



# TTS eGuide to Newsletter Stats

## What they don't tell you

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## Introduction

Newsletters are used extensively in B2B communications and are seen as an effective and cost-effective communication channel; providing valuable statistical feedback, *or do they?*

## Newsletter Service Provider Stats

Most newsletter service providers provide statistical analyses showing, for example:

1. Number of emails/newsletters sent.
2. Number of emails received<sup>1</sup> (indicating any that have been hard and/or soft bounced).
3. The number of emails that have had a hard or a soft bounce – and therefore have not been delivered (See Appendix One Hard vs Soft Bounces).
4. Which email addresses have unsubscribed or complained.

So far so good. However, the really interesting results relate to:

1. Who opened the email? Who did not?
2. If opened, which links did they click on?

This is where the problems arise.

## The Problems – The Background

It is important to note that most newsletter service providers will convert any links you put into a newsletter to: (a) allow the service provider to record the recipient's actions and (b) direct the user to the original link.

However, many, if not most, businesses use firewalls and anti-malware systems which can interfere with these processes.

## How the Statistics can be compromised

First of all, emails marked as received can be directed to the recipient's spam folder. Therefore, it cannot be certain that all emails marked as "received" are actually seen by the recipient. When composing your newsletters it is very important to take [Gmail's spam filters](#) into account.

### Opened vs Unopened

Security systems can work in three ways:

1. They do not interfere with the result.
2. They block the information sent to newsletter service that the email has been opened.
3. They automatically open the email (to check its content for malware) – but this does not mean that the recipient has opened the email.

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<sup>1</sup> However, we have our own examples where the report showed an email as being delivered – but not opened – however, the "recipient" reported that they had not received the email, nor was it to be found in the "Spam" folder. – A mystery.

## Clickthroughs

Often considered the most useful feedback, they are confirmation that a specific recipient has (a) seen the newsletter (b) opened the newsletter and (c) has found sufficient interest in a particular topic to click the related link to for more information.

However, as outlined above:

1. Perhaps, the clickthroughs are accurate for a specific recipient.
2. Perhaps, the clickthrough is simply a record of the automatic checks carried out by the anti-malware system.
3. Perhaps, a recipient has clicked a particular link, but the record of this is blocked by the anti-malware system.

## What can be done to improve statistical reliability?

Taking the above into account:

Avoiding the spam folder	There are a number of considerations you should take into account when drafting newsletters to prevent them being classified as "spam" e.g. <u>Prevent mail to Gmail users from being blocked or sent to spam.</u>
Unsubscribes:	To avoid these simply being the result of an automated check of the unsubscribe link, add an action on the unsubscribe page that has to be completed for this to be confirmed.
Cross-Check:	Where possible, you should cross-check the newsletter statistics e.g. (1) where you have links to your own websites, see if Google Analytics confirm the results shown for your newsletter campaign and (2) check directly with recipients – say, by phone as well as DM – to see if they confirm the results you have for them.

## Conclusions

The basic, initial statistics relating to:

1. The number of emails sent.
2. The emails bounced.
3. The unsubscribed emails.

can be taken as reliable.

1. Received.
2. Opens\Unopens.
3. Clickthroughs.

Unfortunately, these are not necessarily reliable – they may be accurate, under- or over-reported. Therefore, be careful when taking any actions based on them – especially when making any reports to third parties.

## Appendix One Hard vs Soft Bounces

### Hard Bounces

A hard bounce is a permanent delivery failure. This means that the email has been rejected because either:

- The email address of the recipient doesn't exist or is invalid.
- The mail server of the recipient has blocked the delivery.

This means that you should either:

- Remove the email recipient from your newsletter list; or
- Contact the recipient by other means and ask for their current email address and amend your newsletter list accordingly.

### Soft Bounces

A soft bounce is a **temporary delivery failure**. When an email soft bounces, it means that, in most cases, the email address is valid and your email has reached the mail server of the recipient but the mail server rejected it. It means that your email has not been delivered to the inbox of your recipient.

Here are some common reasons why an email address may soft bounce:

- The domain name doesn't exist.
- The email cannot be relayed because of unknown reasons.
- The email cannot be relayed between mail servers.
- The email is blocked because of its content.
- The email is blocked because of your sender or IP reputation\*.
- The email is too large.
- The inbox is full.
- The mail server of the recipient is unavailable.

\*In this case, you should see what actions you have to take to remove your sender IP from any blacklists that may be indicated in the soft bounce response.

Most newsletter service providers will automatically resend the email for a period (usually a couple of days). If the newsletter is still undelivered after this time, this will then be recorded as a soft bounce in the campaign report.