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Email Marketing in 2020

20 Experts Share Their Visions of the Future of the Channel

Email marketing is not for the faint of heart. Whether mobile devices and wearables are redefining email design, inbox providers are redefining engagement and deliverability, or email service providers (ESPs) are redefining personalization and targeting—the channel is constantly evolving.

All this change means that marketers are always reacting, learning, and planning for the future as best they can. Stay nimble, email marketers, because there's a lot more change on the horizon!

In this report, we take a look at what email marketing will be like in the year 2020—in terms of the subscriber experience, inbox functionality, deliverability, design and coding, the technology provider landscape, and much more.

To provide the full picture, we surveyed marketers and consumers about the channel, and then asked 20 experts to share their vision of email's future. Our diverse panel of experts hail from ESPs, agencies, consultancies, and research and education firms—from the US and overseas.

The mosaic of predictions creates a collective vision of the future that's both exciting as well as a bit daunting. Prepare for the future of email marketing!

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Context Will Shape the Subscriber Experience

Daniel Burstein
Director of Editorial Content
MarketingSherpa

The biggest change we'll see in 2020 is the increasing effectiveness of email readers to help customers identify relevant email.

The inbox of today is still largely an unorganized mess, especially when compared to search engines' ability to provide relevant information to consumers. And email readers can know subscribers and their preferences at a deeper level than search engines.

So email readers are going to get better and better at helping recipients manage their email by factoring in contextual information and no longer simply displaying email by an arbitrary factor like recency.

We've seen the first primeval stirrings with Gmail's Priority Inbox, Outlook's Clutter feature, Google Now, etc. But as the technology companies behind email soft-

ware improve their use of machine learning and Big Data, they will better predict what customers want to see.

For example, if it's 1:45 pm on Sunday and the Jaguars are playing, the top email in my inbox will be from ESPN about the playoff picture. But once I leave my house and go to the local organic grocer, the shopping list from my wife and an Organic Valley coupon will switch to the top emails in my inbox. This will happen seamlessly, with no action on my part.

Based on my behavioral data, geolocation, and the like, my email reader will use context clues to serve me information based on my needs at that moment (now, that's truly responsive email).

In addition to passive pattern recognition based on subscriber actions, this better experience will encourage customers to trust email readers more and voluntarily provide information. There is a creepy factor to all of this, of course. But people have consistently shared data when it created a worthwhile customer experience.

For example, commercial data brokers tried for years to keep accurate databases of company employees. No easy task, with how often people change jobs. Then, a service came along that convinced people to put detailed information into a database and keep it updated and accurate. Voluntarily. That's why we have a data broker in social media clothing called LinkedIn today.

I may sound overly optimistic. I may sound like a dreamer. But email technology is ripe for this innovation to better serve email subscribers.

Or…a massive asteroid could slam into the Atlantic and destroy everything. It could go either way.

Content Modules & Targeting Models

Morgan Stewart
Chief Executive Officer
Trendline Interactive

Email's full potential has started to be tapped in ways Don Peppers and Martha Rogers envisioned nearly 20 years ago when they wrote *The One-to-One Future*. Back then, they anticipated a day when marketers could communicate with customers in a way that was truly relevant and personal—that marketers would listen to customer actions and respond accordingly.

While the vision has not changed much in those 20 years, the data and processing power required to realize this vision are finally at a point that marketers can both listen and respond accordingly. Three major trends will help email marketers bring this vision to life over the next five years:

01 | Cross-channel data

The emergence of tools like Facebook Custom Audiences and Google Customer Match allow us to target customers through different channels and develop a more sophisticated view of our audiences. As these offerings expand and new services emerge, incomplete customer profiles will increasingly become a thing of the past.

02 | Machine learning

In order to deliver a one-to-one experience, customer data and content must be completely divorced from one another and algorithms applied that identify which content should be delivered to which customer, and when. Armed with more data and processing power, we can increasingly apply and optimize statistical models that incorporate cross-channel data as well as signals collected through email and site behavior. This will allow us to deliver content that meets customers' expectations, while also exposing them to new products and content they like but wouldn't have thought to ask for otherwise.

03 | Visibility

Tools like Tableau allow us to visualize data in new ways, but more importantly, a new generation of cloud-based business intelligence platforms allows us to quickly aggregate data from multiple sources in order to see how programs are impacting downstream performance. Additionally, the ability to view downstream performance by segment—or even by specific email content—furthers our optimization opportunities.

Despite the increased sophistication of the tools at our disposal, the challenge ahead is to push past the current processes that insist on approving the "final PDF." The client-approval step will shift toward reviewing content modules, not full creative, and signing off on targeting models, not customer segments. Organizations able to shift to this abstract level of marketing will pull away from the pack, while those caught in the status quo will struggle to stay relevant in the marketplace.

The Most Future-Proof Channel

Email is more likely to be around in 10 years than Facebook, cable TV, Twitter, and other channels, according to consumers. And support for email is particularly strong among two key demographics. First, older Millennials, a group thought to be hostile toward email, are the most optimistic about email's longevity. And second, consumers with above average household incomes are also bullish on email. Such optimism among younger, well off consumers is a sign that email marketing will be strong in 2020 and beyond.

Channels with Staying Power

Percentage of consumers who think the following channels will still exist in 10 years

Email - 70.0%

Facebook - 67.6%

Cable TV- 67.4%

Twitter - 60.2%

Snapchat - 57.1%

Postal Mail - 56.2%

Pinterest - 55.5%

Print Media - 51.5%

Landline Phone - 46.6%

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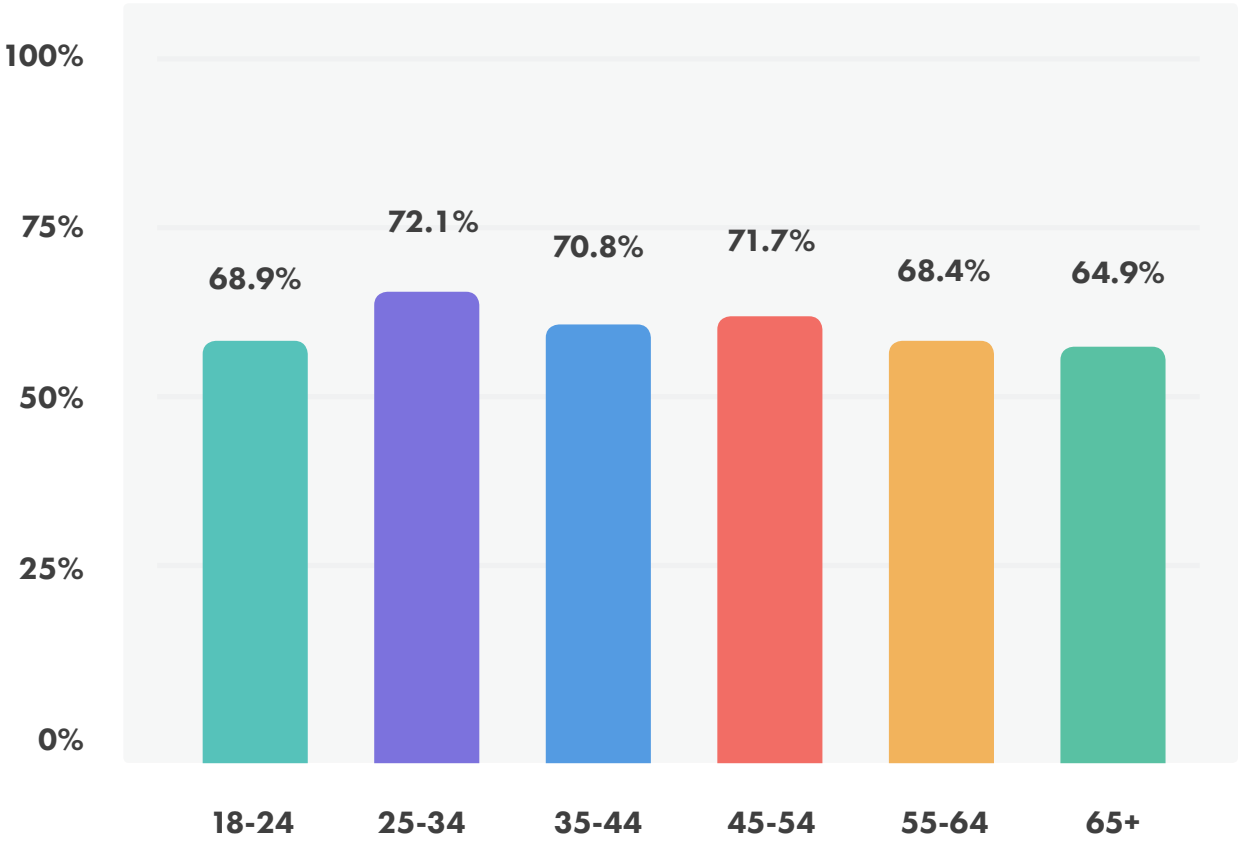
Source: This survey was commissioned by Litmus and conducted online within the U.S. by Fluent, Inc. on Nov. 4, 2015 among 1,225 American adults. Respondents were randomly selected, and the findings are at a 99% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 3.5%. Fluent's proprietary ad serving technology includes a real-time survey module that was used to facilitate the data collection for this study.

25-34 Year Olds Are Most Bullish on Email

Percentage of consumers by age who think email will still exist in 10 years



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Above Average Earners Optimistic about Email

Percentage of consumers in households making more than $60,000 a year who think the following channels will still exist in 10 years

1	Email	65.2%
2	Cable TV	62.7%
3	Facebook	60.9%
4	Pinterest	60.3%
5	Twitter	57.8%
6	Postal Mail	55.3%
7	Snapchat	53.4%
8	Print Media	47.8%
9	Landline Phone	39.1%

Fluent litmus

Source: This survey was commissioned by Litmus and conducted online within the U.S. by Fluent, Inc. on Nov. 4, 2015 among 1,225 American adults. Respondents were randomly selected, and the findings are at a 99% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 3.5%. Fluent's proprietary ad serving technology includes a real-time survey module that was used to facilitate the data collection for this study.

Achieving Digital Integrated Marketing Communications

Jill LeMaire Redo

Vice President of Digital Strategy and Insights
Epsilon

A diminished role for email within the broader field of digital marketing is a perennial—and perennially misguided—forecast. We've heard it before with the emergence of social, display, and now mobile…but it still hasn't happened! Rather email continues to remain a powerful channel alongside search.

In 2020, email will continue to be an anchor, but what will change is the evaporation of siloed channels, allowing the walls to come down and enabling orchestrated digital marketing in a broader sense—that is, Digital Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC).

The principal change agent to get to IMC will first and foremost be people, process and strategy, and finally technology. Strategic roadmaps and customer journey maps will become central to understanding what customers want and need before making technology and channel decisions.

Marketers will be better able to take advantage of predictive, real-time

cues to drive a personalized customer journey and data harvesting that shares key information across channels. That will allow us to create more of a business rules environment than a campaign-based environment. And with that, a parallel path for experimental design and analytics.

CPM-based pricing models at ESPs and their resulting pricing wars have driven a race to the bottom. By 2020, CPM will be less of a factor and performance-based pricing models will reign instead.

Many brand managers appreciate the sound of this, but since email marketing is often viewed as a cost center without directly linking revenue, the realization of this approach is difficult. As a result, what will become a differentiator for ESPs is not just pricing but, more importantly, services and strategic partnerships.

Wearables will have emerged in a major way, heavily underscoring the need to move to more contextual experiences. Messaging will be short, providing immediate value—long-form content will most likely get discarded.

All of this means that by 2020, hyper-personalization in marketing will reach a significant level, along with rules-based triggers, assimilation of the mobile channel, and connecting data from other channels and platforms.

Effortless experiences will be more tailored, adaptive, and predictive by combining a host of active, passive, and situational data. That effortless experience will deliver truly relevant experiences to customers across channels by delivering the right experience to the right user at the right time and through the right channel—which will still include email.

Millennials & Data Will Shape Email's Future

Ryan Phelan
Vice President of Marketing Insights
Adestra

Truly, the email channel will evolve faster over the next five years than at any time in our history. It's already changing at such a rapid pace that it's a struggle sometimes to understand adoption, its necessity and long-term implication to the digital ecosphere.

Two key—and related—developments will change our medium:

First, it's the Millennials and their use of more real-time communication. Email, in turn, will become more real time. This will not only change consumers' medium for consumption (i.e. introduction of new technologies), but also the frequency of response, and possibly lead to shorter and more instantly consumable message content.

In the past, we've been limited by security and function, but technology will evolve to help us meet this expectation. We've already seen it happen with HTML5. I expect inbox providers like Microsoft will adopt this technology rapidly because the benefits are clear and compelling.

And second, we will see broader and more extensive use of data. This is influenced by the Millennials' concept that there is no expectation of privacy, as well as the greater variety and capabilities of the tools we have to use data. Email has not taken advantage of the data-rich environment that other digital marketing channels enjoy.

People's expectations of communication will more align to their other concepts of the digital experience. As those continue to propagate, we will see emails vital nature pair alongside that evolution. Email must use the tools available from ESPs and third-party providers to harness data in meeting those expectations.

We've preached for the last 10 years that marketers must change their strategies and tactics. This will happen when technology providers create the "easy" button that allows for much more rapid growth. This will be forced both by consumer demand and emerging technologies where marketers demand more from an email platform.

On the technology side, consolidation will have already happened through the mid-market and integration with broad data-based technologies will be in full swing making it easier for data to be shared and acted upon.

We might not be far from achieving some of the 1-to-1 marketing that appeared in Minority Report*, but the impetus for change is going to come as leaders in the younger generation adapt to and evolve the incumbent technology.*

Change will happen as these leaders step into the light.

One-to-One Digital Messaging at Scale

Eric Stahl

Senior Vice President of Product Marketing
Salesforce Marketing Cloud

Email marketing—really all marketing—is becoming all about connecting to each and every customer at the individual level across their entire journey. With the customer in control of their media consumption, this shift is only going to accelerate.

This presents a bright future for email in the multichannel world. Unlike any other marketing channel, email holds two key advantages: It is permission-based, and it unveils robust first-party data, which enables greater personalization with every interaction. The email address is now the key to identity-based advertising on platforms like Facebook and Google.

Successful organizations will break down data silos and share data from across the enterprise, creating a consistent subscriber experience across the entire lifecycle. Email marketers will leverage data to create greater personalization, with a single view of the customer, putting email at the center of the convergence between the physical and digital worlds.

From an email marketer's perspective, data science will completely drive content and timing. Marketers will create templates that enhance scale through automations and scale for personalized content based on each individual's unique history, behavior, preferences, and journey.

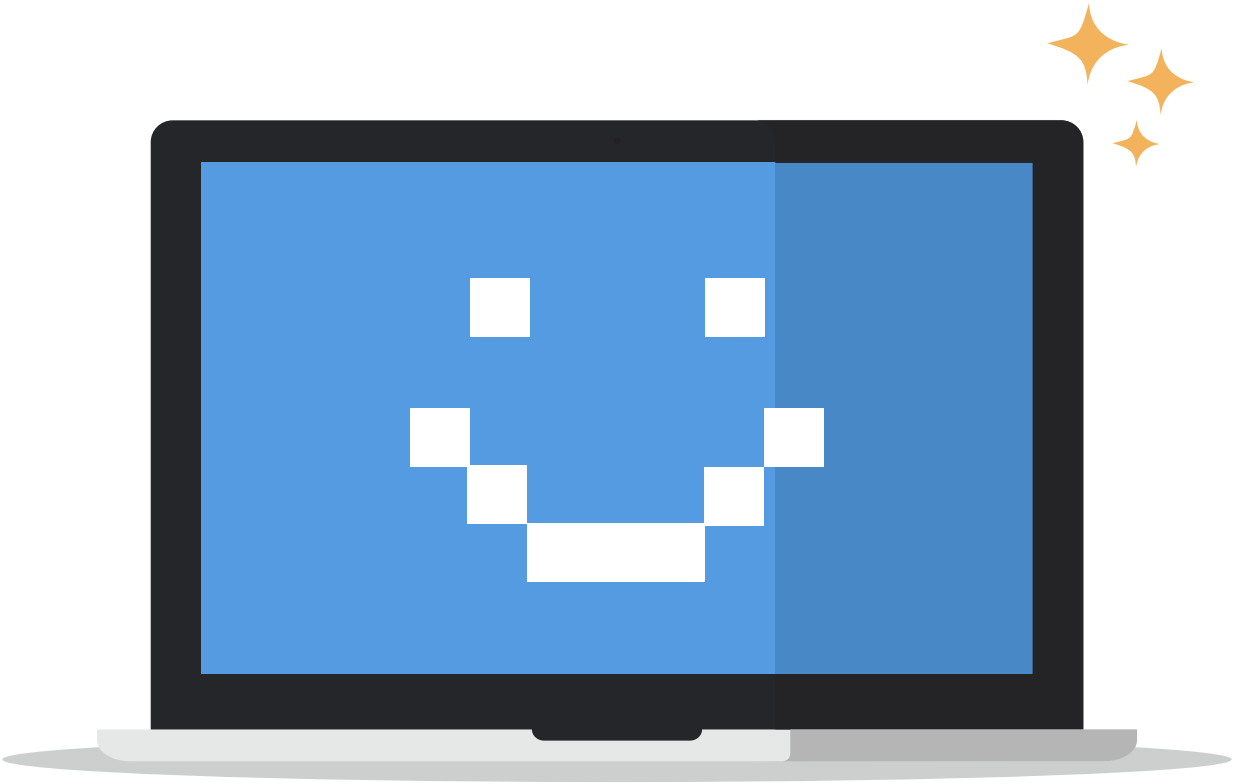
Email will leverage every interaction from the Internet of Things, location, behavioral data, and customer preferences to deliver messages to the customer in exactly the right context.

All parts of the organization will work with marketing to establish performance goals and desired outcomes, then optimize every interaction to create the most seamless path for each individual customer.

Uniting data and automation will create unprecedented, 1-to-1 digital messaging at scale. Email marketers need to leverage data science to identify patterns and optimize performance, combining their knowledge of the email platform with an understanding of which data is most relevant to driving increased conversions. Of course, great content will continue to be a key component—it is the catalyst for creating engagement and action.

With Millennials becoming the top group desired by brands, marketers are going to need to be extremely careful to earn consumers' trust and keep it. More than any other, these subscribers want personalized, relevant communications at each step along their journey, but they expect brands to respect their preferences.

Brands that are hyper-focused on delighting the customer and maintaining a high level of trust are going to be the big beneficiaries of this seismic shift.



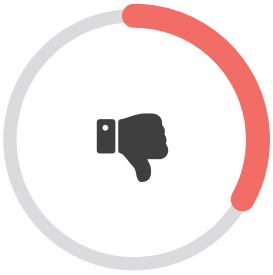
Rise of the Machines

The role of machine learning is expected to play a big role in the creation and sending of email content in the future. We see the beginnings of this trend with predictive analytics for suggested products and content, as well as some of the more advanced data analytics that are able to uncover patterns in complex data sets. Many expect this trend to continue to the point where much of email is automated and content is drafted by machines.

Our Email Copilots

Will machine learning, AI, and predictive software ever determine the majority of the content (subject lines, images, copy, etc.) in marketing emails?

66.1% - Yes



33.9% - No

Source: Litmus poll of 1,137 visitors to its blog between Dec. 14, 2015 and Jan. 15, 2016

Highly Automated

Five years in the future, all email marketing will be automated.

+ +	**Strongly agree**	**13%**
+	**Somewhat agree**	**40%**
/	**Neutral**	**15%**
-	**Somewhat disagree**	**24%**
- -	**Strongly disagree**	**8%**

Completely Personalized

Five years in the future, all email communication will be completely personalized.

+ +	Strongly agree	36%
+	Somewhat agree	40%
/	Neutral	13%
-	Somewhat disagree	8%
- -	Strongly disagree	3%

Fully Integrated

Five years in the future, email will be fully integrated with other marketing channels.

+ +	Strongly agree	38%
+	Somewhat agree	46%
/	Neutral	12%
-	Somewhat disagree	4%
- -	Strongly disagree	1%

Source: Econsultancy/Adestra's 2015 Email Marketing Census survey of 448 marketers during January and February 2015 https://econsultancy.com/reports/email-census/

The Next-Generation Email Automation

Tim Watson
Email Marketing Consultant
Zettasphere

By 2020, we can expect to see new approaches that allow scaling of personalised messages in ways not currently possible.

Right now, statically designed automation sequences are fine because there are just a few behavioural triggers and most brands have just a few simple sequences—perhaps a welcome sequence for new prospects, on-boarding for new customers, and a few process abandon sequences such as abandoned purchases.

The issue is it doesn't scale. What messaging should someone receive if they start as a new prospect and within a few days abandon a web purchase, continue to buy offline, review a product, browse three more products in two different categories, click a PPC ad, and log onto the mobile app for the first time?

As the number of behaviours captured increases, using the fixed message flowchart-type approach to creating automation sequences that is common to all current automation vendors leads to unmanageable automation.

Customers may concurrently sit in multiple messaging sequences leading

to an uncoordinated communication mess. When creating complex automation, the ability to visualise the experience of individual customers rapidly diminishes.

New paradigms are needed that allow marketers to create principle-based automation rather than the current prescriptive-based methods. Operating off these principles,

Machine intelligence will manage and control the messaging to each individual across channels, creating the truly integrated experiences that are currently talked about a lot but rarely delivered.

This needs the customer to be modelled and everything driven from this rather than the current modelling of message sequences.

And then it's not just about the right sequence and timing, but the right content too. Until now automation has mostly been around timing relevance—reactive sending when the customer is already showing engagement by downloading a whitepaper or making a transaction, for example.

The change for 2020 must be automation to scale the right content delivery. The content of broadcast email must be personalised at huge scale with the same behavioural intelligence used to power triggered messaging.

This includes providing strongly personalised subject lines, which may involve elements of AI to write the correct subject line for each individual in a campaign.

The best marketing is and will always be providing strong customer-centric experiences. The difference in 2020 is going to be about how email marketers have to think about and deliver those experiences, taking the fire hose of behavioural cross-channel data and making sense of it for each and every customer.

Email Data Powering Success in Other Channels

Loren McDonald
Marketing Evangelist
Silverpop, An IBM Company

Over the last 20 years, email marketing has progressed from primarily a broadcast messaging channel to one that includes everything from transactional messages to behavior-based, highly personalized one-to-one marketing.

In the next 5 years, however, email will be seen as not just a high-ROI channel by itself but rather a platform that integrates with and makes other channels more successful.

Marketers now recognize email is neither slowing nor dying. In fact, email is the dominant digital identity and the channel consumers prefer when receiving communications from brands.

The email address has become the standard digital identity for consumers when navigating on the Internet. According to the Radicati Group, 2.6 billion people worldwide have email accounts, with an average of 1.7 accounts per individual. By contrast, Facebook, the world's most popular social media platform has 1.55 billion active users worldwide. Much of

email's future lies where these two user groups overlap.

In the next five years, email marketing will remain the top performing messaging channel. As marketing platforms become more affordable and easier to use, email will finally live up to its promise of true one-to-one marketing.

But we will also see dramatic growth in the recognition and use of the email address and associated behavior outside of the channel itself. Some marketers have deployed these email uses for several years, such as emails that retarget customers who have abandoned shopping carts, forms, or web sessions. These remarketing programs are commonplace among retailers, but other industries will adopt them, along with similar approaches, in a big way in the next few years.

The greatest evolution will come when more brands use the email address and associated behavior to retarget subscribers via social channels and web personalization. Facebook's Custom Audiences and Google's Customer Match will be the primary vehicles.

Both platforms allow you to upload an email list and retarget those subscribers—or those that share similar demographics, profiles and behaviors—on their properties. With Google's Customer Match, for example, you can target ads to your email newsletter subscribers who visited certain product pages on your website but didn't convert when they use Google Search, view their Gmail inbox, or watch videos on YouTube.

So while email marketing is still siloed in many organizations today, in 2020, email will not only be used in coordination with other channels, but behavioral data from email interactions will be used to power responses in other channels. In other words, the email channel will be prized not only for the direct action it drives, but for the actionable data it generates to fuel other channel activities.

In-Email Purchases, Super-Sophisticated Targeting, & Data-Driven Experiences

Tom Klein
Vice President of Marketing
MailChimp

Email is already a rich, interactive medium for marketing, and by 2020, this will be even more true. Especially for ecommerce businesses, it'll no longer be thought of as a simple, one-way delivery system to steer a customer toward a shop. Instead, email will be even more widely recognized as a vital part of the whole retail experience.

In the future, email will work harder and smarter to help small businesses.

Subscribers will be able to make purchases right inside a marketing campaign, without ever leaving their inboxes. Campaigns will offer more of an app-like experience, too, with embedded video and other interactivity.

Data will be a huge factor in email marketing in 2020. MailChimp is already helping our users head in this direction. They'll have more access to more data that will allow them to do super-sophisticated targeting based on combinations of purchase behavior, customer service interactions, and more.

Email marketers will be able to create increasingly personalized shopping experiences tailored to the habits and preferences of each of their subscribers.

Email is already the best way for ecommerce retailers to learn about their customers, make relevant and timely product recommendations, and generate sales. I think this will be even more true in the future as more and more marketers realize email's enduring power.

Inboxes are — and will continue to be — where we meet, serve, and learn from our subscribers, and where our businesses grow.

True Automation

Dave Chaffey
Chief Executive Officer & Co-founder
Smart Insights

To look forward to the future of email marketing, I believe we need to first look back to appreciate how little support for and adoption of customised lifecycle messaging there has been. The vast majority of email marketing campaigns involve either no segmentation at all or targeting of just four to six segments, according to our State of Email Marketing in 2015 research.However, by 2020, I expect to see much more support within platforms to deliver on the promise of email marketing automation, including:

01 | Automation of benchmarking and recommendations

Given current variable adoption of best practices, by 2020, systems will step marketers through all the best practices for customised lifecycle marketing, creative, and delivery. This should be based on ongoing benchmarking and anonymous comparison against other similar companies.

02 | Automation of customer lifecycle sequences for the individual

Platforms will evolve beyond 'drag and drop' editors to libraries that automate the creation of lifecycle sequences.

03 | Automation of segmentation

By 2020, platforms will automate creation of target segments based on profile, behavior, and value propositions available from a brand.

04 | Automation of reporting

Much reporting today is still based on performance of an individual broadcast. Reporting needs to be smarter, showing success in engaging individuals over time based on segmentation, targeting, and value offered to subscribers.

05 | Automation of creative optimisation

Most of the testing of email creative is still limited to subject lines, but in the future, platforms will better support A/B and multivariate testing so that it becomes as common as website testing is today.

06 | Automation of integration

Email marketing isn't a separate activity, but often email activity isn't integrated with other experiences as a subscriber browses the website or uses a mobile site. That will change.

Today, the Single Customer View is a myth for most businesses. This will change as email is integrated with other marketing channels within Marketing Cloud services so that email interactions are treated as part of the overall digital experience that includes website, mobile app, and social interactions.

Can platform vendors achieve these major changes in just 4 or 5 years? I think they can, which will be all the more impressive considering how well-established email marketing is.

A Top Marketing Investment Opportunity

Over the past decade, email marketing's return on investment (ROI) has only been rivaled by organic search's. And marketers think this trend will continue for at least the next 5 years, with email marketing remaining one of the top ROI channels.

Most Foresee Even Higher ROI

In the year 2020, will email marketing's return on investment (ROI) be higher or lower than it is now?

46.5% - Higher **19.8% - About the same** **33.6% - Lower**

Source: Litmus poll of 2,746 visitors to its blog between Nov. 16 and Dec. 14, 2015

A Top Performer

Five years in the future, email will still be one of the highest channels for delivering ROI

+ +	**Strongly agree**	**29%**
+	**Somewhat agree**	**45%**
/	**Neutral**	**15%**
-	**Somewhat disagree**	**9%**
- -	**Strongly disagree**	**1%**

Source: Econsultancy/Adestra's 2015 Email Marketing Census survey of 448 marketers during January and February 2015 https://econsultancy.com/reports/email-census/

Email & Email Marketers Integrated into Suite

Kristin Naragon
Director of Email Solutions
Adobe

It's easy to say with confidence that the email landscape of 2020 will be defined by the investment and effort organizations put into their programs. Here are 3 predictions for email marketing and the role it will play in marketing in 2020:

01 | Demise of the "Email Service Provider"

In the past few years, a shift emerged where traditional email service providers explored new territory with mergers and acquisitions, new platform interfaces, and rebranding to become "marketing clouds." In 2020, we're likely to see few competitors describe themselves as "email service providers."

Despite name rebrands, an ESP is not a marketing cloud. For email marketers looking to advance, they need to find a way to put email in context of other channels and be sure the marketing platform they're using lets them do that.

02 | Director of Email Is CMO's Right Hand

Traditionally, email marketing fell under the umbrella of a larger digital marketing strategy—a sort of bolt-on task assigned on an ad-hoc basis, often to entry level practitioners. But the profession has changed, and today's email marketers are entering the field with more technical prowess than ever before.

Armed with solid marketing strategy, deep knowledge of data, and cutting-edge proficiencies, 2020's practitioners will be coveted assets. In fact, smart companies that recognize the value of email marketing will retain top talent by offering tenured career opportunities within the company.

03 | Contextual Data Will Be King

Today's consumer can be anywhere doing anything when checking their email. For the email marketer, learning to drive loyalty with the use of contextual data clues—time, geo-location, weather, events, behavior, etc.—is gold.

By 2020, the ability to use these data points to inform campaigns and drive specific content in real time to subscribers will become the status quo. While only the most advanced programs are using these data points now, new integrations and technology will create opportunities for marketers to gain competitive advantage by applying and executing data based on trends that are unique to their business.

We are on the cusp of a golden era of email marketing where technology enables reliable, personal interactions between people and brands. Savvy marketers will embrace new technologies, allowing them to more clearly create one consumer experience, regardless of channel. Digital communication will evolve and while no one can predict the future, one thing is perfectly clear—email marketing is sure to be part of it.

From Email Marketer to Lieutenant of Digital Interactions

Chris Lynch
Senior Director of Product Marketing
Oracle Marketing Cloud

While email will remain a strategic marketing channel—and still one of the most reliable in terms of revenue generation—the increasingly fractured view of the customer is becoming a bigger concern for email marketers.

Although email marketers have always faced challenges in building out audience profiles, the problem was largely about in-store vs. online behaviors. Since then, the problem has become even more complex.

As today's consumers meander across email, mobile, social, in-store, and paid media channels at will, they generate a multitude of different identifiers, cookies, and device IDs. This makes the view of customers more complex.

Email marketers are often left blind to the many interactions a customer has with their brand due to the siloed nature of their messaging approach, or because their solution isn't built to allow these interactions to inform the larger marketing strategy.

Beyond the more traditional channels within the email marketer's purview, like display, search, and video.

The convergence of marketing technology with advertising technology is taking email marketing to another level. Email platforms will need to be able to integrate with platforms that handle the anonymous marketing data.

As we see this convergence of channels across paid, owned, and earned media continue to evolve, email will see some shifts in ownership from an organizational perspective.

Today, email marketing often sits within in a marketing CRM or direct marketing organization.

In the near future, we project these organizations will evolve into a distinct digital marketing organization that spans commerce, web, email, mobile messaging, and paid channels

This evolution requires the email marketer to greatly expand their breadth of responsibility and act as the main lieutenant responsible for all digital interactions.

The gradual transition has already started to materialize in market and the demand for products that allow scale across all channels out of the box has never been higher.

Even clients whose current needs are satisfied by email alone express relief in knowing that they have cross-channel capabilities where they can grow.

Plenty of Waves of Disruption

Simms Jenkins
Chief Executive Officer
BrightWave

Email will continue to sit in the middle of the marketing cloud and be the hub of the consumer digital experience—it's just going to look different and evolve.

While emerging messaging channels will come and go and occupy dominant niche channels (think SnapChat and YikYak), email will be the old battle axe that won't go away. As long as permission is the centerpiece of the email marketing value proposition and consumers and businesses crave discounts and exclusive content, email will successfully fight for screen time and wallet share.

Subscribers will likely toggle between messaging, social networks, and email inboxes to find the best offer or most recent news from their favorite brands. With digital consumers' attention spans shrinking, poor email marketers will finally begin to suffer a just fate. No longer will email work "just because." Only smart, innovative, and highly dynamic emails will drive interaction, and generic blasts will get weeded out of the subscribers' priorities, if not outright emotionally junked.

The little things will continue to matter as subject lines and preheaders

have a huge impact on the emotional pull between the read or delete conundrum. Marketers that ignore the strategic and highly tactical will face grave inbox peril.

The renaissance of email creative will continue, with added emphasis on making emails stand out from each other and from other messaging channels. A well-crafted email will continue to raise a brand's perception and get better response, especially on mobile and tablets.

Think images that change based on the time of day the email is opened, relevant video based on your preferences, and interactive features like the email carrousel we used in our holiday email to subscribers.

Expect the inbox to continue to morph into a more dynamic environment mirroring the web. Great tools and innovations will move email from a static, "been there, sent that" state to a highly customized message that can adapt based on marketing and subscriber elements.

As for what the email marketing vendor landscape will look like in 2020, there will be three categories of companies. The first will be the dominant technology providers, which largely consist of the major cloud providers: Salesforce.com, IBM, and Oracle.

The second will be independent companies that fit into the "make email better" category. Some of these have been around a while—such as Return Path or my agency, BrightWave—and some are newer to the space and have raised considerable capital—for example, LiveIntent, Movable Ink, and Litmus.

The last category is companies that don't exist today but will be a hybrid of "make email better" combined with "make email different." I can't wait to see what this last category looks like.

10 Changes to Email Driven by SVOC & IoT

Cara Olson

Director of Direct Marketing and eCRM
DEG

With many brands spending the past two years focusing on data and integrations, I predict that the next several years will focus on taking advantage of the single view of the customer (SVOC) to bring to life all the touchpoints identified in customer-journey mapping.Here are 10 ways email messaging will be created and experienced differently by 2020:

01 | Emails will be viewed more as messages, and these will display on devices that are part of the Internet of Things (IoT). Think email-message alerts on your appliances, when you start your car, walk into your house, etc.

02 | New metrics will emerge to report on this message engagement on new devices (watches and IoT). Think the "read" notification that an iPhone can show after someone reads a text message.

03 | Fifteen percent or less of these messages will be read on a desktop. And instead of seeing metrics for desktop, tablet, and mobile, you will have reporting on potentially hundreds of IoT devices.

04 Instead of creating a text version of a message, it will be more like a "short version" that can display on these devices beyond the phone.

05 Customer interactions will happen within the email, brand app, or device that displayed the message (like your refrigerator) rather than driving to a website.

06 Creating the full message of an email will be more accommodating—like web HTML in coding capabilities and practices.

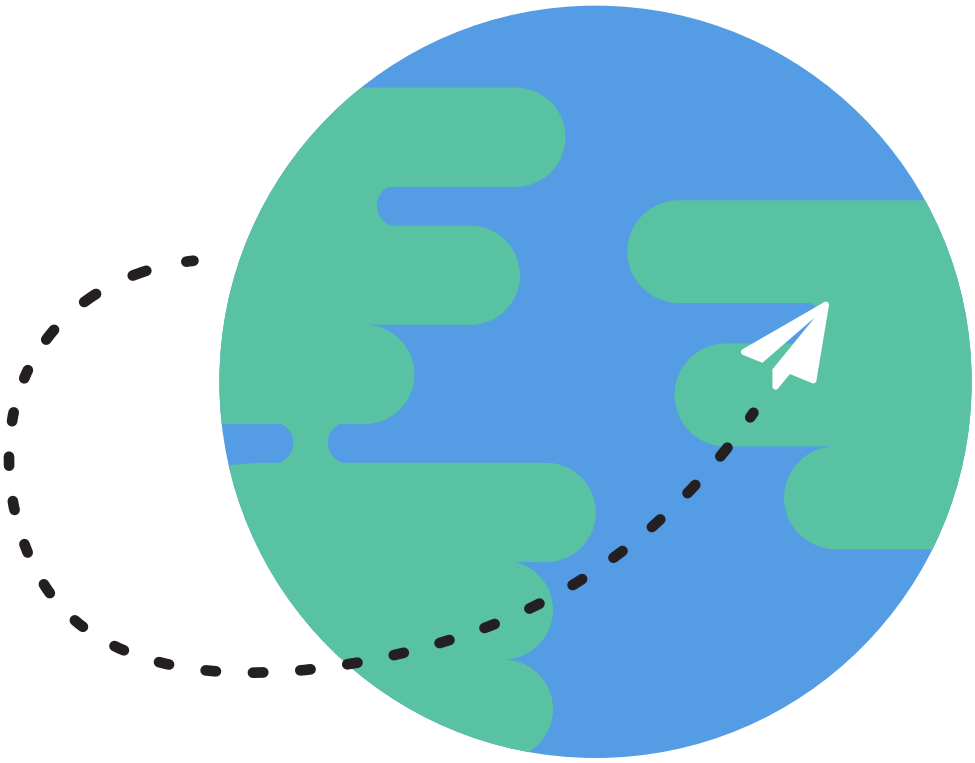
07 HTML live text and subject lines will be able to be changed after the email has been sent.

08 You'll make an online purchase directly from an email by simply using your thumbprint on your watch for authorization.

09 Inboxes will auto-organize promotional messages by brand, making it easy to find a promotion for redemption in store. Even so, retail stores will be able to pull up your email promotions via your account in-store, rather than you having to search your inbox.

10 Beyond voice commands to read and respond to text messages, your car will be able to read email messages to you—and allow you to respond via voice—on your commute to and from work.

In the end, these new messages will be shorter, easier to create, and hyper-relevant—and the term "email service provider" won't make sense anymore because these messages will span more than an email inbox. So get ready to change your title from Email Marketer to Messaging Marketer.



No Standards in Email's Future

While marketers are optimistic about the future of email, they're not optimistic about the industry ever being able to coalesce around an email coding standard in the same way that web developers have standards. Some believe that standards are impossible because the inbox environment is fragmented and still actively evolving, or because inbox providers have little incentive to cooperate with each other. But some see reasons to be optimistic as there are signs of inbox platform consolidation ahead as email reading moves increasingly to mobile.

Most Marketers Doubt There Will Ever Be Email Standards

Do you think there will ever be a generally accepted set of email coding standards?

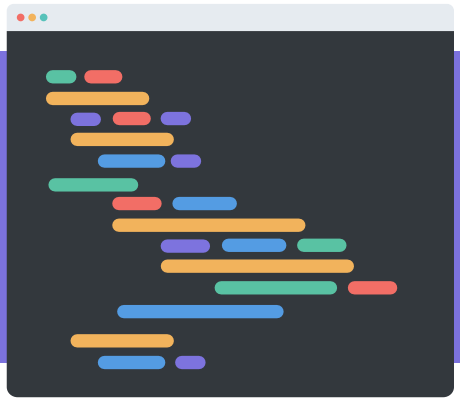
38.5% - Yes **61.5% - No**

Source: Litmus poll of 3,754 visitors to its blog between Oct. 21 and Nov. 13, 2015

"Even if [Microsoft] flips the switch and changes it tomorrow, there's going to be years of lag before subscribers catch up."

—Fabio Carneiro, Lead Email Developer and UX Designer, MailChimp

For more, **check out Will We Ever Have Email Coding Standards?** on the Litmus blog.



Email as the Universal Plumbing

Paul Farnell

Chief Executive Officer & Co-founder

Litmus

Today, if you invite me to a meeting, my watch beeps and I can accept the invite with one tap. Later, if you change the meeting location, my calendar instantly updates across all my devices. This happens transparently, but it's all powered by email. It's this universal plumbing upon which ever more powerful interactions will be built.

I believe email volume is going to increase dramatically by 2020, but it won't feel like it. Inboxes will prioritize messages, many email interactions will be brief, and many emails won't feel like emails at all. As with calendar invites today, there will be a multitude more of automated interactions and machine-to-machine messages.

We'll be able to transact more with emails without even opening them—similar to Gmail's Quick Action buttons today. You'll see more abstraction of email CTAs into other applications, and further interaction types.

In many cases, you won't need to open a full-blown HTML email to see your flight information—it'll be loaded

into your Passbook automatically and you'll never see the underlying email message at all.

Inbox concierge services like Unroll.me and SaneBox will become commonplace and integrated into existing inboxes. Through machine learning, these tools will organize our messages based on our behavior and preferences, pushing some messages to the top, some into folders, or even acting on them then hiding them with no human interaction at all.

For instance, I may never see travel notifications as they'll automatically be archived, the pertinent information already inserted in my TripIt account.

Building on the example of the calendar's .ics file format, emails will make more use of standardized data formats. They will be better able to render content on devices with limited functionality—such as watches and other wearables—and to exchange data between different platforms.

In the years ahead, there will be many more of these standard data formats available—think status updates, travel information, receipts...

These new data formats will be pivotal in the next wave of email communication: machine-to-machine messaging. Email is the universal plumbing that connects the Internet of Things.

When I get low on milk, my smart fridge could email my grocery store app, adding milk to my shopping list. And when I go grocery shopping, the receipt will be emailed to my financial software app, which will add that to the itemization of my purchases.

In short: email will simultaneously become more ubiquitous, valuable, integrated into our lives and devices, and at the same time ever more invisible.

What's Necessary? Just the Subject Line and a Call-to-Action

Dan Denney
Front-End Developer
Code School

Small screen clients changed the way that people read email and, in turn, how we create them.

At this point, it's safer to create a small screen–only layout than to make one that is not formatted for smaller screens. "Mobile" opens have taken the lead over desktop opens and will continue to grow until an open isn't necessary.

You see, a similar technology, push notifications, has been rapidly growing as well. These short messages with a call-to-action are the focus of many device and OS creators because they are one piece of the puzzle in creating a seamless experience across all of your devices.

As we all get used to more of these short messages with an action that gets us right where we need to be, email marketing will move toward this as well.

By 2020, I expect the bulk of email marketing to be similar to the experience of Gmail's Quick Actions. The

whole message will be the length of a current subject line with a call-to-action.

While this will reduce the need for visual design, it will increase the need for copy, data-driven targeting, and comparison testing.

I know this sounds crazy, but 5 years ago who would have thought that today we'd have 54% mobile opens? Or, that we'd be reliant on a fluid approach to building?

Two things happen when you focus on "small screen and up" for creating emails.

You remove content because it's more challenging to build and you remove content because you realize it's not necessary. The "necessary" in email is going to continually reduce.

The latest version of Mail in iOS is helping to lead this transition. The simple addition of the "Back to Mail" action makes it feel as though you are in one experience.

A message with a short bit of content and a call-to-action in the viewable area allows someone to move to the intended location and back seamlessly. Clicking becomes less daunting, less risky. In return, consuming content in the email when you could seamlessly go to the target feels wasteful.

We all want content that is relevant to us that leads us to being able to achieve an action that we desire. We want it in the most efficient way possible and email will evolve to meet our desires.

What Will & Won't Change

Elliot Ross

Managing Director
Action Rocket

I've worked in email a long time. While 2005-10 did not see massive change, 2010-15 was all about mobile.

By 2020, almost everything will be mobile first—design, coding, and strategy. Mobile will be the default experience for users and we will need to accommodate that.

That's not just a layout challenge—it means optimising everything for variable attention spans. Email will be a lot more immediate, with short copy and a message that is easy to act on.

Email was never dying, but email usage is definitely changing and will continue to change. Things like Slack, Basecamp, and social networks are claiming internal and external business communications and discussion with friends.

That doesn't mean email won't have a use, but with those things gone, email will be more about messaging with brands. That's a great opportunity for us, if we get it right.

I think the way marketers approach content for email will change as well.

We've seen this change in social, where things like Twitter's short copy limit mean you have to get a message across succinctly. It'd be great if that mentality permeated through to email campaigns more.

Regarding the ESP landscape,

I'm optimistic about the second generation email platforms that have been built in the last five years. These platforms—which include SendGrid, Mandrill, and Amazon SES—are the developer-friendly platforms of choice for startups and are well placed to take power from the late 90's vintage behemoths.

While many things will change, some will not. For instance, as great as it would be, I can't imagine a revolutionary change in coding standards for email.

In the next five years, it'd be great if some of the more challenging email clients fell out of use further—and that's probably more likely for Outlook than it is for Gmail. If Gmail adds support for responsive design, it will be as a result of the poor experience it provides users, and not pressure from marketers. But I think it would be unwise for us to bank on it.

In the same vein, video in email still won't be a thing without a drastic improvement in HTML support. As the few examples of video in email campaigns we've seen have served to distract, rather than enhance the message, this is perhaps a good thing.

Fewer Email Clients, Better Experiences

Mark Robbins
Email Developer
Rebelmail

I see interactive as a huge shift in email development. Now it's up to the inbox providers and the consumers to determine its future, but I'm pretty confident it'll go in our favour.

Early analytics have shown far greater engagement from users who receive interactive messages. The next step would be for the customers to start noticing when it's not supported and start abandoning those email clients. That's what worked for the web and I believe email can follow.

Along those lines, we'll start seeing closer communication between email developers and inbox providers. I've been talking to a few myself already and making some progress.

The main thing I'm asking for is documentation. The only reason we know anything about email rendering is the community testing and sharing information. If these bugs, quirks, and inconsistencies are made public from the start, it'll mean a lot fewer broken emails.

In the past few years, we've seen a number of new email clients but the death of Mailbox is a sign of that trend reversing. Google is seemingly starting to make moves to replace Inbox by Gmail, and Microsoft has already replaced most of their mobile apps with a single one and is currently replacing Outlook.com with Office 365.

Fewer email clients means quicker testing and more time for innovation. We'll soon get to the point where image galleries and accordion content become pretty standard.

They won't be used in every email, but they'll be used where appropriate as they are both great ways to fit more content in without cluttering the user experience.

What excites me more is what comes next: the bigger, more complex projects.

It's not unusual for large brands to create splash pages or even microsites to launch new products. These are big budget projects that are often accompanied by a single image email trying to draw people to the fancy new site.

I'm hoping to see more of this budget and dev time moving over to the email itself, engaging users from the first impression. This could even be done completely in email, rewarding subscribers with early access.

We'll also see some interesting new CSS styles come into play. I've played around with 3D CSS a bit and there's definitely scope for growth there. CSS flexbox and grid are both very useful layout tools, so we'll start to move over to using those for the more advanced email clients—although, since some things will never change, we'll still use table fallbacks for Outlook 2020.

Regulatory Pressures Mounting

Other countries have long been way out ahead of the US when it comes to email privacy and security. In an increasingly global economy and increasingly singular global internet experience, overseas laws are impacting US marketers more and more every year . Because of those influences—and in light of a seemingly endless stream of data breaches—many marketers expect that the US's lax laws will soon be strengthened.

Tougher Laws Ahead

Do you think US anti-spam laws (CAN-SPAM, etc.) will be strengthened, weakened, or remain largely unchanged over the next 5 years?

46.8%
Strengthened

46.8%
About the same

6.5%
Weakened

Source: Litmus poll of 1,713 visitors to its blog between Sept. 24 and Oct. 21, 2015

"Now that Canada has shown several enforcement actions under their anti-spam legislation, the United States government is definitely looking at what CAN-SPAM is doing in light of some of the data breaches and people's email addresses being made available."

—James Koons, Chief Privacy Officer, dotmailer

For more, check out **Email Marketing in the Age of Data Breaches & Tightening Regulations** on the Litmus blog.

The Most Impactful Laws & Legal Decisions Affecting Email Marketers

2015

EU-US Privacy Shield, which strengthens rules around the safeguarding and transferring the data of EU citizens, is approved by European Commission and on track to replace the invalidated US-EU Safe Harbor deal.

2014

The Canadian Anti-Spam Law (CASL) goes into effect. Since then, there have been several enforcements, largely around not honoring unsubscribe requests.

2010

The Canadian Anti-Spam Law (CASL) was passed, allowing regulators to levy steep fines against marketers who send unsolicited email into or out of Canada.

2008

The Federal Trade Commission approved **new rule provisions for CAN-SPAM** that clarified opt-out requirements, who the "sender" is, and the rules for forward-to-a-friend campaigns, which hastened the end of these campaigns.

2005

The Security Rule of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 goes into effect, setting requirements for the safeguarding of electronic protected health information.

2003

The Privacy Rule of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 go into effect, regulating the use and disclosure of protected health information.

2003

The Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing (CAN-SPAM) Act was passed, establishing opt-out email marketing as the law of the land and putting very basic legal requirements in place, such as including a working unsubscribe link and postal address and not using misleading subject lines.

Next Level of Optin: Permission to Track

Andrew Bonar
Founder
Deliverability Ltd.

I expect privacy concerns to have a major impact on email marketing in the years ahead, driven primarily by enhanced workflow, better security, and improved anti-spam and anti-malware solutions. These changes will ensure that users have time to consider other aspects of their relationship with email.

Enhanced inbox triage and productivity tools are coming to market at the same time as a greater level of sophistication in fighting spam based on individual recipients' preferences. Spam management that adapts and learns on a per-recipient basis will grow ever more sophisticated, with AI research already utilizing web and email behavior for improvements.

Beyond more intelligent spam fighting capabilities, it is almost assured that complete end-to-end authentication of email messaging will be the norm. With much higher adoption of DMARC, much of the phishing attacks we know of today will be thwarted.

These improvements to the user experience will come alongside a greater awareness of technology and data. This

awareness by subscribers will have a fundamental impact on marketers in a number of areas.

At the sender:receiver level, I anticipate we will see a greater shift away from the traditional Abuse Reporting Format (ARF) based feedback loop supplied in its current non-redacted form. Essentially, there will be far less sharing of individual complainants' email addresses with senders. How many average users know that clicking the 'report spam' button in most applications results in a sender being sent a copy of the complaint including their details?

At the brand:subscriber level, we can expect ever greater restrictions imposed on marketers. Where best practice dictates that permission, personalization, & relevance are key to success today, in the future those tenets will barely be considered a minimum acceptable standard.

Transparency and value will be pre-requisite.

We can expect users to demand the right to opt-out of many tools and data points that marketers take for granted. Open tracking, device tracking, location tracking, click-through behavior, and other data may all be subject to subscriber opt-ins and opt-outs.

So marketers will not only need to justify and deliver real value in exchange for permission, but will also need to justify tracking and storing subscriber data and be able to adapt their messaging to varying degrees of visibility into engagement.

The marketers that will succeed will be those that can continue to bring relevance and work within the confines of the limitations imposed by inbox providers and subscribers.

Authentication No Longer Behind the Scenes

Laura Atkins

Owner
Word to the Wise

When Litmus asked me to talk about what email would look like in 2020, I really started reflecting on how much things had changed since I first got my first email address in 1989. There have been a lot of changes in the past 27 years and I see even bigger changes between now and 2020.

The inbox in 2000 was very different than the inbox in 1990. In 1990, I read email from a shell account: plain text, no clickable links, and no images. By 2000, I had a pretty graphical interface, images and clickable links. The inbox in 2010 wasn't that much different from the inbox in 2000. There were some added bells and whistles, but the inbox looked pretty much the same.

The inbox in 2020 will look different than email in 2010. By 2020, we'll be seeing authentication results displayed alongside the sender and the subject line.

In fact, we're starting to see some of this today, as webmail providers are experimenting with the way to communicate technical details to end users

in an easy-to-understand way.

The big change for senders, though, is that authentication will no longer be nice to have. It will be required for inbox delivery. What's more, senders are going to have to change how they authenticate.

As authentication protocols have been defined, email service providers have managed to keep up by doing as much of the authentication themselves. Many ESPs just authenticate all customers' mail for them.

This works great because all the ISPs are looking for is that the mail is authenticated—it doesn't matter who is doing the authenticating.

By 2020, ESPs being the authenticated senders won't be enough for end users. ESP customers will have to authenticate mail themselves. Overhead and management will increase for both ESPs and their customers.

Both sides must develop new processes to get the right DNS entries in the right zones and the right DKIM keys in the right places.

All of these changes will make the inbox a much safer place for end users. We'll all be able to trust email more, which will only improve the email channel for senders, receivers, and recipients alike.

More Security as Email Permeates IoT

Len Shneyder
Vice President of Industry Relations
SparkPost

Here's the thing about predictions: They're as pervasive as opinions and just as dismissible. Marty McFly day came and went I have yet to see a truly viable hoverboard sold in Walmart. However, email is—and I realize this is an oxymoron—a far more tangible topic to prognosticate about.

As we dive into these predictions, keep the following in mind: When email was invented some 38 years ago, it was never intended to be used as a one-to-many communication tool, nor could we ever have envisioned the scale and volume of email today. Now here's what I foresee happening with our beloved email by 2020:

01

There'll be much more of it. Never have legitimate mail volumes contracted. Quite the contrary, our startup-centric demands that every new business incorporate email into their products and services in order to compete, let alone exist.

02

Email's format will become even more portable. We will see more of it incorporated into things like smart televisions and other Internet of Things (IoT) devices. It's not beyond the realm of possibility to imagine our fridge sending us an email (or a push message, if the app designer is clever) to buy milk and bacon on the way home.

03

More real-time advertising within email will become important given the increasingly shorter half-life of trends in fashion, retail, music, etc. The future buying and planning of department stores is changing into a more immediate on-demand model, or at least they should be. Therefore, the content of messages will have to keep pace and change upon opening—a morning offer vs. an evening offer, for example.

04

By 2020, email will take on an even more local flavor: SMTP-UTF8 is the localization of email addresses. People who write in non-Latin alphabets will no longer have to rely on Western characters for their email identity. We will start seeing addresses such as 約翰-多伊@gmail.com (John-Doe@Gmail.com).

05

Over the next 4 to 5 years, we will see new security measures because more of our daily lives will happen over email. Even though we have major players using TLS to encrypt email in flight, we need the smaller ones to join the party, and then move to securing the devices that generate email. The IoT has the potential to generate trillions of messages a day in response to all kinds of triggers, and this tidal wave of email could be laden with all kinds of personally identifiable information (PII), requiring more and more security be bolted onto the back of existing email authentication standards to further secure the channel.

What's Your Vision of the Future?

We've shared some survey results and you've heard from 20 experts about how email marketing will change in the future. Now we'd like to hear from you.

Which predictions rang true for you? How do you think email marketing will change by the year 2020? Let us know by joining in the conversation in the Litmus Community.

Share your thoughts

About Litmus

Litmus helps more than 250,000 marketers make email better. The web-based email creation, testing and analytics platform empowers marketers, designers and agencies to confidently deliver a superior subscriber experience. Litmus provides instant email previews and quality assurance tools across all major inbox providers, browsers, and devices, and features comprehensive analytics to help users quickly and easily build, test, troubleshoot and optimize every campaign.

Headquartered in Cambridge, Mass., with additional offices in London, Litmus has partnered with more than 250 major email service providers and agencies, including MailChimp, IBM Silverpop and BrightWave Marketing. For more information about Litmus and the latest email news and trends, visit **www.litmus.com.**

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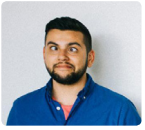
Chad White is the Research Director at Litmus and the author of *Email Marketing Rules* and thousands of posts and articles about email marketing. A former journalist at Condé Nast and Dow Jones & Co., he has spent more than a decade researching email trends and best practices at the Direct Marketing Association, Responsys, Salesforce.com, and in his current role.



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