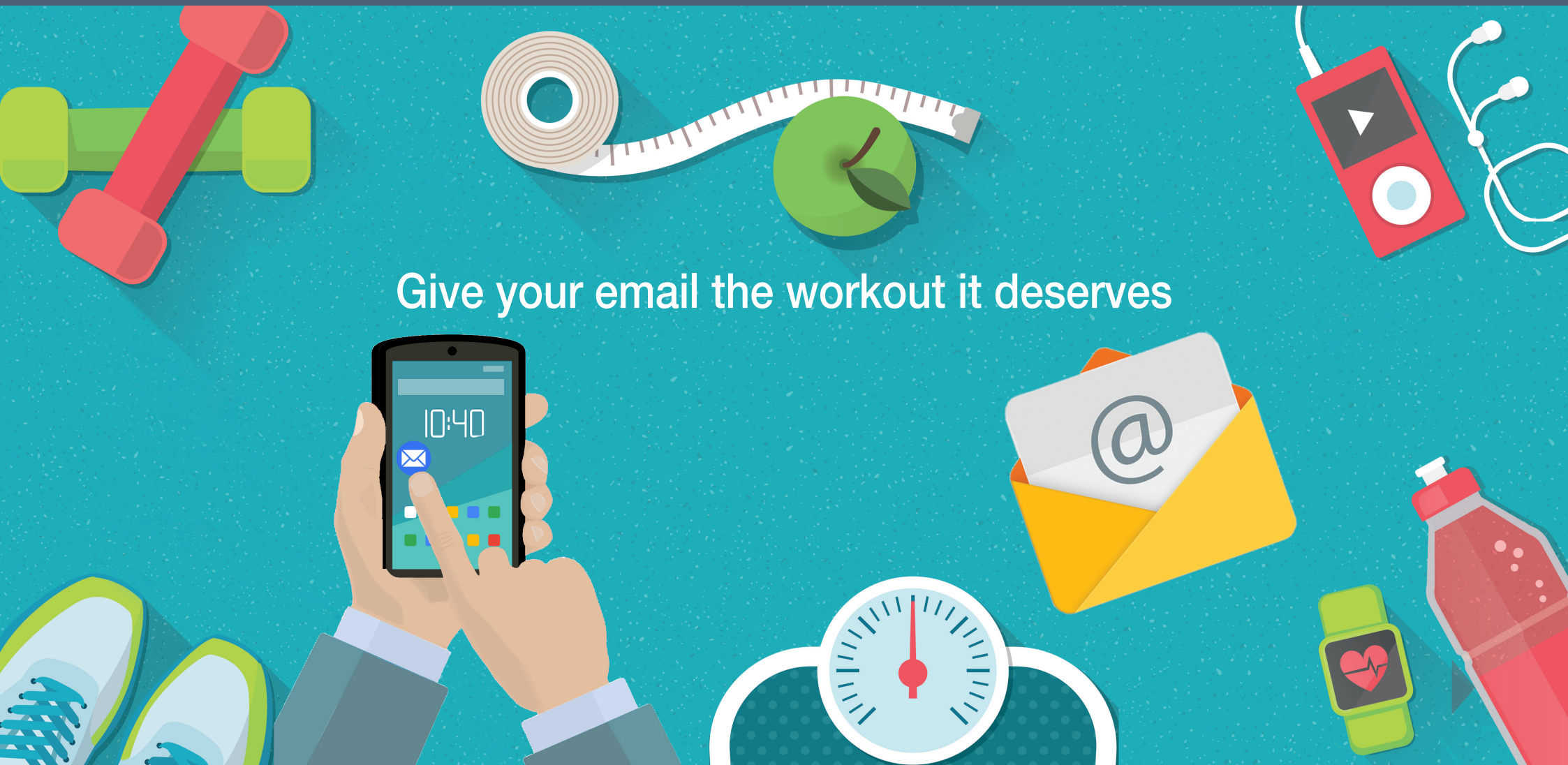
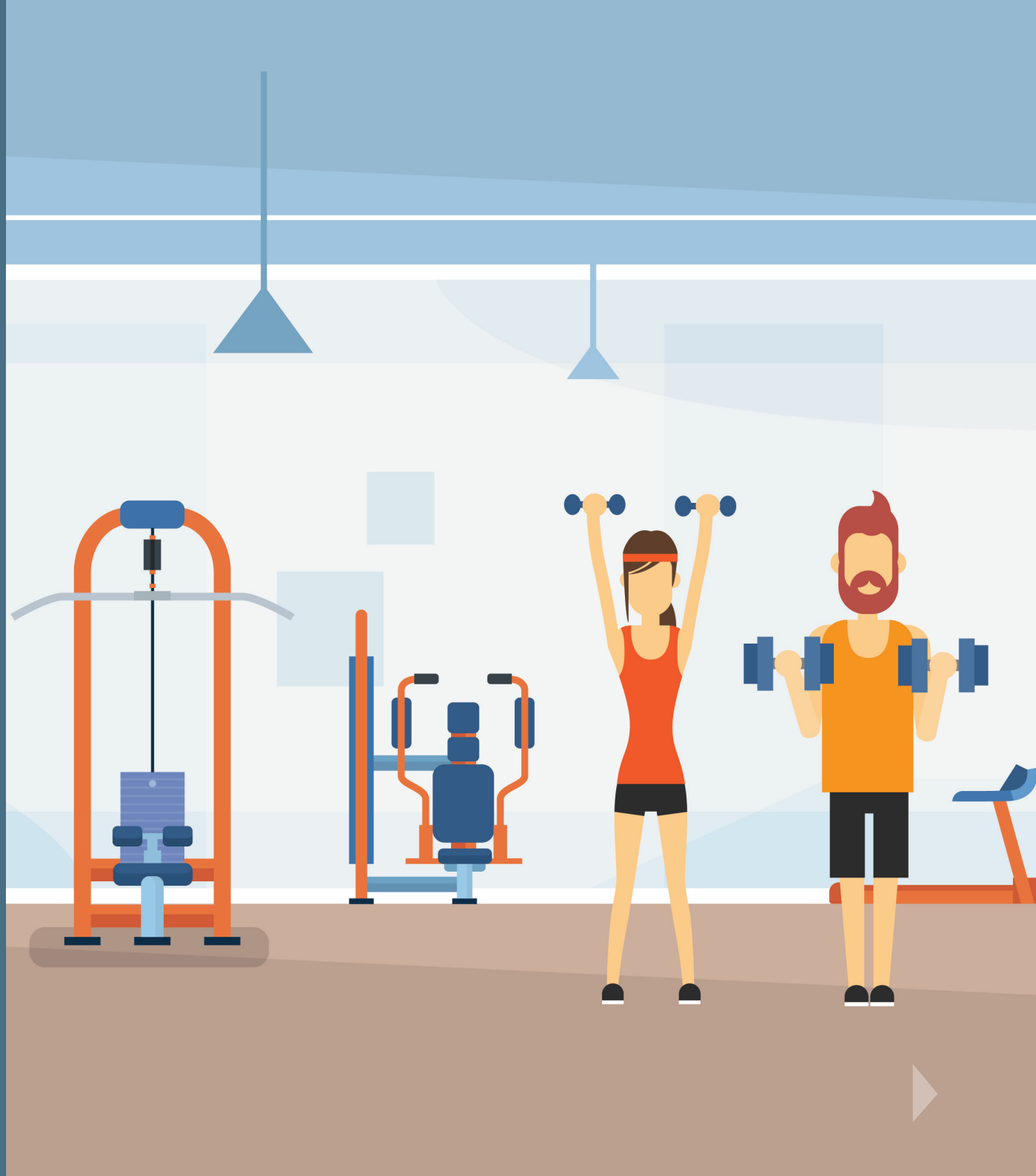
emedia

Best Practice Guide Email Deliverability



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All hail email

Email has been ranked time and time again as the most effective channel available that's also within easy reach of B2B Marketers. Crafting a smart email marketing strategy can help boost brand awareness and generate/ nurture leads and by distributing relevant content to your segmented audience you'll also have them engaging with your brand on a personal level. Not only can you reach customers in real time (since 54% of all emails were opened on a mobile[1]), but email marketing is affordable, cost effective, easy to measure and simple to automate.

In a recent email bench marketing report by Dotmailer, the average ROI on email marketing was reported as £39 for every £1 spent. This means that email is once again the number one marketing channel for ROI[2]; beating SEO, content marketing, paid search, and direct marketing, amongst other popular channels.

95% of today's marketers agree that email remains the core of the digital marketing landscape[3], and because email volumes continue to increase (approx. 2.4 million emails are sent every second globally[4]) marketers now more than ever need to ensure that their emails are appropriate, attractive and arrive in the recipient's inbox!



1 - https://litmus.com/blog/2016-email-client-market-share-infographic

2 - https://econsultancy.com/reports/email-census/

3 - https://dma.org.uk/uploads/misc/589c5b9eaaca9-marketer-email-tracking-report-2017_589c5b9eaabde.pdf

4 - https://www.lifewire.com/how-many-emails-are-sent-every-day-1171210

Don’t play inbox roulette

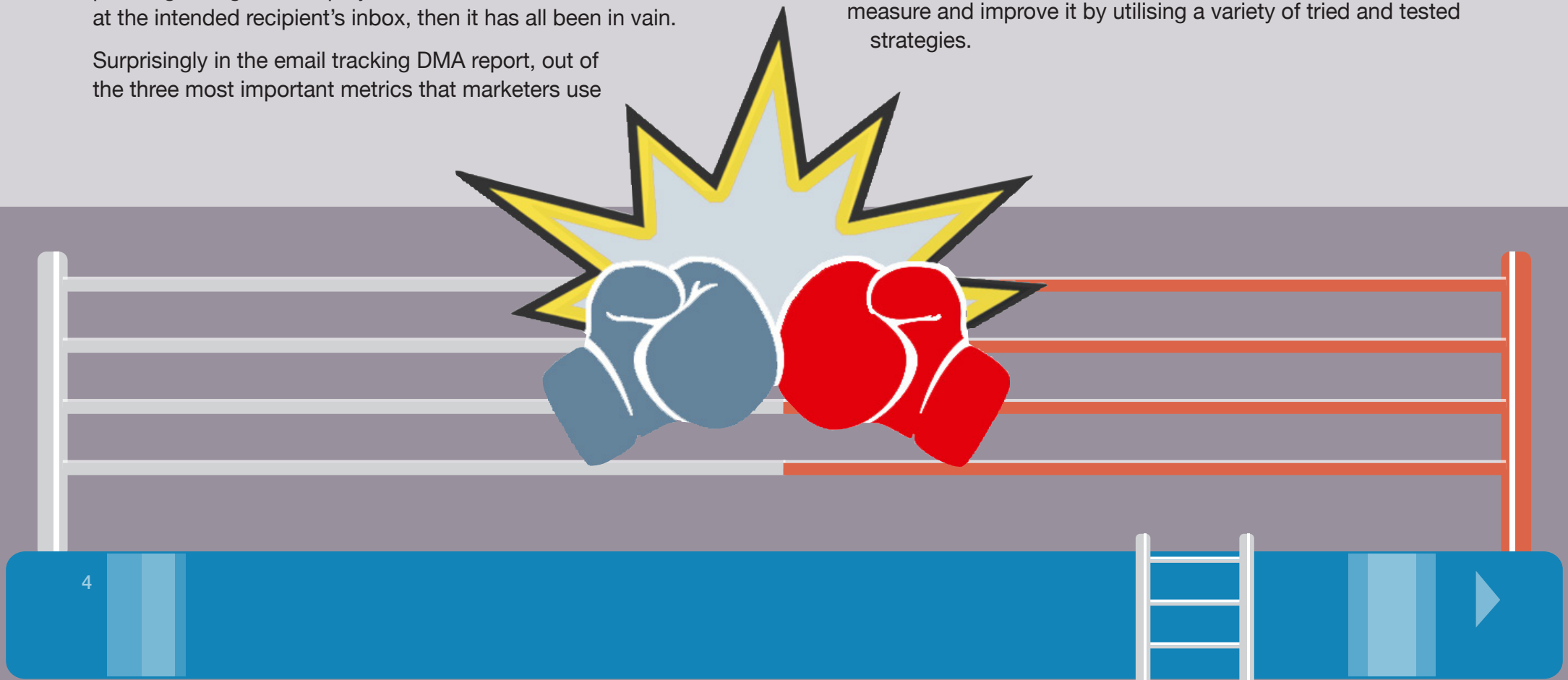
Marketers spend a long time creating email campaigns. From segmenting our audience and tailoring content, to the buyers’ journey and crafting the most entertaining copy, images and teasers in order to encourage the audience to open and engage with the email.

A lot of work goes into building business bulletins. However, no matter how much work and love is poured into the planning, design and deployment, if the email doesn’t arrive at the intended recipient’s inbox, then it has all been in vain.

Surprisingly in the email tracking DMA report, out of the three most important metrics that marketers use to measure the effectiveness of email marketing, deliverability was only chosen by 17% of marketers. Metrics such as click through rates, open rates and conversion rates are indeed important but utterly immaterial if the email doesn’t get delivered in the first place.

A recent report by Returnpath revealed that 20% of global, commercial emails never even make it to the recipient’s inbox.

This best practice guide aims to provide a useable gateway to understanding email deliverability, as well as showing how to measure and improve it by utilising a variety of tried and tested strategies.



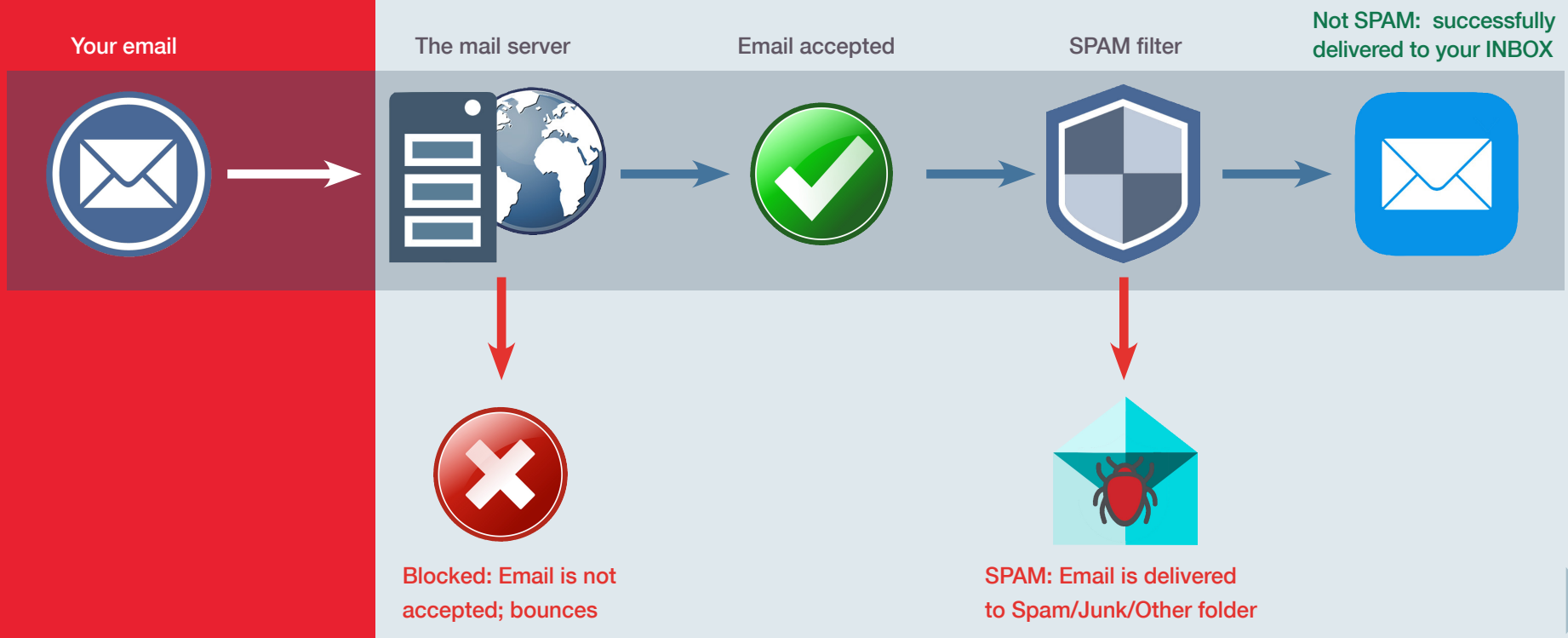
Delivery vs deliverability

Every email sent faces numerous hurdles on its long journey through the digital desert as shown in the illustration below.

Before we outline the details of each obstacle faced, it is worth distinguishing between delivery and deliverability.

Delivery – Refers to whether your recipient's mail server physically accepts your email or bounces it back, before it goes through the spam filter.

Deliverability - This refers to the final destination of the email. Once the email has been sieved through the spam filter, if it hasn't been classed as spam it ends up in the recipient's inbox, hence why it's also known as inbox placement.



Distorted email campaign reports

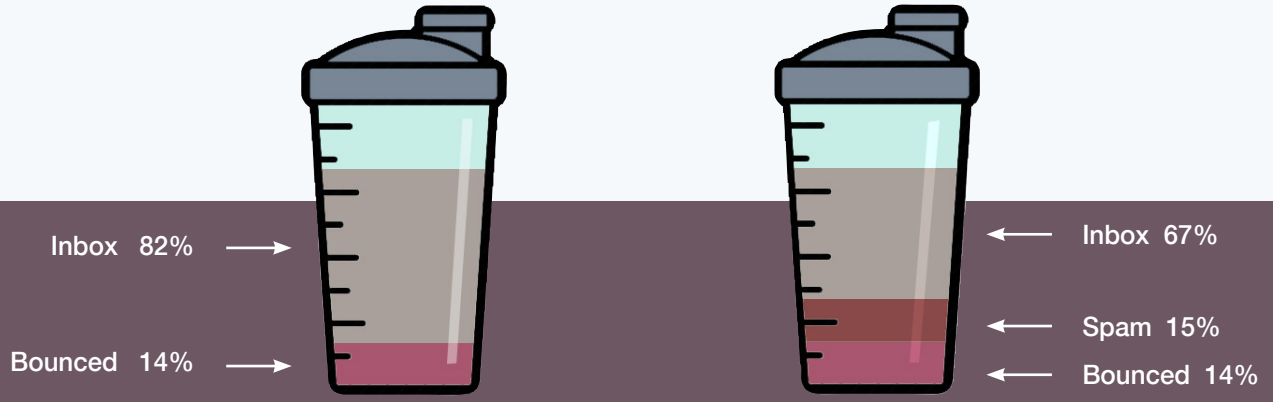
Mail servers might indicate that your email has been delivered, but this can be misleading. For example, an email campaign delivery report might show that your email has a delivery rate of 82% (i.e. 82% of your recipients' mail servers have accepted your email).

However what it doesn't show, is that in reality 15% of your subscribers' spam filters marked your emails as junk/spam. So your email didn't actually end up in the recipients' inbox but sailed straight to the spam folder. Therefore, only 67% of your recipients actually received your email in their inbox, rather than the initial misleading statistic of 82%.

So the lesson here is that the key metric to track is the inbox placement of your email campaigns, not the delivery.



Delivery Report vs **Inbox Placement Report**



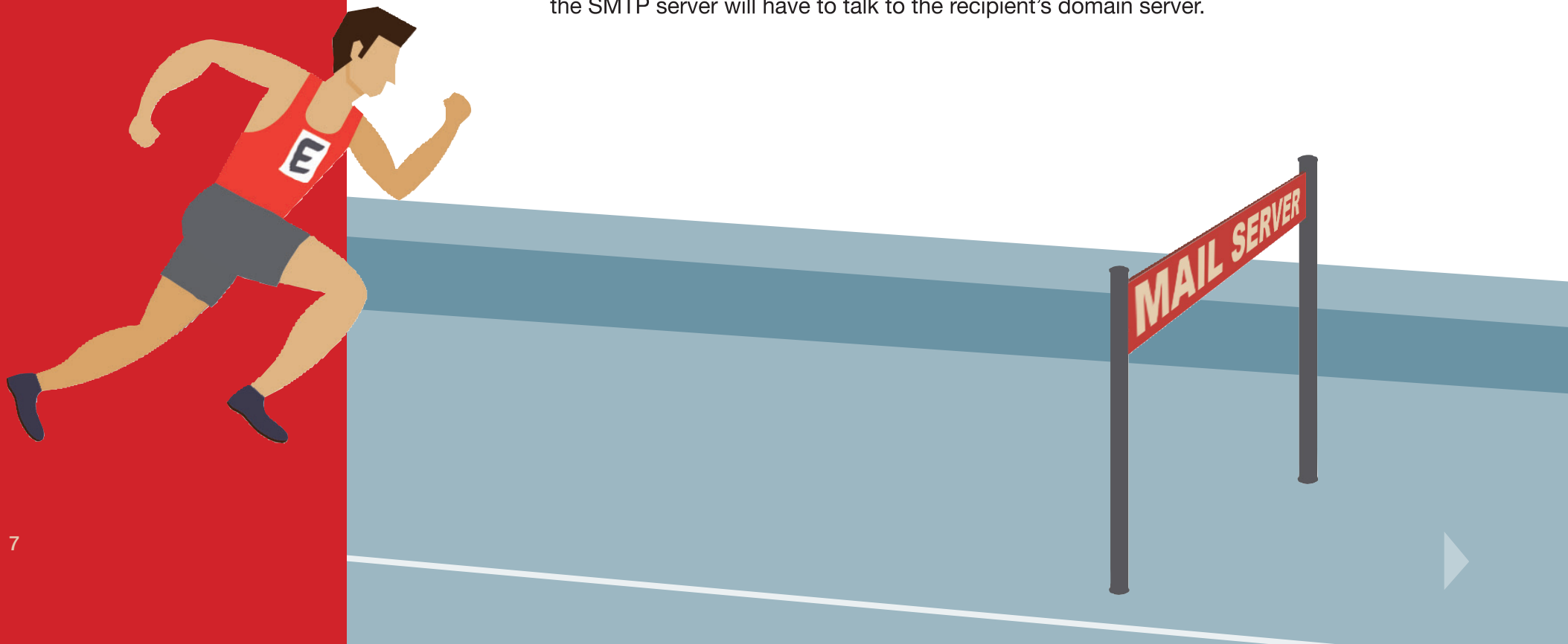
More than just hitting send

Understanding the long journey an email has to take to ultimately reach your recipient's inbox will help to remedy any issues relating to delivery and deliverability that you may encounter.

Hurdle 1 – The Mail Server

Every email has to travel through a complex sequence of mail servers before it can reach its final destination.

If the domain name is the same as the sender's then the message is routed directly (e.g. homer_simpson@springfield.com to marge_simpson@springfield.com). If the domain is different (e.g. homer_simpson@ springfield.com to chief_wiggum@shelbyville.com), then the SMTP server will have to talk to the recipient's domain server.



- To find the recipient's domain server, the sender's SMTP server needs to talk to the DNS (Domain Name Server). This takes the recipient's email domain name and translates it into an IP address, which is a unique number given to every device connected to the internet.



- This is where the recipient's mail server will aim to authenticate the sender's identity. It will check to see if you can prove your identity using a variety of protocols; including your email address, domain name and IP address.
- Similarly the sender's mail server will check to see if the recipient's email address, domain name and IP address are valid.
- Once the message is routed through numerous SMTP servers, and the recipient's mail server allows the message to be downloaded, it can be read by the recipient.

Carry out these basic checks to begin with to ensure your email gets physically accepted by your audience's mail server:

1 **Can you prove your identity?**

The recipient's mailbox provider needs to be able to confirm your true identity as the sender and differentiate you from spammers. If your identity as the sender cannot be verified, then your recipient's mailbox provider might put it through further rigorous testing to determine whether it should be physically accepted or not.

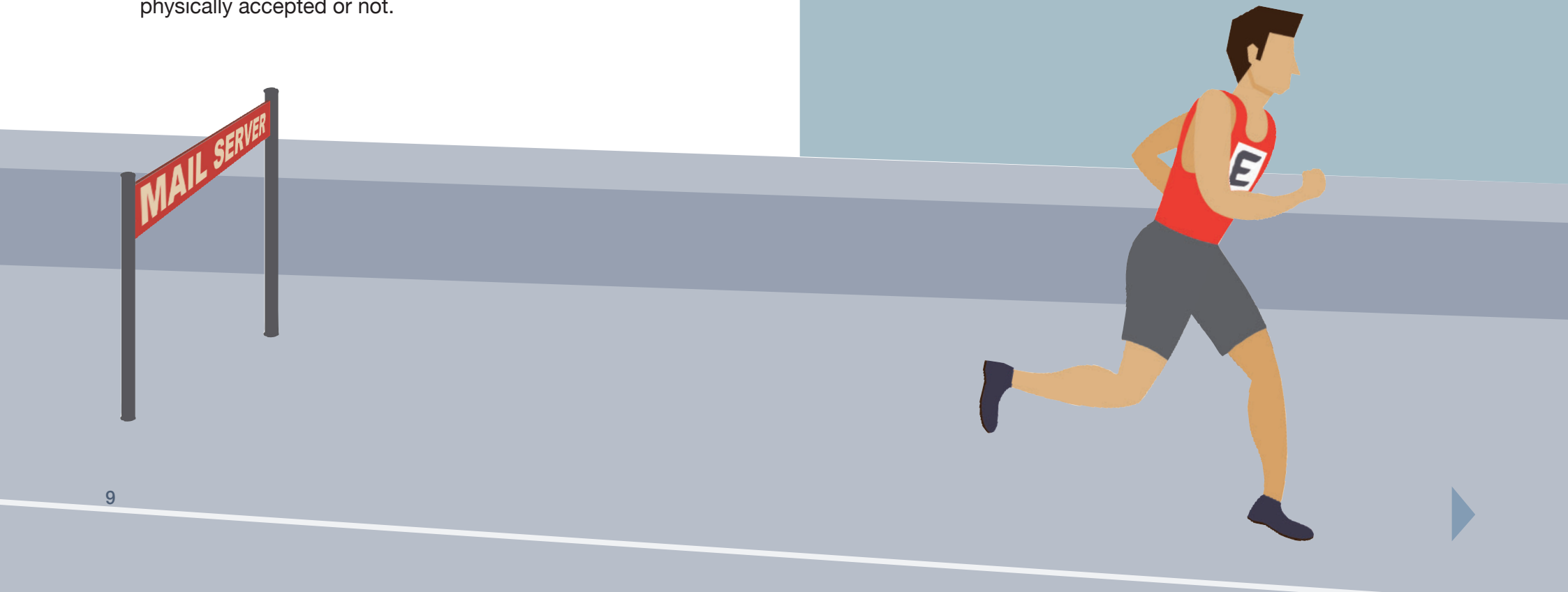
2 **Do you and your recipient have a valid email address and domain name?**

(eg: homer.simpson@hotmail.com the @hotmail.com is the domain name).

Is the recipient real? Are they a spam bot?

3 **Has your IP address or domain been blocked?**

If it has it might be temporary, but can be checked by contacting your email service provider.



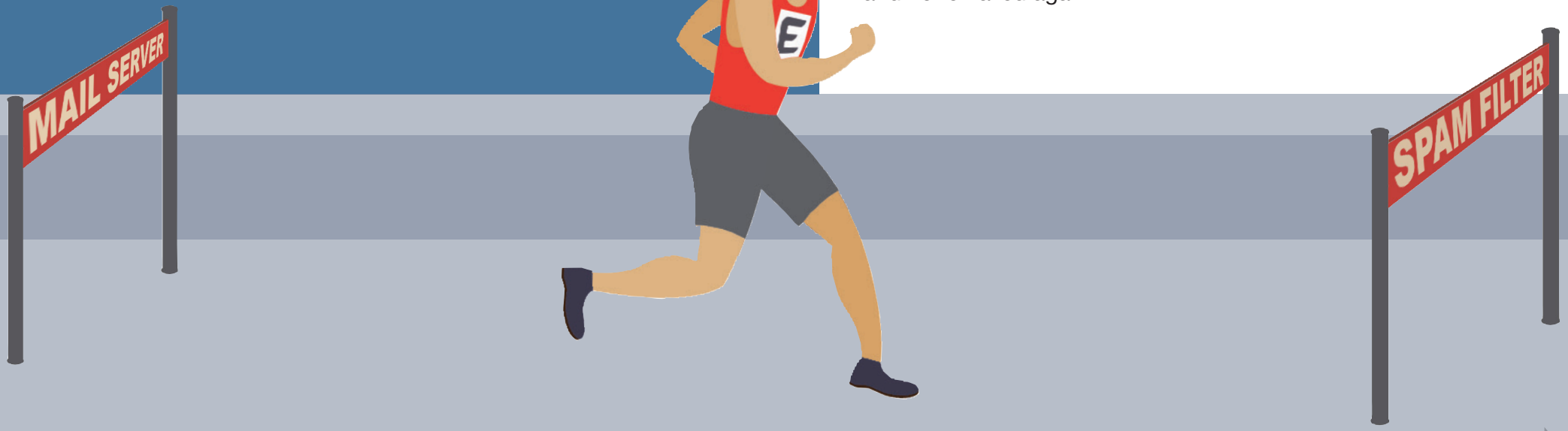
If you use a reputable email or marketing automation provider, many elements of your sender authentication technologies may already be incorporated. Without diving into an abyss of acronyms, email authentication protocols usually include DKIM, SPF and DMARC.

- **SPF** – Sender Policy Framework – The old tried and tested method of enabling a sender to verify their identity.
- **DKIM** – DomainKeys Identified Mail – The new kid on the block and a more robust way to authenticate the sender's identity and to ensure the content of the email has not been interfered with.
- **DMARC** - Domain Message Authentication Reporting and Conformance – Ensures that emails meet SPF and DKIM requirements before they are delivered.

What are the repercussions?

If you can't prove your identity, or your recipient's email address or domain name aren't valid, or even if your IP address/domain has been blocked, then your email is likely to bounce. This means it can't be delivered to the recipient's email address.

- **Hard bounces** usually occur due to an invalid email address, domain, or an address which is no longer in use. Generally, if an email is marked as a hard bounce it will be suppressed and not emailed again.
- **Soft bounces** typically occur because of temporary delivery failures. These can be caused by problems such as a recipient's inbox being full or an email being too large. Most often, if an email is marked as a soft bounce five or more times it will be suppressed and not emailed again.



Hurdle 2 – The Spam Filter

Mailbox providers use inbound and outbound spam filter technology (also known as classifiers) to categorise messages when they are first sent. This ultimately decides their final destination.

These complex classifiers use algorithms and a long list of criteria to ascertain whether or not your message is inbox worthy; and given that a whopping 70% of emails were marked as junk[5] according to Return Path, it helps to know what benchmarks are used to measure unsolicited mail.

The main gauges usually include: the reputation and authenticity of the sender's domain and IP address, and the content of the email.



5 - https://www.returnpath.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/the-ultimate-guide-to-deliverability.pdf



3. Destination – The Inbox

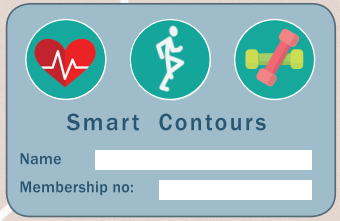
Great success! If your email has not been identified as spam, and arrives in your recipient's inbox, this means it has been successfully delivered, i.e. successfully placed into their inbox.



Achieving optimum deliverability

To achieve optimum email deliverability there are many best practice tips and checklists you can follow. The four most important factors which we will look into are: identity, reputation, content and measurement.

1. Proving your identity



In the previous section we've covered the importance of authenticating the sender's digital identity. Ensure that your marketing department has this covered (whether it's via a reputable third party email or automation provider, or through your IT department, who can set this up and test it for you).

2. Improving your sender reputation



Your IP address and domain impact the deliverability of your email. So, how trustworthy is your sending IP address and the reputation of your domain? Different internet service providers and organisations may have different scores for you based on the recipients' level of engagement with your email.

According to the 2017 deliverability benchmark report by Return Path, senders with a highly reputable email IP address and domain benefit from 20% higher delivery rates compared to other senders, whose messages either get blocked at the gateway or end up in the junk folder.

So we know that having a bad rap can harm your inbox placement, but want can you do to improve that reputation?

We've put together a checklist of techniques that can help to improve your sender reputation, and by extension your email deliverability rates.

☐ Regularly evaluate your sender reputation

- The Sender Score tool offered by Return Path assesses a number of metrics such as spam complaints and sending history to help determine your sender reputation.
- Other sender reputation score services available to marketers include:

  Postmaster Tools by Gmail

  Talos Intelligence by Cisco.

☐ Authenticate your domain

Ensure your email sending domain is correctly configured and validated so that ISPs know that the emails you are sending are from a trustworthy source. You can validate your email authentication by publishing the following: Sender ID, SPF, DKIM, DMARC and reverse DNS. Using an email certification provider can also help prove your authenticity.

☐ Aim to build and continually maintain a robust email sending infrastructure

- It is a complex, time and cost intensive process to set up and maintain, but in the long term it will help provide accurate authentication, a clean IP address and a good sender domain/email rep.
- Ideally your organisation will have experts on hand or you can use an email service provider to manage the process.

☐ Send a regular and consistent volume of emails

- Regulating the bulk and frequency of your emails to your subscribers' preferences will give you a better chance of reaching their inbox.
- High volume and inconsistent senders get red flagged.



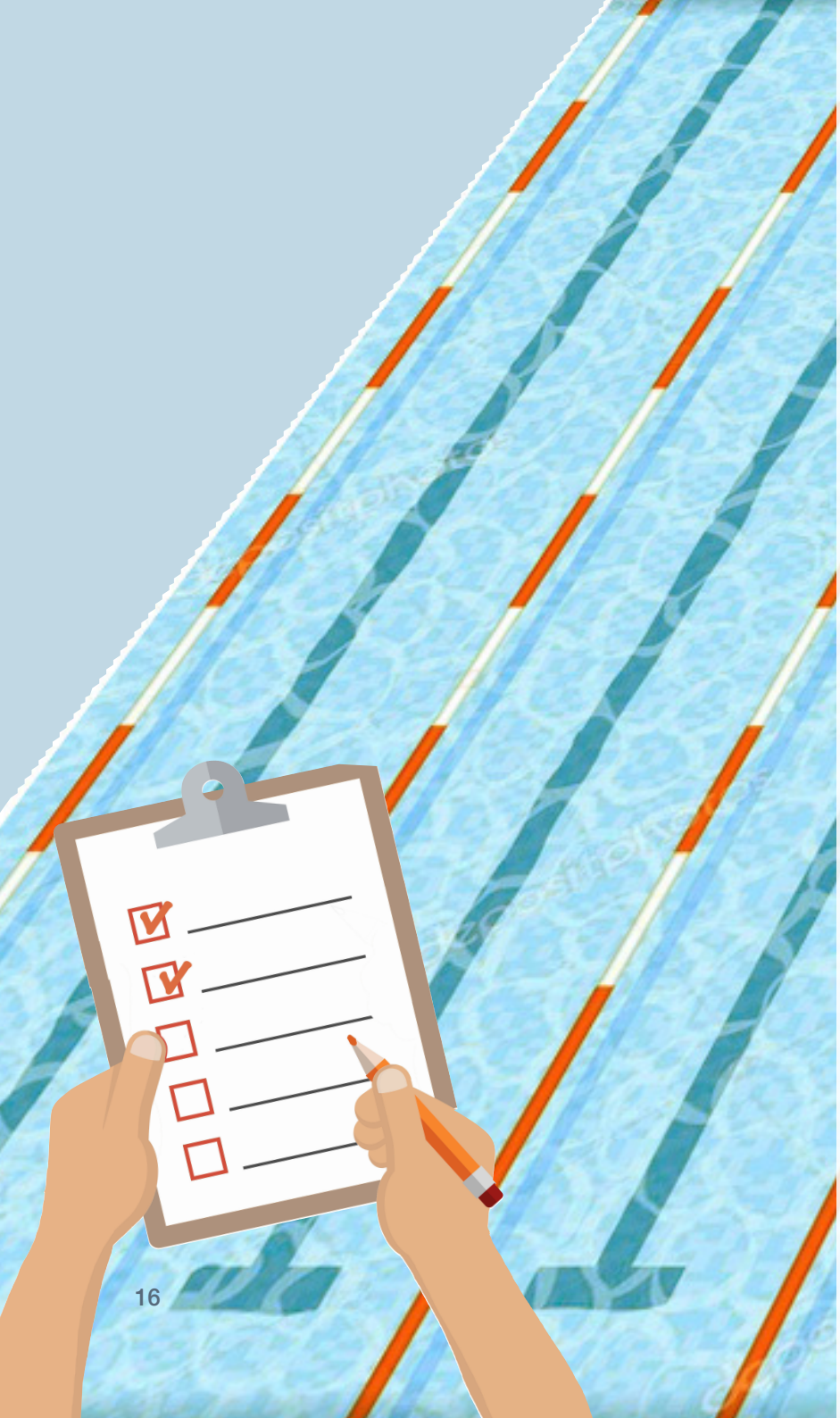
☐ Consider putting in place these list quality measures

The quality of your subscriber list has a profound knock on effect on your sender reputation, and therefore on your email deliverability. In an ideal world, your subscriber list would contain the contact details of prospects and clients who are actively engaged with your brand and the content within your emails. It may be difficult to hit this sweet spot, but you must aim to maintain your list to the highest standard possible.

- **Implement a clear opt in for your recipients -** Using a double opt in can ensure that the email address belongs to a real person, allowing you to cut out fake addresses, lower bounces and avoid spam traps.
- **Have a clear opt out –** So recipients can choose to unsubscribe easily within the email itself.
- **Use a recognisable 'from name' –** so your recipients will recognise who you are. Never use an email like noreply@yourdomain.com.
- **Act on complaints –** Encourage users to air their grievances and ensure that you act on them promptly, appropriately and effectively. It is better that people complain than mark your emails as spam. If your recipients mark your emails as junk/spam or block you, consequently their ISP will reject your email therefore bringing down your reputation. You can even ask recipients to indicate that you are a safe sender by adding your address to their contacts. Set up feedback loops with ISPS to get notifications when a complaint is recorded.
- **Keep an eye on bounces –** A high bounce rate could indicate that your subscribers aren't engaged or that you're not maintaining/updating your lists properly.
- **Avoid spam traps –** Also known as honey pots, these are email addresses which look real, but have actually been set up as a trap to identify spammers. Even one spam trap can have a huge impact on your sender reputation and deliverability to the inboxes of your subscribers. Keeping a clean, properly acquired list will help you avoid getting trapped!







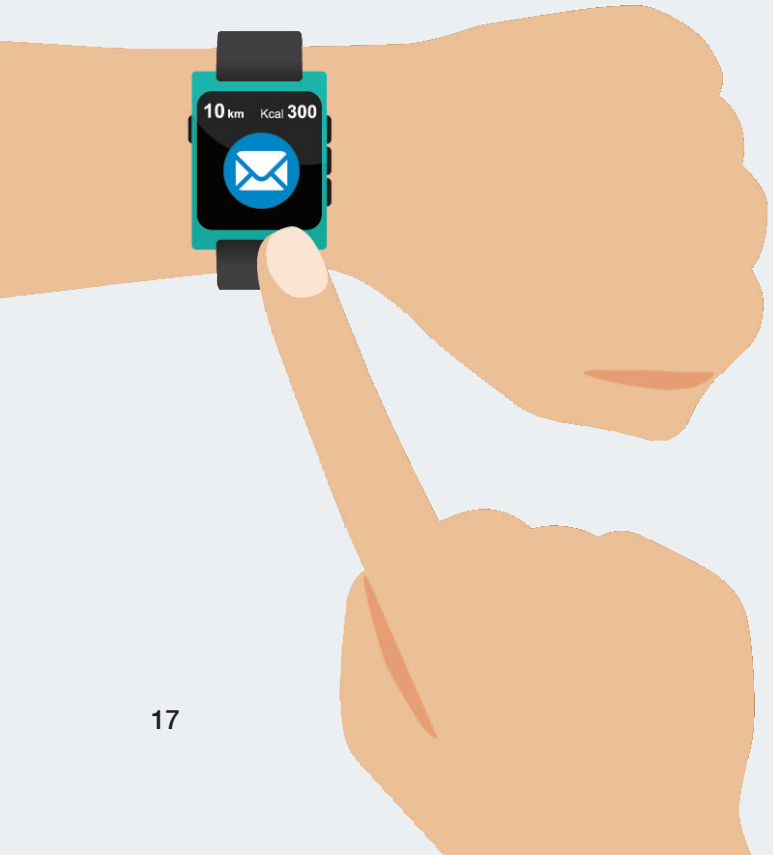
3 Send valuable content

- **Make your content king -** Your emails should contain consistent, relevant and high quality content that your recipients will want to read and interact with.
- **Segment your subscribers –** Send targeted campaigns to your segmented audience. Don't just spray and pray.
- **Ensure your email has been well structured and the HTML is properly formatted.** Using the W3C standards-compliant format will increase the likelihood of your emails being delivered.
- **Test test test!** Most email automation providers offer A/B testing on subject lines, which are simple to execute and can help increase open rates. Ensure you test, open and click through all the links in your final email and check to ensure it is compatible in all environments (i.e. various browsers, different mail servers like Outlook/Gmail and all devices including mobile/tablet).
- **Take time to plan and invest in your content.** B2B emails don't have to be dry and boring, make them as entertaining, educational and engaging as possible so that your readers will open them, click through links, watch or download content and share it.
- **It helps to know what content works best in B2B industry specific emails.** *Luckily, at emedia we have a great content creation team, so our tailored, relevant emails ensure that our audience are highly responsive and thus are 3 times as engaged compared to our competitors[6]. Have a chat with our creative team if you're stuck for ideas on how to make your emails totally tantalising!*

6 Return Path 2016

4. Continually measure your inbox placement

There are various email deliverability monitoring tools available online that help to measure inbox placement. These analytics will help provide data on how your emails perform and whether they have been delivered to the recipient's inbox or their spam folder. For example, Return Path's 'Inbox Monitor' tool helps to track deliverability and address any inbox placement issues.



Measuring inbox placement is crucial for B2B organisations, especially ones that rely heavily on email marketing. There are a variety of metrics that you can use to measure your email performance, which are often provided in reports generated by email automation providers. These include:



High level metrics

- Hard and soft bounces.
- Delivery rate.
- Inbox placement rate i.e. how many emails landed in the subscriber's inbox.
- ROI.

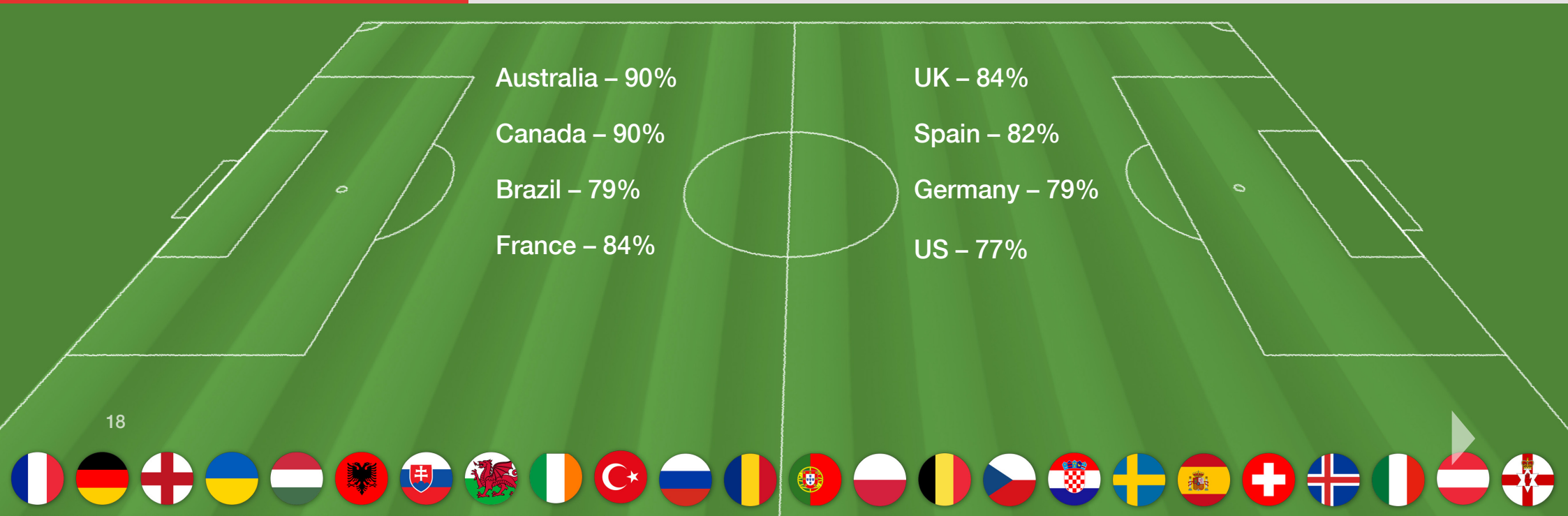
Engagement and interaction metrics

- Click to open rates.
- Click through rates.
- Read rate – Read, skim, glance, unread within the email itself.
- Opt outs/unsubscribe rates.
- Spam complaint rates and TINS (This Is Not Spam) rates.
- Monitor feedback loops.
- Forwarded rate.

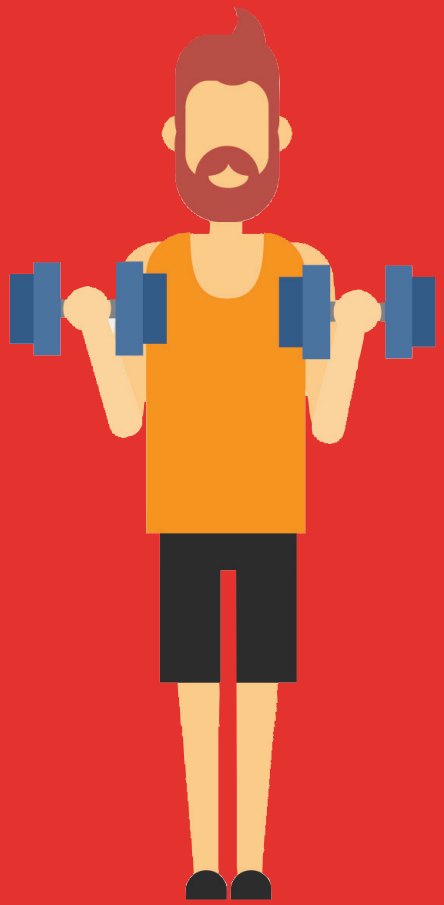
Global Inbox Placement

Global and country/region specific inbox placement rates were calculated in Return Path's 2017 deliverability benchmark report. Overall global inbox placement was around 80% and the industries which enjoyed the highest inbox placement rates were banking/finance, manufacturing/distribution and travel, achieving inbox placement rates of 90% or more.

Below is a list of the average inbox placement rates in the world's top markets. Australian and Canadian marketers seem to do rather well at reaching their intended recipient's inbox, compared to Germany and US.



Conclusion



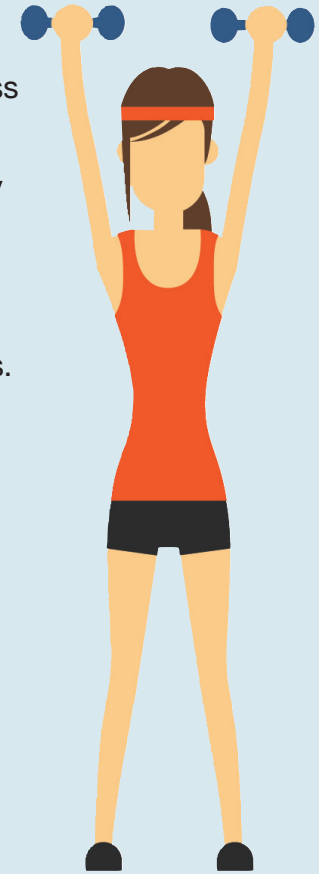
Marketers understand the importance of email in B2B marketing and the variety of benefits that it brings. With an incredibly high ROI, email continues to be the preferred communications channel for brands to keep in touch with their audience in an increasingly competitive market.

In addition to keeping email communications targeted, relevant and personalised, marketers need to understand the path to inbox, the issues faced and how to overcome them. By following the advice laid out in this guide you can ensure your hard earned work pays off and your emails end up in the recipient's inbox.

We all know too well the labour of love poured into email campaigns. To ensure the technical aspects have all been covered just use this simple checklist as a go-to for all your future marketing activities.

Checklist

- ☐ Regularly monitor your sender reputation.
- ☐ Prove your identity and that of your recipient
- ☐ Authenticate your IP address and domain.
- ☐ Aim to build and continually maintain a robust infrastructure.
- ☐ Send a regular and consistent volume of emails.
- ☐ Maintain list hygiene.
- ☐ Send valuable content.
- ☐ Continually measure your inbox placement.





Library

We have an awesome free library of resources, including best practice guides and bite size webinars that you can refer to at any point if you want to look at a topic in more detail.

Watch our series of bite size webinars on hot B2B marketing topics including ABM and Content Marketing.

We're doing it in the 10 minutes it takes to drink your cuppa, so tune in now to our brand spanking new webinar series, TL;DR (Too long; didn't read).

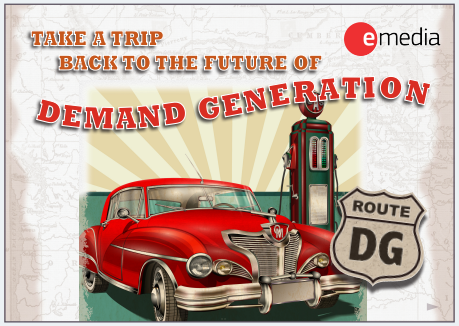
Account Based Marketing



Content Marketing



Demand Generation/Lead Generation



Lead Follow up



Lead Nurturing

