

Email deliverability checklist

"Delivered" means a receiving server accepted your email. It says nothing about whether the email reached an inbox, a spam folder or a quarantine, and nothing about the contacts you never emailed at all.

This checklist follows one email from your CRM to a buyer's attention and lists the checks at each of the five places it leaks: never sent, can't receive, rejected, filtered, ignored. It is written for HubSpot Marketing Hub, but every check has an equivalent in other platforms.

Tick what you have done. Anything unticked is where your next lost email is going.

01

LEAK 1 OF 5

Never sent

An email you never send has a deliverability rate of zero. In the portals we audit, between 1% and 31% of marketable contacts have never received a marketing email, and most of those arrived through offline imports and were never put into a programme.

- ☐ **Build an active list:** marketing contacts where *Last marketing email send date* is unknown or more than 90 days ago. Decide for each segment: mail them, re-permission them, or set them to non-marketing.
- ☐ **Check *Marketing contact status source*** for that list. Contacts made marketable by an import or a workflow rather than by a form are the ones nobody owns.
- ☐ **Audit who gets emailed** and who doesn't by lifecycle stage. If leads and subscribers are mailed but customers aren't (or vice versa), that is a gap, not a strategy.
- ☐ **Review your marketing contact tier.** Every marketable contact you never email is a seat you pay for and a buyer you don't reach.
- ☐ **Map your sends to lists** for the last 12 months. Lists that get mailed every week sit next to lists that are never mailed at all; rebalance.

Can't receive

HubSpot stops sending to hard-bounced addresses automatically, but they stay in your database, inflate your list sizes and distort every rate you report. In the portals we audit, between 3% and 20% of all contacts have hard-bounced.

- ☐ **Filter contacts where *Email hard bounce reason is known*.** Export, review, and either delete them or set them to non-marketing so they stop counting.
- ☐ **Do the same for *Email address quarantined* and *Email address invalid*.** These are small numbers but they are pure noise.
- ☐ **Find marketing contacts with no email address at all.** They cannot be emailed and should not be marketable.
- ☐ **Run *Manage duplicates* monthly.** Duplicates split engagement history, so one real person looks like two unengaged ones.
- ☐ **Verify every imported list** with an address-validation tool before import. Never import a list you bought or scraped; it is against HubSpot's acceptable use policy and the bounces will damage your sending reputation for every other email.
- ☐ **Switch on double opt-in** for new subscription sign-ups if your sign-up forms attract bots or mistyped addresses.

Rejected

A bounce is the one failure your platform reports honestly. Programme-wide bounce rates are usually fine; the damage comes from individual sends. In one portal we audited, 66 of 607 emails bounced on more than 2% of their recipients, the worst at 16%, inside an overall hard-bounce rate of 0.6%.

- ☐ **Sort sends by hard-bounce rate** (Marketing → Email → Analyze) and look at every email over 2%. Find what the list had in common (an old import, a trade-show list, a partner's data) and stop mailing that source.
- ☐ **Do the same for unsubscribe rate.** Anything over 1% on a single send means the wrong people got it or they didn't expect it.
- ☐ **Keep programme hard bounces under 1% and spam complaints under 0.1%.** HubSpot's own email health screen (Marketing → Email → Health) flags both.
- ☐ **Separate transactional email from marketing email.** In HubSpot that is the transactional email add-on or a separate sending domain; one stream's reputation should never depend on the other.
- ☐ **Send a small, engaged segment first** for any new or unusual list, and only widen the send once bounces and complaints come back clean.

Filtered

This is the leak nobody can see. Since 2024 Google and Yahoo, and since May 2025 Microsoft, require any domain sending 5,000 or more emails a day to authenticate with SPF, DKIM and DMARC, offer one-click unsubscribe and keep spam complaints below 0.3%. Below that volume the same checks still decide whether you land in the inbox.

SPF

the guest list

A public list of who's allowed to send email as you.

DKIM

the wax seal

A tamper-proof signature on every email you send.

DMARC

the standing orders

What inboxes do when SPF or DKIM fail, plus a report back to you.

BIMI

the lapel badge

Your logo in the inbox, as a reward for doing the other three properly.

- ☐ **SPF** One SPF record per sending domain and subdomain (two records is a fail), and it includes HubSpot's sender: the `include:` value under Settings → Domains & URLs → Email sending.
- ☐ **SPF** The record stays under 10 DNS lookups. Each `include:` counts; CRM, helpdesk, Microsoft 365, Google Workspace and survey tools add up fast. MXToolbox's SPF check counts them for you.
- ☐ **DKIM** Both HubSpot DKIM CNAME records resolve (the hs1 and hs2 selectors) for every sending domain, and HubSpot shows the domain as *Connected* and authenticated.
- ☐ **DKIM** Subdomains you send from (info., news., help.) each have their own DKIM records. In our audits the root domain is usually fine and the subdomains are usually missing.
- ☐ **DMARC** A DMARC record exists on every *From* domain, with a `rua=` reporting address. A record with no reporting address is a policy you can never check.
- ☐ **DMARC** You are reading those reports (EasyDMARC, dmarcian or Valimail turn the XML into something human). Start at `p=none`, fix every legitimate sender that fails, then move to `p=quarantine` and `p=reject` over 60 to 90 days.
- ☐ **DMARC** SPF or DKIM is *aligned*: the domain they authenticate matches the domain in the From address. Authentication without alignment does not pass DMARC.
- ☐ **BIMI** Only once DMARC is at enforcement: publish a BIMI record with an SVG logo and, for Gmail, a Verified Mark Certificate. Nice to have, not a deliverability fix.
- ☐ Register every sending domain in Google Postmaster Tools and check domain reputation and spam rate weekly. Aim for a spam rate under 0.1%.
- ☐ Leave HubSpot's unsubscribe footer and list-unsubscribe headers alone; they are what satisfy the one-click rule.
- ☐ Check your sending domains against blocklists in MXToolbox after any spike in bounces.
- ☐ Every connected domain resolves and has a valid TLS certificate, including the ones you forgot about. An expired certificate on a tracking domain breaks every link in the email.
- ☐ A dedicated IP only if you send 100,000+ emails a month, every month, and can warm it up properly. Below that, HubSpot's shared pool has a better reputation than you will build alone.

Mailbox providers rank you on whether people open, click, reply and delete-without-reading. Mailing people who stopped engaging a year ago doesn't just waste the send; it teaches Gmail and Outlook that your email is unwanted. In three of five portals we audited, two-thirds of marketable contacts had received ten or more emails since they last engaged and were still being mailed.

- ☐ **Tick *Don't send to unengaged contacts* on every marketing send.** In one large portal, sends with this on opened at 18.4% against 13.8% without; in another, 12.1% against 4.6%.
- ☐ **Switch on fatigue suppression** (Settings → Marketing → Email → Subscriptions) and set a threshold. In four of five portals we audited it was holding back zero contacts.
- ☐ **Write a sunset policy and automate it:** a workflow that catches contacts with no open or click in 12 months and 10+ sends, sends one re-permission email, then sets them to non-marketing if they don't respond.
- ☐ **Cap frequency.** List the list-months where one list got five or more campaigns, and ask whether anyone would have wanted all five.
- ☐ **Measure clicks, not opens.** Apple Mail Privacy Protection and corporate link scanners inflate opens; in our audits between 15% and 71% of opens came from privacy proxies. Report click rate, click-to-open rate and replies.
- ☐ **Segment before you send.** If you have 20,000 contacts, find the 2,000 who share something you can talk to.
- ☐ **A/B test subject lines** on every send that goes to more than a few hundred people. HubSpot does the split for you.

REFERENCE

Benchmarks

The thresholds below are the ones Articulate's Morse audit uses. Mailbox providers publish the complaint limit; the rest are working rules from auditing millions of B2B sends.

Measure	Healthy	Investigate	Source
Spam complaint rate	under 0.1%	over 0.3%	Google and Yahoo bulk-sender rules
Hard bounce rate, programme	under 1%	over 2%	Morse
Hard bounce rate, single email	under 2%	over 2%	Morse
Unsubscribe rate, programme	0.2% to 0.5%	over 0.5%	Morse
Unsubscribe rate, single email	under 1%	over 1%	Morse
Click rate trend	flat or rising	down 20% quarter on quarter	Morse
Inbox placement (seed test)	over 90%	under 87% (2025 global average)	Validity 2026 benchmark
Contacts never emailed	under 5% of marketable	over 20%	Morse
Contacts mailed 10+ times since last engagement	under 20% of marketable	over 50%	Morse

A routine that keeps it fixed

Deliverability isn't a setting. It's a habit. Three cadences cover everything in this checklist.

Weekly

Google Postmaster Tools (domain reputation, spam rate). DMARC aggregate reports in EasyDMARC.

Monthly

HubSpot email health screen. Hard-bounce and unsubscribe outliers in Email Analyze. Manage duplicates. The never-emailed list from Leak 1.

Quarterly

SPF lookup count and DKIM records on every sending domain (MXToolbox). DMARC policy step-up. TLS expiry on connected domains. A full Morse audit.

Want your own numbers?

We'll run Morse over your HubSpot portal and show you your five leaks. No charge, no pitch, you keep the report.

articulatemarketing.com/meet

Sources Validity, 2026 Email Deliverability Benchmark Report · Google, Yahoo and Microsoft bulk-sender requirements, 2024–2025 · EasyDMARC, 2026 DMARC Adoption and Enforcement Report · Articulate Morse email and HubSpot portal audits, 2026 (anonymised)