



The Email Render Rate

The Inadequacies of the 'Open Rate' and the Need for a New Standard Terminology

Presented for Public Comment by
The Email Experience Council's
Measurement Accuracy Roundtable

The Need for Action

The open rate as a metric for measuring email performance has come under increasing criticism recently—and rightly so. Besides being a misnomer, the open rate suffers from a lack of consistency in how it is defined across the email marketing industry. The lack of a standard definition makes it all but impossible to compare open rates across multiple email platforms and creates wide variances in open rate industry benchmarks.

Rather than advocating for the abandonment of the “open rate”—a term that is deeply engrained in our industry’s culture—this document proposes several standard definitions all built upon a new metric: the render rate. We believe that the render rate is a superior term that more accurately describes the actions that the open rate was intended to measure. But more importantly, adoption of this new set of metrics gives the industry an opportunity to finally speak one language when it comes to measuring email engagement.

Definitions

We seek your comments on the following definitions:

Unique Emails Rendered

The number of unique subscribers who rendered an email (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message.

Total Emails Rendered

The total number of times an email is rendered (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message.



Unique Actions

The number of unique subscribers who rendered an email (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message, PLUS the number of unique subscribers who clicked a link but did not render the email (whether due to images being block or a text version being viewed).

Total Actions

The total number of times an email is rendered (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message, PLUS the number of times subscribers clicked a link but did not render the email (whether due to images being block or a text version being viewed).

Unique Email Render Rate

The unique number of times an email is rendered (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message, divided by the total number of messages delivered and expressed as a percentage.

$$\text{Unique Emails Rendered} / (\text{Sent} - \text{Bounced}) = \text{Unique Email Render Rate}$$

Total Email Render Rate

The total (gross) number of times an email is rendered (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message, divided by the total number of messages delivered and expressed as a percentage.

$$\text{Total Emails Rendered} / (\text{Sent} - \text{Bounced}) = \text{Total Email Render Rate}$$

This metrics will be of particular use to advertising-driven publishers to communicate the total number of implied views of graphical ads within a message to their advertisers.

Average Recipient Render Ratio

The total number of times an email is rendered (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message, divided by the unique number of emails rendered and expressed as a percentage.

$$\text{Total Emails Rendered} / \text{Unique Emails Rendered} = \text{Average Recipient Render Ratio}$$

This metric may be an important measure of engagement for senders with deep content or content that has a long shelf life. It provides insight into the



average number of times each recipient (that renders a message at least once) renders an individual message, with a higher ratio indicating that subscribers are engaging with a particular email again and again.

Unique Email Action Rate

The unique number of unique times an email is rendered (whether fully opened or within the preview pane), captured using a tracking image within an HTML format message, PLUS the number of times subscribers clicked a link but did not render the email (whether due to images being block or a text version being viewed), divided by the number of "delivered" emails.

Advanced Calculation:

First determine Total Unique Action Values (TUAV):

If unique record = 1 unique render + 1 unique click
Then unique record action value = 1

If unique record = 1 unique render + 0 unique click
Then unique record action value = 1

If unique record = 0 unique render + 1 unique click
Then unique record action value = 1

Formula:

$$\text{TUAV} / (\text{Sent} - \text{Bounced}) = \text{Unique Email Action Rate}$$

The key difference from the unique email render rate metric above is the inclusion of unique HTML clicks and text message "renders" (applying unique clicks on a text message). So the focus of this metric is on the overall success of a message to engage a reader to render/read. By calculating the metric as a render OR click, we are not double counting both renders and clicks where both actions happen. What we are capturing is the percentage of emails where any action was taken, whether it was a render or a click (including clicks on unsubscribe and forward-to-a-friend links).



Next Steps

Once we finalize these definitions, the Email Experience Council will seek the support of its two main constituencies: email marketers and email solution providers.

Email Marketers

This effort is aimed at helping you to interact and exchange information with other marketers and the industry at large with the confidence that everyone is speaking the same language.

If you are using an email solution provider, we ask that you review their help materials or contact them to ascertain how they currently calculate their “open rate.” If their definitions match up with the render-based definitions above, then you can rest easy knowing that you’re getting the industry-preferred definition.

However, if their definitions don’t match up with the render-based definitions in this document, please ask that they adopt these metrics so you can have a basis for comparing your metrics to the rest of the industry. Having your email solution provider adopt these standard definitions will also ease any transition you might have between email tools—otherwise you’re likely to experience severe variations in your metrics when moving from one toolset to another.

If your email marketing efforts are managed in-house, then a review of your calculations may be in order. If your “open rate” definitions differ from the render-based definitions above, we ask that you adjust your calculation or add these new metrics.

Email Solution Providers

If your method of calculating the “open rate” differs from the render-based definitions above, when we ask that you add these metrics to your applications. Our industry is varied so we devised a suite of metrics to measure engagement in the inbox. We leave it up to individual organizations to determine which of these metrics they choose to leverage or endorse.

If your “open rate” calculation is identical to the render-based definitions, we ask that you clarify that by placing the recommended metric terminology alongside your current term and noting it within related help for your metrics. Even if you’re only using some of the definitions currently, noting which ones you are in sync with will help your clients to better understand the information you’re supplying.

While you’re considering how these new metrics impact your currently provided metrics, consider this an occasion to review and update your



knowledge base to include full explanations of how your metrics are calculated. This allows marketers to better utilize that data.

Your Input is Needed

The preparation of this document involved many hours of discussion among the members of the Email Experience Council's Measurement Accuracy Roundtable, which is lead by Loren McDonald of Silverpop and Luke Glasner of Rodman Publishing. We believe in the value of these metrics and the need for industry standards, but we want your input on these new metrics. Please comment on the Email Experience Council's blog and let your opinion be heard.

Thank you.



About the Email Experience Council

The [Direct Marketing Association's Email Experience Council](#) is a global professional organization that strives to enhance the image of email marketing and communications, while celebrating and actively advocating its critical importance in business and its ROI value.

We are committed to regularly conducting a broad series of initiatives for a variety of organizations that highlight the positive impact and importance of email as a marketing tool, communications vehicle and branding device. Additionally, eec members are setting the standards for email through our [Member Roundtables](#). The members who belong to our organization are representatives of other trade organizations, agencies, advertisers, technology partners, clients and companies focused on the potential of email marketing via mobile and other digital devices.

We encourage you to become part of the eec at <http://join.emailexperience.org>. Multiple levels of involvement are available:

Complimentary Subscription	Paid Membership	Partnership & Advertising Sponsorship
<i>Free subscription to eec email communications. Notifications of best practices, whitepapers, calendar of events and speaking engagements, industry leader commentary.</i>	<i>Access to and participation in eec Roundtables, insights, exclusive content and ability to represent eec at speaking engagements. Ability to set standards and publish thought leadership.</i>	<i>Customized partnerships and sponsorships for organizations interested in reaching the eec network and working with us to lead initiatives, research and email position/standards.</i>
You LEVERAGE the eec	You ARE the eec	You ENABLE the eec & REACH our audience

For information on hard copy or electronic reprints, please contact the Customer Service group at 888-804-4521 x3. We offer quantity discounts and special pricing for academic and nonprofit institutions.