



THE 2015

NONPROFIT EMAIL

DELIVERABILITY STUDY

HOW MUCH DOES SPAM HURT ONLINE FUNDRAISING?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With more than a dozen years managing and consulting for some of the largest issue advocacy organizations in the country, **Brett Schenker** is regarded as one of the industry's leading experts on email and deliverability. Schenker has worked on everything from advising associations, nonprofits, and multi-million dollar corporations on technology solutions and email strategy. He has been a featured speaker at NTEN's Nonprofit Technology Conference, RootsCamp, and FUSEcon.

Schenker is the Email Deliverability Specialist at EveryAction, where he educates national nonprofits, associations, and labor unions on email best practices and future trends. Further, supports organizations with reputation management, mitigating email blocks, and preventing other deliverability issues. He has helped countless organizations raise more money online by implementing his strategies for email deliverability.

Schenker's past experience also includes work as Email Deliverability Specialist for Salsa Labs and Internet Director and Database Administrator for national and statewide campaigns, including Presidential campaigns.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Email is the cornerstone of many nonprofits' online fundraising programs.

Nonprofit marketers have never had more powerful tools than they do today and email fundraising accounts for about a third of online fundraising revenue¹.

However, most nonprofits' email programs raise substantially less than they could due to an often overlooked metric: the percentage of email that actually makes it to recipients' inboxes.

We call this email deliverability.

Nonprofit marketers and communications professionals often report on email list size, open rates, click rates, pageviews, and money raised through email channels. Deliverability affects each one of these metrics substantially.



Email deliverability is a metric for the rate of success you have at getting your messages into people's inboxes. It's affected by a lot of factors, with spam and spam-related things generally being the primary ones.

For the 2015 Nonprofit Email Deliverability Study, we analyzed 55 leading national nonprofit organizations with email lists of 100,000 or more. We selected nonprofits using a variety of ESPs (email service providers) so that the results would be applicable to the nonprofit community at-large.

Our research revealed that email deliverability is a huge problem across the nonprofit community.

1 in 8 nonprofit emails never reach an inbox.

The percent of email never making it to inboxes is almost as high as the percent of emails opened. That is a frightening state of affairs for email deliverability.

EveryAction has special tools and a dedicated team focused on tracking inbox delivery trends and best practices. We've worked with national nonprofits to significantly increase their deliverability, creating substantial gains in email fundraising. In this report, we will share common causes of poor deliverability, the findings from our study, and a few easy ways you can improve your email program.



OF ALL THE EMAILS SENT BY NONPROFITS IN 2014,

12.29%

WERE **DELIVERED TO SPAM FOLDERS**



A NONPROFIT LOSES, ON AVERAGE,

\$14,795

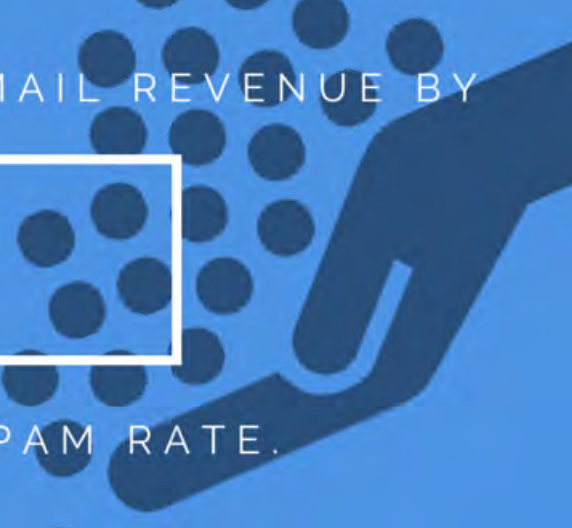
EACH YEAR BECAUSE OF **SPAM**



EACH YEAR, A NONPROFIT LOSES

\$1,204

FOR **EVERY PERCENTAGE** OF ITS EMAIL
THAT GOES TO SPAM



NONPROFITS COULD INCREASE EMAIL REVENUE BY

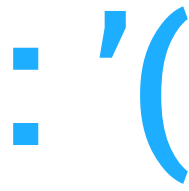
14%

IF THEY REDUCED THEIR SPAM RATE.

WHY WOULD YOUR MESSAGES BE SENT TO SPAM?

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) determine whether or not your email is delivered based on the reputation of the IP address from which your email is sent. If an ISP notices that emails you send are marked as spam, junk, deleted immediately without being read, never opened, or not engaged with in general, they may begin routing your email to spam folders, or worse, completely blocking you as a sender.

Once your IP address has been flagged by an ISP as a bad sender, it can take months or even years to recover.





COMMON CAUSES OF A HIGH SPAM RATE

- 1 Not including a single-click unsubscribe link.**

If you make your unsubscribe process difficult, you're running the risk of a user simply marking your message as spam instead, which is far more harmful to your email deliverability than unsubscribing. Always include a single-click unsubscribe link in all your emails.
- 2 Using an out-of-date email list.**

People change their email addresses fairly regularly. If your email has never been opened by an email address, or you haven't received a response from an email in 6 months, it's likely outdated and should be removed from your regular send list.
- 3 Sending irrelevant email.**

If you are sending the same email to your entire email list, you're likely not providing relevant content to everyone. Segment your list, use dynamic content, and merge tags to make your emails more personal. If you've sent over 3 unopened emails to the same email address, either they aren't interested in what you have to say, or they've changed their email address.

HOW MUCH --- DOES SPAM COST?



WHAT'S TO GAIN FROM IMPROVING EMAIL DELIVERABILITY?

14.01% in email fundraising revenue.

That's the potential increase in email fundraising revenue for a nonprofit sending 24 fundraising asks a year with a 100,000 person email list. On average, a nonprofit loses \$14,795.19 each year due to spam (See Figure 3). While much of the email marketing conversation revolves around list sizes, open rates, and clicks, the amount and impact of messages not delivered or delivered to the spam box is largely overlooked. .

In a study of 55 organizations, EveryAction found that, on average, 12.29% of email was delivered to spam folders monthly during 2014. June saw the highest spam rate (14.82%) and November, the lowest (8.03%). There was a massive range in spam rates among the 55 organizations. One saw a staggering 65.13% of its tracked email going to spam while another saw just 0.49%. These were nationally recognized nonprofits with substantial email programs.



SPAM, OPENS & SENDS BY MONTH

FIGURE 1.

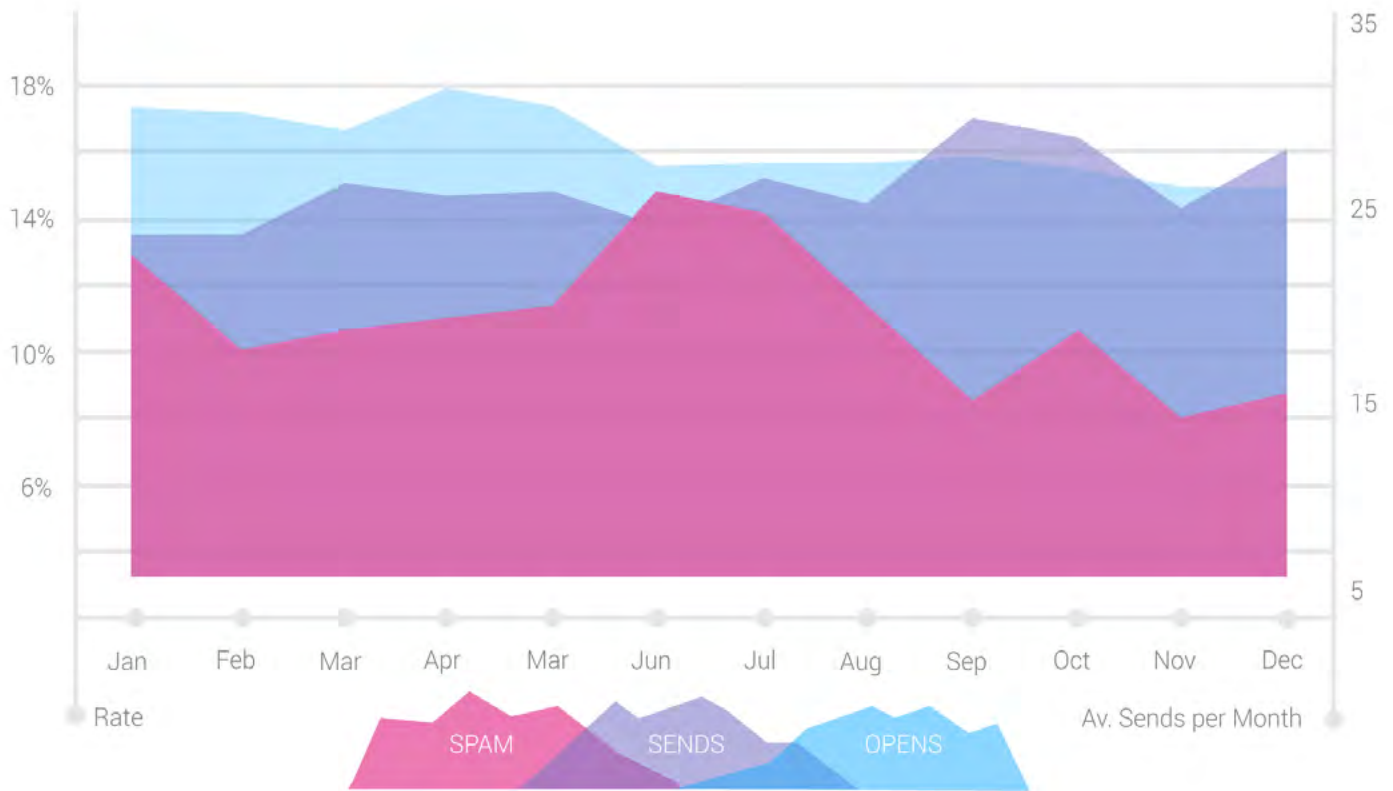


Figure 1 shows how the average spam rate of 12.29% is distributed over the course of a year, month by month. The average number of email blasts sent per month for each nonprofit is included on the right x axis, along with open rates and spam rates on the left.

According to our benchmark email giving data ², every percentage point of email going to spam results in a loss of \$1,203.84 annually, as the impact of spam makes itself felt in every metric from open rates to page completions. Every undelivered email is a lost opportunity for supporters to take action, raise their voices, volunteer their time, and donate to your cause.

1% = \$1,203.84
 SPAM = LOST PER YEAR

THE DATA

To determine how much money nonprofits lose annually from email fundraising asks going to spam, we began with the scenario of a nonprofit with 100,000 person email list sending two fundraising email asks per month. From our interviews and qualitative analysis, this seemed like reasonable starting point.

We then used the benchmark open rate, click rate, page completion rate, and average one-time email donation amount from M+R's Nonprofit Benchmarks Study³ to calculate the expected revenue from a year's worth of email fundraising.

The spam rate affects the amount of emails that actually make it to the inbox, which then subsequently affects the total money raised. The chart below illustrates three scenarios for email lists of 100,000 people sending 24 fundraising messages annually: 0% spam rate (or 100% inbox deliverability), 1% spam rate, and the average 12.29% spam rate.

Some organizations may have a smaller list, send more fundraising asks, or have different opens, clicks, page completions, or average email donation amount from the chosen benchmarks. However, the figures below demonstrate that spam has a direct relationship to total money raised from email fundraising.

FIGURE 2.

	0% SPAM	1% SPAM	12.29% SPAM
INBOX	2,400,000	2,376,000	2,105,040
OPEN RATE (16.35%)	392,000	388,476	344,174
CLICK RATE (0.4%)	9,600	9,504	8,420
PAGE COMPLETION (22%)	2,112	2,091	1,852
TOTAL RAISED (AV. DONATION \$57)	\$120,384.00	\$119,180.16	\$105,588.81

FIGURE 3.

WHAT DOES SPAM DO TO YOUR EMAIL FUNDRAISING?

A STORY OF

2.4 MILLION EMAILS SENT

PERFECT DELIVERABILITY

SPAM RATE: **0%**

0

EMAILS
IN SPAM

OPEN RATE

16.4%

2.4 MILLION ARRIVE IN INBOX

CLICK RATE

2.4%

392,400 ARE OPENED:

PAGE COMPLETION RATE

22.0%

9,600 LINKS ARE CLICKED:

\$57

PER EMAIL

2,112 PAGES
ARE COMPLETED



\$120,384
IS RAISED!!

FIGURE 3. CONT.

AVERAGE DELIVERABILITY

SPAM RATE: **12.3%**

294,960
EMAILS
IN SPAM

OPEN RATE



CLICK RATE



PAGE COMPLETION RATE



\$57
PER EMAIL



\$105,589
IS RAISED

A DIFFERENCE OF
\$14,796

According to a Case Foundation report ⁴, an estimated \$45.7 million was raised offline and online on #GivingTuesday in 2014, growing donations from the previous year by 63%. That's in contrast to U.S. Black Friday sales which dropped 11.3% and Cyber Monday sales increased a less than expected 8% ⁵.

In 2014, for the 55 organizations studied, #GivingTuesday saw an average of 11.63% of fundraising messages go to spam. That's slightly better than the average of 12.29%, despite the fact that nonprofits are sending more than double the volume of emails - an average of 2.29 each, as opposed to less than 1 for a normal day.

#GIVINGTUESDAY saw an average of 11.63% of fundraising messages go to spam.



While there was a smaller amount of email going to spam on #GivingTuesday, the sheer volume of those emails still represent a huge amount of dollars lost. And of course for nonprofits, every dollar counts.

Using our research and benchmark ⁶ figures, we found that a nonprofit with a list of 100,000, the average spam rate of 12.29%, and sending the average of 2.29 emails loses \$1,413 on #GivingTuesday to spam.

What does this mean for your organization? #GivingTuesday remains a key date in your fundraising calendar. Organizations that send a significant amount of email around #GivingTuesday or have a higher donation per email amount for that campaign could be losing even more money than they realize from spam rates.

A glowing lightbulb hanging from a ceiling, symbolizing an idea or innovation. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white bokeh.

WHAT CAN ORGANIZATIONS DO

TO IMPROVE THEIR DELIVERABILITY?

1 Opt-in and confirm:

Not only should you be explicitly asking individuals if they'd like to opt into your email list, you should also send a follow up email to confirm their address is correct. People mistype addresses. Sometimes they feel forced to provide an address. By opting-in addresses and confirming them, you ensure the person on the other end absolutely wants to hear from you.

2 Ramp up your messaging with a “welcome series”:

A welcome series is a great indication of what you can expect from your subscribers in the future. A study by ReturnPath says that “People who read all three messages read 69% of the brands’ email going forward; people who read none continued to ignore the brand’s messages, reading only 5%.⁷”

3 Focus beyond opens and clicks:

Email senders have only a few metrics to go by when it comes to measure how successful email campaigns are: the opens, clicks, and conversions. Email service providers look beyond these metrics and measure activity to the individual. Every organization should be focusing more on how individuals react, testing engagement with subject lines and content, and looking at how various segments perform.

4 Focus on who isn't getting the message:

Explore why bounces are occurring, and what you can do to remediate them. If bounces happen more than 2 or 3 times, remove the email addresses in question. Repeated bounces can cause alarm bells to ring with email service providers.

5 Focus on inactives:

Inactive email addresses are individuals who have not opened or clicked an email in more than 1 month. Individuals who drop off in interaction, or don't interact at all, should be messaged differently with a focus on getting them to re-engage. If they continue to be inactive for more than a year, then it's time to remove them from your list. ISPs can turn dead email addresses into spam traps, marking all emails to that address as spam and seriously hurting your sender reputation.

6 Work with your provider:

Your provider can give you information about your email deliverability, sender reputation, and more that isn't always accessible from your end. At EveryAction, we like to address any email deliverability issues before they get out of hand - in the case of email, an ounce of prevention is worth a couple of tonnes of cure. A good provider should work with you to monitor key deliverability metrics like SenderScore, as well as acting quickly to fix problems like blocks and blacklisting before they get out of hand.

Spam might seem like a hard metric to influence - but it's critical. A couple of simple tweaks can improve deliverability, and unlock huge benefits.



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