

Emoji Use in Email Subject Lines

A Monthly Guide to Emojis and Email



Email Emoji Calendar



Emojis have become a very popular addition to our digital communication. While they are more commonly used in personal conversations—like texts and social posts—they are being increasingly included in email marketing communications, particularly subject lines.

But how are emojis resonating with subscribers?

To explore the effectiveness of emojis in email subject lines, we identified a significant holiday or event for each month and tracked the use of emojis related to that theme. For each month, we show the inbox placement rate, read rate, deleted before reading rate, complaint rate, and “this is not spam” rate for the most common emojis. To demonstrate how subject lines with emojis compare against traditional text-only subject lines, we show these same metrics for all promotional emails sent for the promotional period. We also compare emails with subject lines containing theme or holiday-related keywords. And finally, we highlight the three top performing emojis for each month, to give you a starting point for testing in your own email campaigns.

Before we get started...

The email metrics shared in this report depend on numerous factors, and are not solely the result of emoji use. The subscriber relationship, timing, full subject line, and other elements contribute to these metrics. Additionally, as emoji use in email is still relatively new, report findings are based on a small sample size relative to the total universe of emails sent. This guide is to be used as a reference point, showing what emojis are currently being used in email and how campaigns that use them are performing.

January: New Year's Day

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	21%	13%	2.01%	0.12%	86%
New Year's Promotions	18%	13%	2.26%	0.11%	83%
#1 ... 🍾 ...	22%	13%	2.87%	0.49%	81%
#2 ... 🍷 ...	22%	13%	1.28%	0.22%	88%
#3 ... 🎆 ...	21%	14%	1.94%	0.24%	82%
... 🎆 ...	19%	13%	2.43%	0.05%	84%
... 🎉 ...	19%	12%	1.82%	0.11%	82%
... 🕒 ...	18%	14%	1.21%	0.02%	91%
... 🍷 ...	9%	7%	1.64%	0.00%	38%

To:

You

Subject:

🎉 New Year, New Gear, New Deals!



February: Valentine's Day

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	22%	13%	1.63%	0.11%	85%
Valentine's Day Promotions	20%	15%	2.10%	0.19%	83%
#1 ... 🍷	24%	15%	1.41%	0.18%	89%
#2 ... 😘	22%	11%	0.94%	0.08%	86%
#3 ... 😘	22%	16%	1.64%	0.00%	89%
..... 💕	21%	16%	1.71%	0.12%	80%
..... 💕	20%	14%	1.58%	0.27%	84%
..... 💕	19%	13%	1.78%	0.14%	81%
..... 💌	19%	13%	2.10%	0.20%	82%
..... 😍	18%	11%	1.72%	0.32%	77%
..... 💎	18%	13%	2.10%	0.52%	76%
..... 💕	18%	14%	1.03%	0.18%	89%



March: St. Patrick's Day

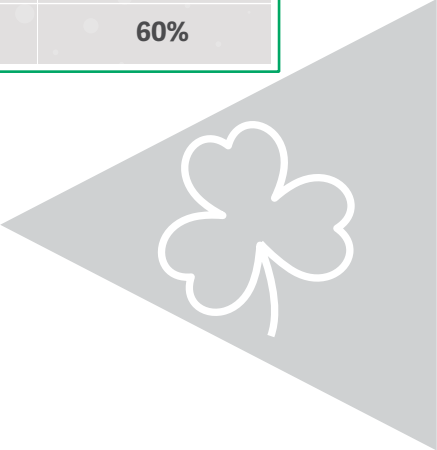
Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	21%	13%	1.46%	0.10%	85%
St. Patrick's Day Promotions	19%	14%	2.33%	0.07%	79%
#1 ... 🇮🇪 ...	27%	11%	1.46%	0.02%	83%
#2 ... 🍺 ...	21%	13%	1.42%	0.12%	91%
#3 ... 🌱 ...	20%	14%	2.34%	0.08%	83%
... ❤️ ...	20%	15%	0.85%	0.03%	92%
... 🌈 ...	19%	13%	3.96%	0.26%	76%
... 🍀 ...	19%	12%	2.54%	0.11%	79%
... 🍺 ...	17%	11%	1.67%	0.49%	60%

To:

You

Subject:

🍀 Lucky You: 30% off our customer favorites!

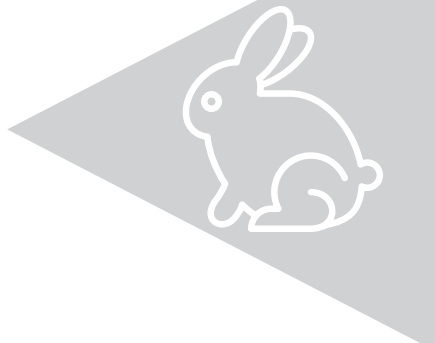


April: Earth Day and Easter

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	21%	12%	1.22%	0.23%	87%
Earth Day Promotions	20%	16%	1.08%	0.28%	90%
Easter Promotions	19%	15%	1.18%	0.35%	92%
#1 ... 🐰	24%	14%	1.23%	0.15%	87%
#2 ... 🌍	23%	16%	1.22%	0.97%	85%
#3 ... 🌳	21%	19%	2.23%	0.73%	87%
..... 🌻	19%	16%	0.98%	0.07%	92%
..... 🐰	19%	15%	1.18%	0.34%	92%
..... 🌍	15%	13%	1.41%	0.11%	70%

To: You

Subject: Hop on over and shop Easter decor! 🐰



May: Mother's Day

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	21%	12%	0.95%	0.26%	87%
Mother's Day Promotions	20%	15%	1.12%	0.18%	88%
#1 ... 🛍️ ...	24%	17%	2.09%	7.13%	83%
#2 ... 🌸 ...	21%	15%	1.34%	0.13%	87%
#3 ... 🎁 ...	19%	14%	1.92%	0.19%	88%
..... 💖	11%	14%	0.67%	0.14%	92%
..... 👩	7%	4%	2.89%	0.18%	30%

To:

You

Subject:

The MOTHER of all gift guides 🎁



June: Father's Day

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	21%	13%	0.51%	0.20%	87%
Father's Day Promotions	21%	15%	0.30%	0.40%	88%
#1 ... 🧰	22%	21%	0.30%	0.20%	96%
#2 ... 👔	22%	14%	0.19%	0.46%	87%
#3 ... 🧔	19%	18%	0.18%	1.29%	89%
..... 🪓	16%	15%	0.60%	0.04%	87%

To:

You

Subject:

Dad deserves a gift. 🧔 You deserve a deal...



July: Independence Day

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	22%	13%	0.42%	0.14%	87%
Independence Day Promotions	21%	15%	0.17%	0.12%	88%
#1 ... 🍔	25%	16%	0.09%	0.21%	91%
#2 ... 🇺🇸	21%	15%	0.37%	0.02%	86%
#3 ... 🌟	21%	14%	0.17%	0.08%	92%
..... ☀️	19%	14%	0.37%	0.19%	87%



Apple



Google

World Emoji Day

The emoji calendar for Apple and Google platforms always displays the date July 17, which was the date Apple originally release iCal for Macs. It also happens to be World Emoji Day.



August: Summer Vacation

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	23%	13%	0.21%	0.12%	89%
Summer Promotions	21%	15%	0.19%	0.12%	88%
#1 ... 🕶️	23%	12%	0.00%	0.00%	89%
#2 ... 😎	23%	18%	0.10%	0.06%	93%
#3 ... 🍹	22%	17%	0.04%	0.00%	90%
..... 🏖️	21%	17%	0.85%	0.00%	90%
..... ☀️	19%	10%	0.30%	0.06%	87%

To:

You

Subject:



It's SPF season! Get ready for fun in the sun!



September: Miscellaneous

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	23%	13%	1.27%	0.16%	88%
#1 ... 🍌	33%	10%	0.43%	2.45%	94%
#2 ... 🔥	24%	15%	0.73%	0.34%	93%
#3 ... 🙌	22%	15%	1.01%	0.15%	92%
..... 😍	20%	13%	2.02%	1.19%	81%
..... 😏	20%	15%	1.16%	1.24%	89%
..... 🏈	20%	13%	1.35%	0.05%	89%
..... 🍕	19%	12%	0.31%	0.03%	94%
..... 🤔	15%	9%	1.09%	0.06%	90%
..... 100	14%	8%	2.01%	0.02%	79%

To:

You

Subject:

🔥 Fire Up the Grill. This Clearance is H.O.T.



October: Halloween

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	22%	13%	1.74%	0.18%	86%
Halloween Promotions	20%	14%	2.30%	0.14%	86%
#1 🕷️	23%	10%	0.99%	13.02%	65%
#2 🍊	22%	13%	4.05%	0.62%	86%
#3 🍬	20%	15%	1.63%	0.04%	89%
🍊	20%	13%	1.87%	0.20%	82%
🕸️	20%	14%	2.48%	5.22%	86%
👁️	19%	9%	1.42%	0.01%	92%
👻	19%	12%	1.90%	0.22%	81%
🍬	17%	13%	1.55%	0.06%	89%
💀	14%	9%	2.23%	0.04%	69%

To:

You

Subject:



BOO YAH! Halloween Costumes ARE HERE



November: Thanksgiving

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	21%	13%	1.73%	0.17%	86%
Thanksgiving Promotions	19%	13%	1.85%	0.28%	86%
#1 ... 🦃	22%	12%	1.11%	0.09%	86%
#2 ... 🍁	19%	16%	2.45%	0.54%	77%
#3 ... 🍗	19%	14%	1.81%	0.32%	86%
..... 🌽	18%	14%	0.84%	0.03%	96%

To:

You

Subject:

🍁 FALLing for this...it's 40% off!



December: Winter Holidays

Emoji	Read Rate	Deleted Before Reading Rate	"This is Not Spam" Rate	Complaint Rate	Inbox Placement Rate
All Promotional Email	21%	13%	1.75%	0.18%	86%
Winter Holiday Promotions	19%	13%	2.19%	0.19%	83%
#1 ... 🧑🏻🧑🏻	28%	9%	1.31%	0.00%	79%
#2 ... 🧑🏻	21%	14%	3.83%	0.41%	73%
#3 ... 📅 17	21%	12%	1.07%	2.73%	74%
..... 🎁	20%	14%	1.78%	0.22%	87%
..... 🎉	20%	11%	1.92%	0.30%	81%
..... 🕒	20%	14%	1.83%	0.10%	88%
..... 🍪	18%	14%	2.99%	0.27%	90%
..... 🧑🏻	18%	14%	2.27%	0.17%	84%
..... 🔥	18%	11%	1.20%	0.11%	87%
..... ⭐	17%	14%	1.49%	0.09%	89%
..... ⭐	17%	13%	1.50%	0.29%	85%
..... 🕎	16%	22%	4.84%	0.00%	78%

Tips for Testing Emojis in Your Email Campaigns

While including a emojis might spark additional engagement from your subscribers, there's also a chance their use could turn subscribers off your content completely. If you are interested in trying emojis in your email subject lines, it's important that you take it slow and be strategic about it.

Below are a few tactics and considerations to keep in mind as you start to incorporate emojis into your email program.



1. Test on a small sample.

Don't start sending emojis to your entire list right off the bat. Test the impact of adding emojis on a sample of your list and compare it to a control sample using the same subject line minus the emoji. This allows you to accurately measure the impact of including the emoji on the campaign while excluding other influencing factors.



2. Dont overdo it.

There's a certain novelty factor seeing emojis in one's inbox. As an email marketer, don't be surprised if performance from use of emojis wanes over time. Avoid using the same emoji(s) every time, and stand out from other emojis in the inbox by avoiding widely used ones.



3. Make sure they make sense in context and for your industry.

While the poop emoji may have had the highest read rate in our study, that doesn't mean it will necessarily go over well with your subscribers. Be conscious of your company's brand identity and be careful about how you use each emoji. Most likely, a subscriber would not be happy to see 🐛 included in an email alerting them about their latest credit card statement.



4. Make sure the emojis render properly.

While an emoji might cause subscribers to open your email, a subject line with a broken emoji is more likely to get deleted or generate a complaint. Make sure you check that the emojis you are using are supported by the mailbox providers and devices your subscribers use.



5. Know where you emails are landing.

In most cases, higher opens are correlated with higher inbox placement rates. Before you conclude whether using emoji was a success or failure, make sure you are also checking where your messages are landing.



6. See how your competitors are using them.

There are many options when it comes to using emojis in email subject lines, so keep an eye on what others are doing, and how they're performing for them. You might be able to borrow some ideas for your own program—or avoid making similar mistakes.

Methodology

Return Path conducted this study using global consumer data consisting of over 17,000 commercial senders, 2 million consumer panelists, and 5.4 billion commercial email messages sent to Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, and AOL users between March 1, 2016, and March 31, 2017.

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