Employee Communications
in a Post–iOS 15 World

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Cerkl®

We're looking to modernize the digital experience for employees and communicators alike, helping our customers embody How Work Should Be. Through Cerkl Broadcast, we've developed a holistic approach to employee communications, managed in one location.

If you're interested in intelligent content delivery that lies on top of your current tech stack, we'd love to give you a personalized demo at:

cerkl.com/mpp

Dear Communicator,

If you've been popping bottles over your record-high open rates from October, you might want to put them on ice.

Unfortunately, **Apple's Mail Privacy Protection** is an email update that internal communications folk can't avoid. Corporate communicators like yourself have been unscathed through the big email privacy waves, but a new wave of privacy control is crashing at our shores.

Communicators have used Opens as an engagement metric since a guy named Gary sent out an email to 400 recipients. Since then, it's been an easily explainable way to measure your comms. Sure it's a little unscientific, but we all agreed this was a decent way to track how many eyeballs you got on your emails.

As Cerkl's Director of Product, our team sprung into action when Apple announced this planned update. We wanted to see how this affected the digital comms landscape, and more importantly, our partners' essential communications.

Rachel Folz

Rachel Folz, Director of Product

According to a rough analysis of the 60MM emails that Cerkl Broadcast customers have sent in the first two quarters of 2021, 25MM of them were opened on Apple devices.

Email and software companies are searching for workarounds, but ultimately this is a decision that rests in the hands of the users.

Here at Cerkl, we want to provide our customers with essential data that helps drive their internal strategy. That's why we've **recruited our in-house data scientist** to help outline tested tactics to help make your employee content as engaging as ever.

I hope this whitepaper will help you and your team shift the conversation away from measuring based on opens and prepare for the next five years of generational corporate comms.

Apple may not be the last system to enable this type of measure, so way to be on top of it.
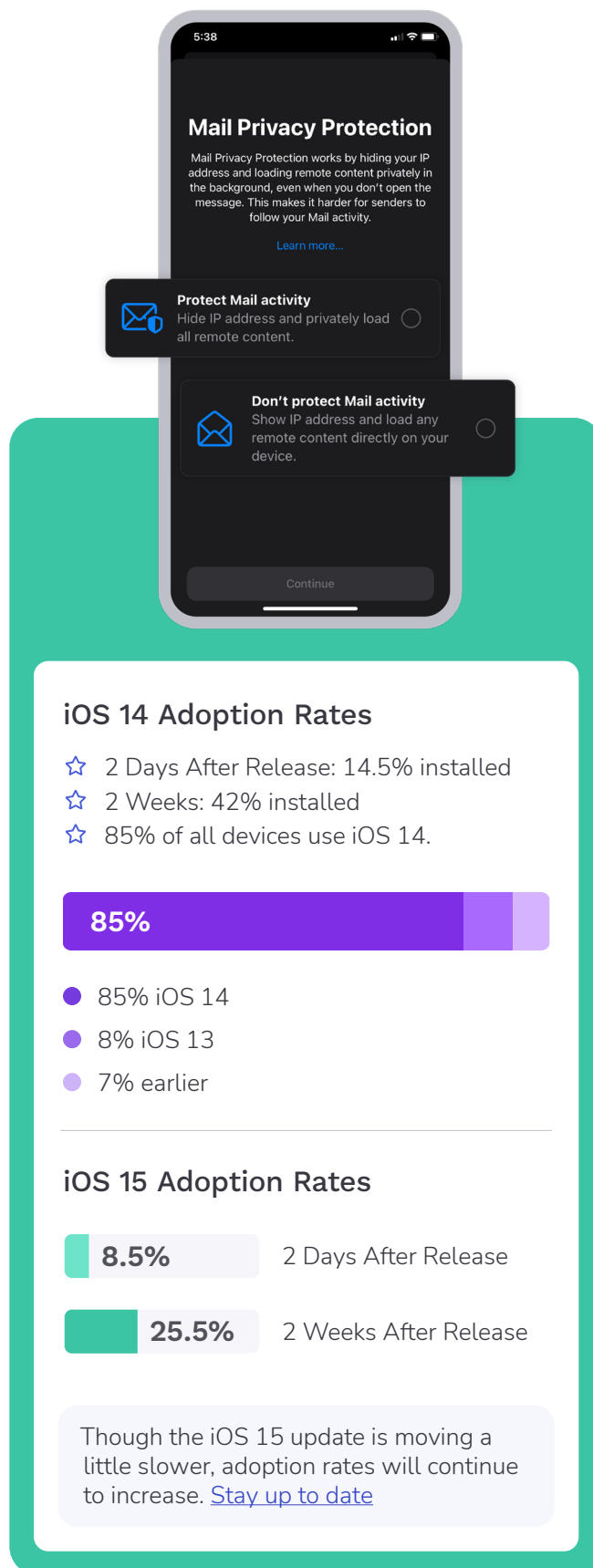
Why did Apple Release Mail Privacy Protection?

On September 20th, 2021, Apple released Mail Privacy Protection packaged in the latest version of their popular operating system, iOS 15. In typical Apple fashion, they made it extremely easy to opt-in to the new privacy feature, making it a primary notice when users update.

It's not corporate communicators' fault that people are spamming and list-buying daily. Anyone else getting a bit of a Watchmen vibe here?

We know our internal communicators are just trying to connect with their audiences, but not every list owner is respectful. Consumers today are tired of large organizations abusing their data to sell to them or sell to other companies. Apple's made moves like this before in prior versions of iOS, where you have to opt-in for your apps to track your data.

There's no current tool to get around it. This isn't a default setting; your employees have to opt-in. But in typical Apple fashion, they've made it too tempting to disagree with.

Outlook and Gmail can't help you. With iOS 15, all of your employees' Apple devices will be affected.

Mail Privacy Protection

Mail Privacy Protection works by hiding your IP address and loading remote content privately in the background, even when you don't open the message. This makes it harder for senders to follow your Mail activity.

Learn more...

Protect Mail activity
Hide IP address and privately load all remote content.

Don't protect Mail activity
Show IP address and load any remote content directly on your device.

Continue

iOS 14 Adoption Rates

☆ 2 Days After Release: 14.5% installed
☆ 2 Weeks: 42% installed
☆ 85% of all devices use iOS 14.

85%

● 85% iOS 14
● 8% iOS 13
● 7% earlier

iOS 15 Adoption Rates

8.5%   2 Days After Release

25.5%   2 Weeks After Release

Though the iOS 15 update is moving a little slower, adoption rates will continue to increase. Stay up to date
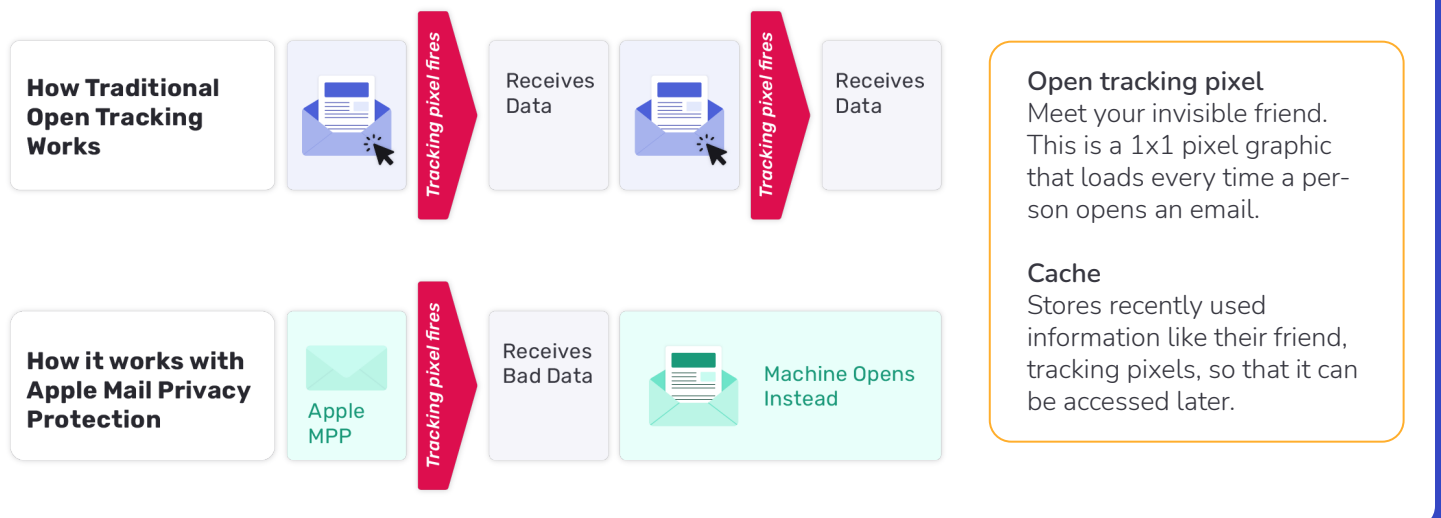
Mail Privacy Protection Breakdown

When something this big comes out, it can be hard to get a real handle on how it all works. So, we created this short guide that you can share with your team or maybe leadership to get everyone on the same page.

1. When Apple Mail is opened, it downloads the email host like Gmail, Yahoo, and Outlook.

2. On the backside, your email client holds the message. Sometimes it's immediate; other times, it takes a couple of days, but Apple will pre-download the image if MPP is on.*

   > *Your employee must be connected to a wireless network and running the app in the background for this to happen.*

3. After caching the image, Apple requests the images from the email service provider, which includes the open tracking pixel. This will trick your service provider into thinking it's been opened.

4. If your employee opens your email, it triggers a download and displays all the images from the Apple Privacy cache, which means that every email sent to an Apple device with this setting on is automatically marked as open even if they didn't open it.

| How Traditional Open Tracking Works | | *Tracking pixel fires* | Receives Data | | *Tracking pixel fires* | Receives Data |

Open tracking pixel
Meet your invisible friend. This is a 1x1 pixel graphic that loads every time a person opens an email.

Cache
Stores recently used information like their friend, tracking pixels, so that it can be accessed later.

| How it works with Apple Mail Privacy Protection | Apple MPP | *Tracking pixel fires* | Receives Bad Data | Machine Opens Instead |

Measurements
Still Matter

Before Apple's Mail Privacy Protection was even a thought, you undoubtedly saw the many internal communications blogs and endless session titles labeling open rate as a vanity metric. It's hard to change minds, though, especially when open rates have been a pillar in your reporting.

There's a good reason for this mindset shift.

Just because someone opened your email doesn't mean that they've read or engaged with the content.

A better indicator that your employees are interested in your content?

Click rate.

> **Yes, open rates are significantly higher than clicks, but think of all of the things it captures:**
>
> - Opening to delete
> - Opened, but didn't read
> - Accidentally opened
> - Forwarded

But, clicks show attention and interest. They could be just the thing to keep your measurement and reporting accurate.

Even some of the biggest email senders in the game, like SendGrid, agree that using click activity as a primary indicator for engagement is the next move in the wake of Mail Privacy Protection.

Measurement Mad Libs

We've all made that quarterly presentation that's packed with engagement stats. We spend hours pulling the data, putting our thoughts into slides, and strategizing our next steps.

Just to deliver the presentation to a room of glazed-over eyes.

Update those dashboards, toss that old presentation, and use this change as a moment to re-examine the role of measurement and reporting in your org.

We've put together a few "business Mad Libs" that you can use that will undoubtedly show that your team is prepared to tackle this change.

Big changes like this, especially when you own them, can demonstrate your measurement fluency and depth of knowledge.

My _____ showed a big
 ANALYSIS TYPE
opportunity in the _____ space that
 PROJECT
could result in a big upside on ROI.

According to _____ there is _____ .
 SOURCE DATA
I ran a gap analysis and it showed that we
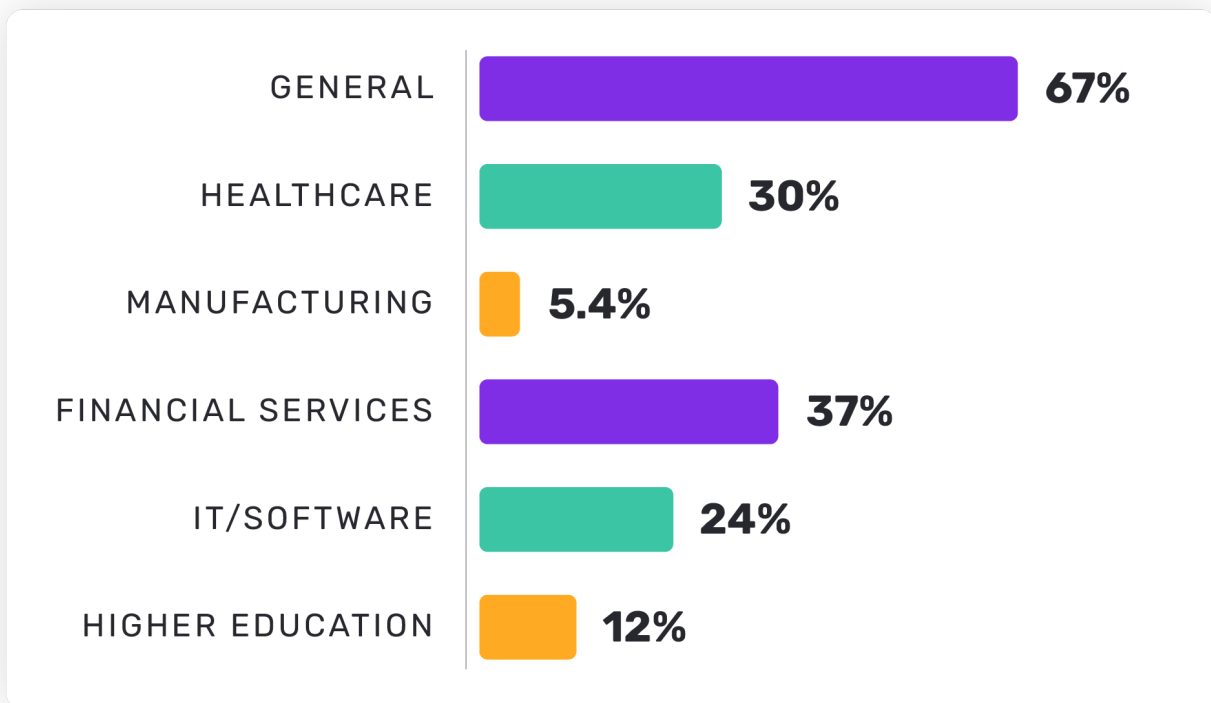are leaving _____ on the table.
 VALUE

Tips for Increasing Employee Click Rates
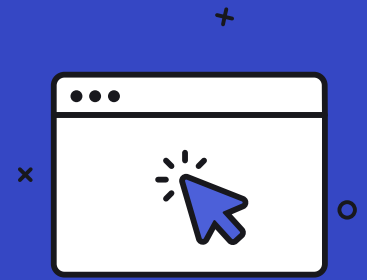
Maybe you're looking at clicks and opens side-by-side, and you find the clicks to be a bit lacking.

There's no need to panic; that's perfectly normal. Open rates were already bad to use as an engagement metric for a number of reasons, and now Apple's made it the most meaningless metric. No worries, clicks were always the answer.

If you're looking for benchmarks for your industry, we've got you:

Industry	Rate
GENERAL	67%
HEALTHCARE	30%
MANUFACTURING	5.4%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	37%
IT/SOFTWARE	24%
HIGHER EDUCATION	12%

Let Employees Read What they Want When they Want It

One of the best tactics that have led to an uptick in our customers' click rates is allowing their employees to select the topics they're interested in and the frequency of their newsletters.

Preferences

Frequency

| Weekly ▾ |

Day

| Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | **Fri** |

Time

| 9:00 AM |
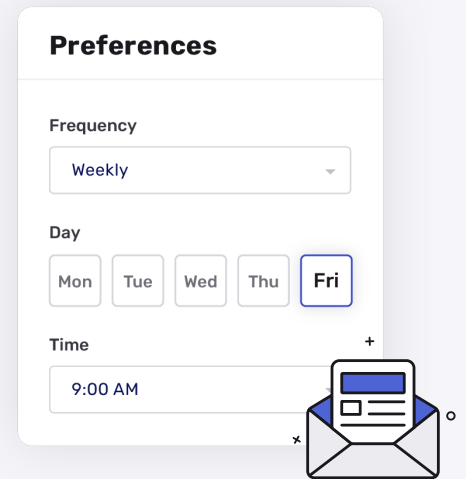
Time and Frequency

Sure, there are times when you need to send an immediate message to your employees. But when it comes to employee spotlights or professional development opportunities, it doesn't hurt to have an employee choose when they get those stories.

By selecting a time and day they'll receive their messaging, employees will feel less spammed and more receptive to opening and clicking through your content.

Maybe someone has a meeting-heavy Monday, or Thursday is the only time of the week you're not in a meeting. Getting that newsletter to the top of their inbox at the right time means everything.

If your employees can't select their preferred delivery times yet, that's not a problem.

Cerkl loves data. That's why we asked our data scientist, Kyle, to dive into our IC data and find the best times to deliver your employee emails if you want a higher click rate.

We turned it into a neat graphic your team can live by when you're scheduling sends.

Hour (EST)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8 AM	✔				
9 AM			✔		✖
10 AM					
11 AM					
12 PM					
1 PM	✔			✔	
2 PM		✖		✔	
3 PM	✖	✔		✔	✖
4 PM				✔	✖
5 PM				✔	

Best Send Times

- Monday at 8 AM
- Thursday from 1-5 PM

✔ Highly Clickable
✖ Rarely Clicked

Topics

Each employee has different priorities. This is true in their personal lives. Why wouldn't it apply to their professional one?

WHICH OF THESE TOPICS ARE **YOU** INTERESTED IN?

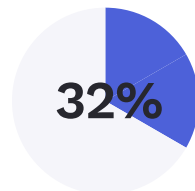|		
Awards & Recognition	Benefits	Corporate Services
Security	Company Culture	Company News
Company Strategy	Human Resources	Training
Sales	Leadership Updates	Financial Advisory

Non-Personalizers
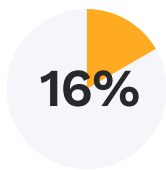
16% **Click Rate**

Personalizers

Before Personalization

Click Rate **32%**

After Personalization

Click Rate **42%**
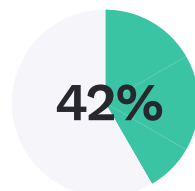
* numbers are based on an average weighted by audience size.

Your engineers won't be chomping at the bit to hear about the new branding updates, but they don't hesitate to click when it comes to leadership updates.

Our client research shows that by allowing your employees to personalize their email experience and selecting their topics, your click rates will begin to climb.

Another reporting bonus? You can track the type of content that's getting the most engagement to help build out your content strategy.

Instead of your content writers spending 10+ hours gathering a dozen different employee stories, you can see if that category is actually getting clicks.

Use the Optimal Subject Line Length

No one likes receiving The Never-Ending Subject Line. You know what that looks like.

A character count is long that you have to preview it on a larger monitor. Excessive use of emojis that cut off the ending that you care about. Why subject your employees to the same fate? Below are examples of subject lines for the same story but with different character counts.

Which one would you click?

Quippy | **32** characters

Subject Line:

2021 Mid-Year Performance Update

Informative | **50** characters

Subject Line:

Athos' CHRO Gives 2021 Mid-Year Performance Update

Way too much info | **80** characters

Subject Line:

Athos' Chief HR Officer, Jane Early, On the 2021 Mid-Year Performance Touchpoint

IDEAL CHARACTER COUNT

30
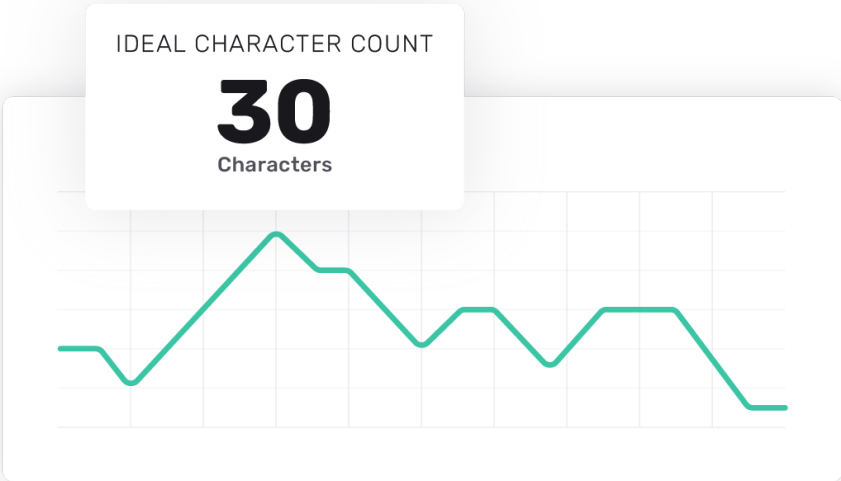
Characters

Cerkl's Data Scientist ran the numbers to find what character count works best for our internal communications clients.

TLDR: If your subject is long enough to make a meaningful point but short enough to fit any screen, it's more clickable content.

Tease Your Content and Add More Prominent CTAs

When it comes to email formatting, many organizations have their preferences. Some prefer a PDF, while others use newsletter tools for responsive updates on whatever device an employee opens.

No matter what layout your team has chosen, a short lead-in and prominent CTA is your friend if you're looking for more accurate engagement numbers.

If a snippet from Twitter listed out the "10 Top Fall Recipes You NEED to Try," then why would you click on the article?

Your employees feel the same way. If you tell them everything I need to know about a story (that isn't urgent), then there's no need to click on your intranet-hosted stories or content.

Our Data Scientist took a look at what email newsletter format got our customer's employees to click and learn more.

Headlines Only	Headlines Plus	Traditional
CLICK RATE **47%**	CLICK RATE **40%**	CLICK RATE **23%**
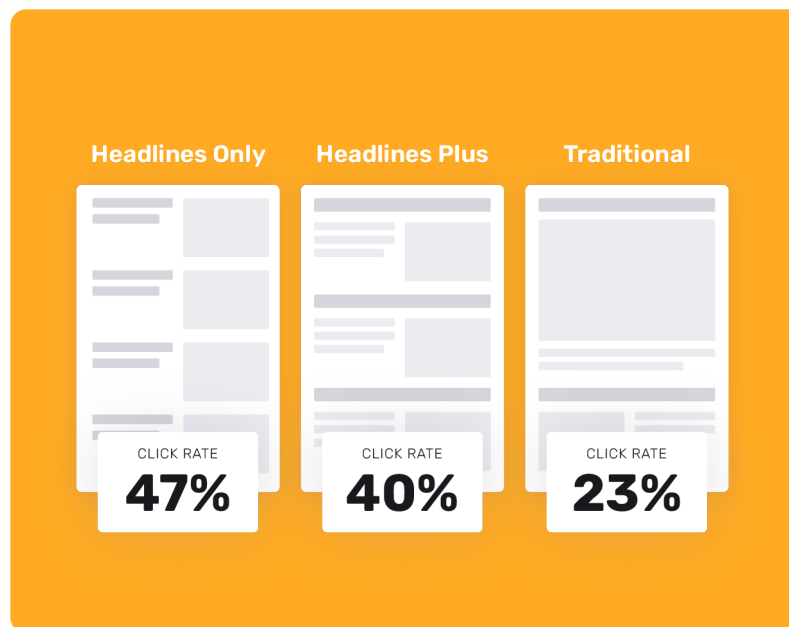
Interestingly enough, the newsletter with the least amount of imagery with the CTA's as the lead got the most clicks.

Sendinblue's imagery best practice includes giving no more than 20-30% of newsletter real estate to imagery.

So, we put our data scientist on the case to answer the question:

What's the ideal number of images that would get more clicks from employees?

Their answer? Just one. In this case, one isn't the loneliest number.

Focusing on the CTA count and headline impact is more important than adding images to your news update to gain engagement.

Employees indicate a genuine interest in your pieces by taking the next step and launching your link. Using CTA buttons or links to your corporate content, you'll get more reliable engagement stats.
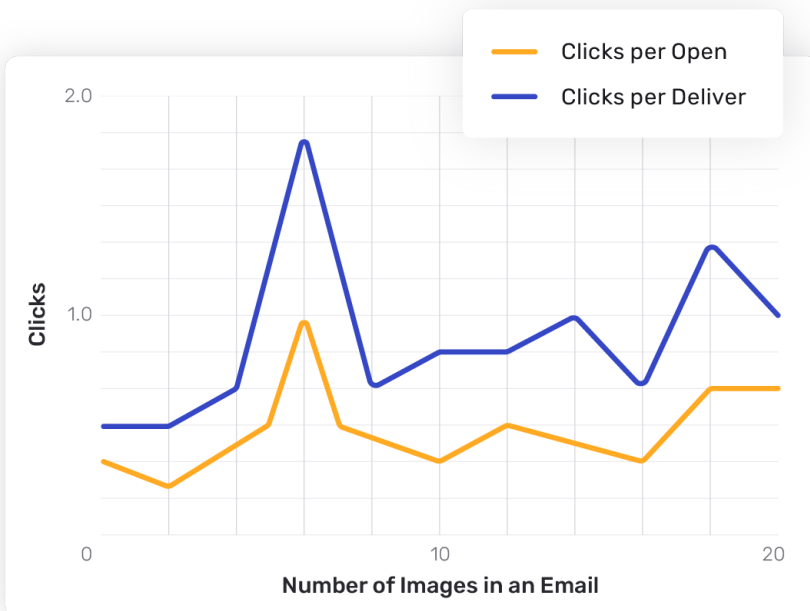
Dichotomy of Our Most Popular Employee Newsletter

Headlines Plus

1. **The Best image ratio is 3:1**

   (600px x 200px)

2. **Maximum story amount is 9. Magic number is 3.**

   The more stories you add, your clicks dramatically decrease.

3. **It's a good rule of thumb to remember: white space is your friend.**

   It gives people the opportunity to scan and identify what they're interested in.

Owning Your Channels is the Future of IC

How many hours does your team spend creating newsletter content, only to be glanced over? That's not changing anytime soon with Gen Z joining the workforce.

Makeup of a Gen Z Employee

Who:
Generation Z is broadly defined as the 72 million people born between 1997 and 2012. This is the most diverse generation so far, and they have many strong opinions. Most Gen Zers had their first phones at the age of 12. They're incredibly tech-savvy and have lived solely in the digital era.

What they expect:
Easily digestive, short-form content that's catered to their interests. Arguably the most personalized digital channel, **TikTok is used by 48% of US adults aged 18-29.**

Where they work:
Whether they're a digital nomad or a suit-wearing young professional, a virtual work environment is all Gen Z knows. A recent **study from Citrix shows that 51% of Millennials and Gen Z wanted to work remotely** for the bulk of their time.

If you're in communications, you've attended a webinar or downloaded a guide about communicating with Gen Z.

They've been in the workforce for a few years now and will be the next wave of young professionals. The way that Gen Z consumes content is different from other generations. They weren't raised on email and are relatively passive in their inboxes.

Most Gen Zer's have had smartphones or iPods since middle school and are used to accessing the info that they want and need at their fingertips.

SMARTPHONE OWNERS

Own an Android — 53.1%
Own an iPhone — 46.9%
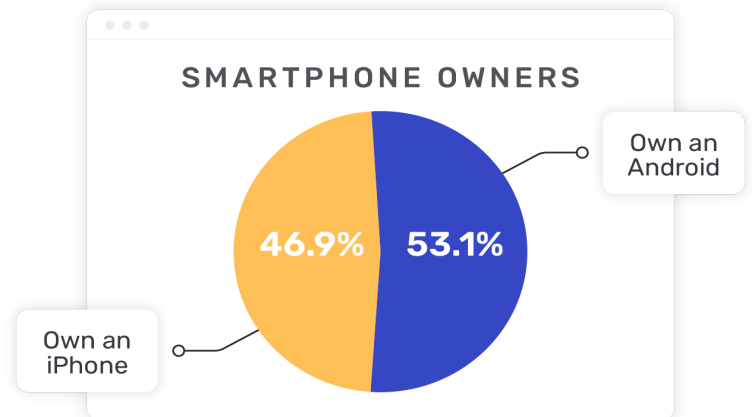
The solution for inbox fatigue? Controlling and deploying your internal content across all primary channels.

The shift towards cross-channel content over exclusively sending newsletters gives communicators more control, provides more in-depth insights, and allows employees to experience their news on the channel of their choice.
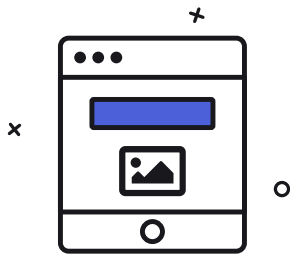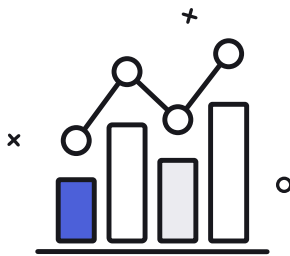
Content

Content allows your team to have control over its expiration date.

Say you send out holiday volunteer sign-ups to work at a food pantry the week before Thanksgiving. What if you a) completely fill up your slots or b)an employee sees it after the date has passed? Not every story is meant to be evergreen and always accessible.

Now let's say you accidentally put one of the slots at 6:00 AM, not PM. Instead of sending out a company-wide correction with content, you can just edit that info in the management system in real-time—no need to spam inboxes. You can edit and publish at the click of a button.

Insights

With cross-channel content, you can track metrics that go beyond click rates and help with your strategic planning.

Instead of tracking engagement by glances, your team can tag and measure topics that trend. Trying out a new security campaign? You can see what stories or mediums work and how receptive your audience is.
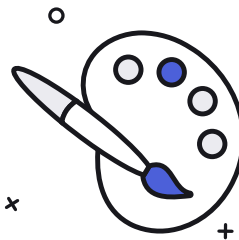
Personalization

We keep bringing it up, but if you want to genuinely connect with employees, you have to meet them where they're at.

Not just by automatically curating content that they'll enjoy, but by delivering it on their preferred devices.

Resources

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