



2026 Email Deliverability Benchmark Report

A Year of
Provider Divergence

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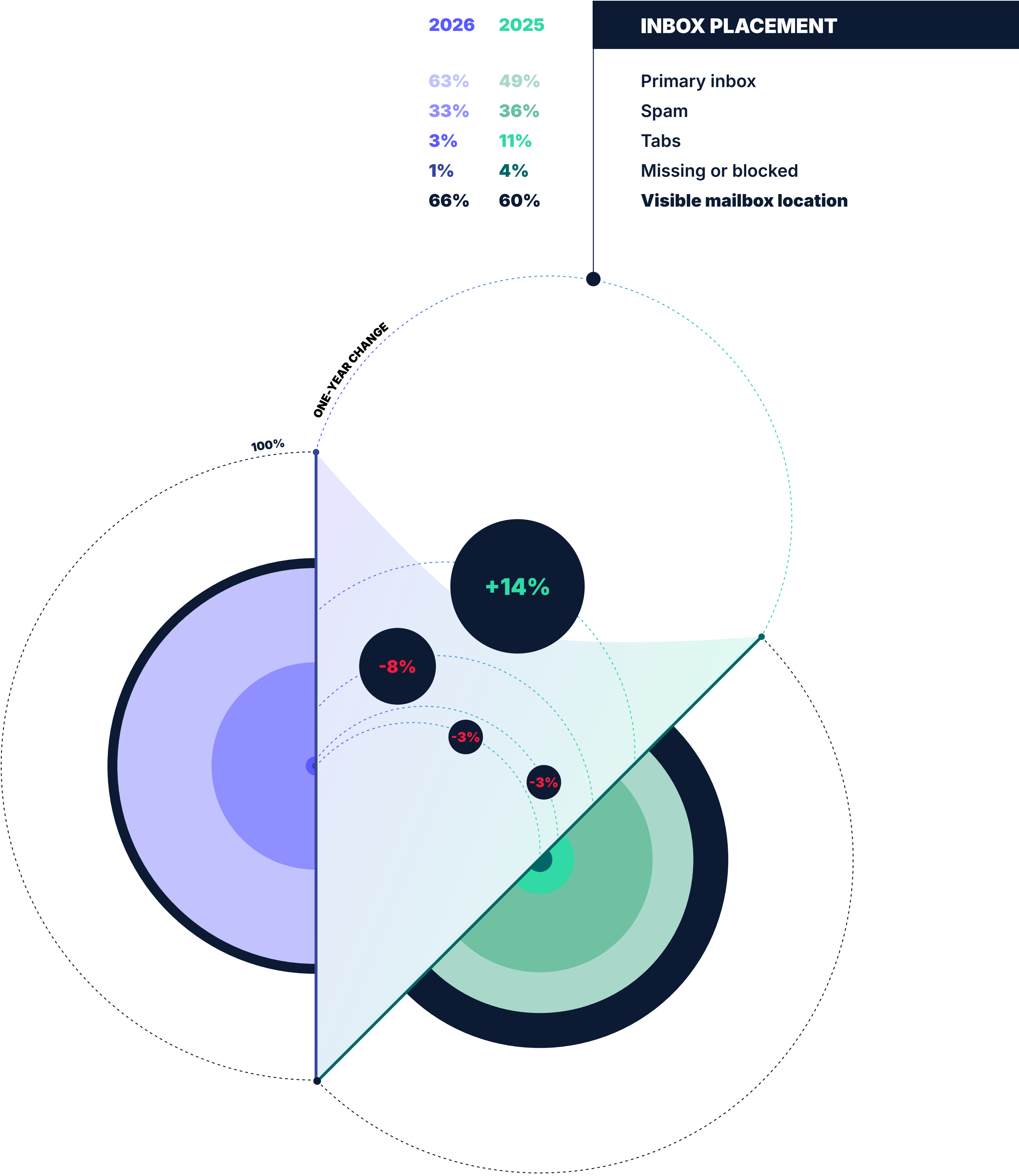
01

WHAT
CHANGED
IN 2026



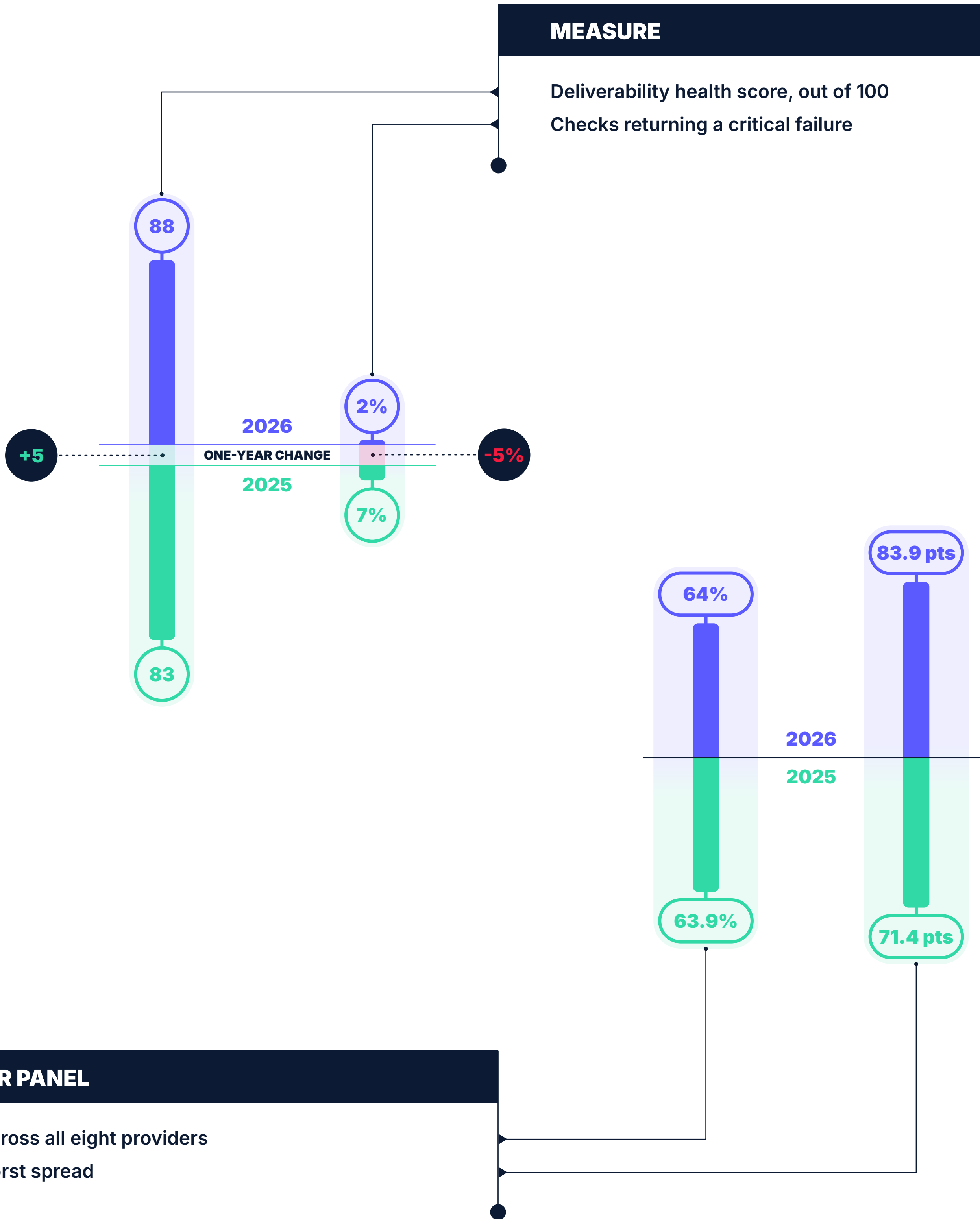
Senders improved on nearly everything within their control, and it showed in where their email landed. The graph below breaks down all tested email, so the categories add up to the full total.

Visible mailbox location combines the primary inbox and tabs. This is the figure used throughout the report for year-on-year comparisons.



Primary inbox placement rose 14 points, while tab placement fell 8. Critical-check failures dropped to less than a third of last year’s rate.

Subject-line quality improved by 39 points, HTML structure by 20, and SPF and DKIM by 7 and 8 points, respectively. Email that once disappeared now almost always lands somewhere.



The average barely moved. But underneath that stable number, Yahoo fell 30 points, AOL fell 34, and Outlook rose 25. The gap between the best- and worst-performing providers widened by 12.5 points.

The placement table above and this one measure different things. The first uses a trailing corpus, while the second tracks a fixed panel of eight providers. They should be read together, not compared directly. Overall, email performance improved, but the recipient’s provider became more important than ever.

Put simply: sending got better, receiving became more uneven, and a blended inbox rate now conceals more than it reveals.

02

DELIVERABILITY
HIGHLIGHTS

THE YEAR IN ONE TABLE

2026

2025

ONE-YEAR CHANGE

+43%

CASL compliance

62%

19%

+39%

Subject line quality

79%

40%

+32%

CAN-SPAM compliance

35%

3%

+27%

GDPR compliance

76%

49%

+20%

HTML best practices

43%

23%

+16%

Checks returning OK

89%

73%

+14%

Inbox rate

63%

49%

+13%

CCPA compliance

85%

72%

+10%

Domain age factor

57%

47%

+8%

DKIM adoption

90%

82%

+7%

SPF adoption

93%

86%

+6%

Broken links clean

80%

74%

+5%

Health score, out of 100

88

83

+3%

Reverse DNS

99%

96%

+2%

List-Unsubscribe header

14%

12%

+1%

Accessibility standards

85%

84%

+0.23%

BIMI record published

1%

0.77%

-1%

Body content analysis

89%

90%

-4%

IP blacklist clean

94%

98%

-10%

Short URL safety

90%

100%

-11%

DMARC adoption

48%

59%



Critical failures fell to under a third of last year's rate

2

Checks returning a critical result fell from 7% to 2%, while warnings dropped from 20% to 9%.

Most senders are now close to getting the fundamentals right. But the 2% still failing outright remain the group most exposed to sudden losses in placement.

The domains that get delivered are old

10.5

YEARS

Domains reaching the inbox averaged 10.5 years old, up from 9.3 last year. The domain-age pass rate also rose by 10 points, to 57%.

Two years of data tell the same story: email that reaches the inbox typically comes from domains around a decade old.

Domain age cannot be built quickly, which is what makes domain rotation so costly.



List-Unsubscribe moved two points in a year

14

List-Unsubscribe adoption rose from 12% to 14% in a year.

More than two years after Google and Yahoo introduced their one-click unsubscribe requirement, six in seven senders still omit a header that takes one line of code and lets recipients unsubscribe cleanly instead of reporting email as spam.



6

IP blacklisting tripled

IP blacklist pass rates fell from 98% to 94%, so listings rose from 2% of senders to 6%. Domain listings stayed rare at 0.3%.

A single listing can take a healthy program to near-zero placement inside a day, which is a large consequence attached to a small number.

+14

POINTS

Email arrived more often and in a better place

Primary inbox placement rose from 49% to 63%, while tabbed placement fell from 11% to 3%.

Gmail's Primary share rose from 82% to 88% over the same period.



16

UNDER

Yahoo and AOL are now the strictest providers

Yahoo averaged 27.2% over the period, the lowest of the eight, and closed August at 15.3%.

AOL finished lower still at 14.7%, down from 48.4% last December.

Both had been comfortably mid-table a year ago.



POINTS

Compliance moved faster than anything technical

CASL rose from 19% to 62%, the largest single-year gain in the report.

CAN-SPAM rose from 3% to 35%, GDPR from 49% to 76%, and CCPA from 72% to 85%.

Legal readiness improved faster than authentication, structure, or placement did across the board.

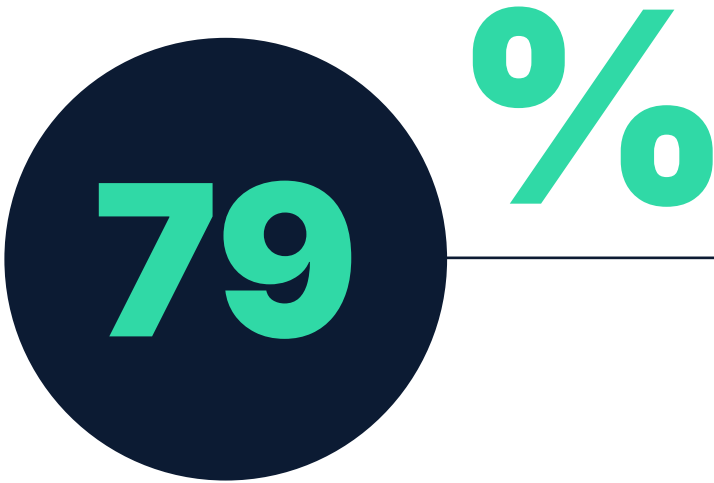


DMARC went backwards

DMARC was the only authentication signal to fall, dropping 11 points while SPF, DKIM, and reverse DNS all rose.

It is also the gate for everything downstream, including BIMI and, under RFC 9989, how receivers may act on your published policy.

Subject lines stopped being the problem

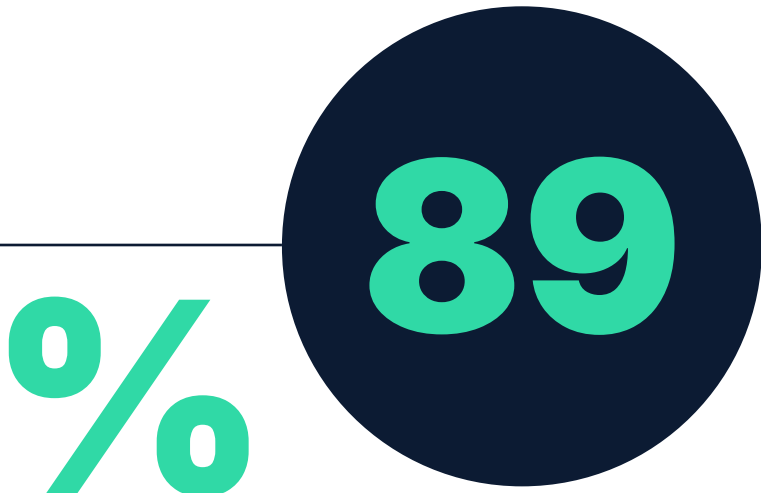


Up 39 points, the largest gain on the technical side of the report.

Long subjects fell from 10% of emails to 7%, emoji from 4% to 3%, while all caps held at 2%.

Those three changes are too small to explain the swing, so most of the improvement came from criteria the breakdown does not capture.

Content still isn't the constraint



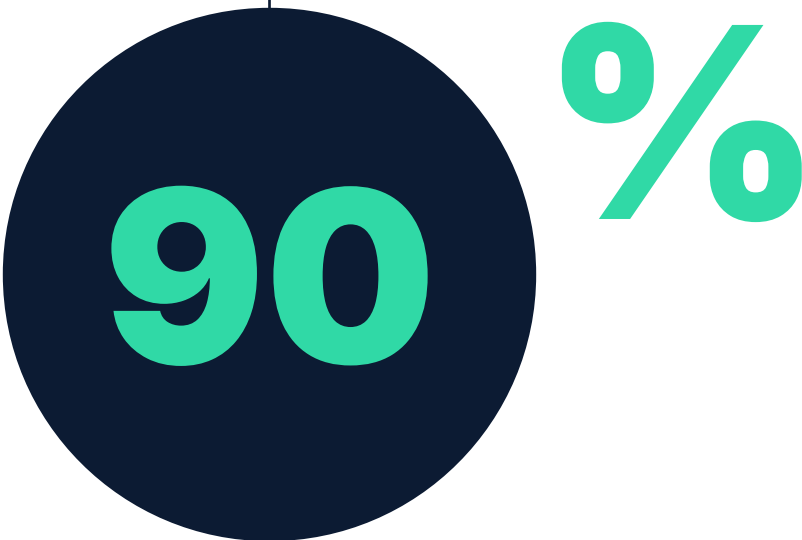
Body content checks pass 89% of emails, while 88% separately score in the safe SpamAssassin band; 66% reach a visible mailbox.

The gap between safe SpamAssassin scores and visible mailbox placement narrowed from 32 points to 22, because placement improved rather than the scores themselves.

Short URLs got riskier

Short URL safety fell from a clean 100% to 90%.

One email in ten now routes recipients through a shortener that hides its destination, a pattern filters can interpret as evasion.



THE RULES CHANGED BEFORE THE NUMBERS DID

Very little in this report happened on its own, and most of what shaped 2026 was already in motion before it began. Mailbox providers shifted from quietly sorting non-compliant mail into spam to refusing it at the SMTP layer, while two European regulators turned the open-tracking pixel into a question of consent.

The full account is in *What Changed in Email Deliverability in 2026*. Here's the short version.

DATE	WHAT CHANGED IN EMAIL DELIVERABILITY IN 2026	WHAT IT TOUCHES
June 2025 onward	AT&T's consumer domains move to Yahoo MX, Comcast migrates comcast.net to Yahoo Mail	Yahoo's blast radius
November 2025	Gmail escalates from filtering to SMTP rejection, temporary 4.7.x errors then permanent 5.7.x	Every bulk sender to gmail.com
Late November 2025	Gmail's image proxy cuts pixel prefetching by roughly a third	Open rates
February 3, 2026	Postmaster Tools API v2 reaches general availability	Compliance monitoring
February 24 to 26, 2026	Outlook.com rate-limits and rejects mail from long-standing authenticated senders	Detection speed
March and April 2026	CNIL recommendation and Garante Provision 284 treat email pixels as consent-bearing, with different exemptions	Open-based automation
April 2026	Gmail MCP server and Copilot in Outlook actions mode ship different exemptions	Agent-managed inboxes
May 2026	DMARC becomes a Standards Track RFC, 9989 for the core protocol, retiring pct, ri and rf	Every record staged with a percentage
June 11, 2026	Washington's ESHB 2274 cuts CEMA damages from \$500 to \$100 and adds a knowledge requirement, easing exposure created by Brown v. Old Navy in April 2025	Subject-line litigation
July 2026	Microsoft tags all bulk mail to business mailboxes as Promotions, rolling out through mid-September	B2B placement
Through 2026	Exchange Online outbound connectors queue then drop mail when a destination's DANE or MTA-STS validation fails	Transport policy at the receiver



THREE OF THESE EXPLAIN NUMBERS IN THIS REPORT



Yahoo's 15.3% reaches beyond yahoo.com

Thirteen AT&T consumer domains already run on Yahoo infrastructure, and Comcast is now actively migrating comcast.net mailboxes to Yahoo Mail even while MX records still point to Comcast hosts.

The address after the @ can hide the true scale of Yahoo exposure. In some US consumer lists, Yahoo reaches far more recipients than their domains suggest.

DMARC falling to 48% got more expensive

A receiver following RFC 9989 ignores *pct* and applies the full policy instead.

A record staged at *p=reject; pct=25* can now reject a quarter of failing mail at one receiver and all of it at another, with no change to the DNS record.

Subject line quality became a legal metric

The Washington Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Old Navy* in April 2025, holding that false or misleading claims in commercial subject lines violate the state's Commercial Electronic Mail Act, with puffery excluded.

More than 100 class actions followed within a year. Washington cut statutory damages from \$500 to \$100 in June 2026 and added a knowledge requirement, narrowing the exposure without eliminating it.

The 79% pass rate in section 02 is no longer only a deliverability number.

WHAT NO BENCHMARK CAN MEASURE



Filtering is becoming per-recipient

The same campaign can land differently for two subscribers at the same provider, while an agent that files your mail into a folder generates no complaint, unsubscribe, or signal a sender will ever see.

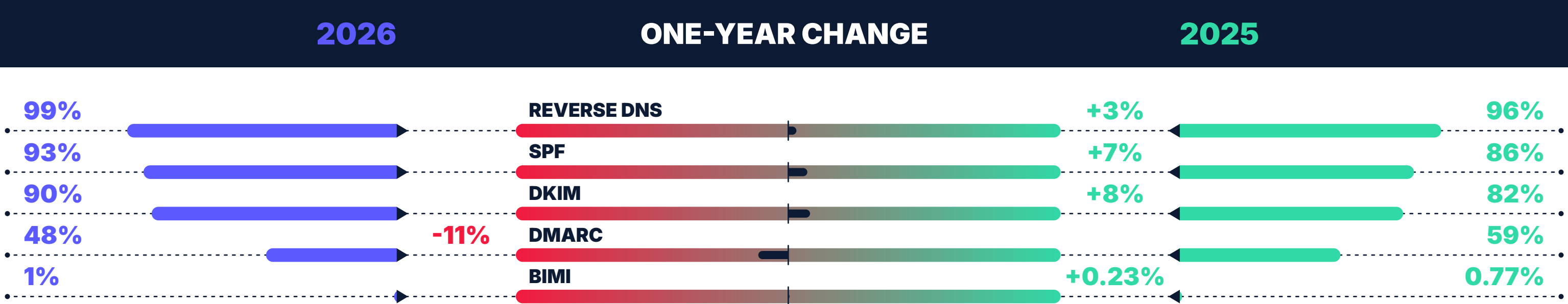
A seed test measures the layer providers reject on. It is fully measurable and, crucially, it is the layer that hardened this year. Read the attention layer from your own engagement data, segmented by mailbox provider.

04

AUTHENTICATION
REACHED ITS
CEILING



Four of the five authentication signals improved. The one that went backwards is the one that matters most.



SPF, DKIM, and reverse DNS are approaching the ceiling. Each improved by several points this year, and none has much room left. The senders still missing these basic records are not the ones reading benchmark reports.

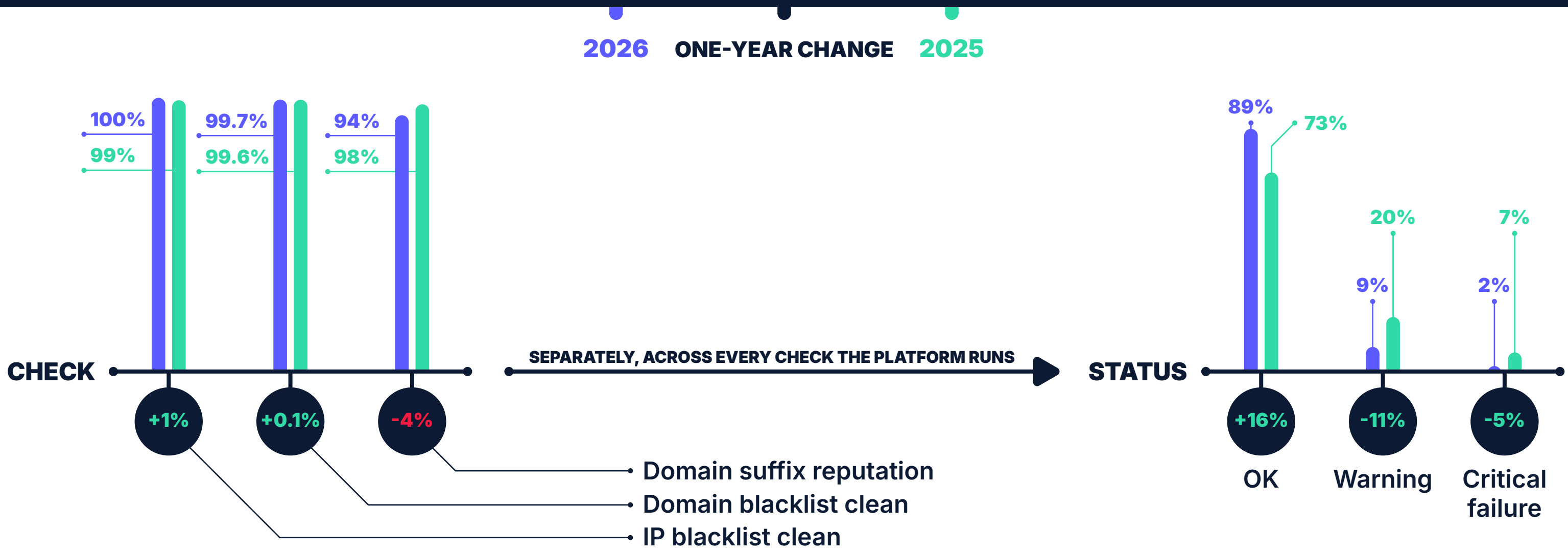
DMARC is the exception. It is the first check that requires a decision, not just a DNS entry: the sender has to tell receivers what to do when authentication fails. Fewer senders made that decision this year than last.

That gap now carries a bigger cost. BIMI requires *p=quarantine* or stricter before a logo can render, so more than half of all senders are locked out before cost even becomes a factor. And since RFC 9989 removed *pct*, a policy staged at a percentage can now behave differently at different receivers without any change to the DNS record.

The decline is also visible outside the benchmark: in August 2026, Unspam reported the same figure, stating that “52% still have no DMARC.”

Check your own record with the Unspam DMARC checker. It flags *pct*, *ri*, and *rf* as historic tags for the reason described in section 03.

REPUTATION AND OVERALL CHECK HEALTH



The overall distribution is the good news in this section: warnings more than halved, while critical failures fell to less than a third of last year’s rate.

IP reputation is the bad news. Domain listings remained rare, but IP listings tripled, pointing more toward shared or rented sending infrastructure than problems with the domains themselves.

BIMI GREW AND STILL ROUNDS TO NOTHING

Record published counts domains carrying a valid BIMI DNS record. Logo display counts logos that actually render in a supporting client. They are separate measurements that happen to reach the same figure at this scale.

2026
ONE-YEAR CHANGE
2025



VMC adoption grew 81% in relative terms but remains below one percent in absolute terms. Client support did not move at all. 72% of the client market could render a verified logo last year, and 72% can this year. About one sender in a hundred gives those clients a logo to render.

The reported payoff is substantial: 25% higher brand recognition, 18% higher open rates, and 32% higher trust scores, with VMC-verified logos showing the strongest effect. Those figures are BIMI reference values, not measurements from this year's sample.

The blocker is the chain of prerequisites. BIMI requires DMARC at *p=quarantine* or stricter, and DMARC adoption fell to 48%. A VMC costs upward of \$1,500 a year. Add the DNS work and logo preparation, and BIMI becomes a project rather than a setting.

That cost can be avoided for senders without a registered trademark. Gmail has honoured Common Mark Certificates since September 2024, allowing a logo to appear beside the sender name without trademark registration. The blue verified checkmark still requires a VMC. The Unspam BIMI checker confirms whether a published record will actually render. One point worth knowing before budgeting: BIMI is still a draft specification, at revision 14 as of May 2026, and has never become an RFC.

Our read: BIMI is the last cheap advantage in email, and it stays cheap only while adoption sits at 1%. Senders already running DMARC at enforcement are one certificate away from something 99% of their competitors do not have. Once adoption passes roughly 20%, the logo stops signalling effort and becomes the baseline, much like SPF did a decade ago.

06

DELIVERABILITY
BY MAILBOX
PROVIDER



The panel average held flat over the period. Six of the eight providers moved by double-digit percentage points, with gains and declines largely offsetting each other.

December 2025 and August 2026 both include data for all eight providers, making this the only clean like-for-like comparison in the dataset.

PROVIDER		2026	2025	ONE-YEAR CHANGE
AWS WorkMail	98.6%		100%	-1.4%
ProtonMail	97.6%		28.6%	+69%
Zoho	93.9%		98.3%	-4.4%
GMX	73.0%		85.7%	-12.7%
Outlook	66.8%		41.6%	+25.2
Gmail	51.7%		63.5%	-11.8%
Yahoo	15.3%		45.4%	-30.1%
AOL	14.7%		48.4%	-33.7%
PANEL AVERAGE	64.0%		63.9%	+0.1%
BEST-TO-WORST SPREAD	83.9 pts		71.4 pts	+12.5 pts

One tenth of a point separates the two years on average. Six of the eight providers moved by more than ten points each. An aggregate inbox rate is now a number that describes almost no individual sender’s experience.

Gmail repeated last year’s pattern. It peaked at 77.3% in February, then fell 26 points by August. In 2025, the same pattern appeared: an 87.5% peak in May fell to 63.5% by December. Two years of an early peak followed by a long slide is unlikely to be noise. The pattern is consistent with Gmail weighting sustained engagement more heavily over time, so flat engagement looks like decay. But what we can observe is the pattern, not the algorithm.

Outlook reversed. It was the strictest provider we tracked throughout 2025, ending the year at 41.6%. In 2026, it reached 74% by May before settling at 66.8%. Two explanations fit. Either senders met thresholds that did not change, or senders who could not meet them were rejected at SMTP rather than filtered into spam, removing them from the placement figures entirely. Placement data alone cannot distinguish between the two, and the second explanation would make part of this rise an artefact.

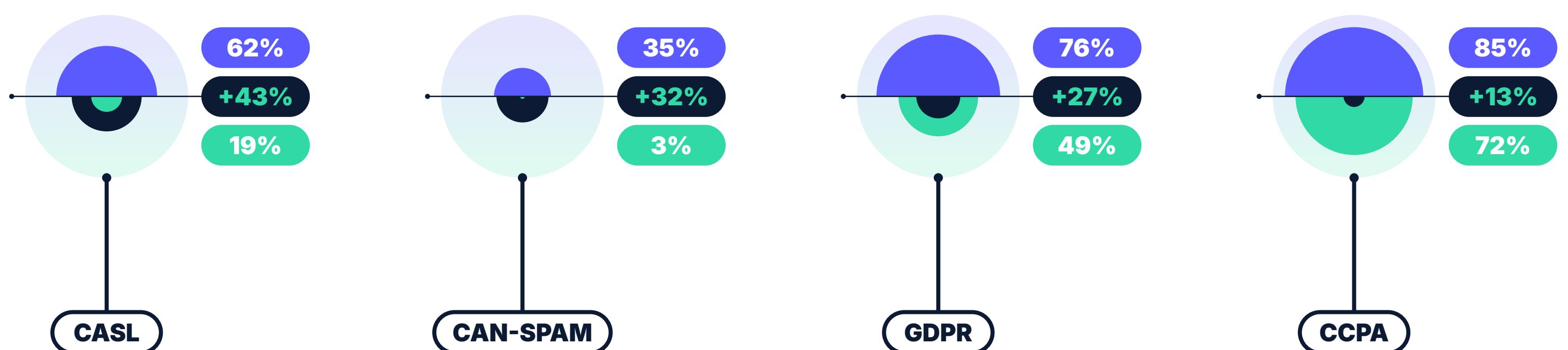
Yahoo and AOL collapsed together. They fell 30 and 34 points from December, share filtering infrastructure, and show a 0.94 month-to-month correlation in 2026. Treat them as one provider. Yahoo had the lowest average placement of any provider across the period, and AOL closed August lower still. List hygiene is where we would start, though nothing in this dataset isolates which lever is driving the decline.

Enterprise and privacy providers stayed high. AWS WorkMail, Zoho, and ProtonMail all remained above 93%. Policy-driven filtering and lower exposure to consumer complaint volume are the usual explanations for that stability. B2B senders should note that this stability is flattering their blended average.

The practical conclusion: segment reporting by mailbox provider before anything else. A blended rate averages providers that behave nothing alike, and it can tell you the program is fine while your largest audience segment stops seeing your email.

07 COMPLIANCE IMPROVED FASTER THAN ANYTHING TECHNICAL

Every regulation we track moved, and one changed more than any technical metric anywhere in this report.



REGULATION ORDERED BY SIZE OF GAIN

2026

2025

ONE-YEAR CHANGE

CASL's 43-point gain is the largest single-year improvement anywhere in this benchmark, ahead of subject line quality at 39 points. CAN-SPAM compliance rose almost twelvefold. Nothing in authentication or structure came close to either gain.

Litigation moved faster than two decades of guidance. Brown v. Old Navy landed in April 2025, holding that any false or misleading claim in a commercial subject line violates Washington's CEMA. More than 100 class actions followed within a year, approaching 200 by mid-2026, and that wave ran across the entire measurement window. Washington then moved the other way in June 2026, cutting statutory damages from \$500 to \$100 and adding a knowledge requirement. So the statute is not what pushed these numbers up. The litigation was. Twenty-three years after CAN-SPAM was signed, what finally moved compliance was a plaintiffs' bar.

Part of the CAN-SPAM jump is mechanical. Honest subject lines are one of the law's four requirements, and subject line quality rose 39 points over the same period. A sender who cleaned up subject lines for deliverability reasons also became more CAN-SPAM compliant, without intending to.

CAN-SPAM still trails the next-lowest regime by 27 points. At 35%, two emails in three fail the simplest standard in the set. CCPA also requires a working opt-out and passes at 85%, so the unsubscribe route is mostly present. What CAN-SPAM adds that the others do not is a physical postal address, making the footer the first place to look. Element-level pass rates are not published, so treat that as the strongest inference the data supports, not a measured cause.

CASL at 62% is real progress on one of the strictest regimes here. Canada requires express consent rather than the implied consent that most list-building assumes. A year ago, four senders in five failed it. Now it is closer to two in five.

Compliance is worth treating as a deliverability signal, not just a legal chore. Mailbox providers do not read statutes, but they measure the behaviours these laws require: identifiable senders, honest subjects, and an easy exit. Those signals feed reputation directly.

UNSPAM.EMAIL PLATFORM

Every number in this report comes from the same platform, using the same checks that any sender can run against their own mail.



TEST BEFORE YOU SEND

Spam test and score. Test a campaign against a generated address and get a 0–100 score. Review failures across authentication, reputation, blacklists, content, links, and structure. Treat SPF, DKIM, or DMARC failures as high risk because any one can be enough to send email to spam.

Inbox placement. Send seed email across consumer and business providers and see where it lands. Check primary, tabbed, and spam placement across the providers your audience actually uses. Most tools test only personal Gmail and Outlook, leaving B2B senders blind to the corporate stack.

Email preview. Preview email across more than 50 clients and devices in light and dark mode. Check layouts, logos, buttons, and other HTML elements for rendering problems. With HTML best practices passing in just 43% of tested email, this catches issues while they can still be fixed.

Accessibility scan. Scan email against WCAG accessibility requirements. Check contrast ratio, alt text, heading order, and dark-mode rendering. With alt text missing from 15% of images across the benchmark, this catches problems that can otherwise go unnoticed.

AI eye-tracking heatmap. Predict where recipients are likely to look across the message. Map attention after placement, when the email is actually being read. It measures the part of the funnel that open rates stopped reporting on once Gmail reduced pixel prefetching.

THEN STOP TESTING BY HAND

Scheduled spam tests and inbox placement. Schedule recurring spam tests and inbox placement checks. Save an email once, choose the days and time, and store each run for comparison. Get alerts when scores or placement start to slip.

Deliverability monitoring. Monitor placement and reputation continuously across your sending program. Track performance over time and receive alerts when it changes. Spot changes in performance as they happen.

DMARC monitoring. Monitor sending sources and authentication across your domain. Verify SPF and DKIM, detect unauthorized senders, and track compliance over time. Flag authentication or compliance issues early.

BUILD IT INTO YOUR OWN STACK

Spam checker, inbox placement, email preview, and DMARC reports are all available through APIs. An MCP server exposes the same checks to AI agents and assistants, making deliverability checks available inside workflows where agents can read and act on inboxes, not just summarise them.

EMAIL DELIVERABILITY CONSULTATION



**DIAGNOSTICS IDENTIFY
THE PROBLEM**



**FIXING IT IS A
DIFFERENT JOB**

Diagnostic and assessment

We evaluate infrastructure, sender reputation, content, engagement signals, list hygiene, and compliance practices in full.

Strategy and remediation

We build a prioritised plan that targets the highest-impact fixes first, with hands-on support throughout implementation.

Mailbox provider and reputation recovery

We handle delisting, policy alignment, reputation rebuilding, and structured IP and domain warm-up plans to restore and maintain sender reputation.

IP blacklist pass rates fell four points this year, making this more relevant than it was.

Engagement and list optimisation

We use segmentation and suppression to remove inactive, invalid, and unresponsive contacts, then address cadence and re-engagement.

With Yahoo and AOL both below 16%, this is where many programs have the most ground to recover.

Ongoing oversight

We continuously review placement and engagement trends and provide embedded specialist support for teams without in-house deliverability resources.

WHAT TO FIX IN 2027

Every number in this report comes from the same platform, using the same checks any sender can run on their own email.

1

Report by mailbox provider, then act by mailbox provider

An 84-point spread makes a blended inbox rate almost meaningless. Split reporting into four groups: Gmail, Yahoo and AOL, Outlook, and all other providers. Manage each group as a separate program, with its own cadence and priorities.

2

Rescue Yahoo and AOL with suppression, not content

Yahoo and AOL fell 30 points or more, and both now sit below 16%. Suppression is the first lever to try, since neither provider appears to respond to content changes. Cut non-openers hard, rebuild slowly, and measure weekly. Remember that AT&T and migrated Comcast addresses sit behind the same filters.

3

Take DMARC to enforcement

DMARC is the only authentication signal that fell this year, and it is the chokepoint for everything downstream. RFC 9989 removed *pct*, so staged rollouts can now behave inconsistently across receivers until you move to a full enforcement policy.

4

Fix the footer, because one number there is still stuck

CAN-SPAM compliance rose 32 points, while List-Unsubscribe moved just two. Whatever senders changed to improve CAN-SPAM compliance, the header was not part of it. It takes an hour to add, Google and Yahoo require it for bulk senders, and at 14% adoption it remains the cheapest unclaimed gain in this report.

5

Audit IP reputation and kill the shorteners

IP listings tripled, while short URL safety dropped by ten points over the same period. Both are infrastructure decisions, not campaign decisions, which means someone needs to own them long-term, outside the marketing calendar.

6

Stop optimising content and start optimising consistency

89% of email passes body content checks, and 88% scores in the safe SpamAssassin band. Subject lines closed most of their own gap this year, rising from 40% to 79%. The remaining headroom on content is thin, and those metrics do not explain an 84-point spread between mailbox providers. Differences in sending volume, cadence, list quality, and domain history are more likely to account for that variation.

CONCLUSION

The senders who did well in 2026 were not the ones with the best-scoring email. They were the ones whose behaviour looked the same in August as it did in January.

METHODOLOGY AND CITATION

These benchmarks aggregate deliverability checks run through Unspam and refreshed every 24 hours. The 2026 figures cover January through September 2026; the 2025 figures cover the full calendar year. Placement is measured using seed mailboxes at each provider across consumer and business inboxes.

Panel averages cover eight providers: Gmail, Outlook, Yahoo, AOL, Zoho, ProtonMail, GMX, and Amazon WorkMail.

The figures reflect senders who tested with Unspam, so they skew toward senders actively investigating deliverability issues and should not be treated as representative of email globally.

SOURCE TO CITE



Unspam Email Deliverability Benchmark

unspam.email/email-deliverability-benchmark

(updated September 2026)