

In Email We Trust

How email is winning consumers' trust as other channels lose ground





Email is NOT Dead

After years of fending off naysayers who claimed that email was dead, the marketing community is finally coming around to the realization that email is NOT dead. Ironically, this medium that has been around for decades is now being called a “Hot New Channel” for brands looking to reach their audience.

In fact, with nearly 7 billion email accounts and growing, email is the preferred channel for commercial communication—that is, between consumers and retailers—with over 80% of consumers saying email is their preferred channel of brand communication, with Facebook a distant second, preferred by just 38%.

Having overcome threats like spam and competition from social media, email is re-emerging as a powerful channel for publishers and advertisers to engage audiences. And, a key driver in email’s resurgence is trust—audiences have come to trust email more than any other channel for a variety of reasons.

In this ebook, we’ll take a closer look at what’s helped email rise to the top as the most trusted channel, and how you can leverage subscribers’ trust in email to drive engagement and revenue.

Why trust matters for brands

Trust has become an extremely valuable commodity for brands. Not only is competition for consumers' attention and their wallets fiercer than ever, but expectations are also ratcheting up. Brands can no longer compete on price and quality because consumers today have far too much choice and purchase options.

Instead, consumers are holding businesses to a higher standard and expect not only a high-quality product and an exceptional experience, but also that their investment will be met with a commitment to maintaining trust. In fact, two-thirds of adults say that trust is a major factor in their purchase decisions, and established brands are more likely to earn consumers' business than a lesser-known startup.

“It’s not now just about price, feature and benefits. It’s not even about history and legacy. It is about trust.

Every brand must build and maintain trust, particularly because the customer is more skeptical and empowered, and not afraid to push back and question.”

—Mark McCrindle, McCrindle Research

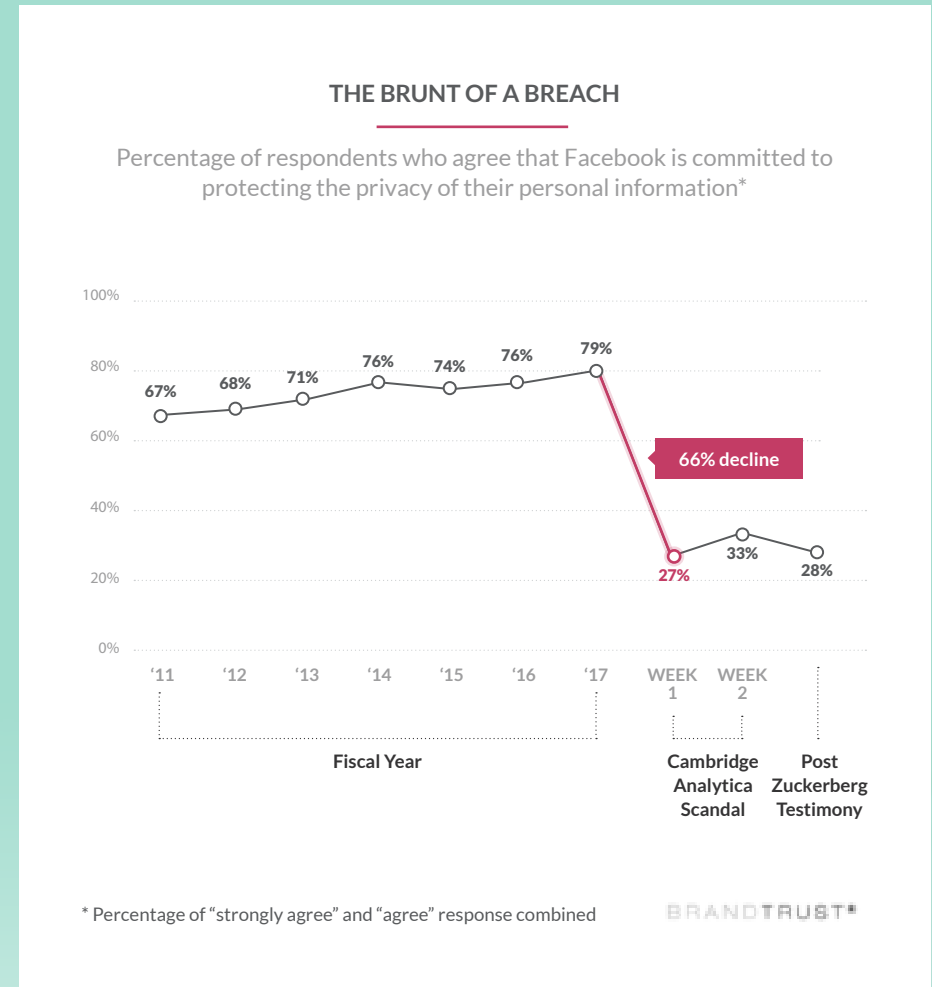


How is trust affected by a breach?

Maintaining trust requires brands to act with authenticity and in a way that reflects their stated values. Building a reputation—and maintaining it—demands investment of time and resources, and approaching every opportunity or threat from the perspective of “what would our customers think?”

Operating with this customer-centric approach should be your guidepost, not only when it comes to product and marketing decisions, but also when it comes to data. As Facebook, Equifax, Target and many other brands have learned the hard way, losing customers’ trust when it comes to data security can be a major blow to your reputation.

In the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, consumers’ trust in Facebook’s privacy protection tanked by 66%, dropping from 79% down to just 27% in a week’s time. This devastating blow undid years of reputation building, and the company is still struggling to recover.





People have lost trust in the media

Unfortunately for publishers, consumer trust in the media continues to decline. Nearly 70% of Americans say their trust in news media has decreased in the past decade, and for some, there's not much hope that their trust can be restored.

The lack of trust has been driven largely by the emergence of so-called “fake news” and perceived biased reporting. Personal and professional scandals that have rocked some of television's most trusted news anchors and reporters have not helped, and the growth in sensationalism and clickbait on the internet has become a major source of audience distrust.

All of this has led to skepticism among consumers who have grown frustrated by what they perceive to be a lack of commitment to truth and fairness among media outlets, and this in turn has sent audiences on the hunt for someone—anyone—they feel is trustworthy.

The definition of “*media*” is changing

This lack of trust in the media is a growing problem for publishers of every variety—and the brands who advertise with them—because the definition of “media” is changing. Whether it likes it or not, Facebook is perceived by most users as a media company, despite the fact that the company has repeatedly insisted that it is a platform, not a publisher.

“We actually define ourselves as a technology company.”

Carolyn Everson, vice president of global marketing solutions at Facebook, has said. “Media companies are known for the content that they create.”

But, insisting that it is not a media company isn’t just clarification of Facebook’s purpose, it’s actually a calculated strategy to shirk responsibility. If it were to identify as a media company, it would have to adhere to the advertising guidelines that traditional publishers must face, and that would eat significantly into its advertising revenue. In fact, the company makes millions from fake ads. In one such incident, Facebook accepted and ran some \$2.4 million worth of false advertising for a scam rebate program that didn’t exist.

This creates a huge problem for publishers who have relied on Facebook to distribute content. As trust in Facebook has waned,

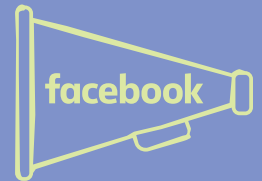
1 in 4 users have left the platform, deleting the app from their mobile phones, which is a significant source of user traffic.

Between the algorithm changes that have pushed publishers’ content off the Newsfeed, and declining use, Facebook is becoming not only a risk to publishers’ revenue, but also a risk to the trust they’ve worked so hard to build with their subscribers.

Clearly, publishers need a better way to engage with subscribers—a channel that’s trustworthy, where they can control the distribution, own the audience engagement and reap the benefits of monetization that drives authentic, valuable traffic to their brand partners.

That channel is email.

*We're not a media company.
Watch our news shows.*



Email: the trusted channel for subscribers, brands and publishers

Email has proven to be the channel of choice for reaching subscribers and engaging with audiences, especially for retail interactions. But it's also become the trusted channel of choice for publishers as well, capitalizing on consumers' inherent trust of the channel to drive engagement and monetization.

According to a recent study, "How Adults Consume and Filter Information Online," trust in the publisher is the #1 reason email subscribers open and read publisher newsletters. In fact, nearly two-thirds say trust is more important than the content itself in enticing them to read newsletters that hit their inbox.

And, unlike social media where distrust in the platform breeds distrust in the content and advertising, when it comes to email, the opposite is true: subscribers' trust in the publisher translates directly to the brands who advertise within them. Two-thirds of adults say they'll click on an ad in an email if they trust the sender. For advertisers, that means partnering with the right publisher can make email an outstanding channel for reaching audiences and maximizing ROI.

"Consumers recognize that the 'free' content they enjoy in emails and online does come at a cost, and they've proven willing to 'pay for it' by accepting ads. But, trust and relevancy are also extremely important and that's why making the right connection with the right publisher is critical for advertisers."

Jeff Kupietzky, CEO of PowerInbox



What makes email the most trusted channel? Several factors:



Email addresses are personal. Thanks to the risk of spam, most email users are hesitant to share their email with just anyone. Which means that, when they do, it's because they see value in the company they're sharing it with.



It's opt-in. Subscribers have raised their hand and said "send to me." That sends a clear signal that they want to receive publishers' content, and they're interested in the value it brings to their inbox.



It's reliable. How many times has Facebook's algorithm determined what is valuable enough to appear in your newsfeed? Unlike social media platforms, whose algorithms determine what users see, email subscribers know that when they sign up, they'll get what they've asked for.



Subscribers can unsubscribe. Having control over the relationship is good for the publisher, but it's also good for subscribers. They know, if need be, they can unsubscribe.



How to build and retain trust with subscribers

The inherent trust that subscribers feel for email has made it the most valuable engagement and monetization channel for publishers and advertisers. But, rather than take that trust for granted, publishers must continue to cultivate and protect that trust. Here are some tips to maintain a trustworthy relationship with subscribers.



Be wary of being spammy. Be mindful of the frequency of sends. While this doesn't mean you shouldn't send often—some data shows that frequent sends can actually work well to drive engagement—the key is to find a cadence that works well for your audience.



Certainly, don't send email to anyone who hasn't given you permission to do so, and always include an unsubscribe option. This shows that you take a customer-centric approach to the relationship and want people to feel comfortable that they can get out at any time.



Take privacy very seriously. Data management and security are critical, and publishers must be extremely careful with how they handle subscribers' data.

Although GDPR and other regulations make things a bit more difficult for publishers, these measures are in place to help instill and bolster trust, so it's critical to adhere.



Deliver relevant content. Subscribers must feel that the content you send them is useful and relevant in their lives. It must also be in line with your brand image and what people would expect from your company. This goes for advertisements that appear in your emails as well.



Use email-based targeting. By using email as the unique identifier, publishers can track user behavior in email, online and on social platforms to refine content delivery. By tracking across multiple channels, publishers can deliver relevant content to users across every touchpoint.



Choose ad partners wisely. As recent data has shown, consumers trust brands who advertise in publications that they trust. That means publishers must take this seriously and be mindful of the advertising partners they work with, otherwise they could risk alienating subscribers with inappropriate or poorly targeted ads.

Conclusion: Email to the trust rescue

The fact that people trust email more than any other digital channel is a huge opportunity for publishers and brands. It has tremendous potential to boost engagement and revenue and to help publishers recoup some of the losses in declining engagement and revenue from other channels.

But, that trust also carries with it a big responsibility, so publishers must be smart and use tactics to cultivate and maintain that trust and avoid taking advantage of it.

Working with an email personalization and monetization partner that's proven to build and retain subscriber trust can help publishers and brands leverage the email opportunity, while also building stronger relationships with subscribers. By pairing advertisers and publishers appropriately and targeting content based on known subscriber preferences, an email monetization partner can help publishers reclaim the relationship with their audiences, control the content and the delivery, and drive revenue that fuels bottom-line business growth.

**Want to learn more about how PowerInbox can help?
Contact us today.**

