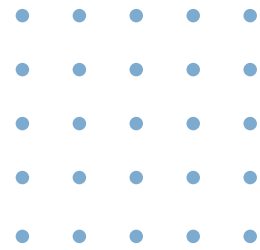# **2021** State of Email Engagement

A Litmus benchmark report based on billions of email opens.
Learn how people interacted with email this year.

Table of Contents

Hello there.

Email engagement is crucial when looking at the overall health of your email program. With data privacy protection measures on the rise, the way marketers utilize traditional metrics like open rates and click-through rates is changing. It's becoming increasingly important to leverage non-traditional metrics—like what email clients people open on and even Dark vs. light mode—to unravel more unique insights about your audience. Understanding these metrics is a powerful way to refine your email strategy and accelerate hitting your business goals.

60% of marketers told us amping up personalization was a top priority for them. What better way to deliver a personalized experience than by understanding your audience's email environment and device preferences... and then optimizing for them?

In this report, we analyzed almost 8 billion email opens, anonymously collected and aggregated with Litmus Email Analytics from January 1 - August 31, 2021. We include worldwide trends for all industries and verticals. Some email clients may be over- or under-represented, particularly with mobile and webmail. This is due to image blocking or image caching, most notably with Gmail. Still curious? Learn how we get this data.

Use this report to understand current email trends, as a benchmark for your own program, and for ideas to leverage these insights to inform your email program strategy. Ready to dive in?

Let's go! ➔

Cheers,

The Litmus Team

P.S. In this report, Q3 (third quarter) contains data from two months, July 1 - August 31, 2021, versus three which was the data available at the time of reporting. Also note: A misreporting occurred with Litmus Email Analytics on Gmail from May 10 - June 7, 2021, which may have caused a lower-reported number of webmail opens for this period.

1   *Where* are subscribers opening your emails?
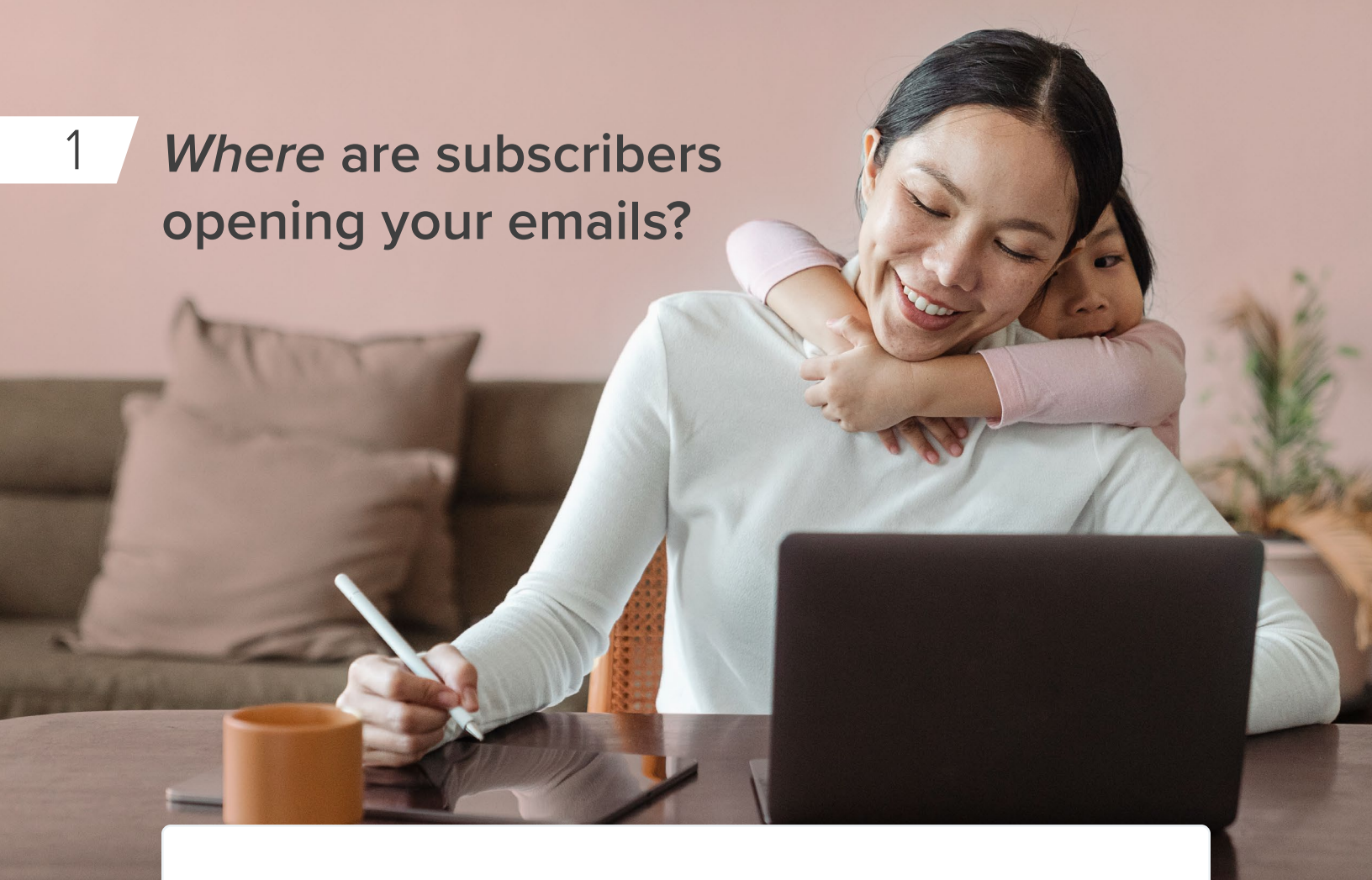
Understand which email clients and devices subscribers use to read emails—and how email client popularity can impact your email strategy and execution.
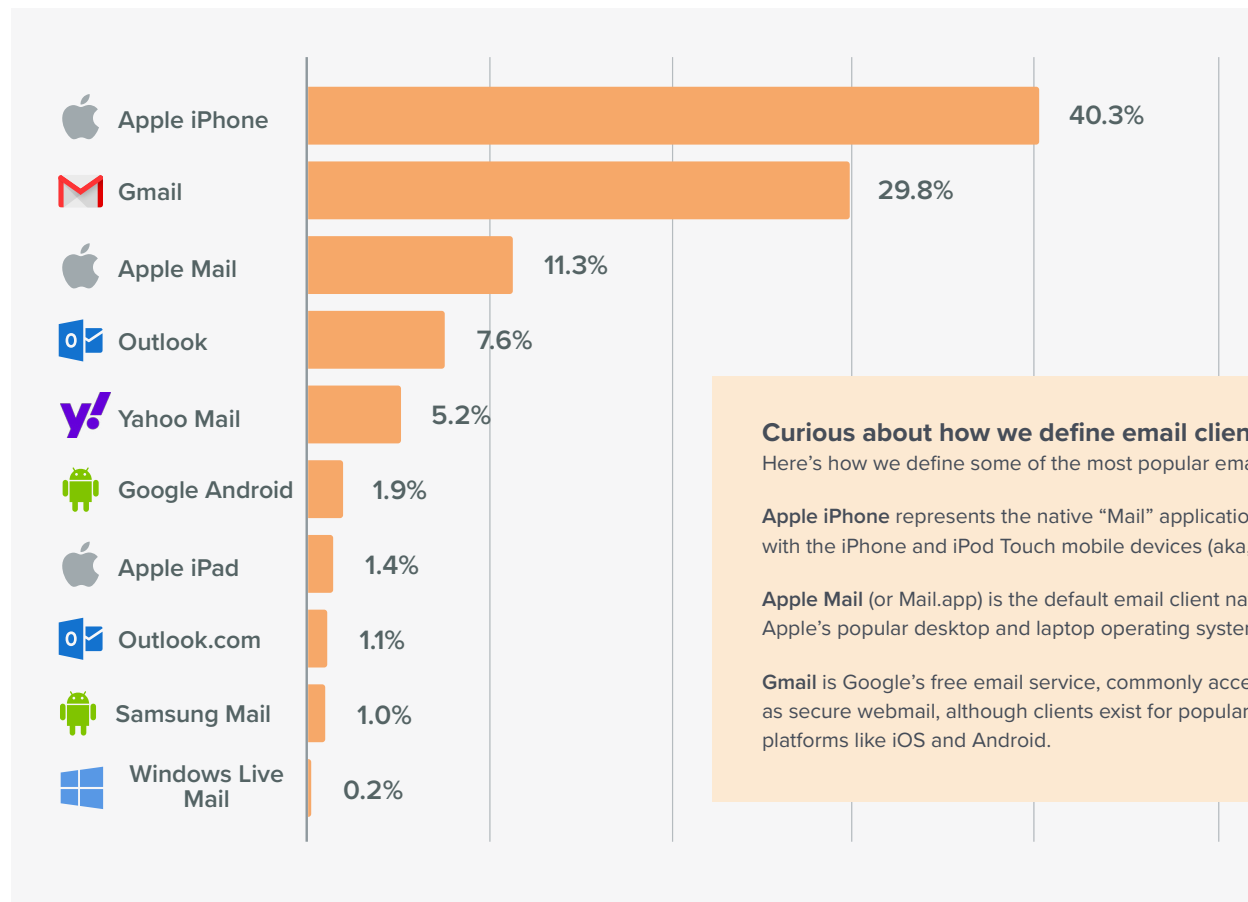
Gaining insight into the devices and apps your audience uses gives you a deeper view into not only who they are, but how you should approach your email strategy. Do most of your subscribers consume your content on mobile devices? Or do they engage with it on a desktop or webmail?

Knowing the answers to these questions will help you think through subscriber experiences like screen sizes, image load times, and more. It can also inform your list segmentation strategy for deliverability. For example, if you know that a large portion of your audience uses Outlook, you might decide to have a completely different design and cadence to get delivered to the inbox. When you know details like these, you can really take your email program to the next level. **Let's take a look at the data** ➜

Top email clients

Apple iPhone (iOS Mail), Gmail, and Apple Mail (macOS Mail) are the top 3 email clients overall.

Email client market share from January 1 – August 31, 2021

Email Client	Market Share
Apple iPhone	40.3%
Gmail	29.8%
Apple Mail	11.3%
Outlook	7.6%
Yahoo Mail	5.2%
Google Android	1.9%
Apple iPad	1.4%
Outlook.com	1.1%
Samsung Mail	1.0%
Windows Live Mail	0.2%

Curious about how we define email clients?
Here's how we define some of the most popular email clients.

Apple iPhone represents the native "Mail" application that ships with the iPhone and iPod Touch mobile devices (aka, iOS Mail).

Apple Mail (or Mail.app) is the default email client native to Apple's popular desktop and laptop operating system, macOS.

Gmail is Google's free email service, commonly accessed as secure webmail, although clients exist for popular mobile platforms like iOS and Android.

Note: A misreporting occurred with Litmus Email Analytics on Gmail from May 10 - June 7, 2021, which may have caused a lower-reported number of webmail opens for this period. Curious why we count Gmail as webmail? Learn how Gmail opens are reported in Email Analytics.

The top 3 email clients overall are Apple iPhone (iOS Mail), Gmail, and Apple Mail (macOS Mail). This ranking is consistent with last year's data. Apple iPhone (iOS Mail) takes the top spot with 40.3% of the market over Gmail's 29.8% and Apple Mail (macOS) at 11.3%.

Something that's on our minds? Apple's Mail Privacy Protection, which means significant repercussions to email marketing in general. Empower your team by using this data to identify "real opens" so you can start adapting now to the future of insights and analytics.

Most popular reading environments

Mobile is the top way to read email.

Most popular reading environments, measured by email opens, January 1 – August 31, 2021
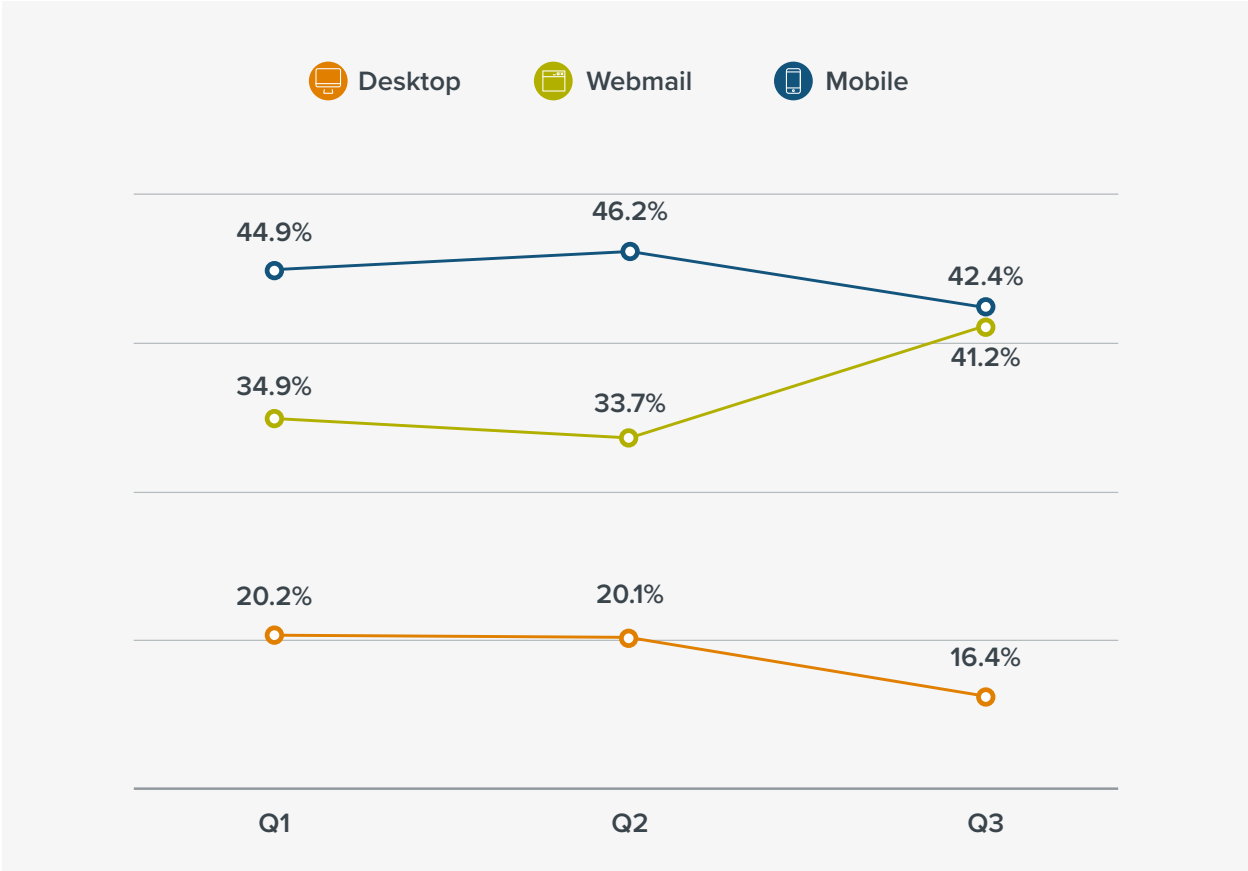
A misreporting occurred with Litmus Email Analytics on Gmail from May 10 - June 7, 2021, which may have caused a lower-reported number of webmail opens for this period. Curious why we count Gmail as webmail? Learn how Gmail opens are reported in Email Analytics.

In 2020, webmail was the preferred way to consume email while in 2019, it was mobile. But in 2021, mobile is back up top. This could be attributed to COVID-19. Perhaps people spent more time in front of their computers during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and now we're seeing a normalization.

When looking at the data from January 1 - August 31, 2021, mobile's share is 44.7%, with webmail at 36.3%, and desktop at 19.1%.

Most popular webmail clients

Gmail is the #1 webmail client

Most popular webmail clients, measured by email opens, January 1 – August 31, 2021
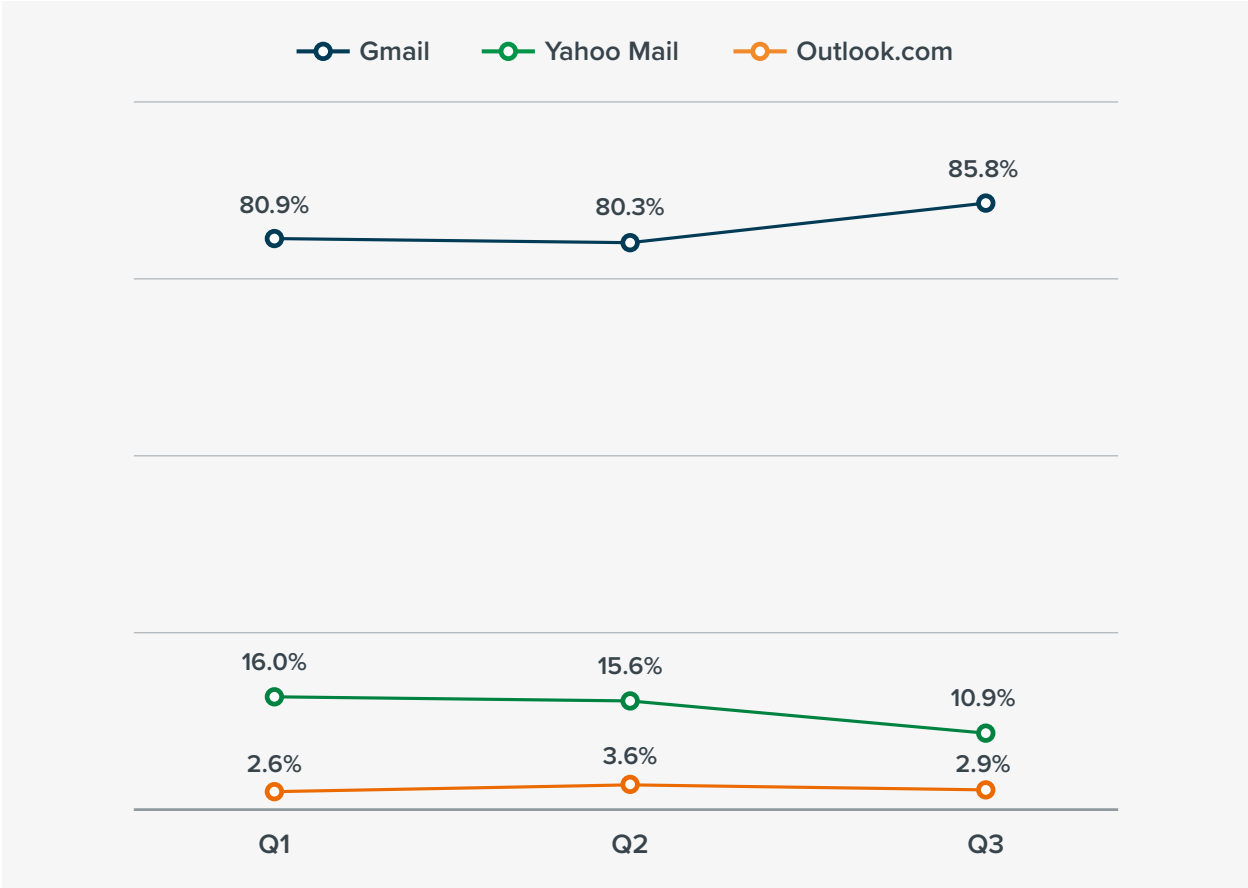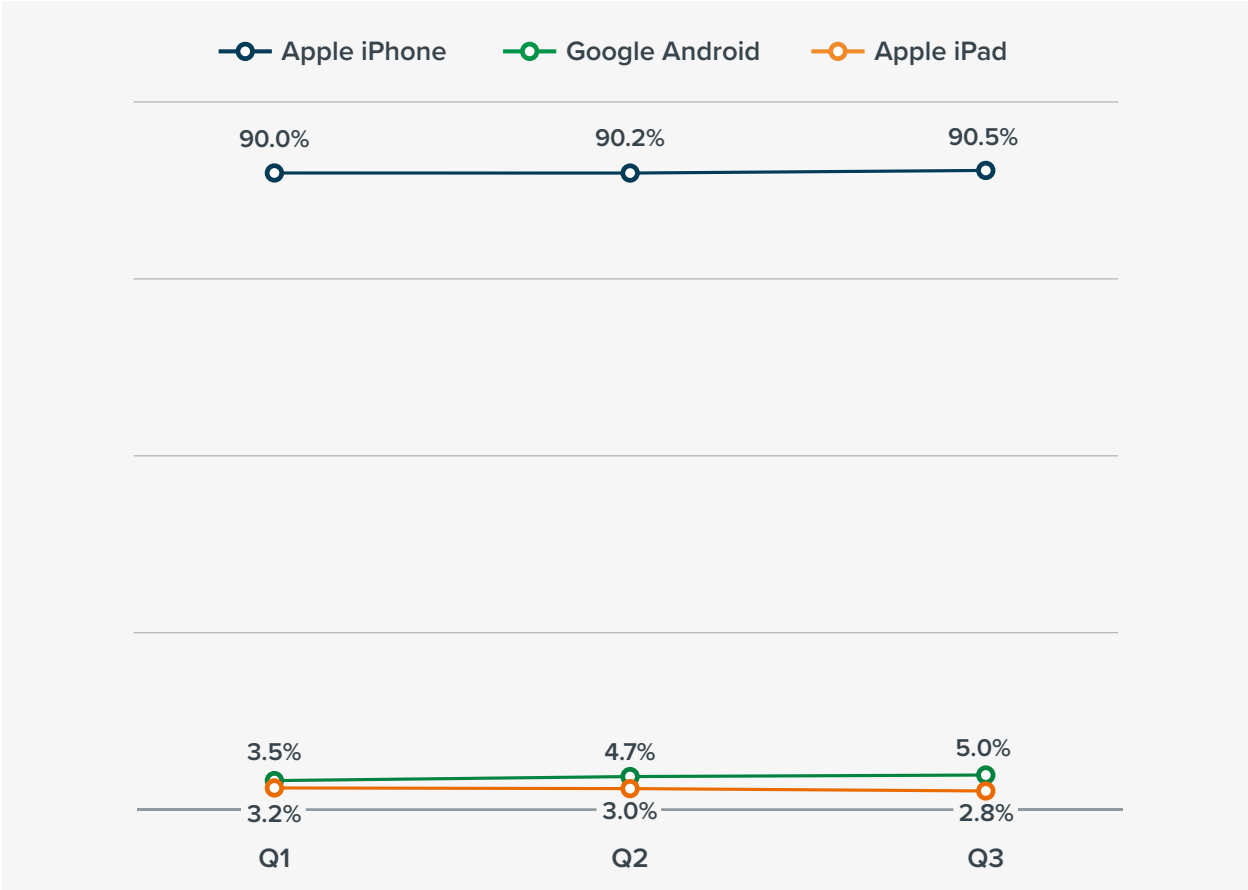

Note: A misreporting occurred with Litmus Email Analytics on Gmail from May 10 - June 7, 2021, which may have caused a lower-reported number of webmail opens for this period. Curious why we count Gmail as webmail? Learn how Gmail opens are reported in Email Analytics.

No surprise: Gmail takes the lead as the most popular webmail client. When looking at the full year, almost 82.3% of webmail opens happen in Gmail, with Yahoo Mail in the next spot at 14.2%, and Outlook.com at 3%.

Most popular mobile email clients

Apple iPhone (iOS Mail) is the top mobile email client.

Most popular mobile clients, measured by email opens, January 1 – August 31, 2021

	Apple iPhone	Google Android	Apple iPad

Apple iPhone: 90.0% (Q1), 90.2% (Q2), 90.5% (Q3)
Google Android: 3.5% (Q1), 4.7% (Q2), 5.0% (Q3)
Apple iPad: 3.2% (Q1), 3.0% (Q2), 2.8% (Q3)

Apple iPhone (iOS Mail) continues to be the leader in mobile email. The second most popular mobile email client is Google Android. In Q1, Apple iPad (at 3.2%) went head-to-head for second place with Google Android (at 3.5%), but fell behind as the year progressed, keeping its spot in third.

Nearly 77.9% of our data comes from the United States. When we dig deeper into non-US mobile apps like GMX and Web.de, the number of Android users is nearly five times more than iPhone and iPad combined (as of July 2021).

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Most popular desktop clients

Apple Mail (macOS Mail) is the #1 desktop client.

Most popular desktop clients, measured by email opens, January 1 – August 31, 2021
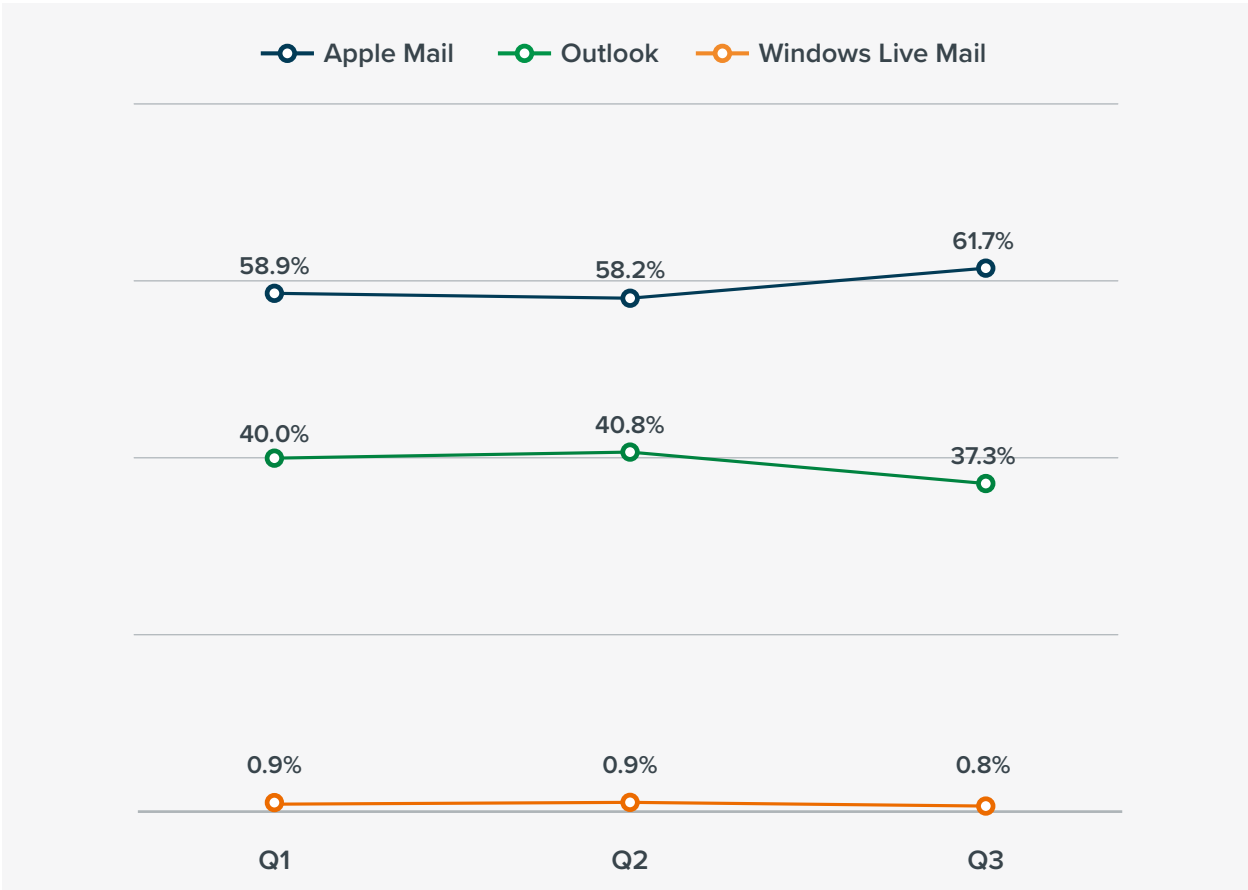

Apple Mail keeps its position in the top spot when it comes to desktop clients, with Outlook holding firm in second. These two desktop clients hold the lion's share of the market.

Dark Mode trends

Another piece we're keeping tabs on? Dark Mode. In 2020, Dark Mode usage was introduced to Litmus Email Analytics and for the first time ever, we were able to share some early data.

Dark Mode trends as detected by Litmus Analytics, January 1 – August 31, 2021 for iOS 13, 14, and Apple Mail only.

	Light Mode	VS	Dark Mode
Q1	74.4%		25.6%
Q2	75.0%		25.0%
Q3	74.2%		25.8%
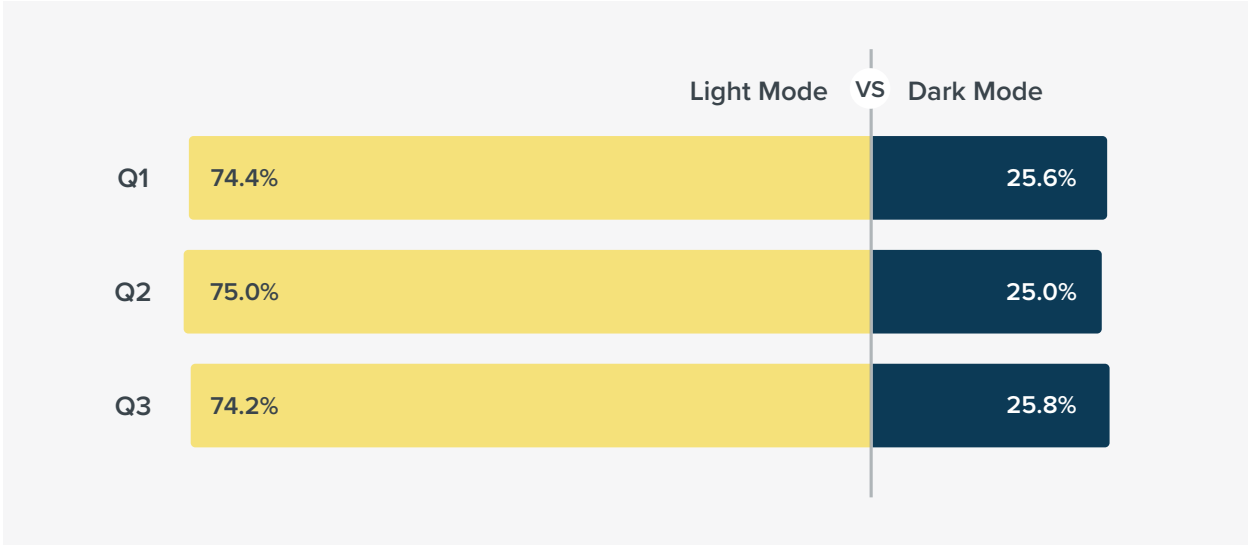
Of those using iOS 13, 14, and Apple Mail, 25.4% are using Dark Mode. Overall, a majority of subscribers are using light mode.

Learn *your* subscriber engagement trends

These benchmarks are a great indicator of global trends, but what are your subscribers doing? Find out how your audience is engaging—or not—with Litmus Email Analytics.

See subscriber trends ➜

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Ideas for action

Looking for ways to optimize your strategy? Taking into account email clients, most popular reading environments, and Dark Mode detection is a great place to start. See our tips below for ways you can get started today.

1. **Look at the most popular email clients for your audience.**
    When was the last time you took a look at the breakdown of email clients for your own subscribers? Do some analysis and see if it's still the same as the last time you checked. Then, optimize your testing, design, and more based on that. Bonus tip: See if there are differences in key audiences you market to. If there are, you may want to adjust your strategy accordingly.

2. **Determine how many subscribers use Apple Mail.**
    Apple's Mail Privacy Protection has started going into effect. While we can't predict the long-term impact, we can start adjusting our strategies now. Learn how to navigate and succeed with our Mail Privacy Protection Guide. Alternatively, with Litmus Email Analytics, you can see what percentage of your opens are being inflated by Apple's Mail Privacy Protection.

3. **See what devices your audience uses.**
    It's always a good idea to keep a pulse on how people are consuming your content. If you see a trend with your subscribers moving away from mobile, design your emails with that in mind. However, you should always make sure your emails will render across mobile devices. As mentioned earlier, mobile is the most popular reading environment, with 44.7% of the share.

4. **Discover if your audience prefers Dark Mode.**
    Use Litmus Email Analytics to determine what percentage of your audience is using Dark Mode. Or, if you find that your audience reads emails using Apple technology, you may want to incorporate a Dark Mode experience into your strategy.

# *When* are subscribers opening emails?
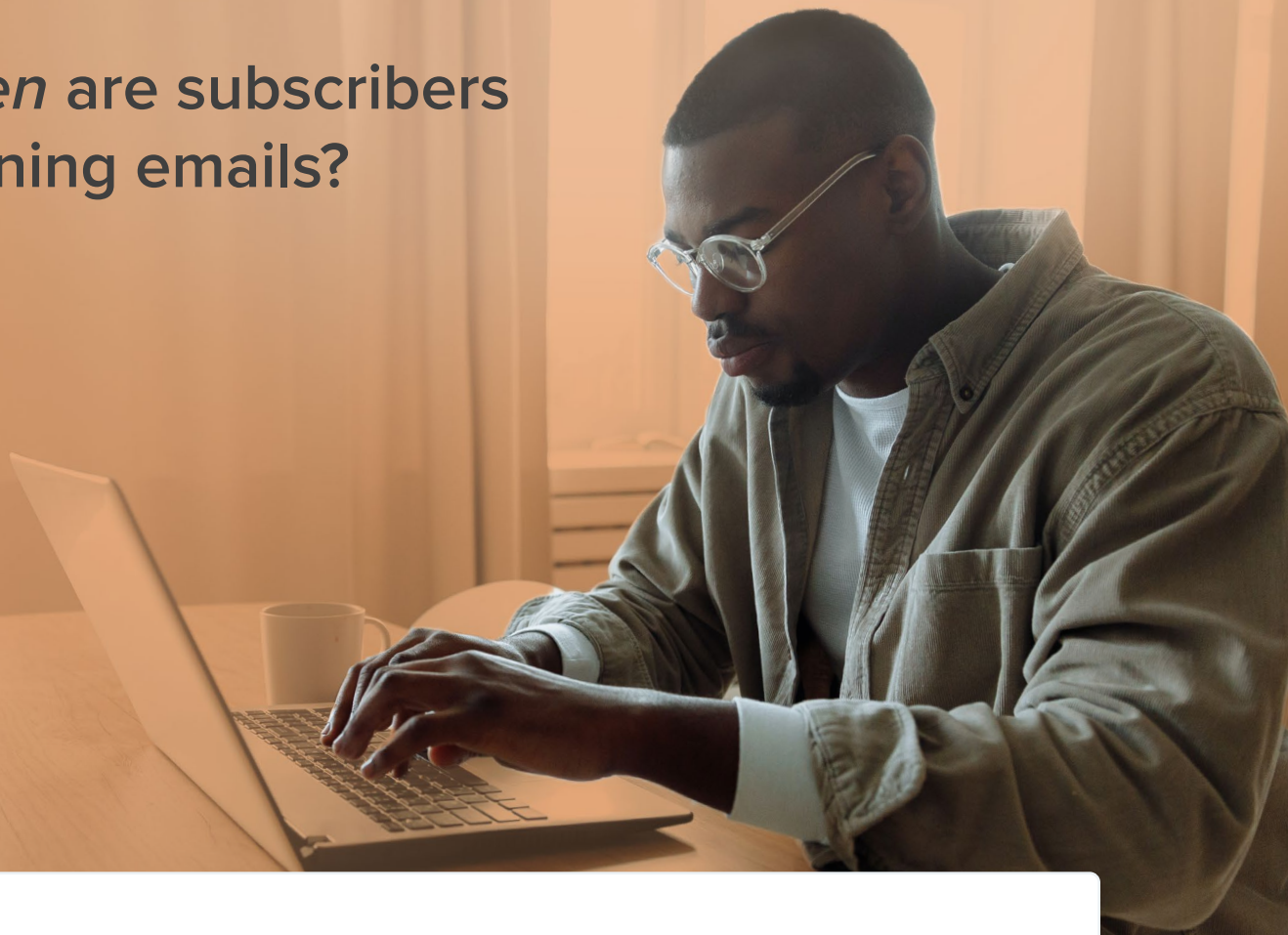
Timing is everything. Or so they say. Discover when subscribers are most likely to open email, by country and reading environment.

We've all heard that rumor in the email community: The best time to send an email is on Tuesday at 10am local time. But is that still true?

Knowing when your audience is most likely to open your email is key to setting your campaign up for success. And one size certainly doesn't fit all when it comes to opening times around the world, so understanding your list demographics—and optimizing for them—is another way to hone your strategy. GetResponse found that almost 22% of all email campaigns are opened in the very first hour after they're sent. And as each hour passes, the likelihood of your email getting more opens, decreases.
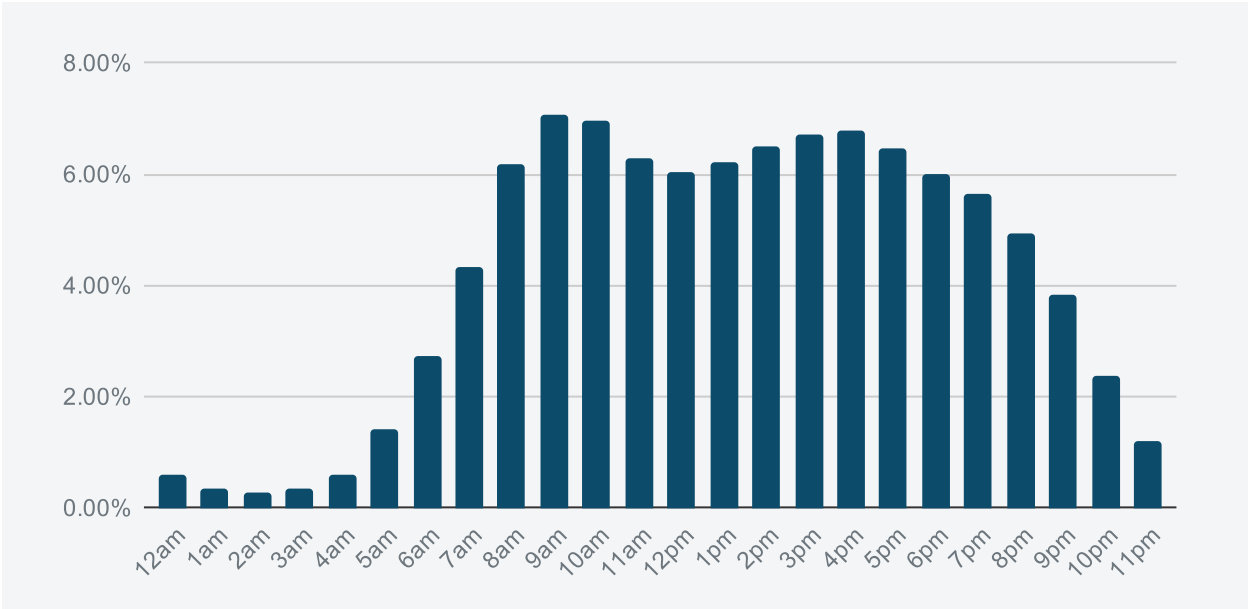
United States: Email opens by time of day

In the United States, the most popular reading time for email is the morning. About 7.4% of all opens happen at 10am, and 21.2% happen between 9am and noon local time which is consistent with last year.
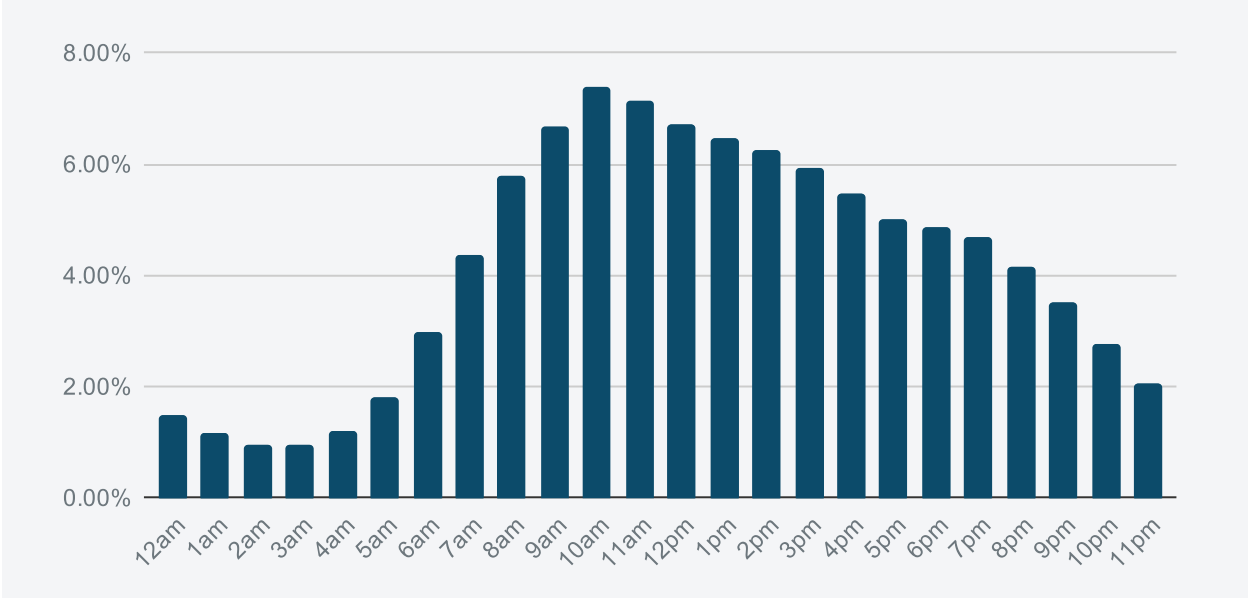

United Kingdom: Email opens by time of day

About 7.1% of all opens happen at 9am in the United Kingdom, which is consistent with what we saw for the second half of last year. Closely following is 10am as the second most popular open time, around 7%. The third most popular is 4pm, accounting for nearly 6.8% of all opens.
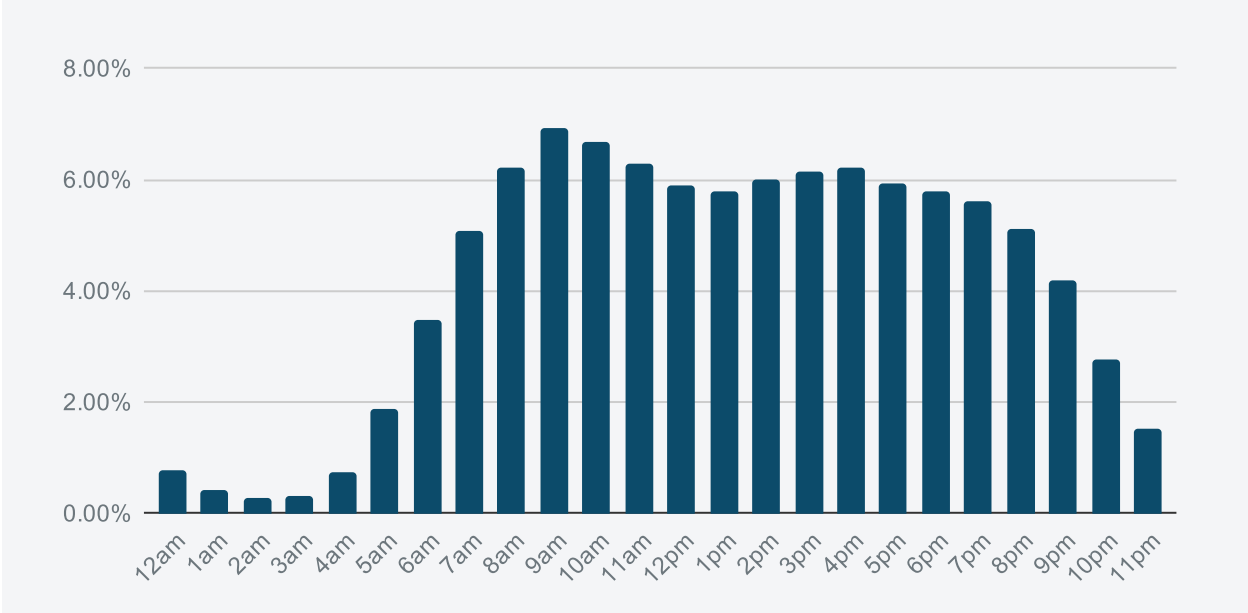
Canada: Email opens by time of day

In Canada, the most popular time to read email continues to be between 10am and 11am local time, with more than 8% of all emails being opened during that time.
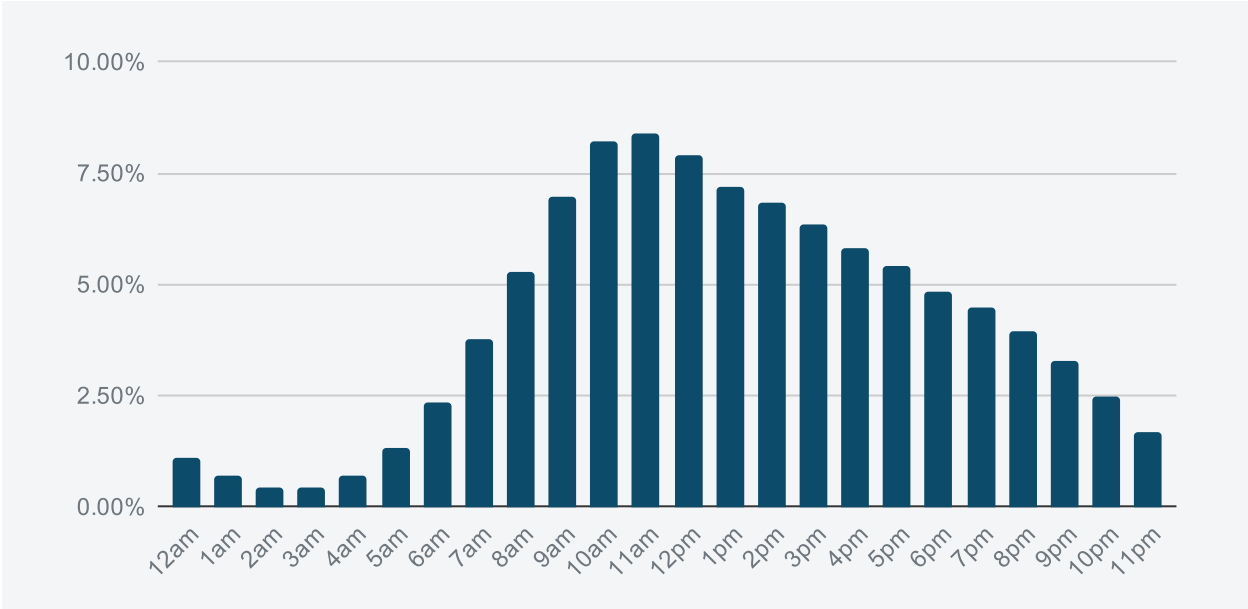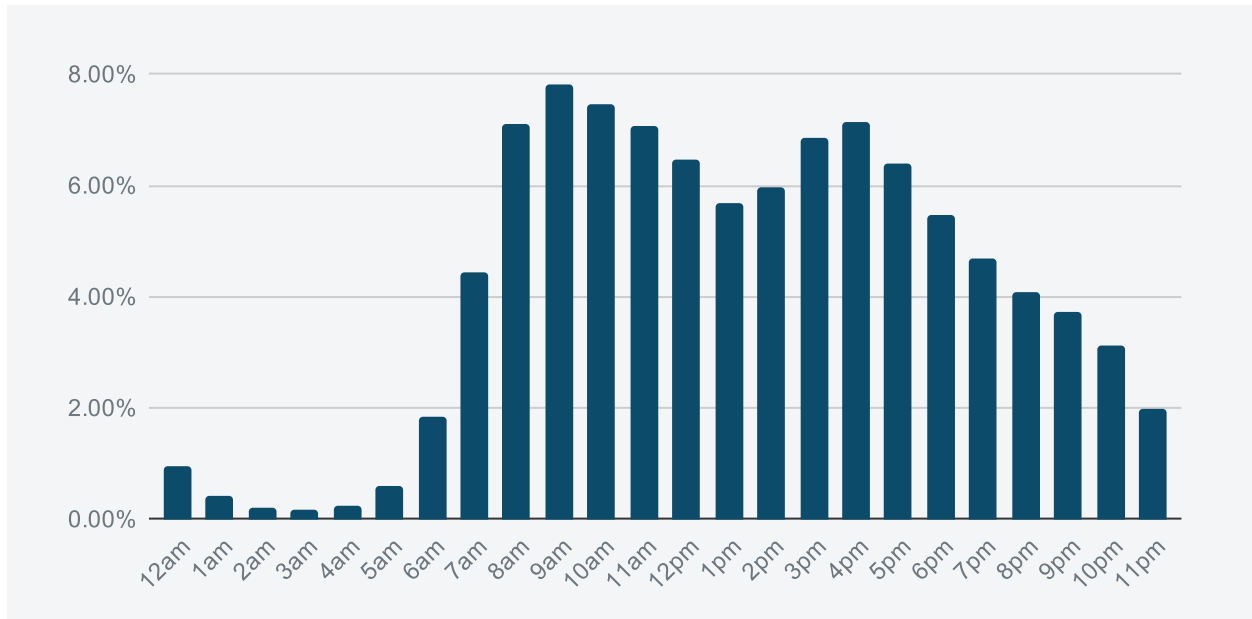

Germany: Email opens by time of day

Most emails in Germany are read between 9am and 10am local time, which has been consistent for the past two years.

Spain: Email opens by time of day

In Spain, most emails are opened between 9am and 11am local time. There is a dip in overall email opens between 1pm and 2pm. After that, opens rise again for another peak between 3pm and 5pm local time.
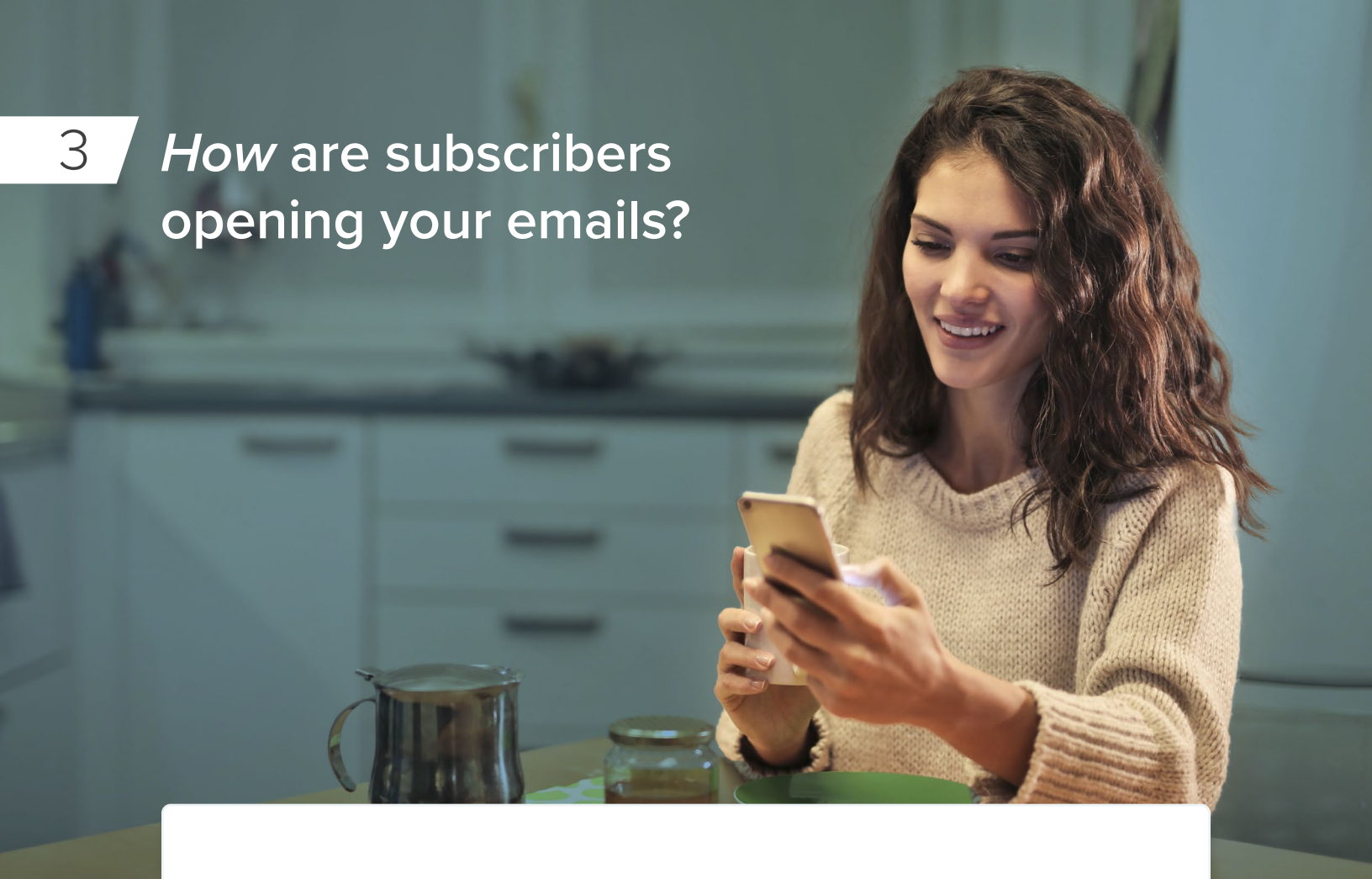

Australia & New Zealand: Email opens by time of day

Most emails in Australia and New Zealand are opened at 10am or 11am, consistent with last year.

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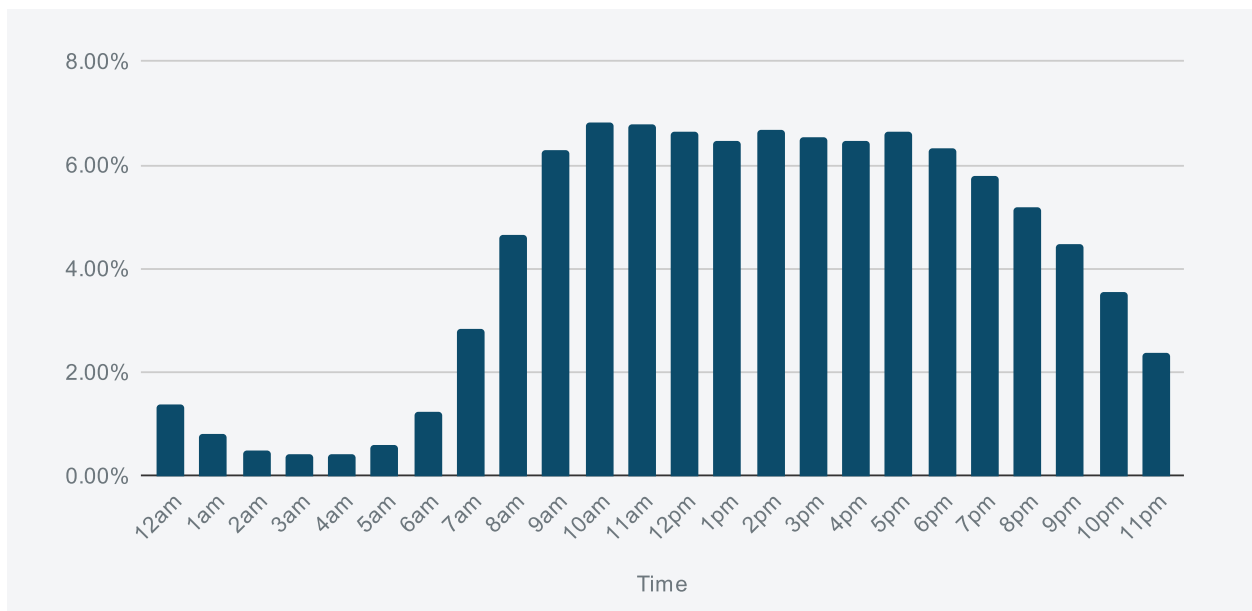
3 / *How* are subscribers opening your emails?

Traditional email metrics—like opens and clicks—are a good guide on performance, but what about some of the non-traditional ones? Go beyond opens and click by peeking into other engagement insights.

Open rates can be a powerful metric. But with Apple's Mail Privacy Protection now in place, there may be a lack of visibility around this traditional number. It's important to consider other forms of engagement, as they are just as important. And depending on your metric of success, they can be even moreso.

How long someone spends reading your email can be a good indicator of how long your content should be. Or it could be an indicator for you to try an alternate length to see if you can increase that number. Either way, it's important to remember that there are other ways to measure how deeply engaged your audience is.
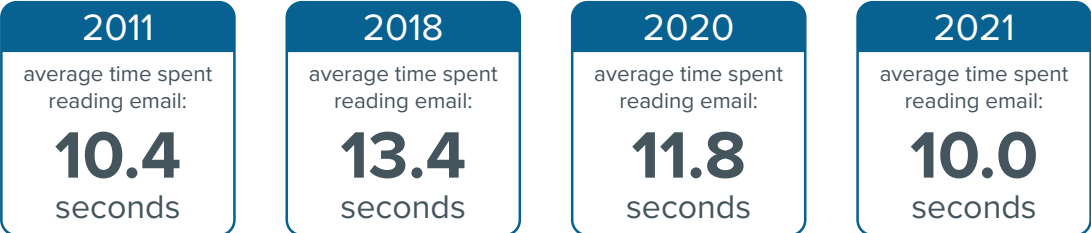
Read on for other non-traditional email metrics that can shape your email program for the better.

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How long people spend reading your email

The average consumer sees between 6,000 to 10,000 ads in a single day. And, 60% of marketing leaders told us they planned to send more emails. At a time when other companies are competing even more for your audience's attention, is your message breaking through?
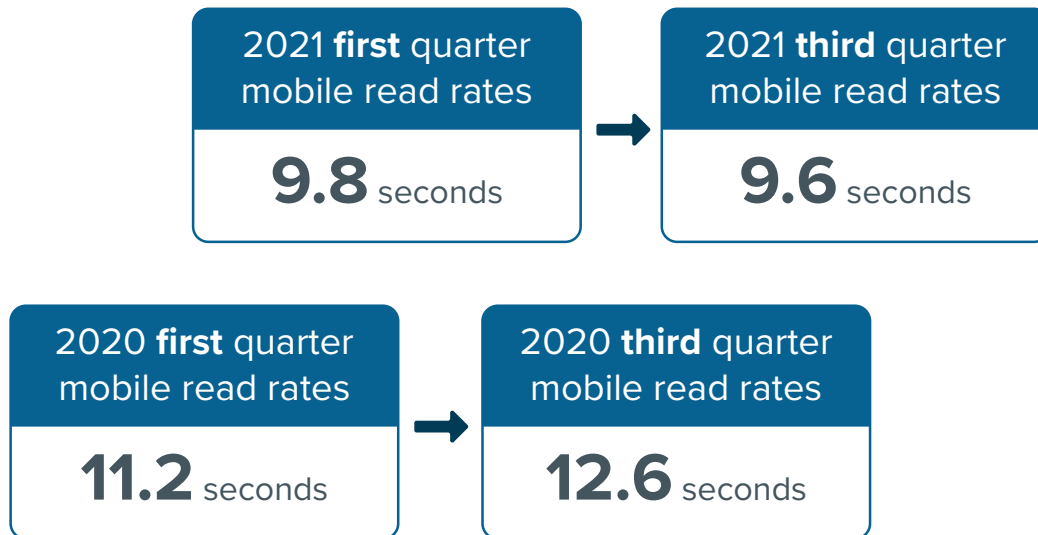
The average time spent reading an email is down by around 15% from last year.

2011	2018	2020	2021
average time spent reading email:	average time spent reading email:	average time spent reading email:	average time spent reading email:
10.4	**13.4**	**11.8**	**10.0**
seconds	seconds	seconds	seconds

Idea for action: See how your engagement times compare to the global average. If your ESP doesn't provide engagement data like what we've shared, check out Litmus Email Analytics for deeper insights.

Mobile engagement times

The average time spent reading an email on mobile went down 2% since the first quarter.

2021 **first** quarter mobile read rates	2021 **third** quarter mobile read rates
9.8 seconds	**9.6** seconds

2020 **first** quarter mobile read rates	2020 **third** quarter mobile read rates
11.2 seconds	**12.6** seconds

On average, the time spent reading an email on mobile went down almost 2% since the first quarter. If we look at the first quarter year over year for 2020 and 2021 respectively, the mobile read rate time is down 12.5%.

So while the mobile environment has been rebounding in popularity this year, subscribers are spending less time reading emails on mobile devices.

Idea for action: If you have a strong mobile readership, consider gamifying your emails through scavenger hunts or quizzes to get people to spend more time on your email. The catch? Make sure it's relevant and fun—a win-win for you and your subscribers.

Leverage reliable insights

How engaging are your emails? Cut through the clutter to identify how subscribers are interacting with your emails and what's most likely to move the needle with reliable insights in Litmus Email Analytics.

See subscriber engagement ➜

A little more about Litmus

Here at Litmus, we're passionate about everything email marketing. And our mission is to help brands access what they need to send better email, faster. Through our blog, Litmus Live conferences, ebooks, webinars, and more, we share best practices and trends to help your team stay at the forefront of the industry. Another thing we're into? Software that makes creating high-performing email easy. Marketers pair Litmus with existing email service providers (ESPs) to ensure a consistently great brand experience for every subscriber, work more efficiently, accelerate campaign performance, reduce errors, and stay out of the spam folder. With Litmus by your side, you'll have the tools and insights you need to provide your customers with an incredible email experience—and an incredible ROI.
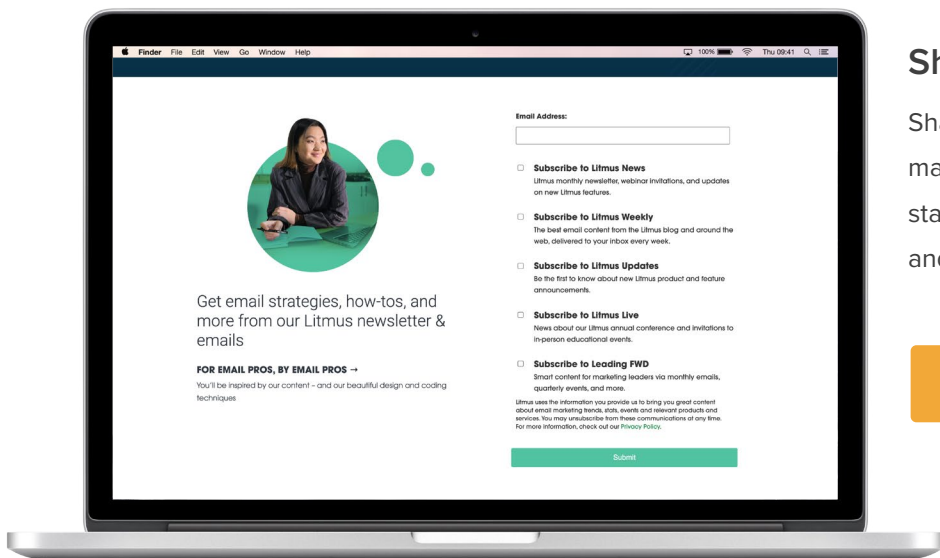
Share the email love

Share this report with others on your email and marketing teams. Then, sign up for our emails to stay on top of what's happening in email today… and predictions for tomorrow.

Stay ahead of email trends →