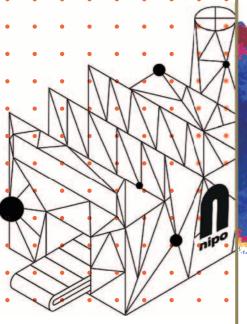
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EMAIL REPUTATION

WHY IT MATTERS
TO MARKET RESEARCHERS AND HOW
TO KEEP YOURS IN
GOOD SHAPE

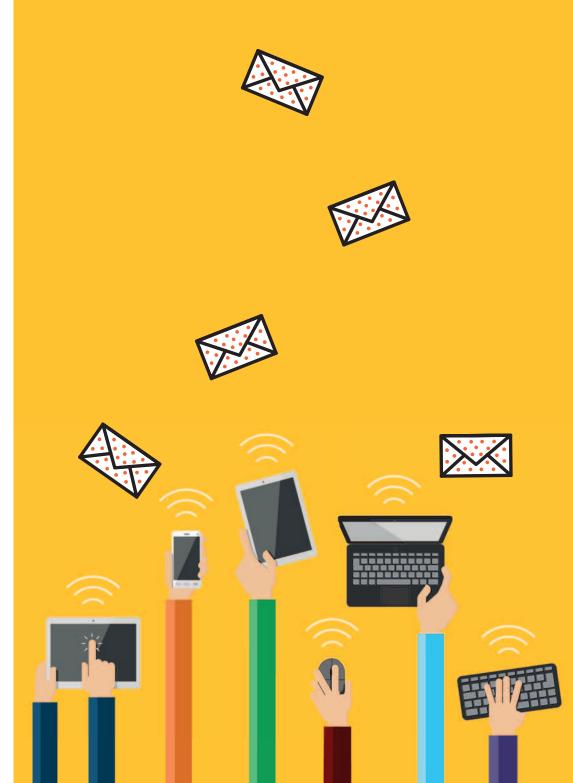
# **Email reputation**

# Why it matters to market researchers and how to keep yours in good shape

The relationship between **reputation and business success** is a well-known fact. While a good reputation improves sales performance and increases a brand's value, a bad reputation can rapidly take a business downhill.

Aware of this, many companies pay meticulous attention to detail when it comes to product quality and customer service. Yet they often overlook the need to also maintain a **good email reputation**, which directly impacts the ability to communicate online.

For market researchers distributing survey invitations by email, good email reputation is essential, as it directly affects how many of these actually arrive in people's inboxes. A bad email reputation can result in your invitations being diverted into spam folders, or even being blocked completely. The result of which is the people you hoped would participate in your survey will never see your invitation. So you'll never receive their responses and your survey conclusions will be less complete.



**PART 1:**Know the basics

# 5 things you need to know about email reputation

### Q1: What is email reputation

Email reputation is a technical metric which email service providers use to decide the 'credibility' of sent messages. It is defined by a score relating to the sender domain (i.e. the "nipo.com" part of an email address). This score, which can continually change, determines whether messages get delivered into recipients' inboxes, spam folders or are even delivered at all. You can think of it a bit like a personal credit rating, which banks use to decide whether they should lend you money.



# Q2: Why email reputation matters to market researchers

There's no point in sending out a survey invitation if it won't arrive in recipients' inboxes. If your sender domain has a **bad reputation**, your message is likely to be swallowed into people's spam folders or, worse still, be blocked from being delivered at all.

But if care has been taken to adopt good practices which results in a **good email reputation**, your survey invitations are much more likely to arrive in a place they'll be seen, reaching recipients' inboxes directly and without delay.

The sender domain's email reputation can therefore **make or break the success** of your market research project.



### Q3: Why the email reputation system was created

The ease and cost-effectiveness of using email to communicate with consumers and companies alike has led to staggering amounts of email traffic. There are currently 3 billion email users worldwide, and rising – approximately 50% of the planet's population.

Unfortunately, this simplicity and accessibility has given rise to **spamming** and dishonest emailing practices, by which irrelevant or unsolicited emails are sent, typically to a large number of recipients, for the purposes of advertising, phishing, and distributing malware. This has turned into a big business, with various reports estimating that spam messages account for 50 – 80% of the world's email traffic.



Most of the world's email traffic is spam.

Email reputation is intended to help legitimate messages, like your survey invitations, take priority.

Email service providers needed to do something to **protect email recipients from the influx of unwanted and dangerous emails**, which has
resulted in the email reputation system currently in use.



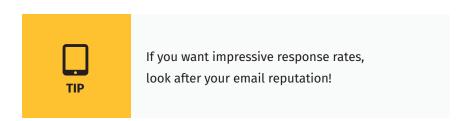
### Q4: How email reputation works

Email reputation is the total result of combining a number of quantitative metrics designed to evaluate how honest and well-targeted emails from a particular domain are. The total score a domain accrues determines whether its outgoing messages are blocked, directed to spam folders or successfully delivered to inboxes.

Whatever role you work in, it's worth understanding the two most fundamental aspects of email reputation:

- 1.) Email reputation measurement is primarily based on the sending domain (e.g. "nipo.com") rather than individual email addresses (e.g. "person@nipo.com"). But there are no universal rules for achieving a good reputation because each email service provider (Google, Outlook, etc...) applies different, publicly unknown algorithms. This means that what works for one email provider won't necessarily work for other email providers.
- 2.) An email reputation score is derived over a domain's entire lifetime. It starts being calculated from the very first email sent from that domain, and continues to be adjusted with every email that goes out. The reputation can improve and decline over time, but the score can never be completely reset to start all over again. A domain which has earned itself a very bad reputation, at any point, will have to live with the consequences forever.

And this is one of the **most difficult things** with email reputation: it can take a long time to earn a good reputation, but it is possible to destroy it in an instant. Vigilance in responsible email practices needs to be applied at all times.



### **Q5: Aspects which influence email reputation score**

Events and aspects which are widely understood to damage email reputation include:

Recipients marking email as spam – The more times your emails are marked by recipients as spam, the more likely email service providers are to conclude that you're sending unsolicited messages.



Poor email engagement – Email providers are interested in how relevant your messages are to their recipients, and they judge this by what percentage of the mails get opened. A low open rate is considered to mean recipients aren't interested in them.



Invalid recipient addresses – Sending messages to invalid email addresses is fatal for your email reputation. It's a clear sign that you don't actually know who you are sending your messages to.



Type of email content – Email providers have become very skilled in identifying certain keywords and phrases which are likely to indicate an email as being unsolicited or dangerous. All messages are scanned for these.



Unverified sending domain – Dangerous senders often try to pretend to be someone they are not by using someone else's domain. Many email service providers therefore block emails coming from an unverified sender domain.



Irregular frequency and volume of emails

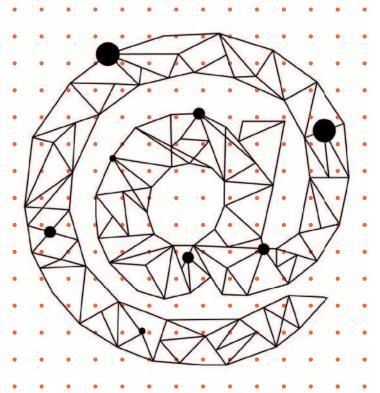
- Because spammers don't tend to have a consistent send frequency, email providers look at how often your messages are sent out. Changing the frequency may damage your email reputation.



**Lack of history** – If there is no history, email providers cannot draw any conclusions about your intentions. Remember that you start enhancing or damaging your email reputation from the first send-out.



**FART 2:**Follow the best practices



# How to build and maintain a good email reputation with Nfield Online

### Your destiny is in your hands!

Every Nfield Online customer gets a new Nfield Online domain to set up surveys, manage respondents, send out survey invitations, monitor respondents and gather collected responses.

Your Nfield Online domain is unique and can only be accessed by you, the owning customer. We don't even have the right to look inside its administration unless you specifically ask us to do so for customer service purposes. This means you have complete control over your Nfield Online domain's email reputation.

We understand this may seem like a daunting responsibility if you are new to the topic of email reputation. But don't worry! Nfield Online is equipped with tips to guide you through.

# Step 1: Identity

Identifying where an email has been sent from plays a major role in email reputation. Recipients have a right to know who's contacting them. And email service providers endeavor to ensure this happens by checking you are who you say you are.

### State who you are

Absence of a company's physical address and/or signature in an email will add to its spam rating. To protect your email reputation, we have made this field **mandatory** in Nfield Online. Our survey system doesn't allow you to send out emails unless you provide the company's real name and physical address.

### Specify your sender email address

Nfield Online survey invitations allow you to choose which email address they are sent from. Because this information must be provided, the default **'From'** field is automatically filled in with noreply@nfielddomain.com.

If you wish, you can overwrite this with **any valid address of your choice**.

Either at the default domain level or at individual survey level. So if you want to, you can send different surveys from different email addresses.

#### Your Nfield Online sender address

Because a new Nfield Online domain has never been used before, its email reputation is also completely 'clean'. In fact, it's even better: thanks to good technical practices at Nfield Online, all new domains are already rated 3 out of 5 when we hand them over.

So if you decide to keep the Nfield Online sender address (e.g. companyname@nfielddomain.com), your first emails should arrive reliably. They are unlikely to be classed as spam unless you immediately adopt bad practices. But beware, as soon as you start using the Nfield domain, everything you do will influence its reputation moving forward. For better or for worse. So look after it well!

#### Your other sender address

If you choose to use a different email address (e.g. companyname@gmail. com), at any point, your survey invitations will be treated according to that address's email reputation. So be sure to check whether the reputation of the address you want to use is good enough to reliably deliver your invitations.

### Prove it's really you

Spammers often pretend to be other people by spoofing their IP addresses and sending domains. Spam filters therefore check for ownership authentications when deciding what to do with an email.



An IP address is a unique identification of a device and its location within a network.

### Verify your emailing domain with

Sender Policy Framework (SPF) This authentication enables owners to publish a list of IP addresses that can send emails on their behalf.



Domain Keys Identified Mail (DKIM) The authentication method that proves an email originated at a specific domain and has not been changed during delivery.

This verification is an easy task for your system administrator. It's only required once and must be done **before you send out the first email**. If you experience any difficulties in doing it, please contact us and we will help you out straight away.

# Step 2: Engagement

Email providers consider engagement as a crucial indicator of how welcome your messages are to their recipients. The way people interact with your emails, from whether or not they open them and click the links to whether they unsubscribe or mark them as spam, reveals whether or not they wish to keep them coming.

The best scenario for your email reputation is when recipients open and click the links. Unsubscribes, as long as you don't have too many of them, are neutral. The very worst outcome is when recipients mark your messages as spam. Some email providers are very sensitive to this and only a few spam reports can send a reputation steeply downhill. As a sender, you need to do everything possible to prevent this from happening.

The two biggest influencers of engagement are the appropriateness of your database and how interested recipients are in the content of your messages.

### Enable recipients to unsubscribe, simply and immediately

If somebody doesn't want to receive your messages and you don't make it easy for them to unsubscribe, they are likely to hit the spam button instead. To encourage unsubscribes over spam marking, we have made the 'unsubscribe link' field **mandatory** in Nfield Online survey correspondence.

It's worth remembering that if you only send survey invitations to people who are expecting them from you, the unsubscribe rate should be low anyhow.

### Only send survey invitations to people who are into you

If you send survey invitations to people who either didn't specifically give consent or aren't interested in your survey activities, many of them will simply move the survey invitation from an inbox to a spam folder. This will damage your email reputation. It's possible they might just unsubscribe instead. But if you have a very high unsubscribe rate this also may be damaging.

### Clean your email database. Again, again, and again

## Unresponsive recipients

Before sending a survey invitation, remove any erroneous addresses from your database and check for validity by using tools such as those found at www.datavalidation.com or www.listwisehq.com.



After sending a survey, continuously monitor how recipients are behaving to identify those who are not taking action. Nfield Online closed surveys enable you to see which recipients didn't open the email invitation or opened it but didn't click though to the survey itself. This information can be found by clicking the 'Manage respondents' bookmark. Be sure to do this for every survey. If you identify recipients who are repeatedly unresponsive, you should consider removing them from the database because their lack of engagement is likely to be damaging to your email reputation.

### **Unsubscribes**



Recipients who opted to unsubscribe can be seen in Nfield Online via the 'Blacklist'. It's vital that you make sure these people do not receive any more of your survey invitations. Delete them from your database or share the file with whoever is responsible for managing your panel respondents. It's very rude to send these people more invitations and if they keep getting them they are likely to hit the spam button, which is terrible for your email reputation of course.

### **Spam reports**



Recipients who have complained about your email, usually by labeling it as spam, can be seen via Nfield Online's 'Abuse report' which can be found within the 'Manage respondents' area. These recipients must also be removed from your database immediately.

### Ask your sample provider about their database practices

Many researchers contract the services of sample providers to obtain contact details of suitable survey recipients. This transfers responsibility for the database's administration to a third party. But it's your reputation that will suffer if the contacts provided are not suitable. To protect these, it's a really good idea to ask your sample provider about their practices for acquiring new contacts and maintaining their database.

### Compose an eye-catching survey invitation

With so many emails, articles and shocking news stories constantly competing for attention, getting your survey invitation noticed is a tough job. To be successful in this, you need to be meticulous in every detail.

The survey invitation must be visually appealing and instantly clear.

Never just present it as unformatted text on a plain white background.

Personalize, be straightforward and be honest. Briefly explain why you are contacting this recipient, why this survey matters (to them) and what you plan to do with the information they provide.



# Step 3: Content

Composing emails which are suitable for multiple recipients is a specific discipline. The way you present words, images and other elements can have a huge impact on your recipients' behavior. And on your email reputation.

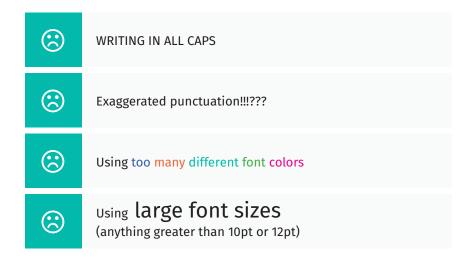
### Choose your words carefully

Avoid words which are typically found in spam such as 'urgent' and 'for free'. If you look at the emails which have arrived in your own spam folder, you can get a good idea of which words repeatedly appear. These are likely to be the red flags which lead email service providers into believing an email is spam.

### Write an appealing subject line

The right choice of words for your subject line is even more important. This line should be short, clear (to the point) and personalized. In a world of short attention spans, it's essential your recipient can instantly identify your message as interesting to them. Otherwise they may not even bother to open it.

### **Avoid 'dirty' formatting**



### Don't let pictures take over

Pictures can be great attention grabbers, but when they are too large or there are too many of them in an email, the spam alarm bells can start to ring. Many email providers block pictures from appearing automatically, which cancels their impact as recipients don't even see them.

### Use original URL links

Avoid using URL shorteners (such as bitly) in emails. Spammers frequently abuse these tools, which means email providers will count them against you.

### Keep your email's HTML code clean

This means ensuring the HTML code only contains directly relevant instructions. If you copy-paste styled text from a Word file straight to your email, the HTML will include all kinds of irrelevant formatting elements, which have a negative impact on your email reputation score. To avoid this, either compose your email text directly in Nfield Online or copy-paste it from Notepad and then style the formatting in Nfield Online.

# More bite-sized tips

### **Build up slowly and carefully**

Starting safely with sending your Nfield Online survey invitations is a good exercise for enhancing your email reputation and developing good habits. If you limit your first survey invitations to recipients you know you can rely on to engage, you set yourself up for giving email service providers a positive impression.



Send your very first survey invitations to people who already know you, are really interested in what you're doing, and therefore very likely to open them and complete the survey.

### Be a predictable communicator

Random and erratic emailing activity will bring your reputation down. Try to establish a consistent email sending routine, as distribution spikes won't help your email reputation.

### **Forget trials**

There's no such thing as a 'trial email' when comes to email reputation. Every testing round is real to email service providers and absolutely every sent email is evaluated. Regardless of the purpose, treat every email as a VIP.

### **Check your sender reputation**

This score is calculated using traditional email metrics such as unsubscribes and spam reports. The sender score is on a scale from 1 to 100 – the higher the better. Emails with a score lower than 70 aren't usually delivered to inboxes.

Try it at www.senderscore.org

### **Test for technical errors**

Technical errors can also be bad for email reputation. Test how your email looks on different platforms and devices before sending it. Check the technical report for errors. Correct these and test again, until it's perfect. Try it at www.litmus.com or www.mail-tester.com

### Could you be on a blacklist?

If things go extremely wrong with your emailing practice, your survey domain can end up on a blacklist. This would result in your emails being blocked as you are considered to be a serious abuser. If you find yourself experiencing serious delivery problems, please let us know and we will check whether your domain has found its way onto any blacklists.

### Say 'hello' to NIPO team members

We are happy to help, guide you through and receive feedback on your emailing experiences via Nfield Online. Feel free to contact our team members at sales@nipo.com or go straight to your regular NIPO contact person.

### **About NIPO**

# NIPO develops Online, CAPI and CATI survey solutions for professional market researchers.

Our unique history of working alongside market researchers means we understand their pain points like no other survey solutions provider, and we continually use this insight to guide further development. Our team is dedicated to helping market researchers shine by sharing our expertise in efficient fieldwork organization and optimized data workflow.

### World-leading technology and security

Because NIPO solutions run on one of the world's most robust technology systems – the Microsoft Azure cloud – our customers enjoy unparalleled flexibility and speed. This is especially handy when simultaneously launching multiple surveys. We are in regular dialogue with Microsoft's people to ensure continued optimal performance.

NIPO takes customer data security extremely seriously. In fact we are the only survey solutions provider in the world whose product is certified to international data security standard ISO 27001:2013.

### **Global support**

NIPO survey solutions are deployed from various regions around the world to ensure every customer experiences optimal speed. With support teams present in Amsterdam, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong and India, we are always available where and when needed to keep everything running smoothly.



## **About Nfield Online**

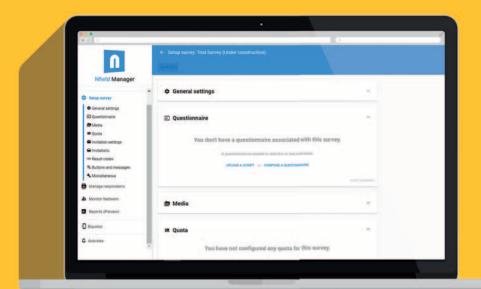
Nfield Online performs beautifully optimized online surveys which help market researchers all over the world succeed to perfection.

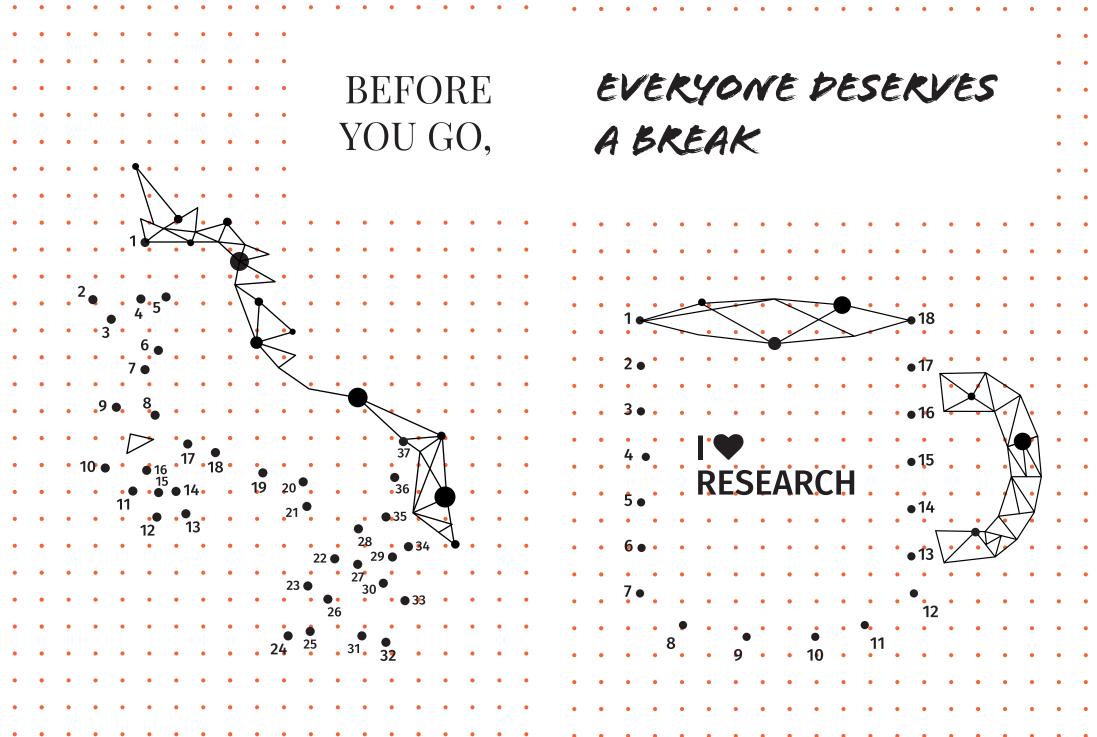
- The world's only online survey solution with zero business limitations.

  Instantly launch as many surveys as you need at any given moment.
- Pay as you go and only for what you use. No more unnecessary IT costs.
- Flawless, automatic survey display responsiveness to any screen size (desktop, tablet, mobile).
- Attractive surveys with standard or branded design that engages respondents and satisfies market research organization contractors.
- Simple and intuitive administration for launching surveys.
- Easy integration with your existing systems, thanks to our API and unique tool for IBM/SPSS data analytical tool.
- Compliant with the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

### This is just the start

There's loads more we can tell you about NIPO's Online, CAPI and CATI solutions. Want to get the bigger picture about how we help your market research performance rock? Just ask our team at **hello@nipo.com** 





### NIPO

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