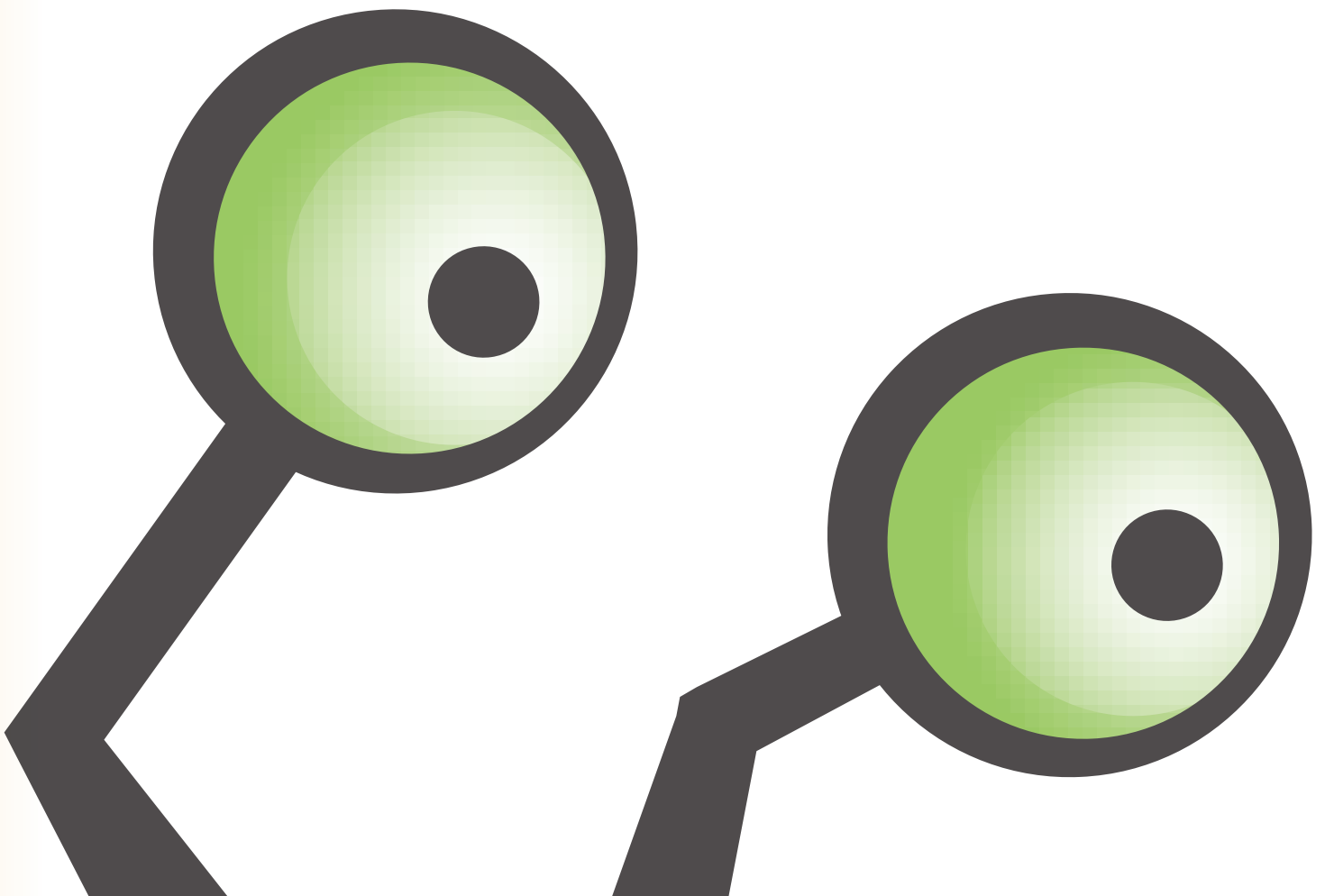


## Why do my open rates continue to decline?

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Sooner or later during your e-mail marketing life, you might notice that your open rates show a declining trend over a certain period.

Open rates are a measure of recipient interest in your messages, and the accuracy of this measuring method is increasing. We will discuss here several issues that can affect your open rates, as well as the actions that will contribute to enhance them.

**An aging list** is one of the main issues to tackle:

Check for older names that have not subscribed and send out a new invitation with a link to a subscription form. Weed out right away the names that don't open and/or don't click.

Send out messages to subscribers who haven't opened or clicked for more than six months, and include in the message special offers and a link to unsubscribe.

Make sure that you engage new members as soon as they subscribe: send out a welcome message with a little extra value in it.

**An unfriendly email client:** As a service to their users –it saves bandwidth, enhances download speed-- many email clients block images in HTML messages at download unless the user changes a setting. Some offer preview panels. Since ESPs and software solutions determine if a message was opened or not by means of a tracking image, when images are blocked you don't know if your recipient has opened your message or not.

In order to skirt this problem, you can either

- a) advise your subscribers to add your "from" email address to their address book and/or to their safe senders list so images will load automatically onto your messages;
- b) use only HTML and text with no images in the top left portion of your message to display the content that would most surely motivate your recipient to open your message.

**Your messages remain unopened:** This very discouraging issue can stem from the most disparate roots:

- a) Bland, indistinct "subject" lines or "from" lines that remain unnoticed in the recipient's crowded inbox;
- b) Your mailings are not scheduled properly and arrive to the recipients' inbox either so often that they perceive you as a nuisance or so far apart that they forget that they why they are coming in.
- c) Recipients find that the content of your messages is not relevant to their needs or does not match their expectations.



To minimize this kind of 'rejection', make sure that you explain clearly the type of information that you will be sending as well as the frequency of those mailings whenever you request to add an email address to your mailing list; use your company or product brand name in the "from" line, and not simply the sender's name or email address; and use a subject line that refers to the content of the message.

But your best option is to direct your potential subscriber to a subscriber preference in your website where they can choose what information they want to receive and what frequency they prefer –and never send anything they have not asked for from then on.

**Your messages are blocked or filtered:** This can happen at the ISP, company or recipient end. If your messages constantly bounce back, it is possible that your mailing list is not 'clean' and/or has too many outdated addresses and/or too many recipients marking your messages as spam; that the content of your message is questionable in some way; or that the IP address you are using is one also used by spammers.

In order to avoid most of these inconveniences,

- a) Use a list management software and remove all unsubscribed addresses from your list ASAP;
- b) Apply to be included in the main ISPs' whitelist of approved senders;
- c) Ask your subscribers to include your "from" address in their address books and contact lists;
- d) Check available ISPs' blacklists often in order to learn of blocks or complaints against your IP address. Take urgent and diligent measures if any issues show up.
- d) Get a message checking tool. Use it to make sure that your content is kosher and that your HTML code is accurate before you send out any messages or launch any campaign.