

Contact engagement - The new deliverability gem

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Have you ever wondered why your emails are no longer getting to the inbox, despite all your best practice efforts? You've employed the best designer, your email has a well-balanced HTML to text ratio, you've made sure to get rid of spam-connotative and abusive words, you've employed the right authentication tools and your template colour scheme is as neutral and clear as possible.

Have a look at what the ISPs consider before allowing your mail to reach the inbox:

- IP or domain reputation
- Message content
- Authentication tools (SPF, DKIM, Domain keys)

This is the traditional check list to get to the inbox, which I am sure we have all mastered. However, the new kid on the delivery block and ranking high up on the check list is, *contact engagement*. It has now become important to know how engaged your contacts and lists are. This means having reporting tools that let you know how many of your contacts are opening, reading and clicking through links on your emails, are essential!

Why is contact engagement suddenly so important?

ISPs have changed the way they filter emails and have started making significant investments in research, in-house spam filters and third party software. This has been done to help measure engagement and better determine appropriate folder placement.



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ISPs have also introduced what we call, 'engagement' or 'user feedback' filtering. This means, the way your contacts interact with you, will determine whether your mail will be sent to the inbox or the junk folder, in which case you better be popular with your contacts otherwise you'll walk straight into a brick wall.

Factors considered include: what messages are being opened, what messages are being moved between folders and how quickly emails are being deleted.

Who has changed?

Gmail: Has new tabs that categorise emails according to user engagement. This is why most of the bulk senders land up in the promotions tabs and most of the emails you engage with, make it to the priority tabs section.

Yahoo: Employs feedback loops which lets users click a "this is spam" button if they don't like your email. The more your contacts click on this, the more resistant Yahoo will be to deliver your mail to the inbox.

Spamcop: A premier service for reporting spam has recently turned on new spam traps in an effort to catch spammers with non-engaged databases. We call these traps, Pristine, which are email addresses that have been fabricated by ISPs and placed in impossible places where only spammers can find them.

What's the solution?

1. **Engagement reporting tools** - Use an Email Service Provider (ESP) that's on top of its reporting game. Now, more than ever, you need to know how the engagement of your list is looking. What percentages of your contacts are

reading and clicking through your emails, who your top contacts are and who the dead weights are.

2. **Clean your lists regularly** - There is really no use in having a million contacts in a list when only 10% of them are engaging with your mails. The only thing you're doing is killing your chances of getting to the inbox for the few that want to read your mails.
3. **Send relevant emails** - Make sure that you stay relevant to the contacts that are already engaging with you. A survey done by [Everlytic](#) proved that [74.28%](#) of the South African population would subscribe to a mailer if it was relevant to them.
4. **Moving Gmail tabs** - To appear on the Gmail primary tab and avoid being forgotten in the promotions tab, you need to manually ask your Gmail contacts to move your emails. After moving your emails, they will be asked if this is a permanent decision. If their answer is yes, you'll always appear on the priority tab.
5. **Optimise emails for mobile readers** - A recent research study by Everlytic shows that [52% of email users](#) open their mail on the go. If your emails do not render perfectly on a cellphone you are losing the chance of someone opening it and interacting with your message. Make use of responsive design.

Technology is the game of change and staying on top of that game might require the odd tweak to your strategy.

In this case, it would mean taking the focus of getting your mail to the inbox one step further and making sure your contacts engage with your mail.

ABOUT LINDANI TSHABANGU

In a world where legitimate email senders are mistaken as spammers sneaking their way into the inbox, some describe Lindani Tshabangu as the "lawyer of the accused". Lindani is Everlytic's Reputation Manager and her zero spam tolerance translates really well into her personality. "I'm pretty straight laced, no-nonsense kinda gal. Admittedly, I'm a recovering shop-aholic, but I blame that habit on my rep as a social butterfly," says Tshabangu.

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