ISP Profile: Gmail

Deliverability Intelligence

Quick Look

» Successful mail delivery to Gmail depends on reputation and subscriber engagement
» Eliminating spam complaints will help to improve and maintain a positive IP reputation

Overview

Gmail is the top ISP in the space – its growth unmatched at the current pace. Gmail as of 2016 has notched 1 billion monthly active users worldwide, having more than doubled in size since 2012.

Gmail classifies inbound messages as either Spam or Not Spam by relying heavily on user feedback. Gmail users who mark messages as spam are providing Gmail's filter a strong signal not to deliver future messages to the Inbox. These spam complaints will lead to low inbox rates and low open rates.

Messages are further filtered into distinct categories -- Primary, Social and Promotions. Here Gmail once again relies on user feedback to improve the filter. Recipients can move messages from one category to another, effectively teaching the filter which senders belong in what tab. Since the release of Gmail tabs in 2013, the algorithm has improved steadily and is very accurate. And audience engagement within the tabs appears to be as good or better than the non-tabbed interface.

As of Oct 16, 2018, the new Gmail interface featuring the new snooze option, confidential mode, and alerts was made the default environment for all mail users. As was the case with the release of tabs, these updates will enhance both the sender, and user experience. Provided general mailing best practices are followed, there should be no impact registered by senders.

Recommendations

Gmail recommends the following for successful mail delivery:

» Establish a solid foundation by using a dedicated IP address (one each for promotional and transactional messaging).
» Keep your identity consistent – don't change IP addresses and use the same domain or sub-domain for all your mailings.
» Authentication is a must-have. Utilize all the technologies available – SPF, DKIM, Dmarc – to cover your bases.
» Gmail recommends confirmed opt-in (double opt-in) – Allow your users to check the opt-in box themselves and then send a confirmation notice before proceeding with promotional messaging.

Known Characteristics

» Gmail's anti-spam filter is one of the best in the field. Google continues to improve and evolve the filter each day based on user feedback.
» Spam complaints are the single most damaging factor to a sender's reputation at Gmail. But positive actions can improve Inbox placement such as – starred messages, messages moved from Spam to Inbox folder, opens and clicks.

» Poor authentication is a non-starter at Gmail. Messages that can't be authenticated will trigger a "question mark" icon in the Gmail UI and will land in the Spam folder.

» Google is a huge proponent of encrypted communications (TLS). In 2016, Gmail began identifying senders who use unencrypted mail server connections by displaying a "broken lock" red icon in the Gmail UI. This by itself will not hurt deliverability but has obvious implications for the perceived trustworthiness of your brand.

» Gmail does not offer whitelisting status. But they do offer Postmaster Tools, a suite of diagnostics that can help senders understand what's going wrong with their sends – be it delivery errors, spam reports, security problems, feedback loops or compliance status with Gmail recommendations.

Additional Tips & Recommendations

» When deliverability goes wrong at Gmail we recommend rethinking your audience segmentation. Mail only to engaged users – those with recent opens or clicks.

» An ongoing process of removing disinterested recipients is the best course of action for preventing future deliverability problems. If they haven't opened or clicked in a while, it's time to stop mailing them.

» Gmail states, "Gmail users can mark and unmark any message as spam, at any time. To increase the inbox delivery rate of your messages, make sure that all recipients on your distribution lists actually want to receive the mail".

» If you do not have access to Gmail Postmaster Tools to review key data related to your sender reputation at Gmail, please open up an SR with the Deliverability Operations team and we can assist you in getting set up with access to this valuable tool Gmail offers

References

Gmail Bulk Sender Guidelines

https://support.google.com/mail/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=81126

Gmail Postmaster Tools

https://gmail.com/postmaster/