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The State of Email in **Lifecycle Marketing** Report

Data, trends, and expert insights that reveal how marketers use email across the customer journey.

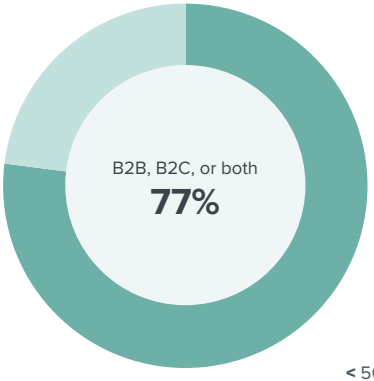
In this report, you'll learn:

Understand email's role in lifecycle marketing this year

Acquisition is exciting, but lifecycle email supports retention and engagement for business sustainability. Read on to learn how nearly 1,000 marketers surveyed between January 29th and February 29th of 2024 use email in lifecycle marketing. Plus, get commentary from six industry experts on what to do in the year ahead.

Who responded to our survey?

Respondents market



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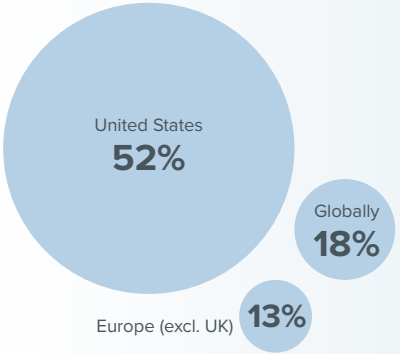


Top Industries

- Software + Technology
- Marketing/PR
- Retail
- Financial services

39% Litmus customers | **61%** Not Litmus customers

Meet the experts

Jaina Mistry

Director of Brand and Content Marketing at Litmus

Drew Price

Co-Founder at JRNY PPL

Chad S. White

Head of Research at Oracle Digital Experience Agency and author of Email Marketing Rules

Ramli John

Content Director at Appcues and author of Product-Led Onboarding

Dan Oshinsky

Consultant at Inbox Collective

Courtney Grab

Senior Customer Marketing Manager at Litmus

Chapter 1

How marketers use email in the customer journey—and how they should be

Fewer marketers are focused on lifecycle emails than we expected

Why aren't more teams using lifecycle marketing?

Less than half of marketers use lifecycle and onboarding emails, which means there's huge untapped potential for customer retention and engagement. Growth has been a top priority, but the tides may be changing.

Revenue-boosting emails are the crowd favorite

Marketing and promotional emails are the most-used, probably because the direct link to sales is satisfying and validating. 55% of marketers use email to make sales.

Newsletters are a versatile tool to add personality

Newsletters are the second most-used email type, yet are only used by half of marketers. Our experts think they're an underutilized way to stand out.

What is lifecycle marketing?

Before we explore email's role in lifecycle marketing, let's look at lifecycle marketing as a whole.

1.

Awareness

🎯**Goal:** Introduce potential customers to your brand, product, or service.

👉**Touchpoints:** Social media, advertising, email

2.

Engagement

🎯**Goal:** Use content to encourage audience to engage with your brand

👉**Touchpoints:** Blog posts, newsletters, webinars, social media, lead nurture email programs

3.

Consideration

🎯**Goal:** Provide content/info to guide customer into considering your product/service.

👉**Touchpoints:** Product pages, case studies, testimonials, comparison guides, retargeting ads, email

4.

Activation/Conversion

🎯**Goal:** Drive the customer to take action, like purchasing product/service

👉**Touchpoints:** pricing information, promotional offers, email campaigns

5.

Onboarding

🎯**Goal:** Help customer get the most out of your product with smooth onboarding

👉**Touchpoints:** Welcome/onboarding nurtures/emails, tutorials, user guides, customer support, onboarding calls

6.

Retention

🎯**Goal:** Keep customer engaged + satisfied enough to consider repeat business

👉**Touchpoints:** Newsletters, loyalty programs, personalized offers, product updates, customer surveys

7.

Loyalty/Advocacy

🎯**Goal:** Create brand advocates out of happy customers

👉**Touchpoints:** Referral programs, reviews and testimonials requests, social sharing incentives, community building

8.

Reactivation/Win-Back

🎯**Goal:** Re-engage inactive customers, return them to the customer lifecycle

👉**Touchpoints:** Re-engagement emails, special offers, surveys to understand why they lapsed

Lifecycle email marketing: it's complicated

Less than half of marketers surveyed use lifecycle emails to activate, engage, and retain customers. Why? Because it's complicated.

Strategizing lifecycle emails takes more time and effort than firing off a standalone promo email, and once they're set up, measuring the impact feels like staring into a black hole. You can't simply count the clicks to understand if your lifecycle emails are working—you need to chop it up into activation, engagement, and retention. Plus, email's impact can be qualitative, further complicating reporting.

Even if you want to invest more in lifecycle email, you might not have the time. While our survey found that (encouragingly) most marketing teams feel at least adequately resourced, over a third feel email marketing doesn't get enough staffing or technology investment.

"It used to be easier to raise money and say 'let's just throw more ads!' or 'let's plug retention and onboarding problems by just putting more people at the top of the funnel.' And now that's no longer the case, and people have some holes that we need to plug."

Ramli John, Appcues

Automation can bridge the lifecycle email gap

Creating more email automations is the top email marketing priority this year (more on that in chapter four), which is a great way to leverage lifecycle marketing without taking all of your attention away from other campaigns.

51% of marketers need two weeks or more to create a single email, and a lack of appropriate email team resources is the second largest bottleneck in production. Since a single automation is used over and over, the effort you invest into them goes further than one-to-one messages or batch and blast campaigns.

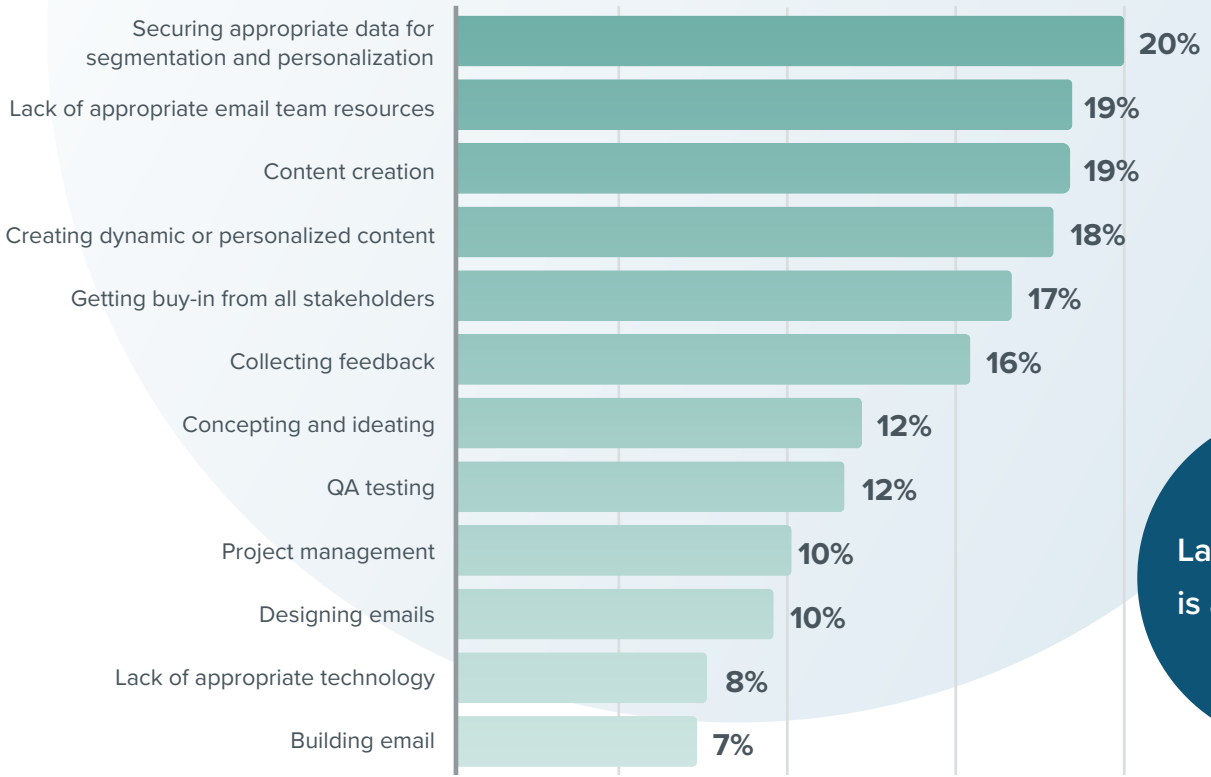
"We've been playing checkers for too long and not enough chess. Looking at things more holistically and diversifying our investments with automation will go a long way. There's just a bit of a mindset shift that we need to do."

Drew Price, JRNY PPL

Trust your automations with Litmus Email Guardian

Your critical email automations work independently to connect with your audience, but what happens if an issue goes unnoticed? Litmus Email Guardian monitors your emails 24/7 to alert you to problems with your template, links, images, and more.

The biggest obstacles in marketers' email production cycle

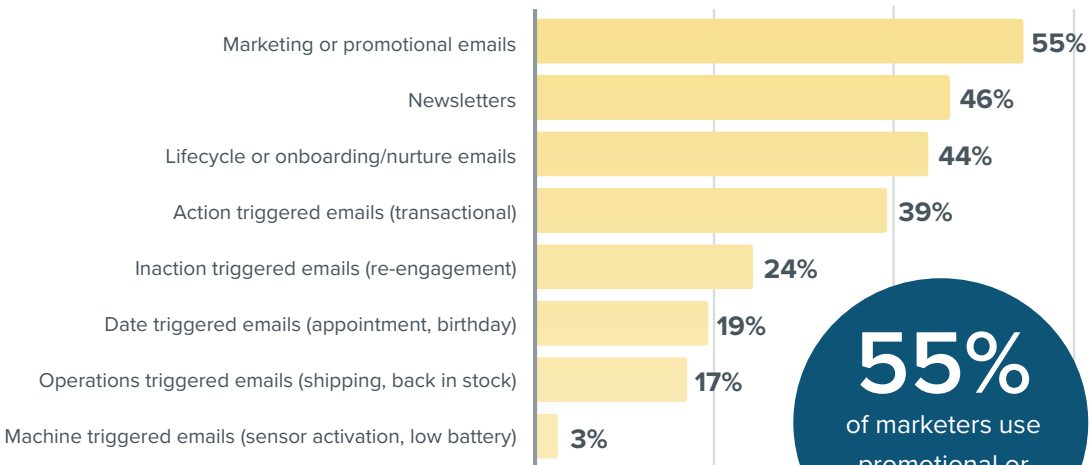


Lack of resources is a major obstacle

Promotional emails are the most popular—here's why

Marketing and promotional messages are the most-used type of email, and we think there are a few reasons for that. First, these campaigns are simpler to set up than tactics that fall further down on the list, like triggered emails. Second, promotional emails have a more direct and measurable impact on sales. Linking email to earnings is exciting for organizations and satisfying for marketers who want to understand their impact.

How companies use email



55%
of marketers use promotional or marketing emails

"I don't think the data is necessarily shocking. However, I think there's something going on here that levels up to KPI setting. A lot of times in lifecycle and email, the most exciting moments are the ones that drive revenue. It's one of the areas where we can have a direct response."

Drew Price, JRNY PPL

Newsletters create a differentiating connection

Newsletters are the second-most used email tactic, but the survey revealed that less than half of marketers use them. Here's why we hope to see that number increase this year:

🙏 Build relationships:

Newsletters let you show off your brand personality, share helpful content, and show up consistently to build relationships with your audience. With interactive elements like polls, they can even turn into two-way conversations that give subscribers a say in their experience.

🤩 Increase retention:

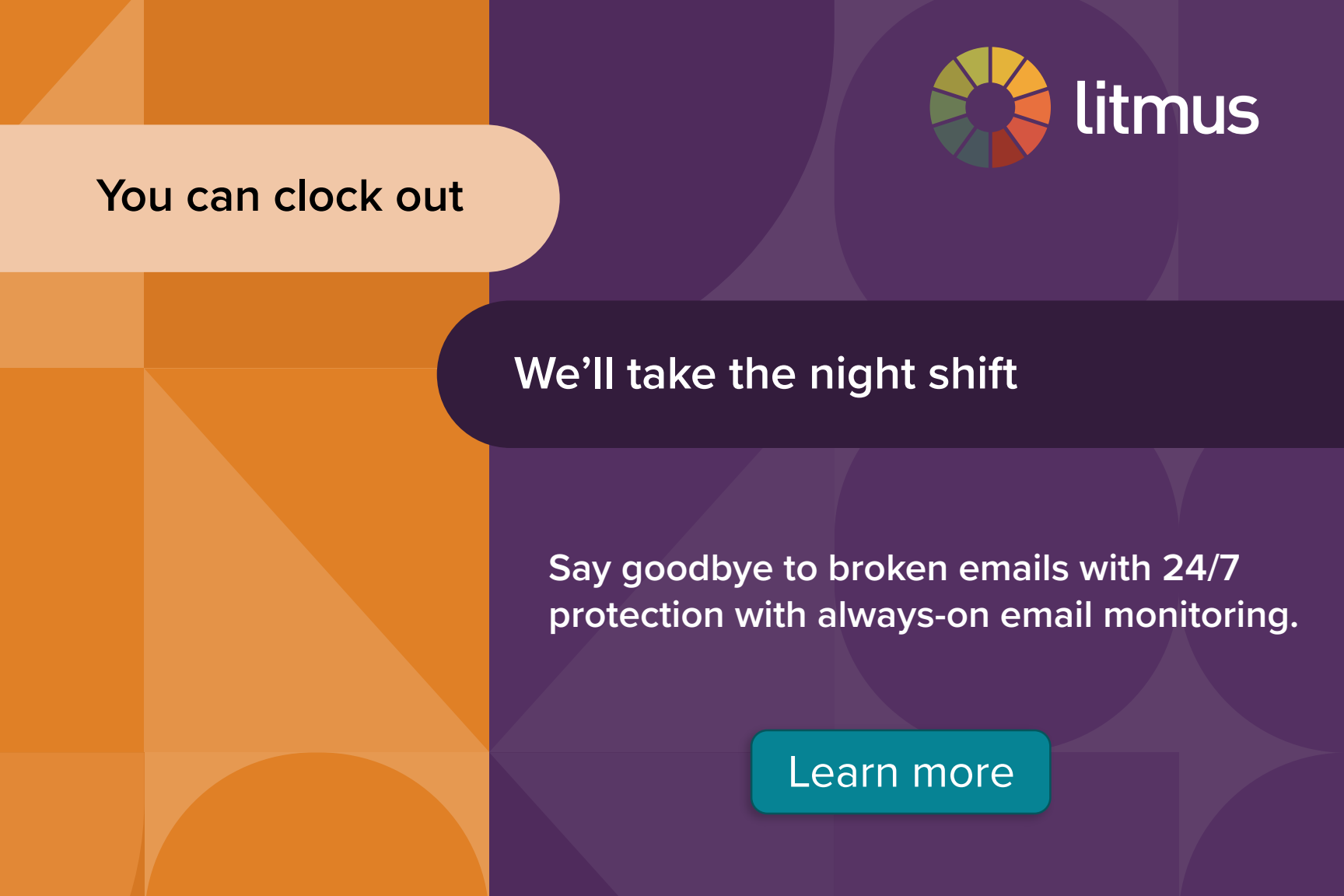
Product features are easier to copy than how you make your audience feel, and newsletters give you a customizable outlet to make sure customers stick around for a longer time. Ramli John shared, "I think people have realized they can't just run the same ad playbook and outbound playbook. We need to think about other more creative approaches."

😌 Establish trust:

You can't sell to someone who doesn't trust you, and trust is earned. Research shows that only 5% of your audience is ready to buy right now, and consistent newsletters let you engage with the other 95% of your list.

"I would love to see more organizations build newsletters into their overall strategy because it is such a powerful relationship building tool. So many folks now are used to getting newsletters from the individuals, the organizations, the businesses, the nonprofits they like and trust. And so the more that you can try to build those relationships using newsletters, I think the better your marketing strategy will be in the long run."

Dan Oshinsky, Inbox Collective


litmus
You can clock out
We'll take the night shift
Say goodbye to broken emails with 24/7 protection with always-on email monitoring.
Learn more

Chapter 2

The top email KPIs that marketers measure

There's a misalignment between goals and priorities

Improving customer retention is a top goal...

Revenue goals are, unsurprisingly, at the top of marketers' minds. But just over a third said boosting customer retention is their top goal.

But not a top priority

Boosting customer retention was the second most common marketing goal, and yet it didn't make the top five when we asked marketers to rate goals by importance.

Why there's a misalignment

Measuring email's role in customer retention is a nuanced, cross-functional task that isn't as compelling as revenue.

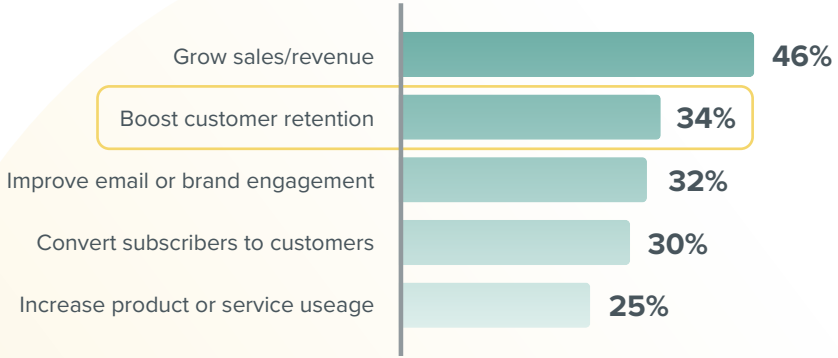
Marketers said retention is a top goal, but didn't vote it as important

Customer retention isn't a cut-and-dry KPI that lives on most email analytics dashboards. To figure it out, you have to make friends with your data team and look at holistic performance instead of granular results. That is, if your marketing team is even in charge of the retention KPI. If you're merely a retention partner instead of a driver, you might not have much say in the effort. So, it's easier to focus on KPIs that might indirectly boost retention, like email engagement or sales, and hope that a rising tide lifts all ships.

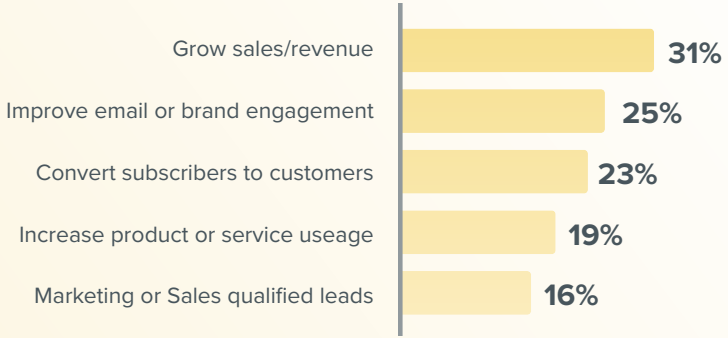
"We all know retention is critically important. But how you actually solve for retention at scale is very tricky."

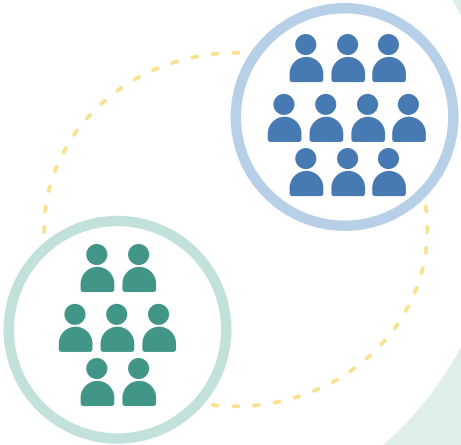
Drew Price, JRNY PPL

Top 5 company KPIs **by popularity**



Top 5 company KPIs **by importance**





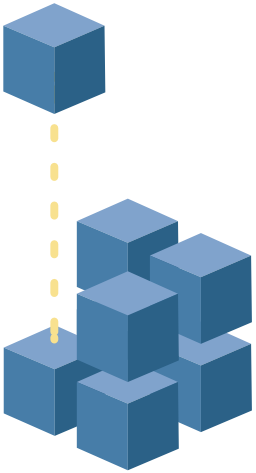
Alignment tip: make cross-functional friends

Customer retention doesn't happen in a vacuum, so the first step to getting aligned on KPIs is working across teams.

- Set up time to talk to other departments, like customer success and sales, about their goals and challenges
- Plot out the entire customer lifecycle and multi-channel touchpoints with other departments to identify gaps
- Regularly share email insights and listen to other teams about what they learn

"The top goal became customer retention, based on the shift in macro economics where it's much harder to raise money now. I'm guessing it slipped because often marketing doesn't own retention. It's left to another function, often customer success, who's not given any kind of marketing resources at all. And then they have to fight for marketing resources from content and lifecycle."

Ramli John, Appcues



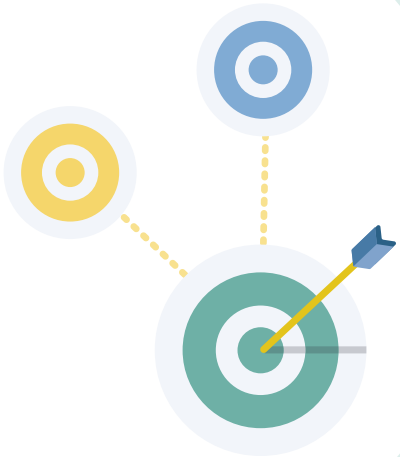
Alignment tip: consolidate data

Measuring customer retention requires data, and finding your weak points is a good starting point.

- List out the metrics your team can access
- Talk to the data team about what measurement is possible
- Consider whether you need new tools, team connections, or processes to make measurement possible

"Customer retention is so hard to measure. Marketers and email marketers are only just getting to the point where they can calculate the exact ROI or conversion rate of email. Going beyond that to see the impact of an email program on the customer lifecycle requires plugging into so many different teams and tools and people."

Jaina Mistry, Litmus



Alignment tip: set shared goals

If every team has a different goal, you'll make a little bit of progress in a lot of different areas.

- Choose goals for multiple teams to work on
- Clearly outline how each team will contribute
- Evaluate performance and strategize next steps

"If you're improving brand engagement, chances are you're improving your retention. If you're expanding your accounts and growing sales, you're probably improving retention. Not necessarily, but probably are."

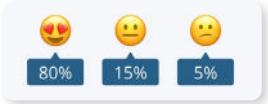
Chad S. White, Oracle Digital Experience Agency

A quarter of marketers are prioritizing email engagement

Improving email and brand engagement came just behind revenue goals on the list of marketing priorities. Increasing engagement in your emails keeps your brand top of mind and strengthens relationships, which can positively impact retention in the long run.

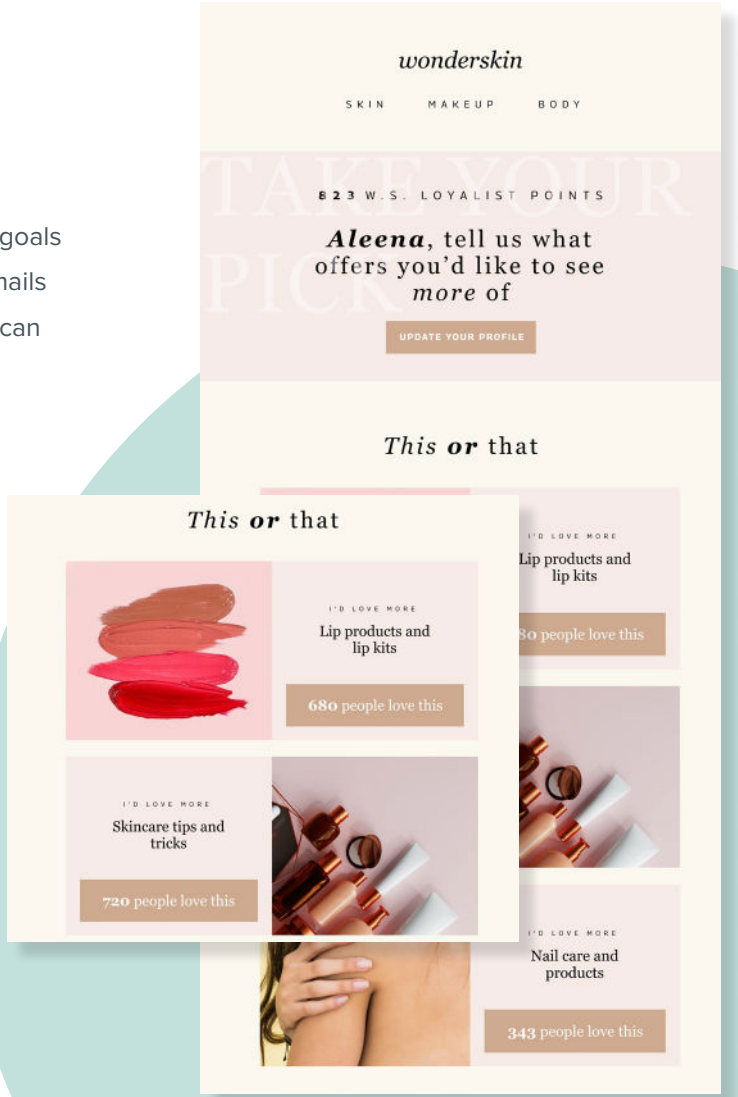
As a bonus, the marketing team is wholly responsible for email engagement and there are new ways to stand out in the inbox with Litmus Personalize:

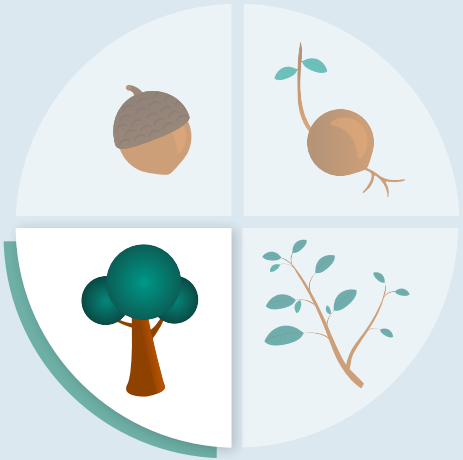
Use Live Polls to drive clicks and let customers share their perspectives



Include Sentiment Trackers in emails to learn what they do and don't like

Use Scratch-Offs to make reveals or deals interactive





Chapter 3

Personalization in the customer journey

How to manage personalization across a diverse customer set

Email personalization is a must-have

How do you stand out when customers are inundated with emails and advertisements all day? Personalization.

Relying on basic personalization alone isn't enough

Your subscribers have seen their first name in a subject line before, and it isn't enough to wow them anymore.

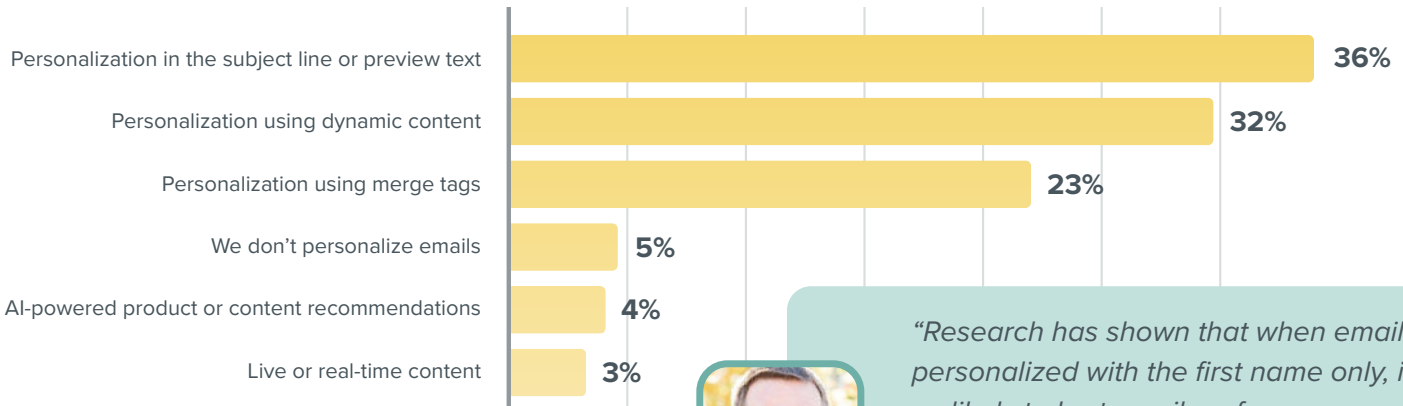
Curiosity is the starting point for personalization

The most effective personalization is based on your audience and the unique segments within it. Asking questions to narrow your focus makes it easier to be effective.

Basic personalization is everywhere, but is it enough?

Our survey revealed that the overwhelming majority of marketers use their ESP to create personalized emails, which can create basic personalization through merge tags. Since tactics like first names in a subject line are so common, they don't stand out anymore.

How does your company personalize email?



69%
of marketers feel their ESP handles personalization well or very well

"Research has shown that when emails are personalized with the first name only, it's actually as likely to hurt email performance as it is to help it. People have seen this trick. They don't appreciate it when you only personalize the envelope content. It's a disconnect when they encounter it on one level and then dig down deeper, and it seems like it's just content for everybody."

Chad S. White, Oracle Digital Experience Agency

Advanced personalization is within reach

Fewer marketers use more advanced personalization strategies, like live content, because a lack of data, resources, technical expertise, and inspiration get in the way. Thankfully, all of the top challenges have solutions. Here are some of our top tips to overcome personalization hurdles.

- Use preference centers and zero-party data from surveys and polls to make data collection straightforward
- Take advantage of free email templates with built-in personalization
- Use a purpose-built tool to make implementation and measurement easy. Litmus Personalize, for example, offers a range of analytics to help you see how subscribers respond to or interact with your personalized elements.

What do you find challenging about personalizing emails?

Segmentation is the foundation for lifecycle email personalization

Before you dream up your next interactive email quiz or dynamic image, you need to think about segmentation. Understanding who your audience is and what they need at each phase helps you create relevant content that's enhanced with personalized elements.

WHO

Who are they?
How you segment your audience is unique to your business, whether by user type, tenure, plan level, buyer persona, or something else entirely.

WHAT

What do they need?
Consider the goals and challenges of each segment and what they need to do to move between activation, engagement, and retention.

HOW

How can you help?
Plan what information or nudge they need to take the next steps or expand their relationship with your company.

"I think it's important for folks to really think about and understand who the people behind the emails that they're sending to are. What are the core motivations like? What makes them tick? What makes them want to do that?"

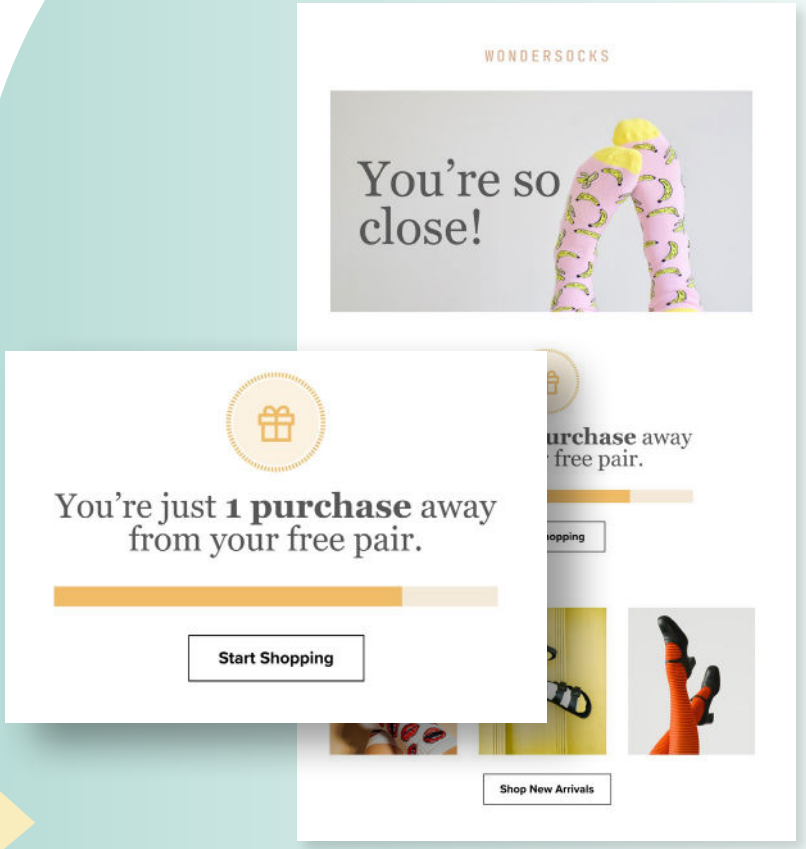
Ramli John, Appcues

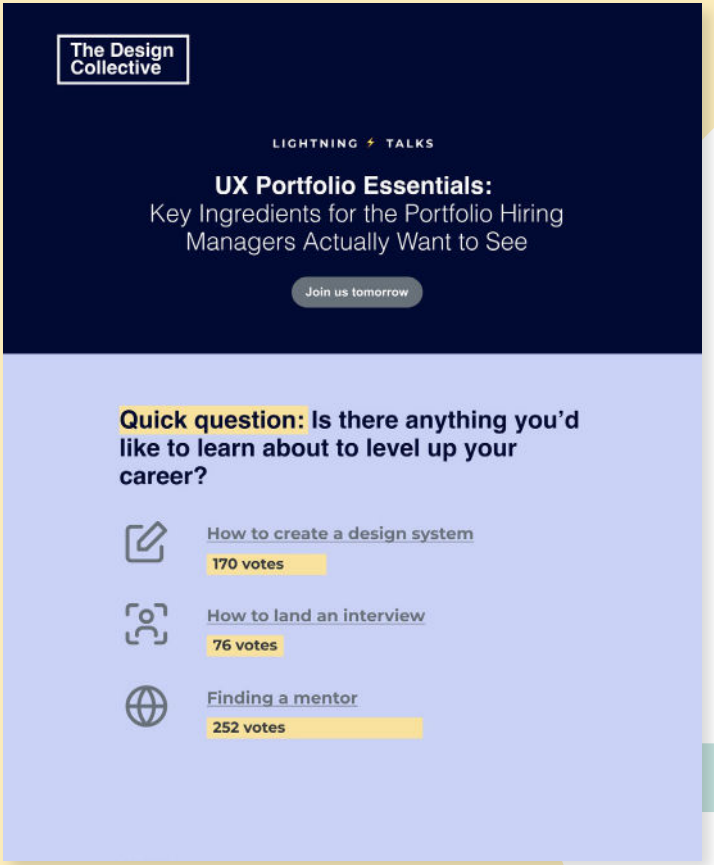
Lifecycle personalization idea: progress bars

Lifecycle journeys like onboarding are a natural fit for progress bars. Track audience progress through their free trial or encourage them to take the next step in onboarding. Ecommerce and nonprofits can get involved, too, with progress bars for reward programs or fundraising.

12%

of respondents use progress bars if they use live content





Lifecycle personalization idea: live polls

If you need more data to personalize your emails and you want to boost engagement, try live polls. Asking your audience about their goals, preferences, skill levels, or interests lets them feel heard and helps you build progressive profiles.

10%

of respondents use live polls if they use live content

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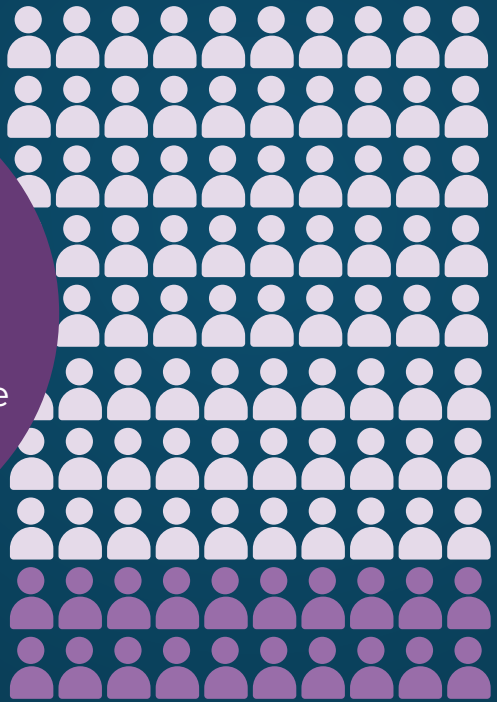
Why do marketers **LOVE** personalization?

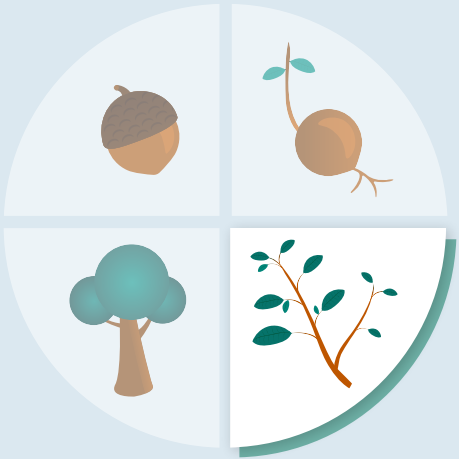
80%

of marketers say **personalization** improved performance



Learn how Litmus Personalize can help you personalize fast, without the heavy lift.

Learn more



Chapter 4

Priorities for the next 12 months

Better data holds the key for marketing automation and personalization

Email automation moved up the priority list

Marketers' top goal this year is to create more automated and triggered emails, which rises from the second slot in last year's survey.

Marketers want to personalize, but there are a few common roadblocks

Over a quarter of marketers want to expand how they use email personalization, but inadequate data, resources, and technical expertise are among the reasons holding them back.

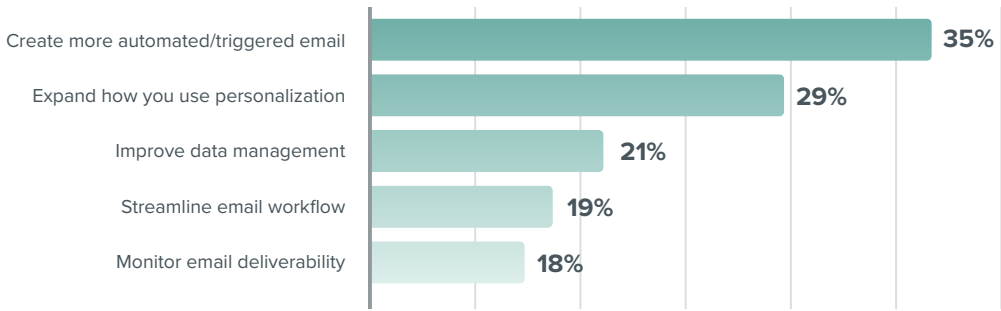
Data management is a recurring issue

Even though improving data management was lower on the priority list, it's a universal challenge that's intertwined with automation and personalization goals.

Automation and personalization are the top marketing priorities

The top two marketing priorities have been the same in recent years—automation and personalization. However, automation takes the top spot this year with more than a third of marketers wanting to create more triggered emails.

Top 5 biggest priorities for the next 12 months



"It's funny that this is number one in the survey, because it's our top priority at Appcues. To me, it's a function of becoming more productive so we're not doing one-on-one but one-to-many. With the macroeconomics and becoming more sustainable and making sure that we're all as productive as possible because AI is here."

Ramli John, Appcues

Data management has to come first, though

Data challenges consistently stand in the way of email marketing. But to accomplish the automation and personalization you want this year, you have to work through it.

21%
of marketers listed data management improvements as their top priority

"There's supercharged excitement about what AI can fuel, like better personalization and smarter triggers. In between is all of the data, which is just a dumpster fire. In a lot of cases the data is scattered, fragmented, and conflicting. I think the data barriers are really intense. There's nothing sexy about most of the data structure stuff. But it's absolutely essential."

Chad S. White, Oracle Digital Experience Agency

How to (finally) get the data of your dreams

If you struggle with data management, you're in good company. Most marketers face some sort of data hurdles, but there are ways to work through it.

Step 1

Figure out what data you have and need

Ideally, you can clean up or get creative with data you already own to try new personalization ideas. If you need to work with other teams to source intel, having a focused request helps. Make a list of:

- Data you have now, like customer segments or location
- Data you can easily get, such as through preference centers or email polls
- Data you'd love to have, like browsing history

Step 2

Pick a lifecycle phase to focus on

Personalization and automation opportunities abound, but you only have so many hours in the workday. Choosing a single lifecycle or metric, like re-engaging cold subscribers or converting abandoned carts, narrows your focus.

Step 3

Brainstorm ways to personalize

With your goal on one side and available data on the other, it's time to mix and match. How can you use what you have to create what you need? Sometimes, working within confines makes creativity easier. Of course, if there's a glaring hole of data you need, you now have a clear direction to work toward.

Customers vs. Prospects	Personalized Campaign Idea	Data You Need
Customers who purchase products in multiple categories	Gift guide or come visit our store	• Purchase behavior • Stated preferences • Geolocation
Customers who have purchased one product but not a second	Product recommendations	• Purchase behavior • Browsing history • Stated preferences
Customers who have purchased 3+ products (aka your superfans)	Ask for a review or shout-out on social media	• Purchase behavior • Sentiment
Prospects who have been on site browsing in the last 24 hours	Back-in-stock or “get it before it's gone”	• Browsing history
Prospects who haven't engaged with an email in 30 days or more	Re-engagement campaign	• Email engagement • Browsing history
Prospects who are thiiiiis close to making a purchase	Abandoned cart or abandoned browsing	• Interest signals • Browsing history

Chapter 5 What to do next

We asked the experts what lifecycle marketers should focus on now—here's what they said.

Break out of your bubble

"I always encourage folks to sign up for newsletters and get on email lists of different sorts of companies and publishers and brands and individuals that are outside your orbit. See what they send you. Sometimes it's stuff that you like, often it's stuff that you don't. But you can learn things from the stuff that you hate."

Dan Oshinsky, Inbox Collective

"People are always asking, 'Well, this is great for B2B but what about B2C?' But I think there's so much that B2B can learn from B2C and B2C can learn from B2B. We're all trying to market to human beings. Putting these boundaries and barriers in place and just learning what this industry is doing is doing ourselves a little bit of a disservice."

Jaina Mistry, Litmus

Work across teams

“Befriend your CRM manager or whoever owns the data that you want to be sending your emails based off of. I feel like those teams are so inundated—lifecycle marketing is not the only team who needs data help. And sometimes it's not even the priority. So I do feel like it's really important to follow their process. If you respect the data and operations process and follow it, it makes it easier to rinse and repeat that work when you have future needs that come into play.”

Courtney Grab, Litmus

“I think we need to connect with other teams to understand what they’re doing. If we have connections and build those relationships with other teams, then we can have a better picture of how everything fits together.”

Ramli John, Appcues

Audit your lifecycle program

"My number one piece of advice is to audit your existing lifecycles, journeys, and programs. These are not set it and forget it programs. But so often they are treated as such, and they get out of date, and they get broken."

Chad S. White, Oracle Digital Experience Agency

Test new things

"Take bigger swings. I think we've gotten addicted to these one variable at a time A/B tests. And next thing you know, a year and a half has gone by, and you're drowning in small wins and ties. Don't be afraid to stand up a new program and then kill it within a couple of months, if it's not working. Just be thoughtful with how you do it."

Drew Price, JRNY PPL

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About Us

Litmus is an all-in-one email marketing platform empowering marketers of all stripes to build, test, personalize, and analyze every email.

From solutions for effective email personalization to an airtight QA process monitored by cutting-edge emerging email technology, over 700,000 marketers trust Litmus to help them send emails that just click.

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