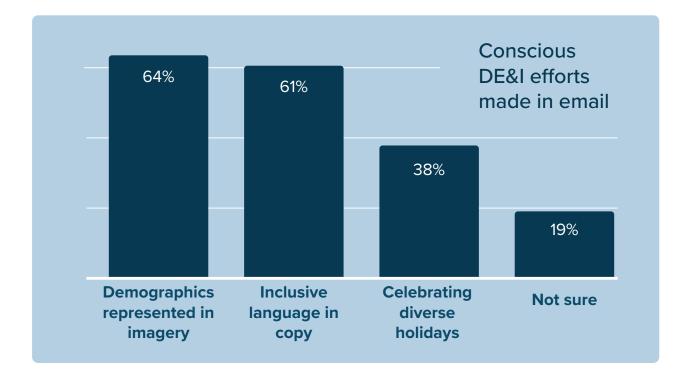
- Focus some time thinking about company values.

- Articulate them internally.

- Then share them with customers.

Ultimately, when making decisions, values are really all we have to fall back on. Even if that's falling back on the bottom line as the key decision driver, that itself falls back on fundamental values."

Tabish Bhimani
Founder and Principal Strategist, **Mastrat Digital**
Follow Tabish on **LinkedIn**

Even if brands choose to explicitly say nothing about DE&I, many are at least making more conscious efforts to make their emails more diverse and inclusive through imagery, language, and content. Seeing as this requires a more ongoing effort, it could be seen as more genuine (walking the talk), and that might be enough to appeal to and attract some subscribers.

Conscious DE&I efforts made in email

Demographics represented in imagery	Inclusive language in copy	Celebrating diverse holidays	Not sure
64%	61%	38%	19%

"The latest US Census data confirmed what we already knew—that we live in a country that's increasingly diverse and less monolithic. Young people are at the forefront of driving these changes, rejecting brands that don't accurately portray the diversity of their world and don't support the social values that are important to them.

In response, many brands are leaning into using less gendered language, being more inclusive with their photography choices, and participating in cultural conversations."

Chad S. White
Head of Research, Oracle Marketing Consulting
Author of *Email Marketing Rules*

83% of millennials say it's important that companies they buy from also align with their values, and 73% of 35-54 year olds and 60% of 55+ year olds agree.[12] It's becoming more and more clear that brands have to recognize the world we're living in and be a constant ally, not a performative one.

12 5W Public Relations: 2020 Consumer Culture Report

Emails for everyone

Create emails with diversity, inclusion, equity, and empathy in mind. Learn how—with these helpful resources:

Why Empathy Wins in Email Marketing

5 Examples of Great Email Communication During COVID-19

The Importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Marketing

Delivering Episode 29: Kevin Tyler on Inclusion in Marketing

What it Takes to Create More Inclusive Email Marketing Experiences

Trending in Email Design: Representation

The Dos and Don'ts of Season's Greetings Emails (+ 17 Examples)

The Ultimate Guide to Email Accessibility

Now what?

With the wild years we've experienced and the growing uncertainty of the future, it's no surprise that:

- Email marketing has become essential to business.

- Personalization and automation are must-haves to thrive.

- Privacy measures are shaking things up—in a good way.

- Brands are going agile to meet increased email demand.

- Marketing must embrace the state of the world.

"COVID-19 made the inbox an even more competitive space, and companies that aren't using email to create great experiences will lose out. Segmentation and personalization must become the standard in your email marketing. Privacy controls will force changes, but marketers will adjust. It's a great time to work in email marketing."

Hillel Berg
CEO, Hillel Berg Email Marketing
Follow Hillel on LinkedIn

To keep your email marketing program sharp, let's recap the top takeaways for moving forward:

- Increase your email marketing investment to prevent burnout and drive more powerful results alongside other marketing channels.

- Make a great first impression by optimizing your newsletters, welcome series, and onboarding flows.

- Create an accurate ROI calculation using accurate email marketing costs. Tie those to conversion tracking using sales and revenue driven by email.

- Pursue more zero-party and first-party data such as email preferences and behavioral activity to aid in personalizing emails beyond first name and measuring email performance—even as privacy measures continue to gain ground.

- Don't be afraid to A/B test big changes like images vs. no images. You're likely to see more impactful results than minor differences like a single word change.

- Scale your email efforts with automation, AI, and agile marketing to get more done, faster. For example, switch to modular email design to quickly produce flexible, on-brand, and error-free emails.

- Humanize your brand by empathizing with your audience and what's affecting their lives, aligning your company values with theirs, and creating more inclusive experiences.

Keep the trends revealed in this report in mind as you develop your email marketing strategy for the rest of this year and beyond. Check out Litmus for quick and painless **email building**, pre-send **email testing**, and post-send **email analytics** to ensure your emails perform.

Stay ahead of email trends

Share this report with others on your email and marketing teams, and sign up for our emails to stay on top of what's happening in email today… and predictions for tomorrow.

Keep your know-how fresh