

2019 EMAIL DELIVERABILITY BENCHMARKS STUDY

 everyaction



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRETT SCHENKER



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 to technology solutions and email strategy. He has been a featured speaker and panelist at NTEN's Nonprofit Technology Conference and other industry events. Schenker is the Email

Deliverability Specialist at EverAction, where he educates national nonprofits, associations, and labor unions on email best practices and future trends. He also supports organizations with reputation management, mitigating email blocks, and preventing other deliverability issues. His past experience includes over seven years of work dedicated to nonprofit email deliverability and serving as Internet Director and Database Administrator for national and statewide campaigns, including presidential campaigns.

ABOUT EVERYACTION

EveryAction is a unified platform offering best-in-class fundraising, engagement, and advocacy tools for nonprofits. Unlike other CRM providers, we've built specific tools and employ a dedicated team to work with clients on applying the latest inbox delivery trends and best practices to their email fundraising programs. National nonprofits like Greenpeace, Audubon, the Union of Concerned Scientists, NextGen America, and Everytown for Gun Safety use EveryAction to improve their deliverability and create substantial gains in their email fundraising.



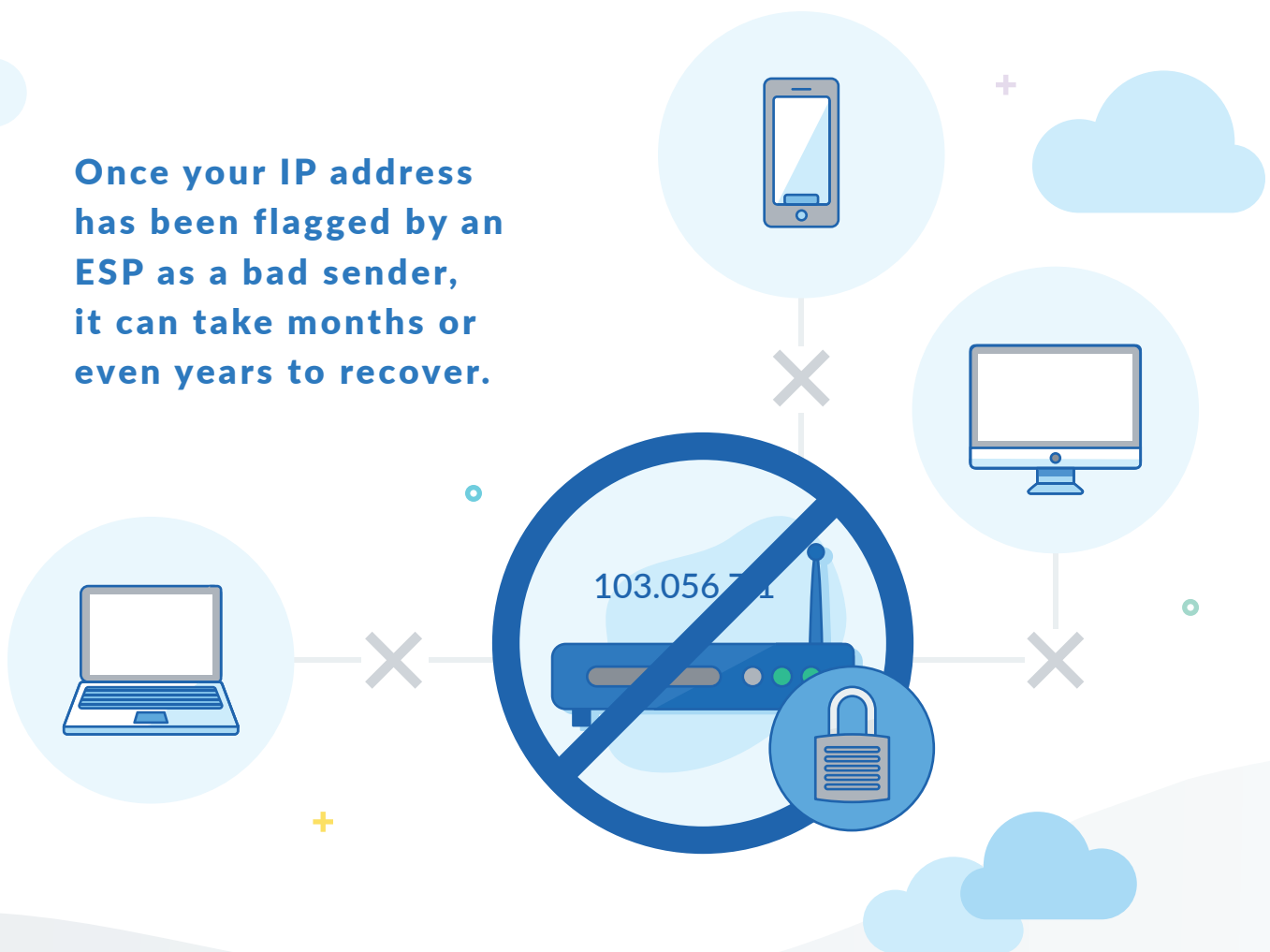
Introduction:

WHAT ARE SPAM AND DELIVERABILITY RATES

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.

Email Service Providers (ESPs) determine whether or not your emails will be delivered based on hundreds of different metrics that are constantly changing. If an ESP notices that emails you send are often marked as spam, 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. Recently, ESPs have placed an increased emphasis on authentication and security, but the fundamentals like relevant content, opt-in, and list management still hold true.

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





*“On our old database our open rate was 18% but on **EveryAction** our average across all the emails we've sent so far is at 32%. It's incredible!”*

- FEEDING WISCONSIN

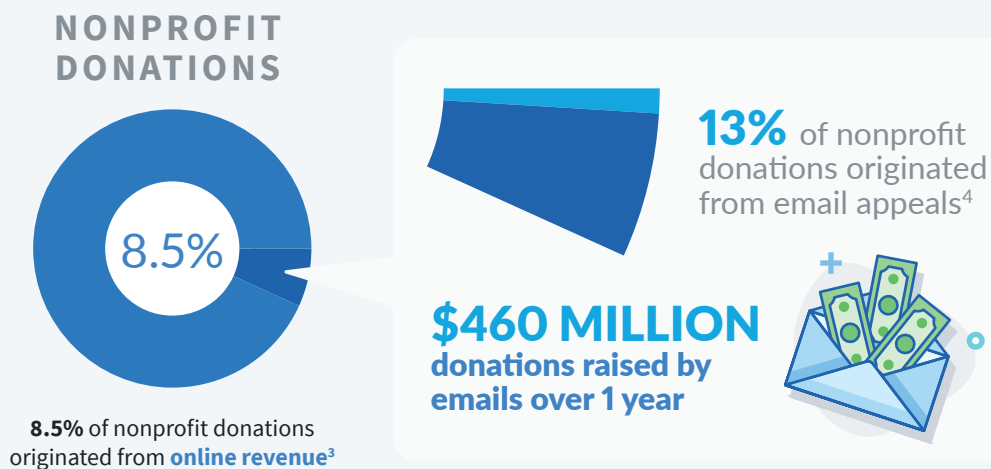
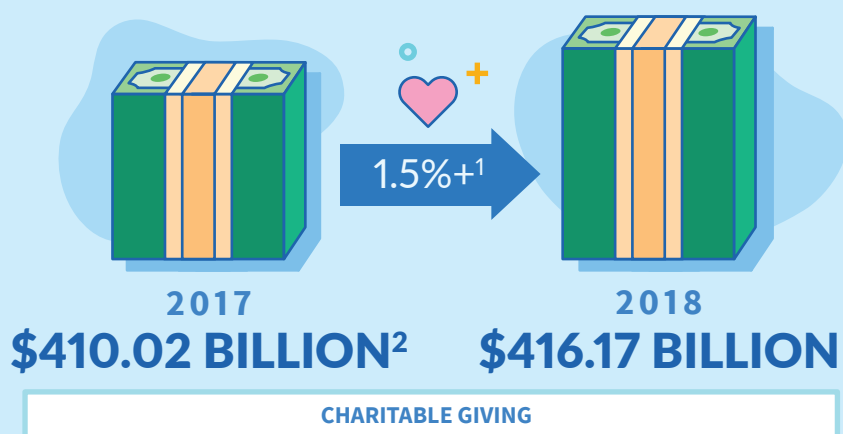
GET A DEMO

<https://act.everyaction.com/get-demo>

The Big Picture:

SPAM AND DELIVERABILITY IN 2018

In 2018, charitable giving increased by 1.5%¹ over the previous year's \$410.02 billion². Of the total amount of nonprofit donations, 8.5% was classified as "online revenue"³, and 13% of that amount originated from email appeals⁴—for a total of \$460 million raised by email over the course of the year. Assuming an industry average spam rate of 20.18% for the year, we estimate that **nonprofits lost out on a whopping \$92.8 million due to spam filters and low deliverability rates in 2018.**

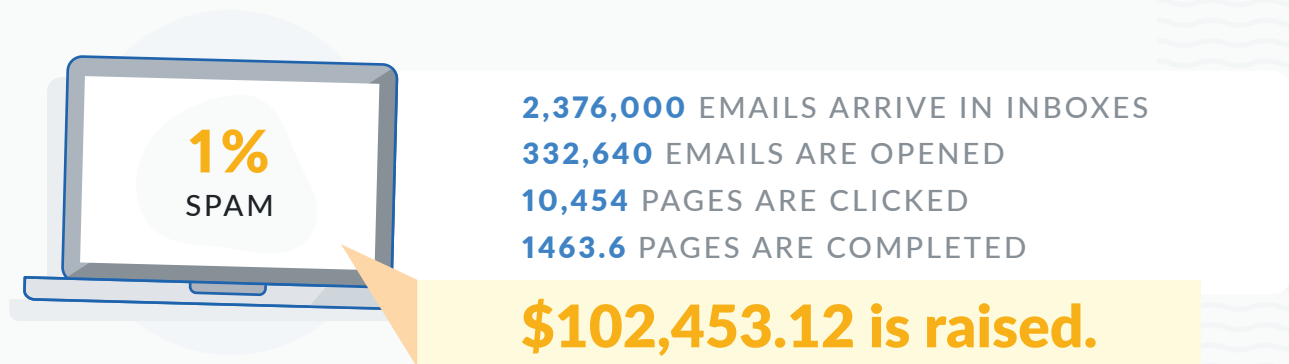
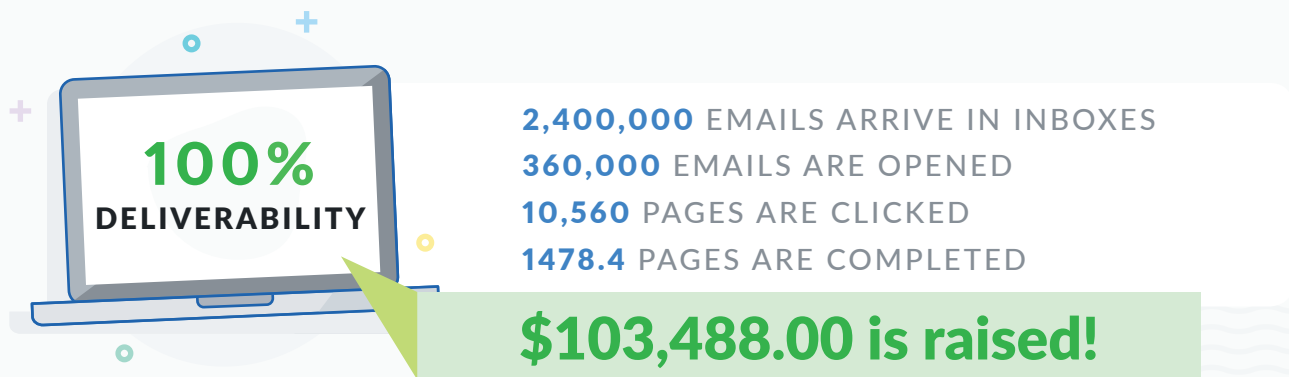


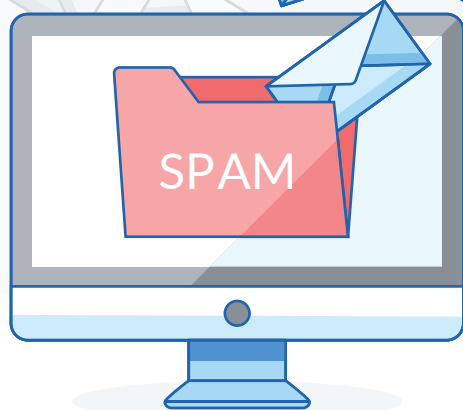
The Data:

NONPROFITS LOSING OVER 20% OF EMAIL REVENUE DUE TO SPAM FILTERS

In 2018, the average email spam rate across the nonprofit sector was 20.18%—down from its peak last year at 24.16%, but still high above pre-2016 levels (the average spam rate was at 7.03% in 2015). Despite this slight improvement from 2017, spam filters still cost nonprofits a significant amount in lost revenue. For instance, consider a hypothetical nonprofit with a list of 100,000 email addresses, and standard performance across all other email metrics. In 2018, this nonprofit lost over \$1,000 for every percentage point of email that went to spam, a total of \$20,833.88 of revenue lost to spam filters.

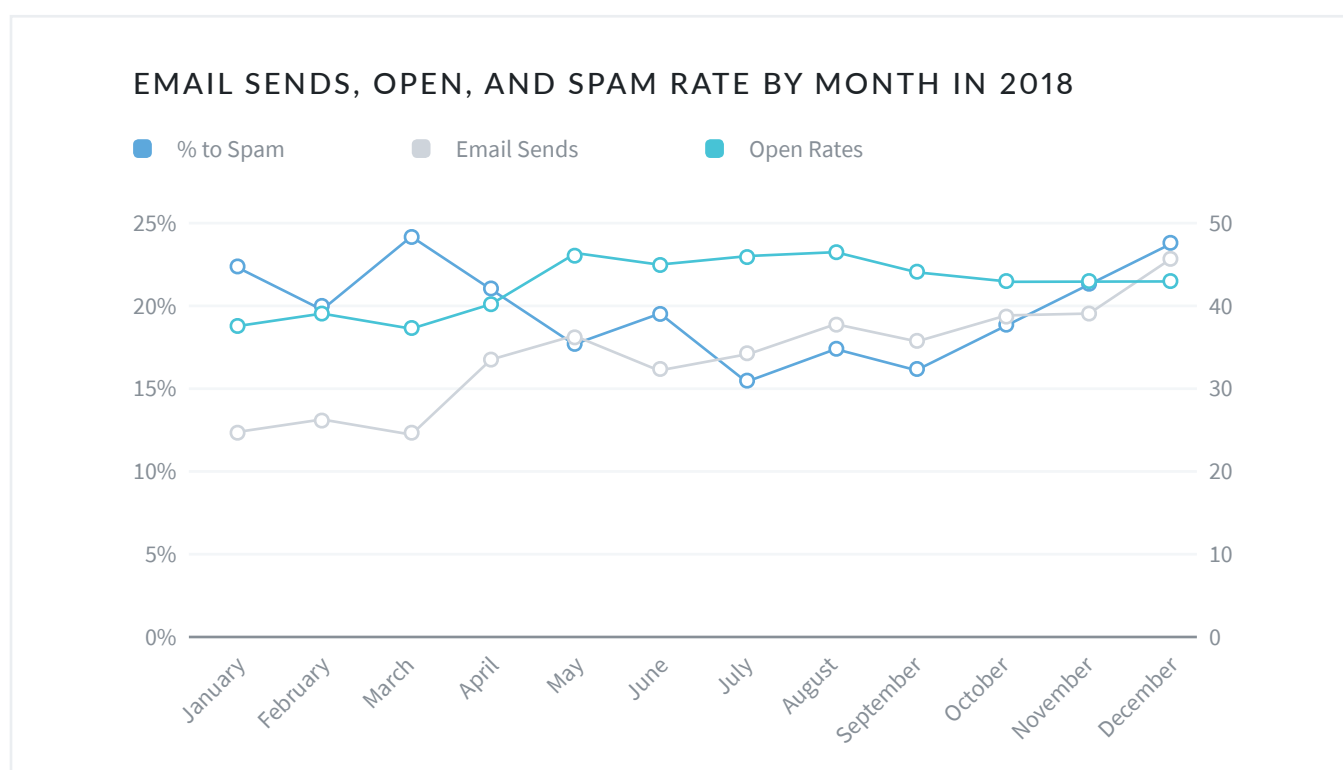
For all of the deliverability examples listed we used these baseline email metrics: a 100,000 subscriber email list being sent 2 emails a month. These are our results:





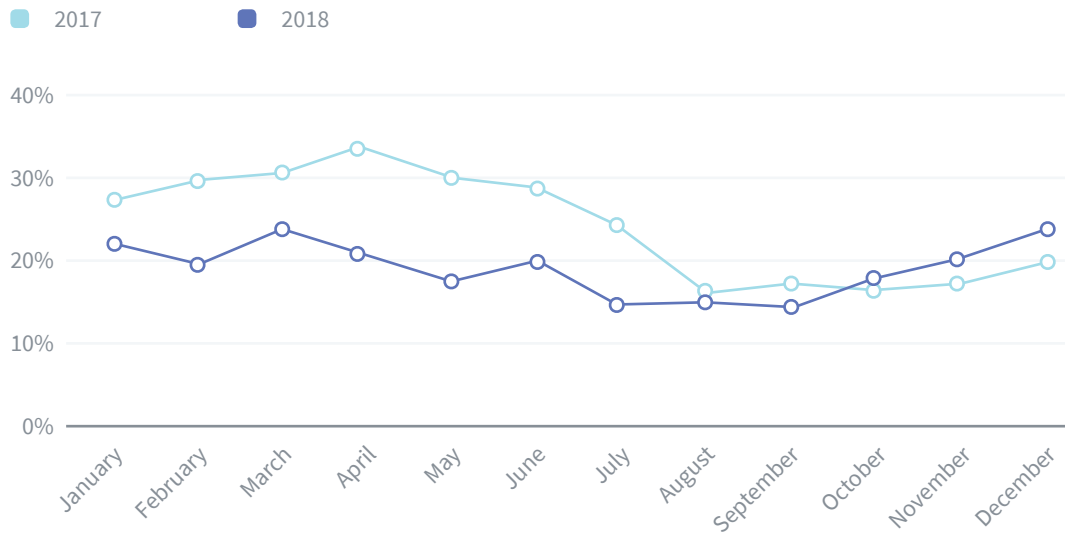
20.18% of emails were delivered to spam in 2018.

VISUALIZED: INCREASED EMAIL SENDS AND DECREASED SPAM 2017-2018



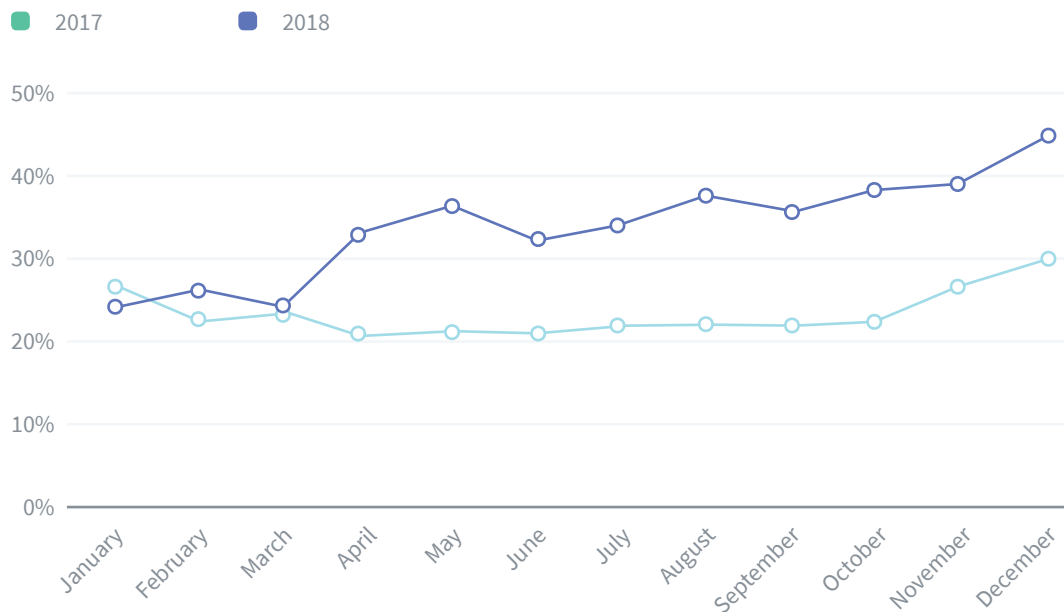
While most conversations about email marketing metrics revolve around list sizes, open rates, and clicks, it's clear that ignoring the impact of deliverability is a costly oversight. In this year's study of 55 organizations, EveryAction found that, on average, 20.18% of emails were delivered to spam folders monthly in 2018. March saw the highest spam rate (24.21%) and July, the lowest (15.20%), a trendline somewhat similar to the previous year.

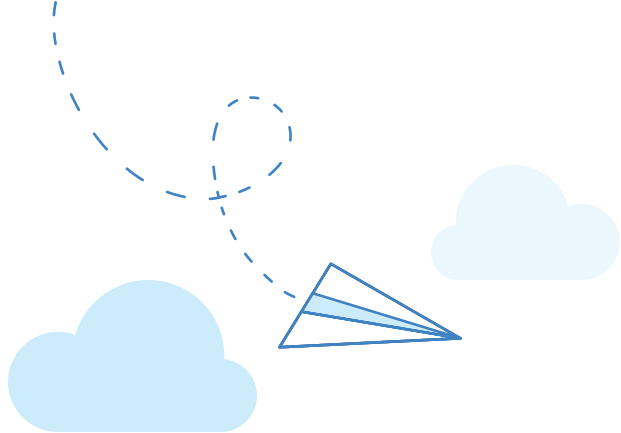
SPAM RATE BY MONTH 2017 VS 2018



To further compare 2018 email trends with previous years, nonprofits sent about 30 fundraising emails per month; a significant increase from last year's average of 21, hitting a high of nearly 45 emails during Year End fundraising in the month of December.

EMAIL SENDS BY MONTH 2017 VS 2018





Next Steps:

WHAT CAN ORGANIZATIONS DO TO IMPROVE DELIVERABILITY?

NEW IN 2019

Email service providers are constantly updating their algorithms in order to better filter unwanted content and provide users with only relevant emails. Lately, Gmail has updated their algorithms to focus more on “gray mail,” the type email that falls in somewhere between the categories of “wanted” and “spam.” This is a natural next step for email filters, which are already sophisticated enough to block almost all of the “low hanging fruit” of obvious spam emails. Political and nonprofit email often falls into this gray area, especially if a nonprofit or campaign has engaged in non-recommended practices such as list trades, appends, using an opt-in, etc.

As spam filters become more and more adept at sifting through “gray mail,” it is increasingly important for nonprofits to follow best practices for managing and maintaining their email lists. Regularly cleaning the list and using an opt-in are two of the most impactful actions that senders can take to ensure good inbox placement—organizations who are simply sending emails without prioritizing list management may be impacted negatively by increasingly sophisticated spam filters. **Ultimately, Gmail, AOL, Yahoo, and Hotmail are all moving in this direction, and in order to ensure continued deliverability nonprofits will need to shift focus from list size to list quality.**

If your organization is having deliverability issues, start with a focus on sending to active individuals (those who have opened or clicked within the last 6 months or less) and continue sending to that universe until open rates get back to the 20–30% range. Then expand the universe by adding in another group of less engaged addresses and focus on building engagement with them, and simply repeat this process over and over for each email domain. It takes time to fix but will be worth the effort in increased fundraising from better deliverability.



GENERAL BEST PRACTICES



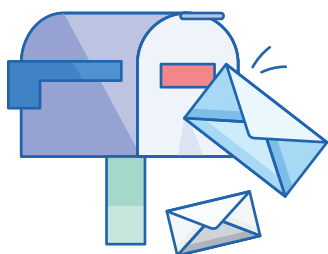
OPT-IN AND CONFIRM.

Not only should you be explicitly asking individuals to opt-in to your email list, you should also send a follow-up email to confirm that their address is correct. People mistype addresses. Sometimes they feel forced to provide an address, which results in their ignoring your messages or providing a fake email address. By opting-in addresses and confirming them, you ensure the person on the other end absolutely wants to hear from you and will be an engaged subscriber.



SEGMENT YOUR LIST AND PROVIDE PERSONALIZED CONTENT.

For nonprofits with substantial email lists, especially organizations that run multiple programs or tackle multiple issues or issue areas, it is very likely that your subscribers have a varied interests. In the era of Big Data, consumers are primed to expect content that is personalized to their preferences, and nonprofits are no exception. Rather than sending blast content to your entire list, segment your list into smaller universes based on the specific types of appeals they are likely to respond to, and send content that is likely to resonate with each affinity group.



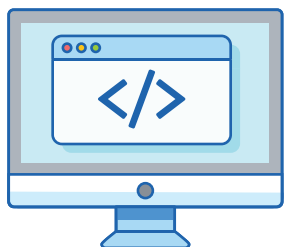
FOCUS ON BOUNCES AND INACTIVES.

Explore why bounces are occurring, and what you can do to remedy them. If they happen more than 2 or 3 times, remove them. Repeated bounces can cause alarm bells to ring with email service providers. Similarly, if an email address has been inactive for more than a year, remove it from your list. ESPs can turn dead email addresses into spam traps, marking all emails to that address as spam and seriously hurting your sender reputation.



AUTOMATE EMAIL SERIES TO PROVIDE TIMELY COMMUNICATION.

Automated email series allow an organization to communicate with a supporter based on various triggers, ensuring that no one falls through the cracks when it comes to receiving timely communication. For instance, welcome series are an important facet of building engagement and rapport among new supporters, and win-back series can help draw in subscribers on the verge of becoming inactive.



CHECK YOUR HTML.

Tidy HTML is a sign of a good sender. Some email providers look at how “clean” your HTML is and check that things are coded properly. With enough issues in your coding, you could wind up having problems getting your email to the inbox.

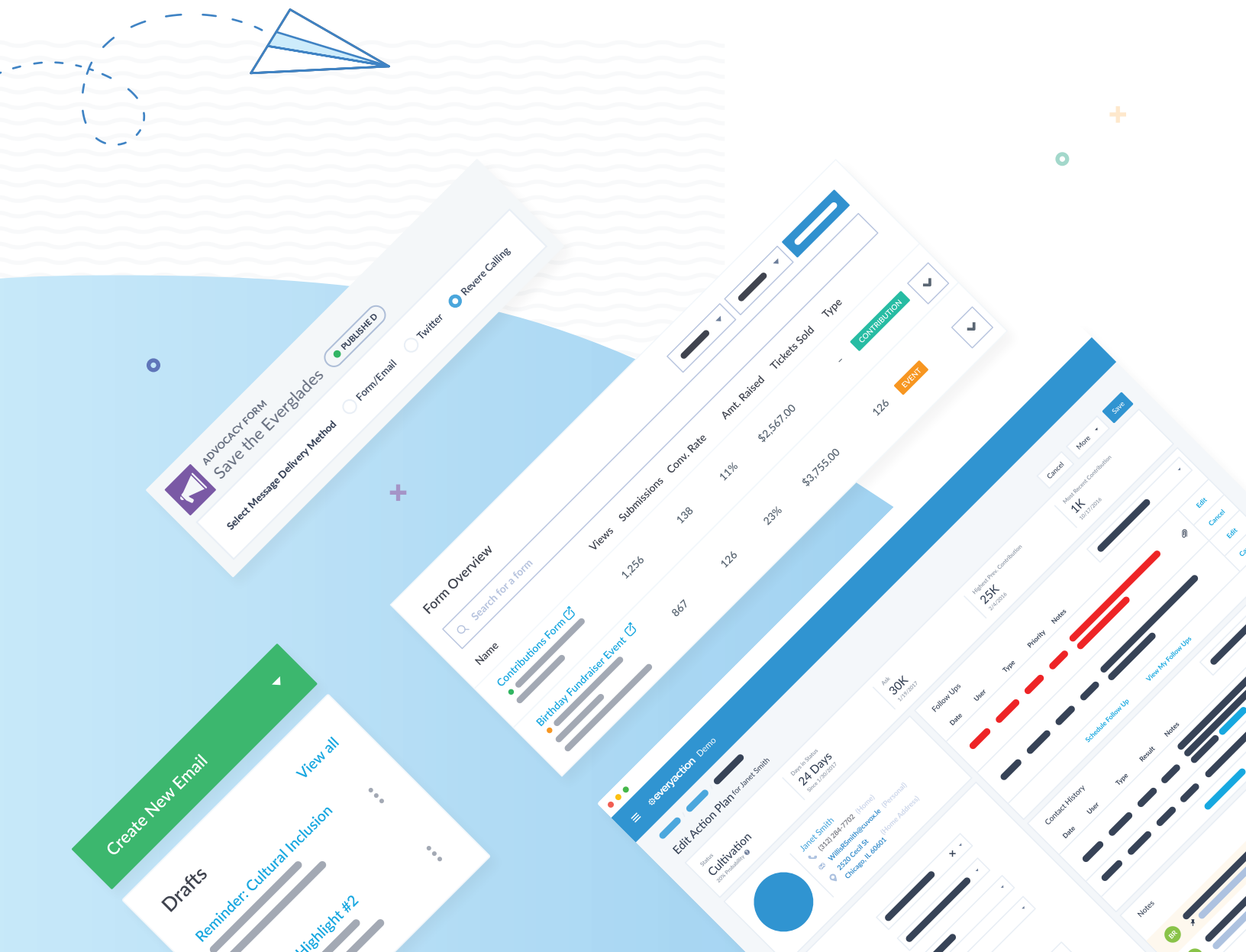


CHOOSE THE BEST PROVIDER.

Nonprofits deserve a technology partner that’s as dedicated to their success as they are. With EveryAction, nonprofits can work directly with expert staff that monitor key deliverability metrics, keep up with the latest best practices, and provide information about sender reputation, helping them raise more money and inspire more action. Choose an email tool with best-in-class features and a support team to match.

Resources

- 1 Blackbaud Institute, 2018 Charitable Giving Report, <https://institute.blackbaud.com/asset/2018-charitable-giving-report/>
- 2 Giving USA, Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2017, <https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2018-americans-gave-410-02-billion-to-charity-in-2017-crossing-the-400-billion-mark-for-the-first-time/>
- 3 Blackbaud Institute, 2018 Charitable Giving Report
- 4 M+R, Benchmarks 2018 <https://mrbenchmarks.com/numbers/fundraising>



The background features a collage of various software interfaces from EveryAction. At the top left, a table lists 'Primary Solicitor' with entries 'Adams, Martha' and 'Demo, Michelle', and a 'Number of Action Plans' column with values '1' and '1'. To the right, a 'Moves Management Report' header is visible. Below it, a navigation bar includes a search bar and icons for home, search, and other functions. Further right, a 'Contribution Report' section shows a 'Report Results' area with a date filter set to '2/26/2016'. At the bottom, a 'Stop the Hate Against Immigrants + Refugees' campaign page is shown, featuring a 'Select Message Delivery Method' dropdown, a 'Message 1' input field, and social media sharing options for Facebook, Twitter, and Email. A central blue wave graphic separates the top and bottom interface sections.

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with donors?

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