

2012 through the lens of 2011 deliverability and Q4 benchmarks

By Len Shneyder

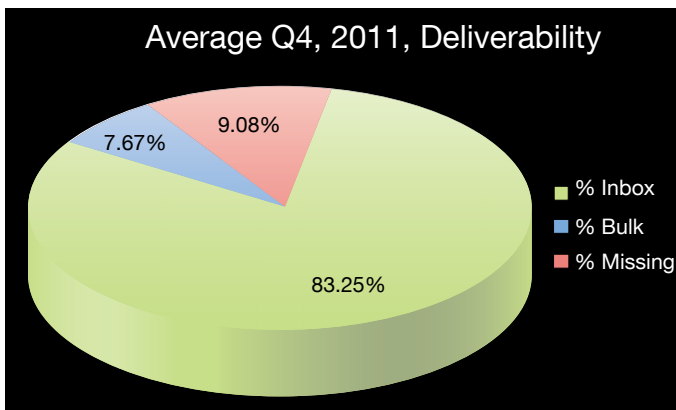


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Welcome to 2012! What better way to start 2012 than by reviewing the last quarter of 2011? High points, low points, let's soak up the learnings from the entire year; let's take it all in and hope that it helps us steer the ship into smoother waters in the year to come.

Overall deliverability



Sometimes no news is good news, or so the saying goes. In this case the news is the same as the quarter before: overall deliverability held firm at approximately 83.25 percent.

I don't mean to sound despondent about it, and really I'm not. Given micro trends we witnessed with certain ISPs around the all-important [Black Friday and Cyber Monday](#) retail events, overall deliverability holding firm is a good thing. We don't have to brace ourselves for a cataclysmic shockwave; rather, we

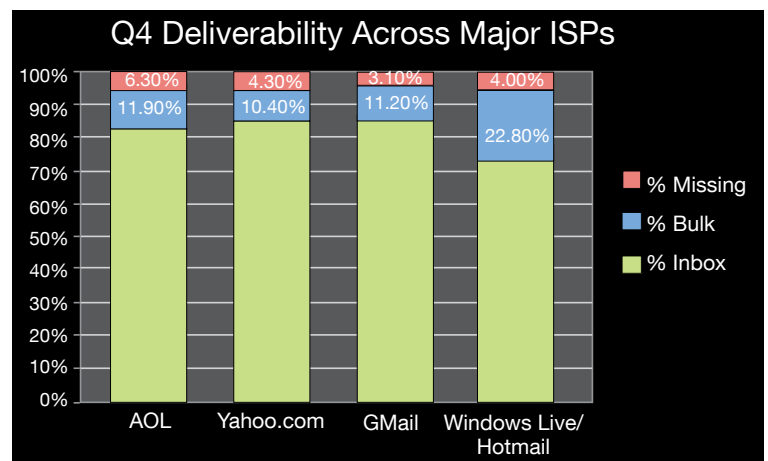
can spend the opening months reviewing what's worked and what hasn't worked as a means of constant self-improvement.

What can you do with this information?

- Prioritize your efforts. Not every problem is mission critical. Deliverability is fluid and constantly evolving. Knowing that your overall deliverability is ahead of the average puts problems in perspective as they arise.
- Set your goals. If your overall deliverability is below average, then there's an endemic problem in your list, your content or both. You should stop, take a long, hard look at what you're doing and make changes that will positively impact not only your deliverability rate, but also your ultimate bottom line.
- Give yourself a pat on the back. If you've made it this far and found yourself capable of delivering at a sustained rate that meets your business needs, then you deserve a pat on the back. But don't rest on your laurels; emerging channels have their own needs and nuances. You need to experiment in order to stay ahead. Take some chances. Be creative. Stagnation is the fast road to failure.

Deliverability across major ISPs

Delivery rates to AOL, Yahoo! and Gmail follow the trend of overall industry deliverability I mentioned above. In some cases one ISP is a little bit better than another. Hotmail continues to be a problem for numerous marketers, with average inbox placement 10 percent or lower than that of other ISPs.



Remediating Hotmail deliverability

Although Microsoft’s policies appear to make consistent inbox deliverability more difficult, they do provide marketers with a significant number of tools to help them:

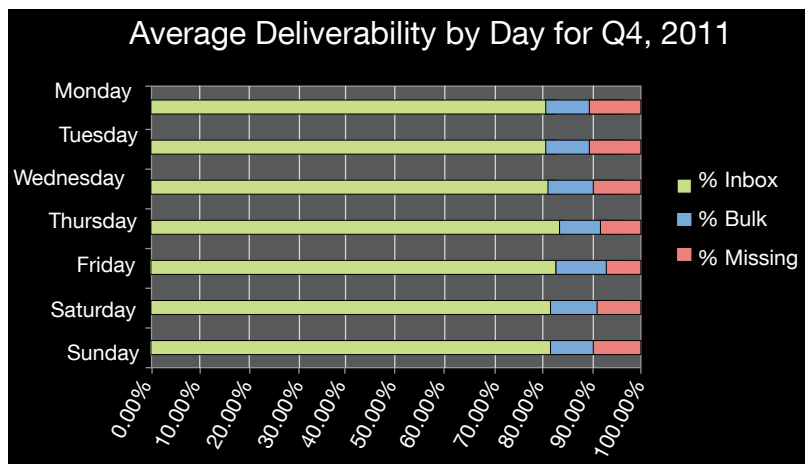
- **JMRPP:** The [Junk Mail Reporting Partner Program](#) is Microsoft’s feedback loop. Marketers that apply and qualify for this program will receive complaints generated by individuals who clicked the ubiquitous spam button to a preselected address. This is a critical mechanism to help sustain ongoing list health. It’s important to establish feedback loops where possible, and ensure whatever mechanism processes the complaints is constantly operational. Checks and balances make the difference.
- **SNDS:** [Smart Network Data Services](#) is a monitoring tool that yields valuable information about your IPs and domains, how many traps you may have hit in the course of normal operations, and how the smart screen filters have reacted to your mailing. Data is provided one day in arrears. Cross-referencing the data from SNDS with your own targeting and delivery data will yield valuable insight on the perceived health of your chosen segment or campaign at the domain or ISP level.
- **SIDF Cache:** To ensure a minimal latency between publishing your [SPF/SenderID](#) records and Hotmail picking them up, Microsoft has set up a manual method for you to submit those records to a cache. If you aren’t using [SPF/SenderID](#), it’s a new year and you should resolve to add those records. If you are, then it never hurts to ensure all the records are properly submitted to the right places.
- **List Unsubscribe Header:** Help your customers help you by giving them an option to unsubscribe directly in the webmail header of Hotmail. By publishing a List Unsubscribe header (see [RFC 2369](#)), your emails will automatically appear with an Unsubscribe option as part of the Hotmail interface. Customers who no longer wish to receive your emails will not have to scroll to the bottom to find that carefully hidden link (which, consequently, you should make plain as day) but rather have the option, there at the top, to click the Unsubscribe link rather than the spam button.
- **Adjust your targeting:** One of the major reasons marketing email winds up in Hotmail’s spam folder has to do with overzealous targeting. Don’t send everyone the same message all the time. By sending emails to old, inactive addresses

you’re setting yourself up for either a bounce or a click of the spam button. Too many of either is potentially disastrous to the entire campaign. Chose your recipients based on recent activity and modulate your deliveries. By trimming the oldest and worst performing five percent of your list, you give the other 95 percent a strong chance at the inbox.

- If all else fails, [contact the Hotmail Postmaster team](#) using their online form

Creatures of habit versus creatures of opportunity

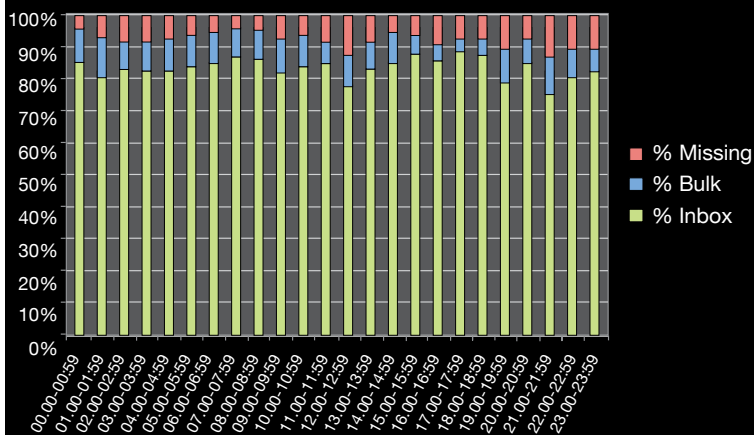
Opportunity lurks around every corner, but in order to take advantage of that opportunity we have to get out of our old habits and adopt some new ones. For years I’ve been saying that the tribally accepted wisdom of Tuesday and Thursday as the best days for delivering email are based on assumptions and technologies that are dated.



Based on our data Thursday – Sunday trend higher than the first half of the week. So you have to change half your habits, not quite all of them. The point here is that tribal wisdom was based on limited mobility. Our audience is incredibly mobile, wielding smart phones and shooting off texts and mobile emails with agile thumb work. Take into account today’s platform and device landscape, and use your intuition tempered with good data to establish your mailing days. Business as usual may be leaving dollars on the table.

Ask yourself this as you ponder the possibility of shifting your chosen weekly delivery day: which day do you see the most number of your competitors' emails in your inbox? If you're mailing on the same day, then congratulations, you're following the cattle call. If you've spent time to isolate mobile users, determine when you're seeing the most mobile traffic on your site and track high rates of web purchases, then you have a pretty good grasp on the opportunities that lay outside of what everyone else is doing.

Q4 Deliverability By Hour



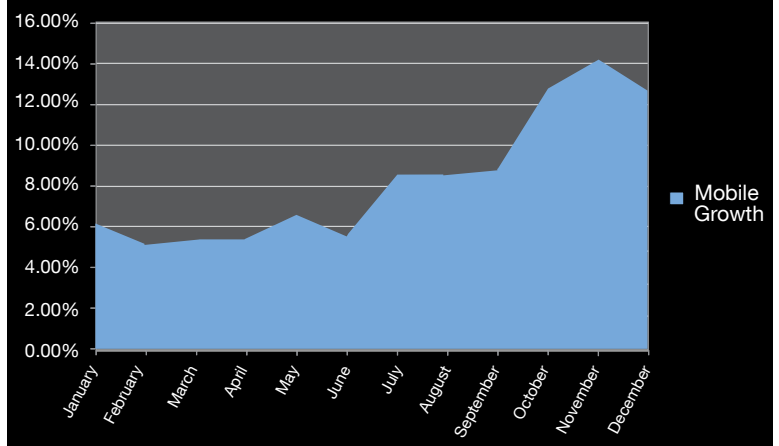
The same rules apply to finding key opportunities by hour for delivering email. Ample delivery windows during high peaks of deliverability exist during the evening. Most marketers front load the day assuming that email will be digested as people arrive to the office. The truth is that email is consumed from the moment someone wakes up to the moment they go to sleep, thanks to smart phones. I know you're blushing, but seriously, I do the same thing! The optimal delivery window is the one you find based on the browsing and purchasing habits of your customers. Assume that delivery times are as fluid as days, and should be established based on behavioral data.

The mobile year in review

By now, mobile marketing is old hat. There's no news in the fact that mobile, as a channel and platform, is not only viable but also red hot! If you read our [Holiday Benchmark](#), you

know that mobile devices played a major role in the success of this holiday season. Here's another look at how mobile grew over 2011, and more importantly how it soared around the holidays!

2011 Month Over Month Mobile Growth



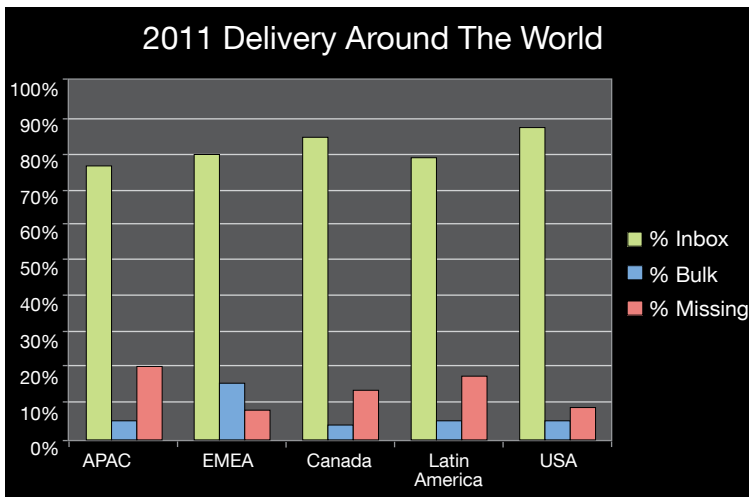
Mobile is more than just a boon to retailers during holiday peaks; mobile connects people in ways never before imagined and empowers creative thinkers to come up with exciting new possibilities like the [QR code-driven grocery store in Korea](#). Mobile is an inbox in every user's pocket and that liberates you from thinking of your campaigns, calls to action and content as something to be experienced seated in front of a monitor. What does this mean? It means be succinct, be timely, be selective and be direct in your communications. Always assume that they are being viewed and consumed on mobile devices.

Global deliverability

However much excitement we may find in the possibilities surrounding mobile marketing and more importantly, mobile email, we have to keep in mind that different markets, just like ISPs in North America, have very different requirements surrounding email.

If you thought that living with an average deliverability rate in the low 80's was difficult in North America, then chances are

that the delivery rates in the APAC region will leave you completely dismayed.



It should come as no surprise that delivering email to China is no easy task because Chinese ISPs have to comply with censorship laws and have added filtering and security in place to mitigate unwanted email traffic. Marketers would be well served to read Article 57 of the Regulations on Telecommunications of the People's Republic of China and consult with their legal counsel.

Germany has some of the strictest privacy laws in the EU, limiting the ability of German ISPs to offer feedback loops without end recipient permission. Marketers have to be aware of these nuanced situations and take into consideration local custom and law when deciding on how to approach digital messaging in a particular market.

Setting your sights on 2012

As I said before, resting on your laurels isn't allowed. You may want to start 2012 by dissecting your successes and failures, capitalizing on what worked and adjusting what didn't. But don't stop there. Have you been monitoring your social presence and are you leveraging content that is driving traffic across channels? Do you know who your **social influencers** are? No? Then you have your homework cut out for you.

- Re-examine your opt-in and registration pages. Do you really need someone's fax number for your records? I don't think that today's teenagers even know how to use a fax machine. Why not ask potential subscribers what their Twitter handle is, or if they'd like SMS delivered to their mobile phones?
- Connect the dots. You have data in all kinds of places and you should find ways of not only merging data silos, but also drawing unique conclusions based on multi-sourced data. Make your data paint a more thorough picture of your customers by tying these data sources to unique profiles, thereby creating more customer-centric profiles.
- Send smarter communications, not more of them. I regularly unsubscribe from newsletters and companies that think sending me 2-3 promotions a day is a good idea. I bet you do the same thing. If you've done your homework and acquired more actionable data about your customers, then you know you can reach them on Facebook (assuming you set up a welcoming company page), or send them a tweet or an app message (if you have a dedicated mobile app).

In today's world there are numerous means to reach customers; you don't have to exhaust your customer's inboxes in order to meet your bottom line. Staying relevant means cross-channel optimization and that doesn't mean creating the same cadence across all channels but rather, modulating them.

Personally, I'm excited about 2012. With so many options and platforms to choose from the only thing holding you back is you. Go ahead, get creative; for every failure you will have two or three ground breaking successes. Experimentation will ensure that you remain relevant and in lockstep with the opportunities of tomorrow.

About IBM Unica Email Optimization

Email Optimization is a cloud based solution to optimize email communications from creation, deployment, social sharing and landing pages. It has several components including Design & Rendering tools, deliverability tracking via seed lists and the new Social Email Analytics which allows customers to track the viral potential of every link in their emails.

For more information

To learn more about IBM Enterprise Marketing Management solutions, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: ibm.com/software/info/unica.

About the author

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