

Email marketing checklist

Twenty-six checks. Deliverability first, because a beautiful email in a spam folder is worth nothing.

SPF, DKIM and DMARC are group one because they are the difference between arriving and not. They take an afternoon once and then never need thinking about again -- and almost nobody does them before they start sending.

Deliverability -- do this first

- ☐ SPF record published and passing
- ☐ DKIM signing enabled for your sending domain
- ☐ DMARC record published, at least at p=none, and you read the reports
- ☐ You send from your own domain, never from a free provider address
- ☐ A subdomain is used for bulk sending, so marketing cannot damage transactional delivery
- ☐ Bounce rate is under 2% -- above that, the list needs cleaning before the next send
- ☐ Spam complaint rate is under 0.1%
- ☐ Transactional and marketing email are sent through separate streams

List health

- ☐ Consent is recorded, with a date and a source, for everyone on the list
- ☐ No purchased or scraped addresses anywhere in the database
- ☐ Unsubscribe is one click and takes effect immediately
- ☐ Contacts who have not opened in six months are in a separate segment, not the main send
- ☐ Hard bounces are removed automatically rather than retried
- ☐ A re-engagement sequence exists, and a deletion rule for those who ignore it

The emails themselves

- ☐ Every send has one primary action, not four competing ones
- ☐ Subject lines are written for the inbox preview, and the preheader is set deliberately
- ☐ Plain-text alternative renders properly, and the email works with images blocked
- ☐ Links are tagged so email traffic is identifiable in analytics
- ☐ The email has been sent to yourself and opened on a phone before going out

Automation

- ☐ A welcome sequence exists and is the highest-performing thing you send
- ☐ Automations are checked quarterly -- broken ones fail silently
- ☐ Someone receives a reply when a contact replies to an automated email
- ☐ Frequency caps prevent a contact receiving three automated emails in a day

Measurement

- ☐ You report revenue or enquiries per send, not open rate
- ☐ List growth is net of unsubscribes and bounces
- ☐ You know your revenue per subscriber, or have decided it is not measurable yet

Which email metrics to trust

Open rate is the one to stop reporting. Mail clients pre-fetch images, so it no longer measures a human opening anything.

Metric	Good for	The warning
Open rate	Rough direction only, within one campaign	Inflated by privacy features that pre-fetch images. Do not report it as a result, and never target it.
Click-through rate	Whether the content matched the promise	Report clicks on the primary action, not total clicks -- a footer click is not engagement.
Click-to-open	Comparing creative when volume differs	Inherits the open-rate problem in its denominator. Useful for comparison, not for reporting.
Conversion per send	The number to report	Needs link tagging and conversion tracking in place first, or it reads as zero.
Revenue per subscriber	Deciding what a subscriber is worth acquiring	Only meaningful over a period long enough to include repeat purchase.
Bounce and complaint rate	Early warning on deliverability	The two that get your domain blocked. Check these before volume, always.

Your score

Count the unticked boxes per group. Fix the group with the most gaps before starting anything new.

Deliverability -- do this first

List health

The emails themselves

Automation

Measurement