



The 2023 State of Email

Workflows

Report

The latest in email workflow data, trends,
and best practices, from marketers like you.

What to expect in

The 2023 State of Email Workflows Report

It's time for our annual survey of the email landscape! This year, we've split our analysis into four parts. In this report—the first of four—we will collect, analyze, and share the latest in **email marketing workflow data, trends, and best practices.** We'll cover all stages of the email workflow, including production, engagement, acquisition, and ROI—as well as a look into the future at the next twelve months of email.

- **Just the facts**
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About this report

Almost every year for the past few years, we've aggressively collected and collated data on the latest email marketing workflow, design, and ESP trends. Surveys, polls, interviews—you name it, we've tried it. Why? It's simple: We want to know and understand what's going on in email. So we can keep sending better emails.

It's that simple, and that complicated.

To that end, we collected responses from hundreds of marketers just like you to get a sense of what's moving and shaking in the industry right now. We surveyed over 440 email marketers worldwide, across multiple platforms, with the goal of surfacing a comprehensive state-of-the-nation status report on how email teams are researching, writing, designing, developing, segmenting, sending, and analyzing emails.

Email Marketing workflow *noun*

ē-māl mār-kə-tij wərk-flō

The fine art of managing all the different kinds of work that go into creating a beautiful email from inception to completion.

Ready to find out what's going on with email workflows?

Trick question. Of course you are. Read on to find out how the best in the business are doing it.

Just the facts

Are you a busy marketer? We got you. Here's the short version of our team's top takeaways from the 2023 State of Email Workflows research.

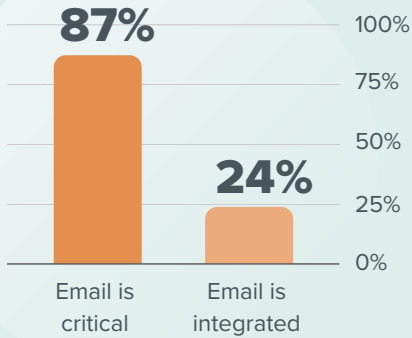
Wham, bam, stats please, ma'am.

Email marketing is the most effective marketing channel

Email marketing is important. In fact, email was deemed **very critical to the success of the company by 39% of marketers**, and 87% of marketing leaders say email is critical to their success.

We asked our audience their thoughts on the most effective marketing channel. Not your personal favorite, but the hardest working, best-delivering marketing channel. And, drumroll please: email came out on top. Email wins. **The most effective marketing channel is Email marketing (41%)**, followed by Social media (16%), and Paid Search (16%). Huzzah for email!



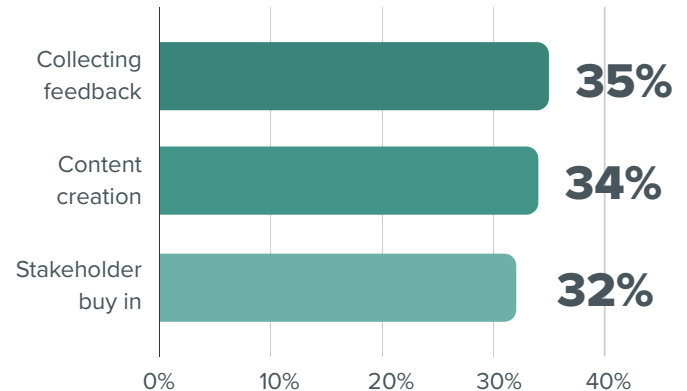


Email needs to be integrated in more marketing channels

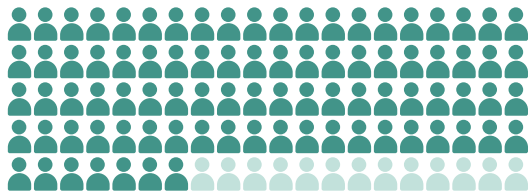
While **87% of marketing leaders say email is critical** to their success, **only 24% of email marketing programs** are highly integrated into other marketing channels! It's time to bring email to other parts of the marketing mix wherever possible.

Collecting feedback and stakeholder buy-in are major blockers to email production cycles

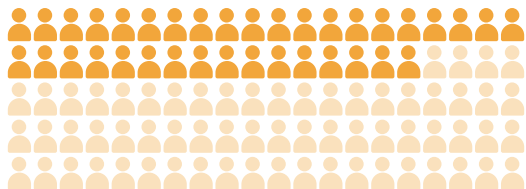
The biggest obstacles/bottlenecks in email production cycles are **Collecting feedback (35%)**, Content creation (34%), and Getting buy in from all stakeholders (32%). It's hard to get people to read emails! Even harder to get them to leave feedback that's actionable for you and your team. This is a pain point for leaders, too—since **17% of email marketing leaders cite collecting feedback and approvals** as one of their biggest frustrations.



87% Say email is critical



36% Marketers aren't measuring ROI



Measure email ROI, it's more important than you think

Even though **87% of marketing leaders say email is critical to their success**, 36% of marketers aren't measuring email ROI. The numbers matter! If you haven't set aside the time to go over goals and evaluate campaign performance recently—don't miss out on the opportunity.

Ready for more? Read on, intrepid email explorer. Read on.



Improve collaboration and cut review cycles with Litmus' email collaboration and review tools.

Better, faster, and easier feedback and approvals. [Learn more](#)

CHAPTER ONE

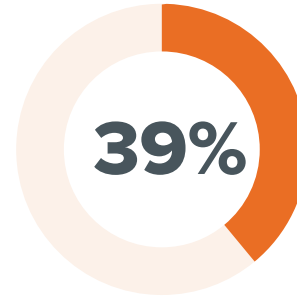
PRODUCTION

Life, for the email, begins in production. (Imagine this bit in your best internal David Attenborough voice.) In the calm valleys and placid pools of an enterprising email marketer's mind, the email begins its laborious entrance into the world through a process fraught with copy, design, and code. It's a beautiful process, if something of a struggle for the poor marketer.

Ahem. Basically: Before you can segment, track, or analyze performance, you must have an email to send. So, let's take a look at how marketers are building emails, what's working, and what's not.

What goes into building an email?

Building an email involves content, design, development, and often automation. It's a lot of steps. There are, however, ways to streamline that process: 39% of marketers say they currently build emails by replacing the text and image coding in a template or previous email.



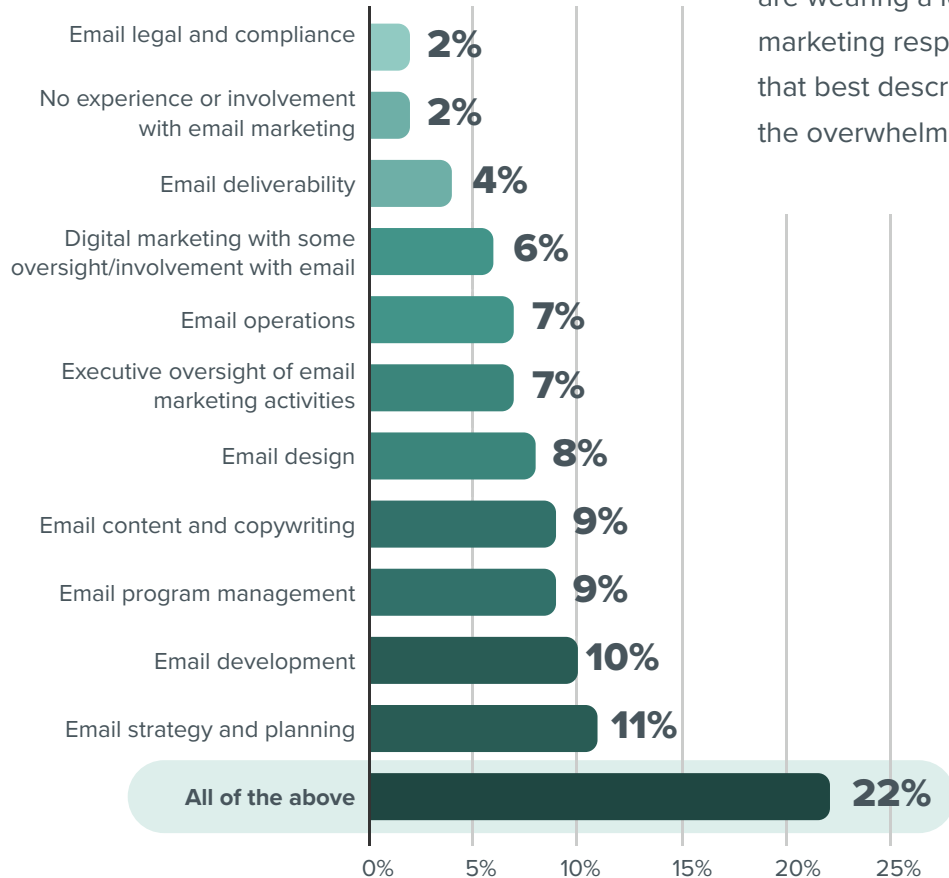
Build emails by replacing content in a template or previous email



Contrast this against how 42% of marketers would prefer to build an email: Using a library of standard components, snippets, or partials. That means nearly **40% of email marketing professionals are using a method they would not consider optimal to build their emails.** (Yikes.)

And building an email isn't as simple as wearing all those hats for one email and calling it a day, either. **44% of marketers say they build 2-3 versions of every email**, on average, while 18% build 4-6 versions.

What are your email marketing responsibilities?



Speaking of everything that goes into an email, you all in email are wearing a lot of hats. (Like, a lot, a lot.) Out of a long list of marketing responsibilities, we asked folks to select the options that best described their email marketing responsibilities, and the overwhelming majority selected All of the Above.



Looking for a better way to build emails using a library of pre-built components?

Check out the [Litmus Design Library](#).

Reusable templates, code modules, and brand settings make scaling email development easy.



21%
One week

62%
Two weeks
or more

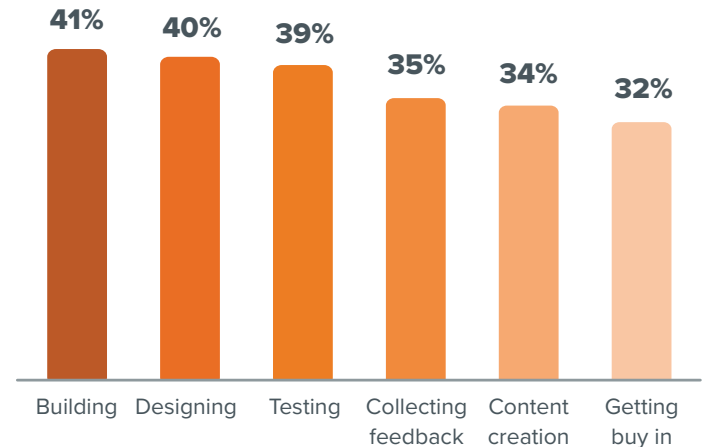
How long does it take to build an email?

The email production cycle is **one week for 21% of email marketing teams**. But for **62% of email marketing teams, it takes two weeks or more** to build an email. And considering resources isn't just about time, it's also about volume. And at any given time, 23% of teams have up to 5 emails in production. That's a lot of emails!

What's the biggest block during email production?

According to our research, the biggest blockers marketers face during email production are **Building (41%)**, Designing 40%, and Testing (39%) their emails. Other big obstacles/bottlenecks in email production cycles include **Collecting feedback (35%)**, Content creation (34%), and Getting buy in from all stakeholders (32%). Basically: it's tough out there for busy email marketers.

But there's good news on the horizon.



Many folks are already moving towards using email guidelines, snippets, partials, and other ways to streamline email production in the design and development phases. 31% of marketers said they currently use snippets, and 16% said they plan to use them. **60% said they use an HTML framework or an email template**, at the very least—and these are all great ways to optimize the build process.

While we’re all struggling to streamline our production workflows, the good news is that there are plenty of available solutions waiting to be implemented.

Which of the following does your company use or plan to use for email development?
(445 responses)

Statement	Currently use	Plan to use	Don't use and don't plan to use
Task runner(s)	16.18%	7.87%	37.53%
Snippets	31.01%	16.85%	24.72%
Partials	20.67%	13.26%	31.69%
HTML email framework or email template(s)	60.00%	11.46%	12.36%
Email guidelines or design system	44.72%	19.33%	14.83%
Code inspections tool(s)	29.21%	14.38%	26.52%
CSS inliner(s)	22.47%	10.79%	29.89%
CSS resets	18.42%	12.81%	29.44%

So...

How's all that going for us?

That's the million-dollar question. It's interesting—everyone says email is important, but there's a distinct lack of resources being devoted to supporting email production. Just look at that elaborate list of hats for the individual email marketer.

And we're not just making that up. Spoiler from later in our survey: Only **27% of marketing leaders say their team is very well resourced**, while **87% say email is critical to their success**. Makes you wonder.

“Implementing an email design system with snippets and partials can help you or your team save hours of time. If you already have an email framework or set of templates, you're part of the way there! You can use your templates to create snippets and partials for future email creation.”

- Carin Slater, Email Marketing Specialist, Litmus





CHAPTER TWO

AUDIENCE

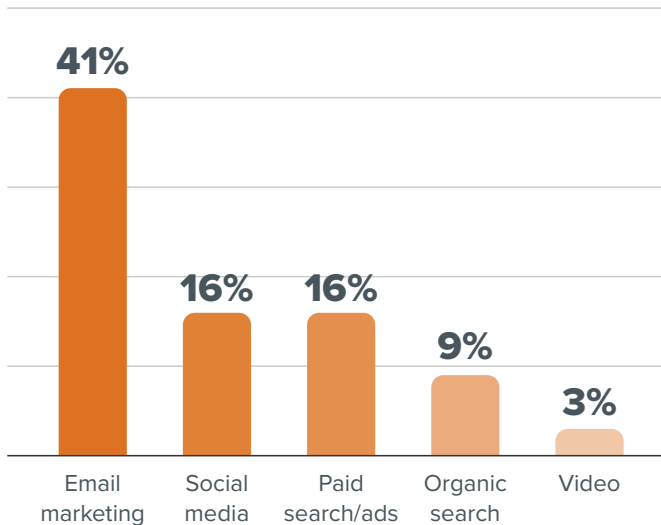
The next step in our beloved email's lifecycle is to look at who will be receiving that email when it finally spreads its wings (or fins, or flippers, or whatever it has). Are you capturing the right audience? Are you segmenting sufficiently? Are you speaking to the right channels?

In this chapter, we'll look at how marketers are engaging with their audience, where subscribers are coming from, and more.

What's the best marketing channel we're using?

A contentious question in the marketing world! According to our data, we found that email and social media are tied for the top spot in multiple areas. The top channels used by marketing leaders included **Email marketing (65%)**, **Social media (65%)**, and Video (37%). Email and social, still more popular than anything else. (Perhaps because of the lower lift?)

What are your most effective marketing channels?



That said, here's the *most effective* marketing channels: **Email marketing (41%)**, followed by Social media (16%), and Paid Search (16%). Email sweeps in by a large margin here, proving once again that some times, the old ways are the best ways. You want to reach a human, you send them a nice email.

This tells us where our audience is and where they want to hear from us. So, dedicated email marketers of the world... Perhaps post some of your lovely content on Instagram as well, from time to time.

How's your relationship with your subscribers?

The majority of email marketers said that their company has **less than 100,000 subscribers** on their active email list (29%). And on average, those subscribers receive **2-4 emails** from your marketing teams every month (35%).

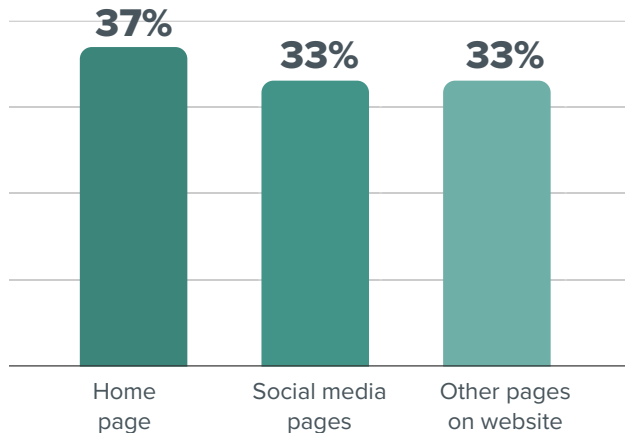
Stop! Quick math break: Let's pause a minute and do some quick calculations. If your email team is sending 4-5 emails a month, and building 2-3 versions of every email, you could actually be sending **up to 15 unique emails per month**. That's a lot of emails.

The average email team sends as many as **15 emails a month!**



Where are we getting our subscribers from, anyway?

According to our data, the top subscription acquisition sources are: Sign-up form on home page (37%), Online registration for webinars or events (33%), and Sign-up form on other customer-facing page of website (33%). Sign ups, sign ups, everywhere.



A couple takeaways here: First, social makes another appearance as an unexpected source of meaningful traffic, so take a few notes there. (We sure are.) Second, these subscriptions are a great opportunity to leverage automated customer onboarding emails. As we'll look at later, automated emails are a great way to streamline these top acquisition sources.

What about MPP?

What about it, indeed. Turns out the Mail Privacy Protection (MPP) phenomenon didn't make much of a difference for most email marketers. Only 20% have invested in any sort of analytics tool that tracks MPP impact, and 60% say they haven't done so, and don't intend to.

So...
How's all that
going for us?

As we pointed out a moment ago, the average email team could be sending as many as 15 emails in a single month.

This brings us back to the question about resources—do you know how much work your email team is doing, or how much support they really need? It may be more than you think.

“Don't be afraid to get granular in documenting your workflow when you're requesting more resources. Articulate the strategy behind your segmentation, the multiple dynamic content pieces that have to be created, the labor behind the testing that's done. Accurately and clearly representing the complexity of your email program is necessary to ensure that your work is appropriately valued and supported.”



- Logan Sandrock Baird, Sr. Community Evangelist at Litmus

CHAPTER THREE

AUTOMATION

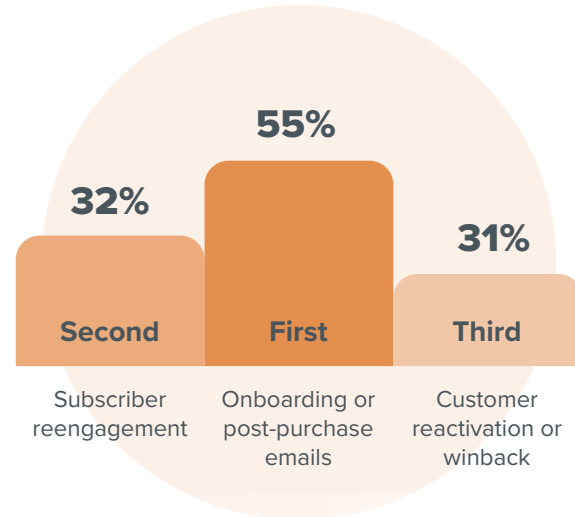
Once the email has matured into a fully-formed missive and begun its salmon-like journey to reach all your subscribers, it's time to consider automation. For one thing, automated email sends can eliminate so much admin time when done correctly. And also, the robots are here to stay—so if you can help your little email along its journey any faster, why wouldn't you?

In this chapter, let's look at what tools we're all using (or not using) to automate and simplify our workflows.

What journeys or sequences are being automated?

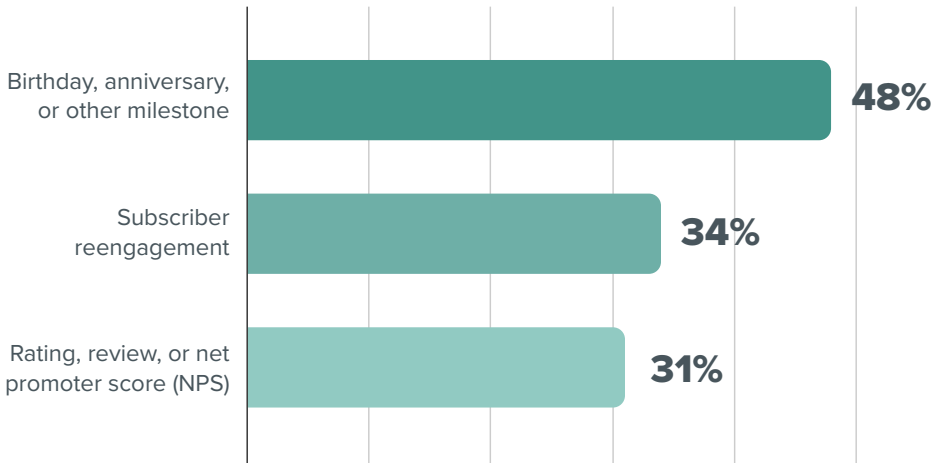
First up, let's talk about what we're automating. We asked our audience which emails, journeys, or sequences they were automating, and the results may or may not surprise you. **Onboarding or post-purchase emails (55%) came in first**, followed by Subscriber reengagement (32%), and then Customer reactivation or winback (31%).

This tells us a couple of things. First, onboarding emails are overwhelmingly automated, and that's a quick win that if you aren't doing, you can implement. Second, Customer reactivation emails, often sent when a customer cancels or has made a purchase in the past. This, too, is a fairly low lift with a good Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool and can significantly reduce workload for your team.



What types of emails are most likely to be automated?

Outside of the realm of fully automated sequences, individual emails often see automation as well. The most common culprits here are **Birthday, anniversary, or other milestones (48%)**, Subscriber reengagement (34%), and Rating, review, or net promoter score (NPS) (31%). This is another area where a little work can go a long way! Automation is a gift that just keeps on giving.



Are you making ART or SPAM?

Another commonly automated process is checking against spam filters. The top tools email marketers are using for this project are Google Postmaster Tools (28%), MailReach (26%), and Fresh Address (26%). (Further proof that everyone is checking for spam issues before they send, and you should be too.)



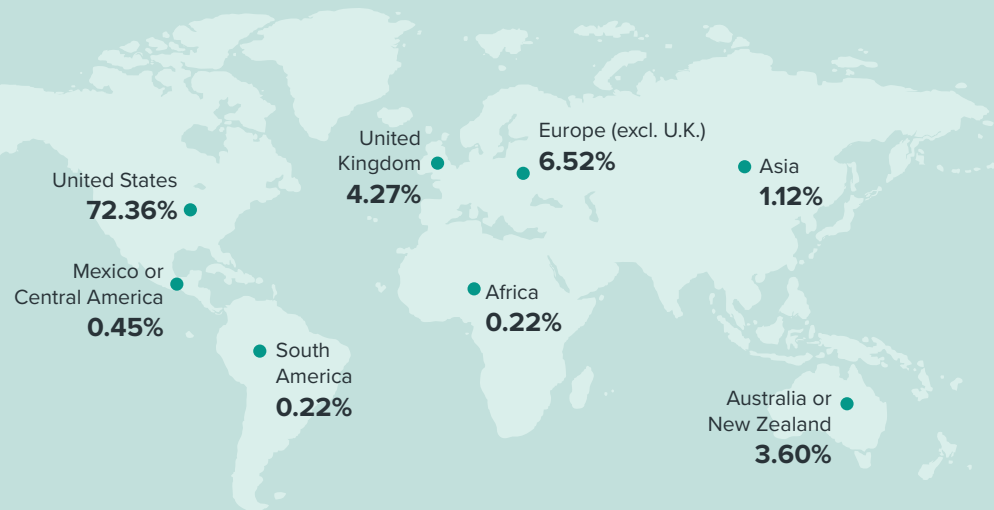
What project management tools are email teams using?

Let us turn our attention inwards for a moment and look at our own teams. Email teams are using a range of project management tools and approaches to automate tasks and manage work—including not using them at all. The most popular? **Slack (33%)**, followed by Other (32%), Jira (26%), Asana (19%), and Trello (17%).



This says a handful of things, perhaps most notably that arriving at a centralized solution for email marketing automation and management is not a simple or straightforward issue. We would, however, like to point out that with the global nature of many companies, it is important to have one! We asked people where their company does business, and answers ranged from the United States (72%), to Australia or New Zealand (3%), to **Globally (9%)**.

● **9.21%** Globally, with offices in multiple countries or on multiple continents



So...
How's all that
going for us?

The robots are here, but we're still not using them as much as we could! **Only 55% of email marketers have automated onboarding sequences**, and only 48% have automated birthday or anniversary emails.

There's still lots of room to eliminate repetitive tasks and make the most of automation here!

“If you or your team find yourselves repeatedly sending the same emails, set a goal to create an automated email process. While initial setup and testing take time, you can thoughtfully plan your enrollment criteria, time delays, test variations, and the number of emails throughout the journey. These emails should never be as “set it and forget it” and should be analyzed and optimized regularly.”



– Tracie Pang, Email Marketing Manager at Litmus

CHAPTER FOUR

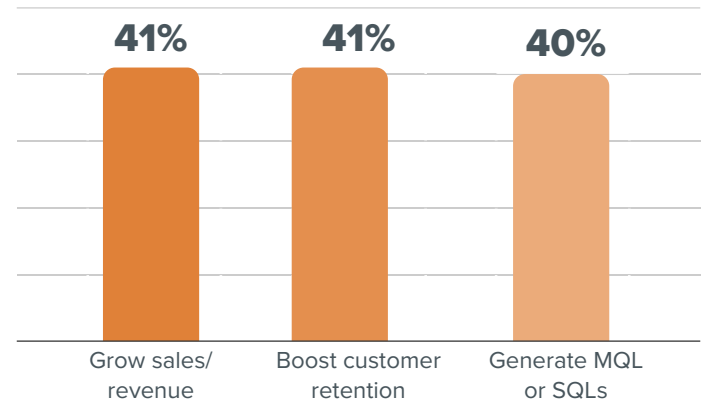
ROI

Finally, the email reaches the end of its lifespan, and the end of its short but tumultuous journey. It's here in the analytics, in the slide decks and spreadsheets, where the email makes its final resting place. And now we, the email marketing team, analyze the stuffing out of it.

So, let's talk Return on Investment (ROI). We've gotten our data from the rest of the email's lifecycle, and now it's time to discuss results and how we measure them.

What are the top email marketing KPIs?

The top email marketing KPIs are the three heavy hitters that are probably familiar to most of us: Grow sales/revenue (41%), Boost customer retention (41%), Generate marketing or sales qualified leads (MQL or SQL) (40%). It's interesting to note how nearly even these three are in terms of priority. None gained a significant majority over the others in our data.



How do I calculate email marketing ROI?

In a world where **66% of marketing teams measure email ROI**, you may be thinking to yourself: Litmus, how do I measure ROI? Especially if you're that other 34%. That said, in the past, 45% of marketers have told us that ROI measurement was poor, very poor, or weak—so we're delighted to see that number has gone down in the three years since that survey!

The simplest way of explaining email ROI is going to involve some math. (We're sorry.) Take the sales growth from email marketing, subtract the cost of your email marketing program, and then divide the resulting number by the cost of your email marketing program. Voilà! **The resulting number is your ROI.**

The equation for calculating email ROI:

$$\frac{(\text{Sales Growth From Email Marketing} - \text{Email Marketing Cost})}{\text{Email Marketing Cost}} = \text{ROI}$$



Learn how to [calculate your email ROI](#).



How do I improve my ROI?

Expanding your reach is a **great way to improve your ROI**. 30% of marketers we surveyed said they will spend up to 15% more on Integration of email with other channels in 2023. That's a great plan—especially since **only 24% of email marketing programs are highly integrated into other marketing channels** right now.

So...
How's all that
going for us?

Measuring email ROI when it's hard to get to some of those numbers is easier said than done, but with a little creativity, it is possible. You just have to expand the way that you think about change.

Did the time it takes to accomplish tasks decrease? Has your output increased? Have you been able to take on more projects? All signs of Return. On. Investment.

“You're likely working with your sales team to establish attribution for email ROI. If you're going that far, take it a step further and ask for stories from converting prospects on the email content that prompted them to inquire. Those make for compelling human accompaniments to complement what otherwise might be dry numbers, and make your reporting on them more memorable.”

– Logan Sandrock Baird, Sr. Community Evangelist at Litmus



CHAPTER FIVE

LOOKING AHEAD

While we came to the end of the email's lifecycle in the previous chapter, that is of course not the end of our study. Because it is a cycle, and that cycle—like email or salmon migrations—repeats itself endlessly. So, it behooves us as savvy marketers to look ahead at future cycles as well.

And maybe that's the biggest insight you, I, or anyone else is looking for in these reports: the promise of the future. What's on the horizon? Where are my peers looking at that I can't see yet? What trends will shape 2024, 2025, and beyond?

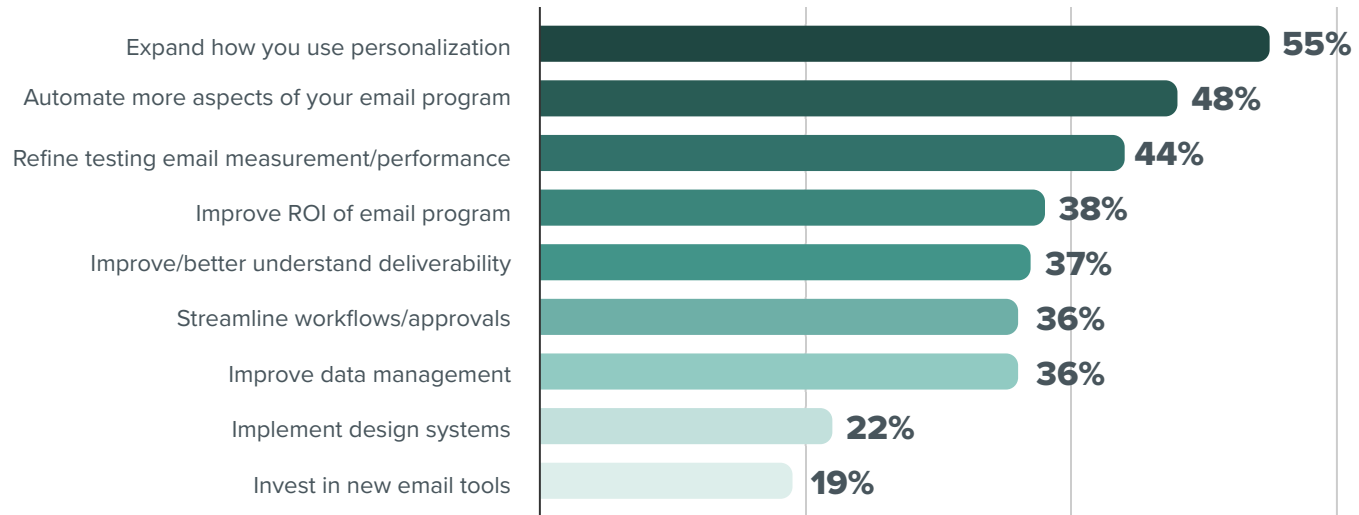
Well, we asked, and you all pulled back the veil.

Personalization and automation are (still) the future

The biggest priority for email marketers in the next 12 months is **Expanding the use of personalization (55%)**. This has been a big priority for many years for many reasons, as technology evolves and it becomes ever-easier to implement. Automation is a close second, with 48% of marketers stating that they will work to automate more aspects of their email program in the next 12 months as well.

These are both quick wins, becoming quicker as technology evolves, and they're classics to prioritize for a reason.

What are your marketing priorities in the next 12 months?



Email is going to get (even more) integrated

When it comes to spending this year, the biggest priority for email marketers is integration. **30% of marketers** said they will spend up to **15% more on Integration of email with other channels** in 2023. This could look like social media feeds, review platforms, paid ads, or advanced segmentation and targeting strategies—but the goal is to bring email together into a more omnichannel approach to marketing.

What does that mean?

TLDR; **Personalization, automation, and integration** are the three biggest priorities on the minds of email marketers for the next twelve months.

“*A design system is truly something that can help the bottlenecks in production, increase your speed to market, and enable you to do more personalization and create more email. Carving out that time to streamline your workflow, implement a design system, and improve data management—those are the less sexy things that can actually help move the needle in the long term.*”

– Jaina Mistry, Director of Content and Email Marketing at Litmus



CHAPTER SIX

ACTION ITEMS

So that was a lot of numbers, words, and attempts to make marketing analysis sound *at least as* interesting as National Geographic.

But you might be wondering... “How do I do any of that?”

We got you.

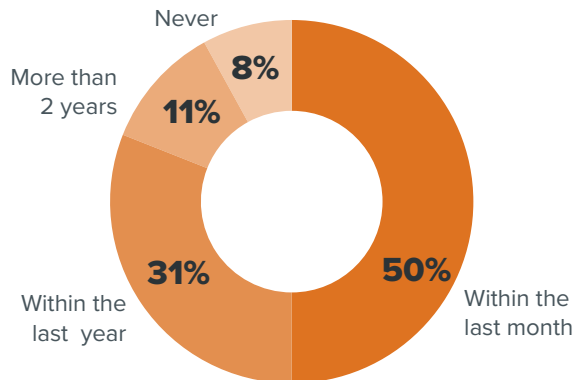
Here are three action items you can take today based on the information in this report.

Revisit your strategies

Take a look at your email workflows. When was the last time you updated them? Look at all your automated emails and check whether they still reflect your current brand voice and priorities as a marketing team. Peek at your acquisition channels and see if there's a way you can better optimize who's getting your emails, or maybe automate a thing or two. And of course, look at that ROI calculator.

Just make sure you're revisiting your email workflow strategies on a regular basis.

When was the last time you reviewed or updated your email workflow?



Personalize, personalize, personalize

Everyone's been talking about personalization for years, and there's a reason why. If you haven't taken steps to personalize your emails, now is the time—after all, 80% of customers are more likely to purchase after a personalized experience! With **55% of marketers** looking to expand their personalization capabilities next year, you won't want to be left behind.

And hey, if you're looking for an email personalization tool... [We know some folks.](#)

Remember why we do this in the first place

And finally, take a moment to remember why we do any of this. Email marketing is still, in the end, about human-to-human interaction—as much as we can automate or use machines to simplify parts of that process. When 65% of marketers still classify **direct contact with subscribers** as the most beneficial part of email marketing, we can't forget that.

As you look to improve your email workflows this year, remember that **there's a human being on the other side of the inbox**. Keeping this in mind will always help your emails resonate with your audience more efficiently and effectively.

“Personalization testing is an email marketer's playground. Take a step back and consider how to tailor your emails to your audience. Should they receive certain emails based on the weather in their area? Do you want to highlight the closest retail store near them? Or do you want to showcase similar or complementary products based on their past purchases? The opportunities are endless.”

– Tracie Pang, Email Marketing Manager at Litmus





Contact Us

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