validity

Q4 Inbox Reality: Winning Attention When AI Reads First



Guy Hanson

VP of Customer Engagement

www.validity.com

www.linkedin.com/in/guyhanson

Email Developments 2026

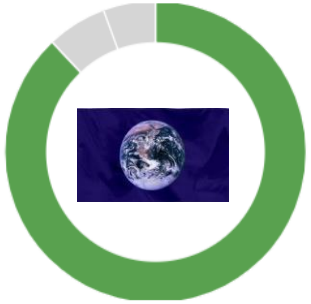
- Jan: Gmail's Gemini AI integration
- Jan: Gmail address change feature
- Jan: GMX/Web.de/Mail.com enforce inbound DMARC
- Jan: Costco fined $14M for "false urgency" subject lines
- Jan: Major Exchange Online incident
- Feb: Australia cracks down on fake service emails
- Mar: Google IO: Gemini Spark launches
- Apr: Apple changes hide my email domain
- May: GPT 1 fully retired
- Jun: Apple launches iPhone 18 and iOS 27
- Jul: Salesforce Marketing Cloud security incident
- Aug: DMARC gets a major overhaul
- Aug: GPT 2 adds plain language verdicts
- Sep: Gmail filtering exemption for political senders
- Sep: Validity launches Heatwave domain blocklist
- Sep: Washington CEMA reform signed
- Sep: France & Italy restrict open tracking pixels
- Sep: Chrome announces email verification API
- Sep: Workspace Studio AI now sends Gmail messages
- Sep: Meta launches Muse personal AI agent

Deliverability is Getting Harder

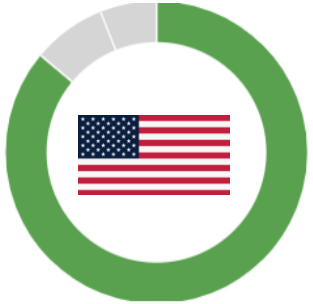
Global Deliverability



www.validity.com/resource-center/2026-email-deliverability-benchmark-report



88.0%



86.1%



91.4%



94.4%

Inbox Placement

All Mailbox Providers

- Global: Down by **2.1%**
- United States: Down by **2.4%**
- Canada: Up by **6.1%**
- Europe: Down by **4.9%**
- B2B: **Flat**



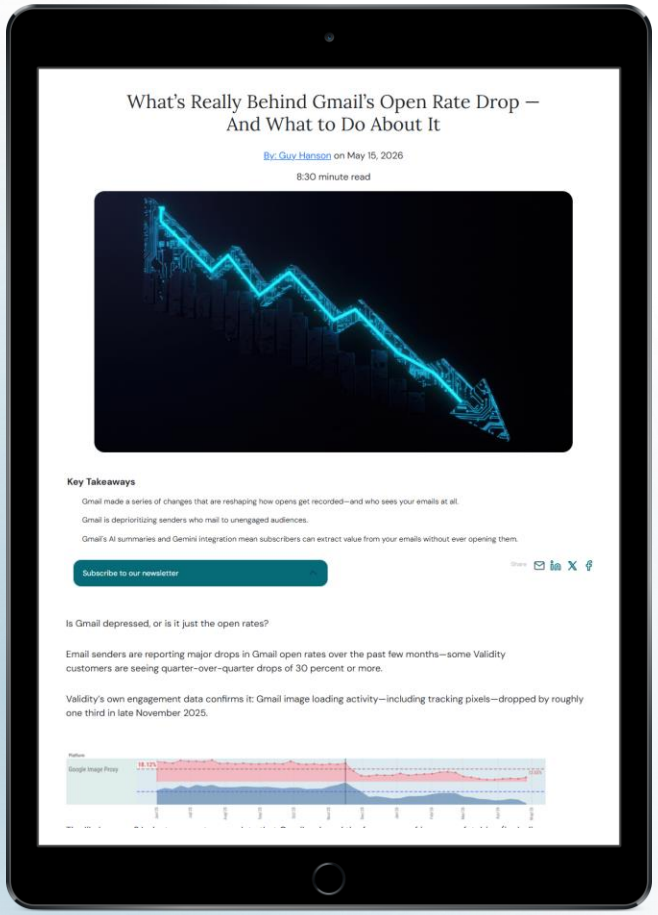
Inbox Placement

Gmail

- Global: Down by **9.7%**
- United States: Down by **8.2%**
- Canada: Down by **0.3%**
- Europe: Down by **5.9%**
- Google Apps: Down by **12.8%**



What's Happening?



www.validity.com/blog/whats-really-behind-gmails-open-rate-drop-and-what-to-do-about-it

Bulk Sender Requirements

- More aggressive enforcement of bulk sender requirements for non-compliant senders

New Inbox Functionality

- Features like Gmail's relevance-sorted Promotions tab are dampening subscriber engagement

Impact of Artificial Intelligence

- AI summaries and inbox assistants mean less human interaction with email content

All Change at Apple

Gmail's Gemini Integration

AI Overviews

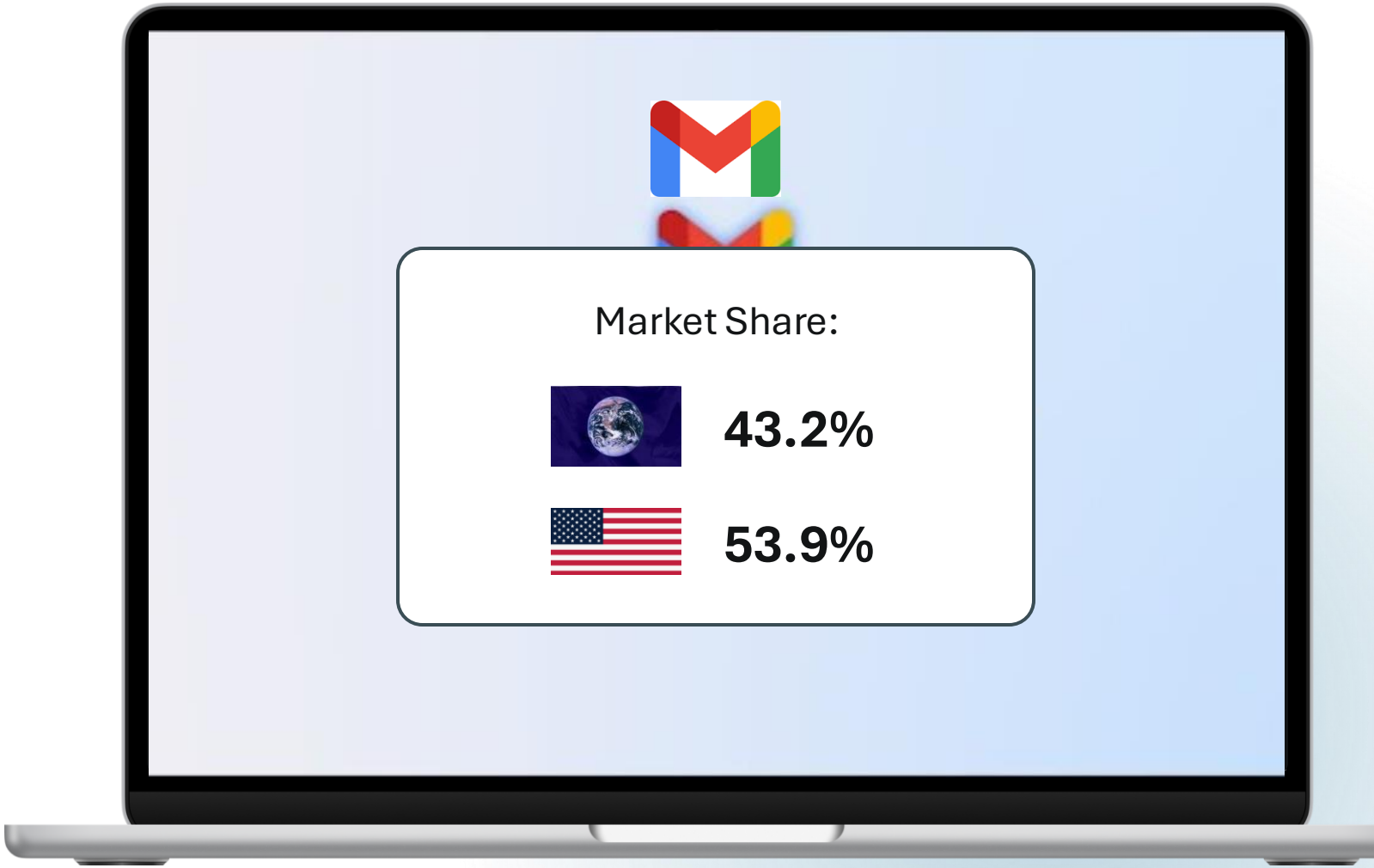
- Turn information into answers without the digging

Get things done faster

- Help with writing, replies, and proofreading

See what matters most

- Personalized briefings to filter out the clutter



https://blog.google/products-and-platforms/products/gmail/gmail-is-entering-the-gemini-era

Latest Releases



www.litmus.com/email-client-market-share

iPhone 18 (including foldable Duo)

- Duo offers the largest screen yet on an iPhone, with layouts adapting as the device folds/unfolds/rotates, as well as supporting the side-by-side "Split View" of two apps

iOS 27 (including Siri AI)

- Enables natural-language questions - for example, finding an old email from a specific sender about a defined topic

Upgrades to Apple Intelligence

- Mail can now proactively surface suggestions drawn from message content, to complete actions elsewhere in iOS e.g. retrieving a flight confirmation for use in the Phone app

Impact for Email Marketers



www.validity.com/blog/email-radar-what-apples-september-2026-release-means-for-email

Higher net worth subscribers

- Low initial adoption is predicted, but it will skew toward premium buyers, so designing specifically for this segment potentially delivers improved returns from email

Transactional and confirmation emails

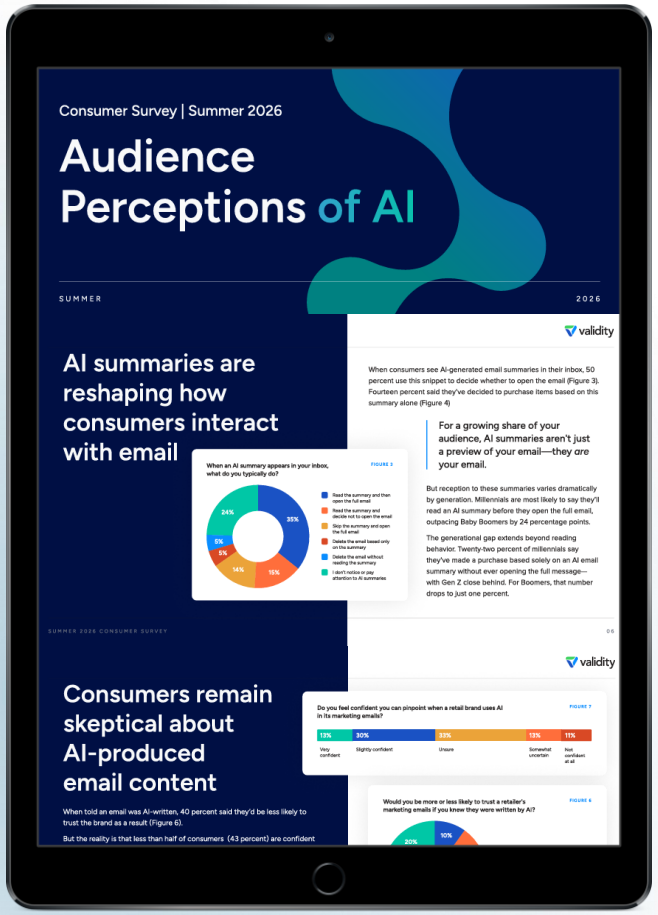
- Already generate phenomenal revenue per message, which will increase further as the valuable data they contain is harnessed by Apple Intelligence

Higher value clicks

- While overall click rates may decline as Siri AI takes on more of the heavy lifting, the increased relevance of the curated clicks means their value increases

Looking Through the Consumer Lens

Audience Perceptions of AI



www.validity.com/resource-center/summer-consumer-survey-audience-perceptions-of-ai

Consumers remain skeptical

- **40%** of consumers are less likely to trust AI-generated emails. Main concerns are with data privacy and misuse -marketers must balance increased scale with reduced trust

AI summaries are changing how consumers engage

- Only **10%** of consumers fully trust AI summaries, with big concerns about accuracy … but **55%** of consumers are already making inbox decisions based on AI summaries

AI is reshaping product discovery

- **12%** of consumers now use AI products like ChatGPT & Gemini as their primary research tool, and a **31%** increase in the use of AI for shopping compared with 1 year ago

How Senders Need to Adapt



www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/a8059228

Provide reassurance around data usage

- Update privacy policies. Practice data minimization. Maintain a human touch

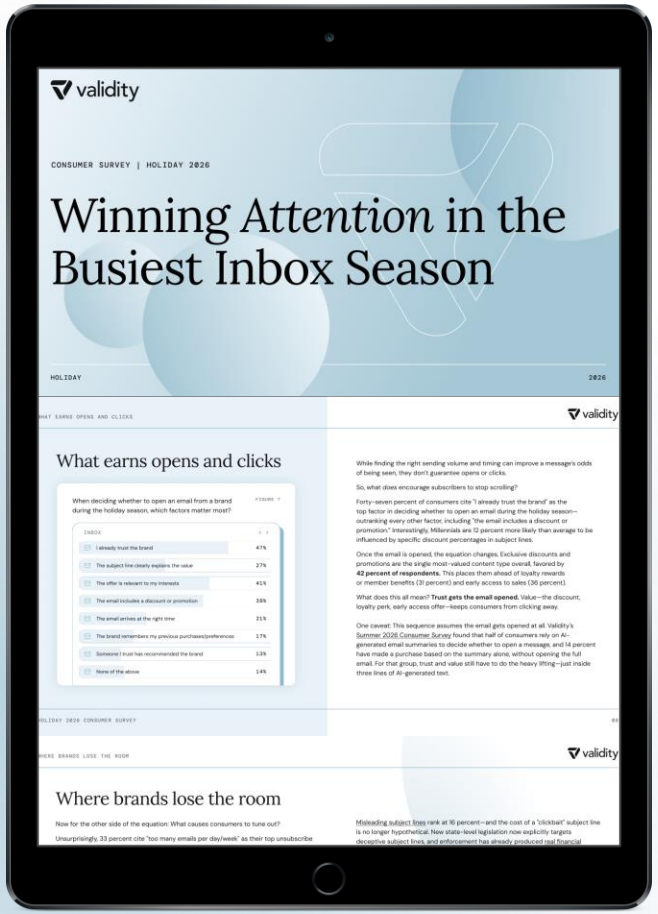
Start designing for AI summaries

- Use live HTML text, not image based. Use CTAs that “force” a click. Remember that accessible email is AI-ready email

Support AI-powered shopping

- Test your “AI ready” messaging. Refine messaging for missing or misrepresented elements. AI’s view of effective personalization has a key role to play

Happy Holidays



www.validity.com/resource-center/holiday-2026-consumer-survey

Trust gets the open before value gets the click

- The brands getting attention are the ones consumers *already* know and trust, and this is built during the other ten months of the year

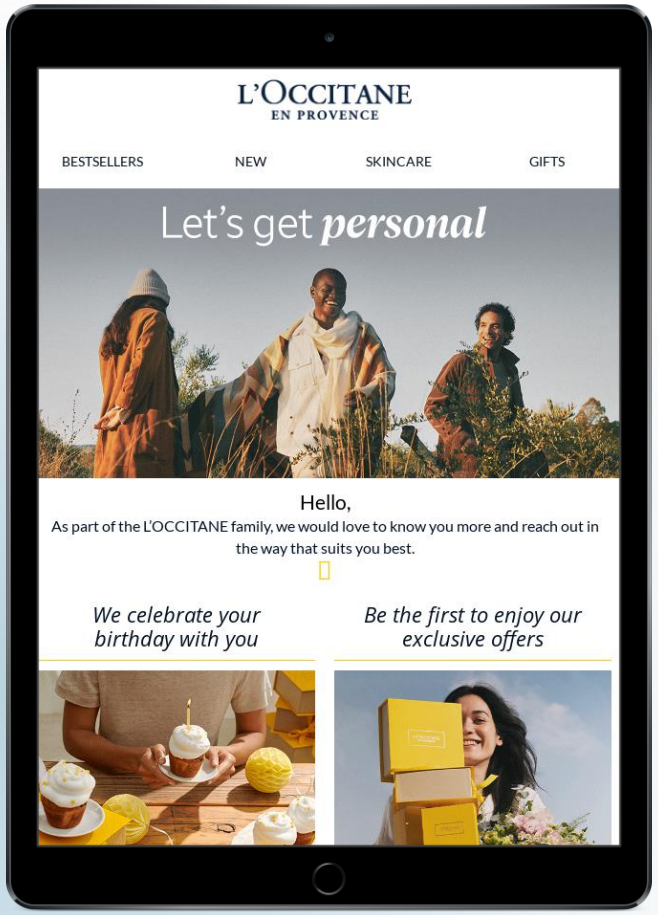
Volume, not price, drives unsubscribes

- Consumers don't opt out because they don't like the offers they are receiving. Instead, they opt out because they are hearing from brands too often

Consumers want a volume knob, not an off switch

- Even if customers don't want to leave your email program, they do want control over how often they are hearing from you

Holiday Fine Tuning



Be a good actor

- Practices like opt-in consent, data processing transparency, subscriber choice, and opt-out simplicity build trust, which is reflected in improved deliverability and engagement

Make sending frequency a choice

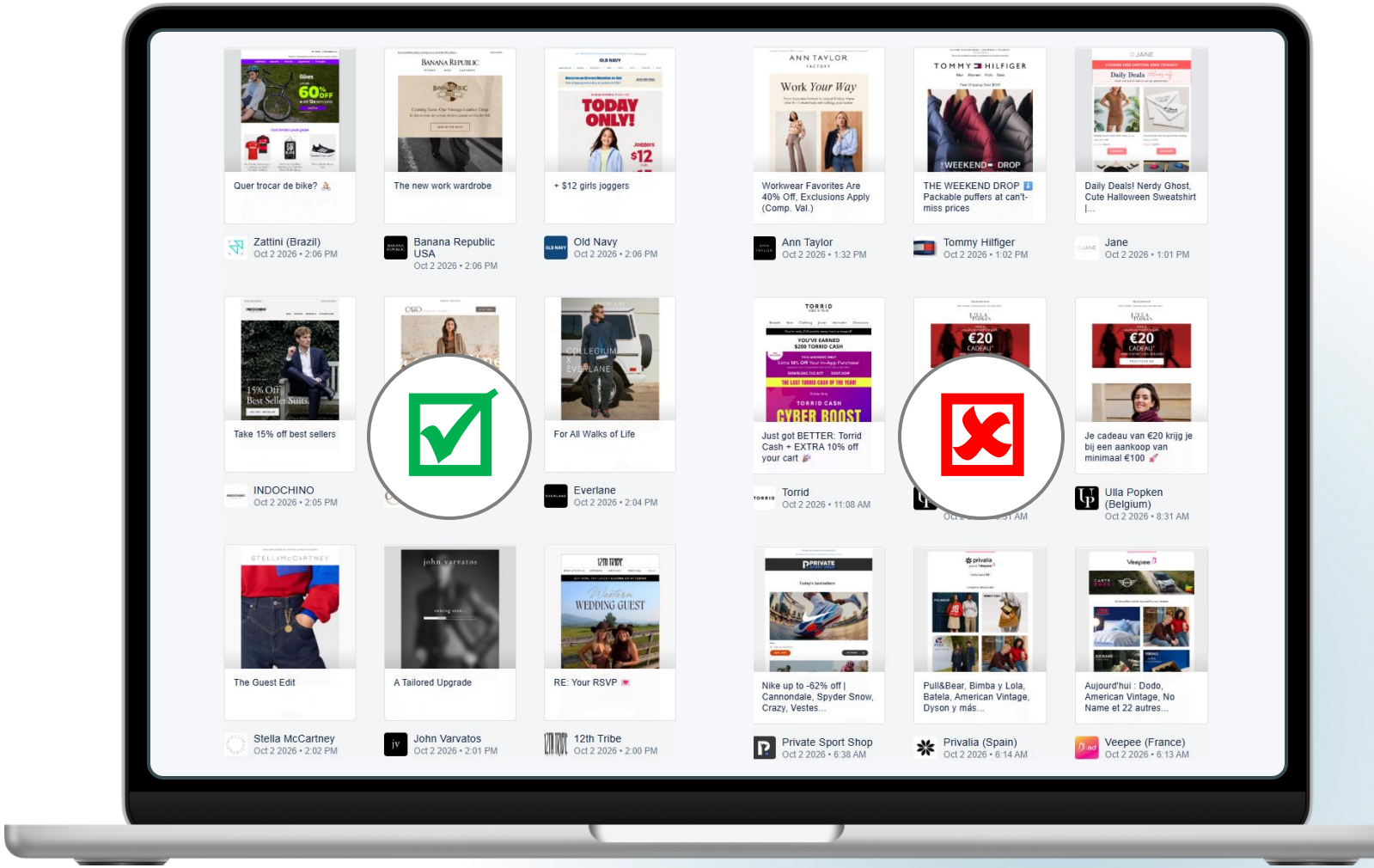
- Let your subscribers tell you how often they want to hear from you, and then honor those choices

Proactively promote preferences

- Don't wait for your subscribers to find your preference center – tell them where it is, and encourage them to use it

Change is the Only Constant

The Return of Longer Subject Lines



The Return of Longer Subject Lines

- Larger screens display more characters
- Prime readers for greater engagement
- Implied continuation creates curiosity
- More content for AI summaries to discover



www.getresponse.com/resources/reports/email-marketing-benchmarks

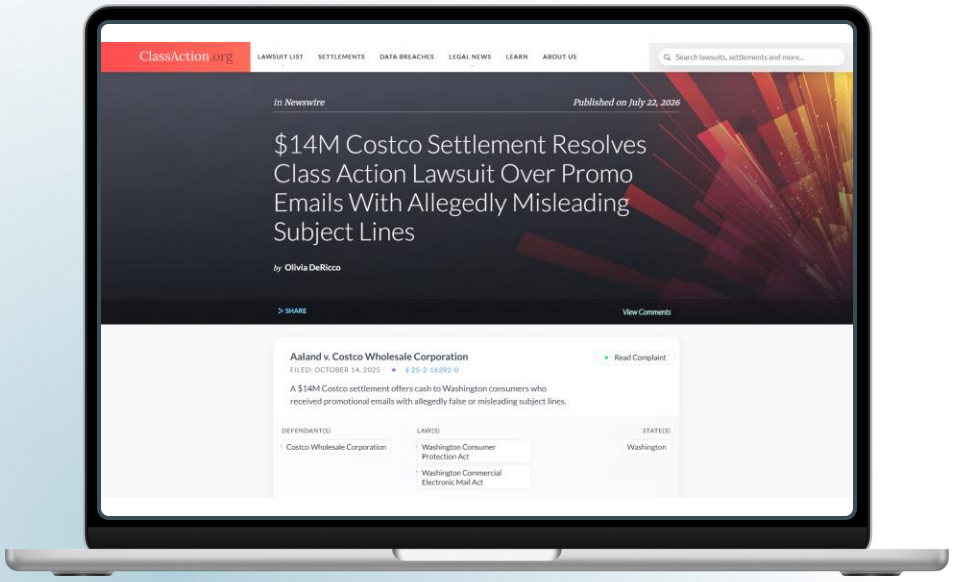
The Return of Longer Subject Lines

- Larger screens display more characters
- Prime readers for greater engagement
- Implied continuation creates curiosity
- More content for AI summaries to discover



www.getresponse.com/resources/reports/email-marketing-benchmarks

But Don’t Get Sued!



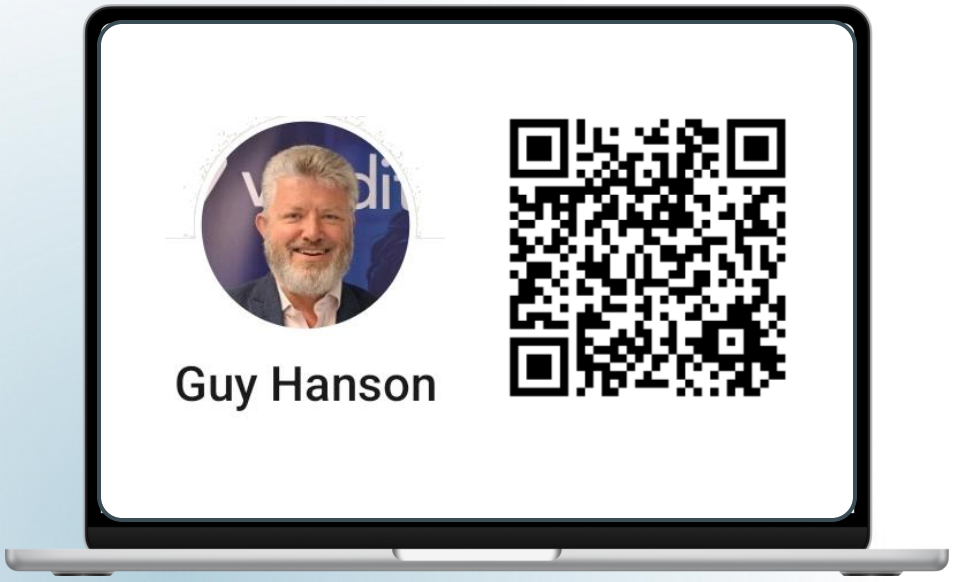
www.validity.com/blog/the-dangers-of-misleading-subject-lines

www.classaction.org/news/14m-costco-settlement-resolves-class-action-lawsuit-over-promo-emails-with-allegedly-misleading-subject-lines

- *'Last Hours!', 'Today Only!', 'Final Hours', 'Ends Midnight’ – which run again next week*
- *Countdown timer subject lines and 'Up to N% off' claims that survive past the stated cutoff*
- *'Free gift' or 'free shipping' subject lines where the promotion requires a minimum purchase*
- *Repeated re-sends of the same deceptive subject line over weeks/months*
- *Marketing automations that recycle 'limited-time' templates*

Wrapping Up

5 Key Takeaways



- *Rigorously monitor the sender reputation and inbox placement achieved by your programs*
- *Start designing your emails to support AI summaries and AI-powered shopping*
- *Put subscriber choice front and center as part of your holiday season preparations*
- *Challenge established best practices, and be ready to pivot when they are no longer valid*
- *Don't get sued for using misleading subject lines*

Thank you!

validity

Download new Enterprise AI research at: validity.com

See exactly where your email program stands


validity