

Econsultancy



2019 Email Marketing Industry Census

The 13th annual Email Census, in partnership with Upland Adestra, is a comprehensive analysis of the trends, opportunities and challenges driving the email marketing sector, enabling marketers to future-proof their own email marketing strategy.

In association with:

 upland **Adestra**

2019

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Excellence in marketing

2019 Email Marketing Industry Census

In association with Upland Adestra



upland Adestra

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1. Executive Summary

The 13th annual **Email Marketing Industry Census**, published by Econsultancy in partnership with Upland **Adestra**, is based on an online survey of more than 400 marketers carried out in June and July 2019. The report contains comprehensive analysis of survey data and a comparison with results from previous years, as well as insights from leading email marketing experts and Econsultancy's recommendations at the end of the report.

The research reveals the following key trends:

Email continues to confound expectations around performance and innovation, but email marketers still need to justify further investment

Email continues to lead the pack when it comes to delivery of marketing results, with 73% of client-side marketers ranking the channel as excellent, compared to 72% for SEO and 67% for paid search, in second and third place respectively.

Innovation is very much on the agenda for email practitioners seeking to take the channel to new heights, with many companies in planning mode when it comes to new techniques and practices.

Disciplines such as marketing automation and personalisation have become established in the email marketing environment, while marketers are also seeking to harness artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to boost the effectiveness of campaigns and deepen customer engagement.

But while email continues to evolve and remains the highest-ranked medium for ROI, the research shows that the channel still doesn't receive the level of spend that is justified. A combination of unsophisticated monitoring, misconceptions about the channel, and other factors are holding back email from even greater effectiveness.

Among the key findings from this year's Email Census:

- Many email marketers are focusing on ways to improve message relevance and engagement. A significant proportion of brands are planning to add *advanced segmentation* (47%), *content personalisation* (37%) and *behavioural targeting* (39%) to their email marketing practices.
- Marketing automation continues to be regarded as the most important capability for improving email effectiveness. 66% of respondents highlight automation as an important attribute of email solutions, up six percentage points from 60% in 2018.
- The top three areas for marketers to focus on over the next 12 months are *automated campaigns* (37%), *personalisation* (32%) and *segmentation* (29%).
- On average, email attracted only 13% of company marketing spend in the last year, despite being attributed to 19% of sales. Among factors behind this perception gap is that email measurement remains skewed towards non-commercial metrics, such as open and click-through rates, and therefore seems short on supporting evidence.

Personalisation represents the next wave of innovation

Personalisation is the future of email marketing, as it allows companies to stand out in an already flooded inbox, differentiate themselves from their competitors, and create rich, deeply engaging experiences with their customers. Despite the progress that has been made, this research indicates companies could be doing more to provide more targeted and personalised experiences to achieve higher conversion rates and greater likelihood of purchase.

- Almost a third of marketers (30%) say they have the technological capabilities for personalisation, but are in the process of fine-tuning the execution. *Data integration* is still the most significant obstacle to implementing personalisation, with 51% of marketers reporting this to be an issue.
- Antiquated IT systems and legacy software are also holding back companies, as over a third of companies (34%) cite a technology shortfall as one of the main challenges to implementing personalisation.
- Over two-thirds of marketers (67%) want to practise *better personalisation* in 2019, while 62% are focused on garnering *cross-channel data*.

Predictive solutions and AI drive the forward march of data-powered, personalised marketing

The growth of artificial intelligence and machine learning presents a huge commercial opportunity for marketing across the organisation. Looking at email marketing specifically, predictive solutions allow for the automation of basic processes, based on sophisticated customer analytics, enabling marketers to make smarter decisions and gain deeper insight into which strategies are the most effective.

- Companies are beginning to deploy AI solutions for email marketing, with 41% of companies reporting they have *fully* or *partially implemented* intelligent solutions for email scheduling, while 27% are using AI for product selection.
- There has been a significant increase in the use of predictive analytics solutions since 2018 when only 34% had fully or partially implemented AI for email scheduling, compared to 41% in 2019.

2. Foreword by Upland Adestra

The email channel's longevity, and frankly, sparkling success, can be explained by marketers being creative and having fun with email – which is encouraging for such a mature market. Email allows so much innovation that it never stands still and just keeps reinventing itself. It continues to deliver the highest ROI of any channel, further encouraging marketers to experiment with new tactics.

There are signs that modern brands are moving beyond the services that a traditional Email Service Provider (ESP) offers, demanding more cohesive services that are proven to deliver long term results. It's no longer good enough for suppliers to simply bolt on an automation module, and a third-party AI engine, to keep customers happy. Suppliers, therefore, must be proactive offering customers a better digital experience and a broader, integrated set of tools. The rise of CXM platforms enables marketers to optimise customer interactions and foster customer loyalty – with email playing a central role.

This year, customer expectations are sky high and brands must react. Customers expect personalisation, even if only at a basic level. After all, if you have gathered their data you should be using it. Simply tailoring emails to individual customers is often a good place to start but taking a strategic view by making the whole customer experience better can only happen with advanced personalisation.

Make no mistake, there are still major opportunities in the email market. One area where adoption remains low is marketing automation. Almost half of companies have no triggered response to a subscription or website signup. Furthermore, over two-thirds send no automated basket abandonment message – effectively ignoring potential new customers. Initial automation success with an ESP can help the marketing team win over senior management and attain buy-in from all parts of the organisation.

To fully understand the benefits of optimisation and analytics, marketers need to stay on top of trends in predictive solutions, AI/machine learning, CX and personalisation. For example, personalisation and marketing performance can be enhanced by using real-time customer feedback to influence communication choices. Overlaying customer sentiment analysis alongside other key customer data, across the lifecycle, can create hyper-personalised campaigns, effectively delivering sentiment-driven marketing success.

It's time for marketers to take action, use the valuable data they have at their fingertips, cherry-pick the key tech available, move ahead with automation projects, and start on the journey to build a better customer experience. Your customers will thank you for it.



Tristam Jones
Strategic Customer Success Manager
Upland Adestra

2.1 About Upland Adestra

Upland Adestra is a feature-rich email marketing platform that helps clients on their journey to First-Person Marketing success.

As part of the Upland CXM family, Adestra helps to enhance the total customer experience by empowering marketers to easily and effectively manage and segment data and automate customer journeys, maximising ROI.

Visit www.adestra.com to find out more.

2.1.1 About Upland Software

Upland Software (Nasdaq: UPLD) is a leader in cloud-based enterprise work management software. Upland provides seven enterprise cloud solution suites that enable more than one million users at over 9,000 accounts to win and engage customers, automate business operations, manage projects and IT costs, and share knowledge throughout the enterprise. All of Upland's solutions are backed by a 100% customer success commitment and the UplandOne platform, which puts customers at the centre of everything we do.

To learn more, visit www.uplandsoftware.com.

3. Methodology

The **2019 Email Marketing Industry Census** is the 13th annual edition of this report, published by Econsultancy in association with **Adestra**. Many of the questions have been repeated over this time period, enabling us to compare data and look at trends.

There were 435 respondents to our research request, which took the form of an online survey in June and July 2019. Respondents included both companies or in-house marketers (70%) and supply-side respondents, including agencies, consultants and vendors (30%).

Information about the survey, including the link, was emailed to Econsultancy's user base and promoted on social media and other channels. The incentive for taking part was access to a complimentary copy of this report just before its publication. Detailed breakdowns of the respondent profiles are included in the [Appendix](#).

3.1 Acknowledgements

Econsultancy would like to thank the following people for their insights included in this report:

- Tim Bond, Head of Insight, Data & Marketing Association
- Andrew Campbell, Martech Director, Customer Experience Division, The Home Agency
- Riaz Kanani, CEO, Radiate B2B
- Kath Pay, CEO & Founder, Holistic Email Marketing
- Jordie van Rijn, Founder, Email Vendor Selection and eMailMonday
- Natalie Rockall, Email Marketing Consultant, Eleven11 Digital
- Jenna Tiffany, Founder & Strategy Director, Let'sTalk Strategy
- Tim Watson, Email Marketing Consultant, Zettasphere

3.2 About Econsultancy

Econsultancy's mission is to help its customers achieve excellence in digital business, marketing and ecommerce through research, training and events.

Founded in 1999, Econsultancy has offices in London, New York and Singapore.

Econsultancy is used by over 600,000 professionals every month. Subscribers get access to research, market data, best practice guides, case studies and elearning – all focused on helping individuals and enterprises get better at digital.

The subscription is supported by digital transformation services including digital capability programmes, training courses, skills assessments and audits. We train and develop thousands of professionals each year as well as running events and networking that bring the Econsultancy community together around the world.

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4. Approach to Email

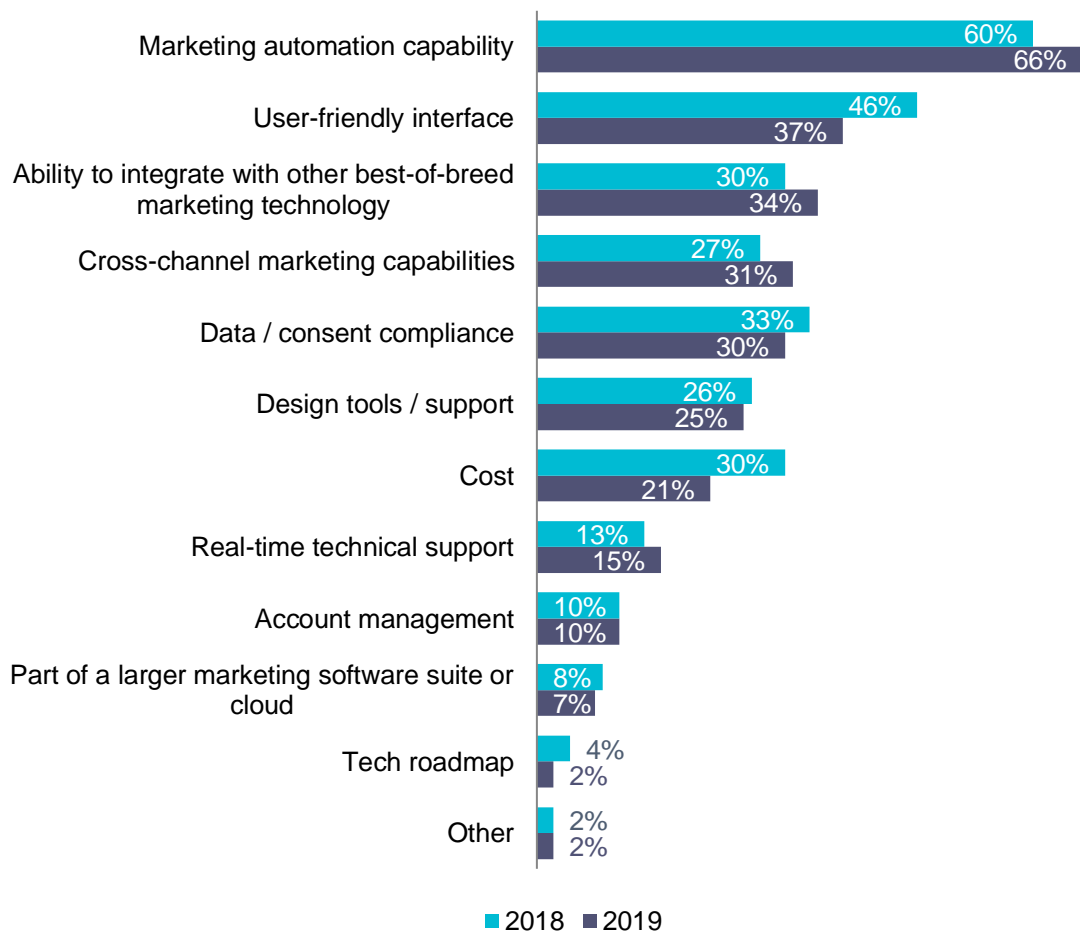
4.1 Most important attributes of an email technology provider

As a relatively 'old-school' digital communications channel, you might be forgiven for thinking email marketing has run its course, and that best practices are now fully baked into how businesses approach their email activities. Recent consolidation in the market has seen some vendors exit the email technology business, raising questions over how much scope remains for innovation and value growth in the space.

This year's *Email Marketing Industry Census* shows the opposite, reiterating that email is very far from being a stale medium. It is clear that marketers continue to see a wealth of opportunity to evolve and optimise how they approach email campaigns and have a wide range of requirements when it comes to selecting the best solutions to support these plans.

Company respondents

Figure 1: What are the most important attributes of an email technology provider?



Respondents 2018: 427

Respondents 2019: 283

Notes: Respondents could select up to three options.

Voice of the expert

“It’s unsurprising to see that automation is the most essential attribute of an email technology provider, given consumers’ demands for relevant messaging. For email marketers to be able to achieve personalisation and relevancy at scale successfully, automation is vital and is an important tool in the email marketer’s armoury.”

Jenna Tiffany, Founder & Strategy Director, Let’sTalk Strategy

“It’s interesting to see so many marketers pushing for automation capabilities While automation clearly offers an opportunity, there’s equally a lot that organisations can do with their existing technologies to better target customers with more engaging and targeted content.”

Tim Bond, Head of Insight, Data & Marketing Association

“Efficiency is clearly top of mind, but marketers are clearly looking for best-of-breed solutions that integrate well together and are not restricting themselves to single providers that can over time provide an all-in-one solution.”

Riaz Kanani, CEO, Radiate B2B

“I am glad to see marketing automation, integration and cross-channel marketing being among the top attributes. It is a sign that marketers aspire to bring their triple A-game. Triple-A meaning automated, all-channel and an amazingly adaptive amped-up customer experience. The road to get there means combining skills with technology to create a sophisticated and tied-in marketing machine. With current martech sophistication, flexibility will become a main differentiator. When brands can set up campaigns faster, they will be able to shift focus from being ‘able to do it’ to being ‘able to do it better’. As a result, marketers’ experimentation and optimisation abilities are the new hallmarks of a future-proof technology stack.”

Jordie van Rijn, Founder, Email Vendor Selection and eMailMonday

Expansion plans: Automation, not cost, is a focus

Many respondents to this year’s *Email Marketing Industry Census* have ambitions to improve email ROI further, and are clearly transmitting this to technology suppliers. *Marketing automation capability*, for example, continues to be emphasised as a key software attribute by a majority of email practitioners (*Figure 1*). The proportion of respondents highlighting it as an important area of focus has risen significantly over the past year (66%, up six percentage points).

For email marketing, automation is seen as an opportunity to transform the ‘engine room’ behind campaigns, and turbo-charge efficiency and effectiveness. It is not just about generating savings from campaigns or playing off scale advantages to increase the scope of existing activities. Strategically, marketers have positioned automation as a way to better leverage data and improve personalisation, thus engaging with customers more effectively, and creating feedback loops to drive further gains in ROI.

Another notable indicator of user enthusiasm for email marketing opportunities is that a lower proportion of respondents name *cost* as an important aspect of technology than last year (21%, down from 30%). Natalie Rockall, Email Marketing Consultant at Eleven11 Digital, sees this as a positive signal of marketer intent. “*Does this indicate email budgets are on the up and cost is of less concern? Or are more organisations looking for improved functionality in the systems they use to help them deliver even stronger ROI for the email channel? I hope it’s both,*” she says.

Similarly, Jordie van Rijn, Founder of Email Vendor Selection and eMailMonday, suggests the reduced focus on cost shows increased confidence in the business case for investment in email technology. “*If we polled and instead asked [about] ‘value for money’, all marketers would agree that it is one of the most important attributes. Apparently the value part is already secured, tried and trusted, so the out-of-pocket costs seem less of a thing,*” he surmises.

Technology shifts: Time to scrutinise suppliers

Email continues to be seen as a distinct field of communication with its own specific technology requirements, despite modern-day marketing’s focus on integration and consolidation. But many respondents accentuate the importance of email platforms having the ability to *integrate with other best-of-breed marketing technology* (34%) and support *cross-channel marketing* (31%). They recognise that email marketing is by no means an ‘island’, and must work in conjunction with other channels and systems to produce the best results.

However, only a small section of respondents appear to buy into the vision of email software being subsumed into broader marketing platforms. Only 7% see email functionality being part of a *larger marketing software suite or cloud* as important.

Tim Watson, Email Marketing Consultant at Zettasphere, sees this as significant for the broader direction of marketing technology, with some companies starting to question the service and innovation levels provided by ‘all-in-one’ marketing products. “*The email solution marketplace is nothing if not dynamic,*” he says. “*We continue to see mergers, acquisitions and even disinvestment in email platforms – notably, IBM selling off the Silverpop platform¹ it purchased five years ago and Yes Marketing obsoleting its email technology, Yesmail².*”

With vendor strategies in flux, it seems worrying that very few email marketers appear to delve deeply into their solution providers’ *technology roadmap*. Only 2% view this as an important solution attribute, down from 4% in 2018. Watson sees it as particularly important for clients to press technology partners on their willingness to invest in platform development, going forward. “*When shopping for technology, ask ‘what key innovations have you introduced in the last 12 months?’*” he recommends.

4.2 Email marketing practices

That email marketers are not standing still is further reflected in *Figure 2*. The chart shows the different practices they currently employ, and plan to employ in the future.

Most practices are only in use by a minority of companies, but none are merely being left on the shelf – all are being ‘planned’ by a sizeable section of companies surveyed. There are only two cases – *dynamic email content* and *dynamic social feeds* – where at least half of users are neither employing them nor planning to.

¹ <https://newsroom.ibm.com/2019-04-04-Centerbridge-Partners-to-Acquire-IBMs-Marketing-Platform-and-Commerce-Software-Offerings-to-Form-Standalone-Marketing-and-Advertising-Technology-Company>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forrester/2019/07/19/does-yesmails-sunset-mark-the-end-or-the-beginning-of-the-email-era/>

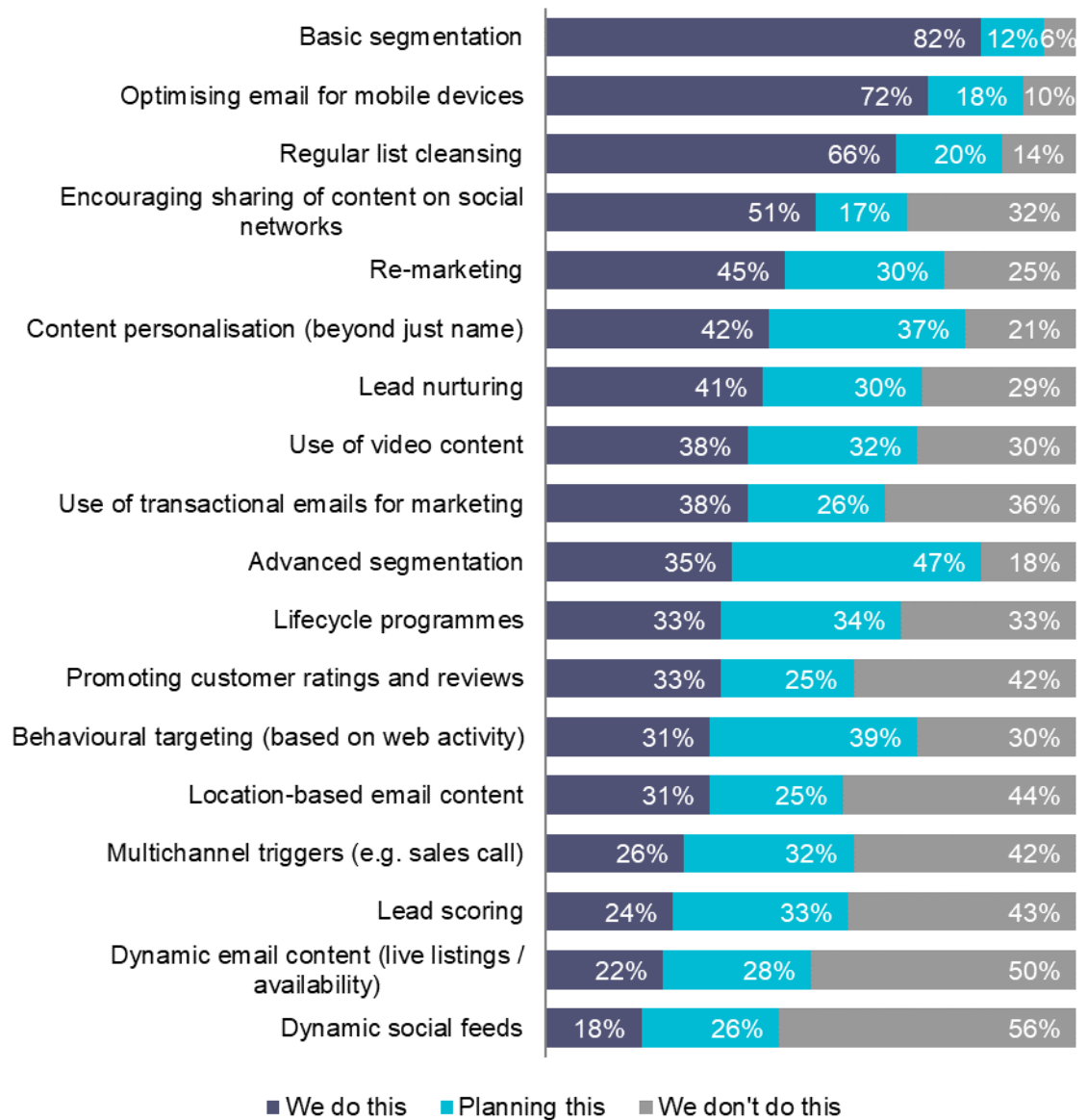
Voice of the expert

“Dynamic content and social feeds are underutilised in the email space, despite the fact that they not only save time when creating email content but also provide email campaigns which are relevant at the time of opening, not at the time of sending. I’ve worked with several brands that have achieved outstanding results by utilising this technology while also improving the customer’s experience. This is definitely an area that brings the excitement back into email and is an opportunity for more email marketers to embrace.”

Jenna Tiffany, Founder & Strategy Director, Let’s Talk Strategy

Company respondents

Figure 2: Which of the following practices are part of your email marketing efforts?



Respondents: 229

Voice of the expert

“Lead scoring can be such a useful feature for email marketers, especially for those in the B2B space with sales teams who want quality leads. The position of lead scoring near the bottom of the list here suggests either brands are not seeing the true value of this practice or the investment in the setup required puts them off. I’d recommend brands go through an effort versus benefit exercise on this point – the results may surprise.”

Natalie Rockall, Email Consultant, Eleven11 Digital

Driving quality and performance

Given the increased emphasis placed on marketing automation by email marketers, discussed in *Section 4.1*, it is clear that many survey respondents are focusing heavily on extracting more ROI out of this already highly profitable channel. Many see that a more strategic and integrated approach to how they harness data will allow them to engage with customers more intelligently, and drive sales.

This is further reflected in *Figure 2*, which signals that many marketers are working on improving personalisation, segmentation and behavioural targeting capability.

As in previous years, most marketers (82%) indicate they are performing *basic segmentation* (using obvious characteristics such as gender or geography), suggesting it is now a largely standard practice. Only a minority (35%) have progressed beyond this to *advanced segmentation*, however. This practice divides recipients into categories based on more in-depth factors, such as browsing behaviour, past email response or custom variables based on statistical modelling.

The responses suggest this is set to change in the coming years. The proportion of respondents performing *advanced segmentation* has risen by 4% since 2018 (*Figure 3*). It is also the capability the largest slice of marketers say they are ‘planning’ to bring into practice (47%). A similar proportion said the same thing in 2018, showing this is a challenging capability to develop, but this year’s data shows an ongoing commitment and belief that the rewards will be worth it, in terms of engagement and ROI.

There is a similar story with *content personalisation* and *behavioural targeting*, with many marketers actively seeking to add these capabilities to the mix (37% and 39%, respectively).

Zettasphere’s Watson is encouraged by the focus on these areas, noting they are “*all great ways to improve relevance*” and will lead to more in-depth and long-term customer relationships. “*Providing value in previous emails is key to customers continuing to engage*,” he notes. “*We often think in terms of campaign send. But recipients don’t see emails like that. They experience email as a continuous stream of communication. What they do is influenced by their experience of the past – not just how good the current campaign is.*”

Andrew Campbell, Martech Director of the Customer Experience Division at The Home Agency, sees similar positives, saying that bundling personalisation, segmentation and targeting together will provide “*a step change in email performance and unlock synergies across the three individual initiatives*”.

Voice of the expert

“From my own experience at my email agency Let’sTalk Strategy, segmentation is critical for all of our clients and heavily depended upon. However, we have also advised clients not to overly segment and re-evaluate the levels and types of segmentation used. Segmentation is beneficial when aligned with business and marketing goals and objectives. But there is a delicate balance to achieve when using segmentation. Creating hundreds of niche segments wouldn’t be useful for many organisations: it could impact the effectiveness of email marketing as a channel, making it incredibly difficult to monitor and measure. With segmentation, less is more”

Jenna Tiffany, Founder & Strategy Director, Let’sTalk Strategy

“Companies have the ambition to move from basic to advanced segmentation. But you don’t have to segment your whole database and email list completely. Instead go for ‘super segments’ – highly interesting and identifiable groups that have big potential. Focus on them, create content for them, identify more look-alikes and attract them to sign up to your email programme. And then? Identify conversion events (behaviours that signal upcoming shopper intent) and cater for them with timely offers. Advanced segmentation is more refined, not more complex, because there is a plan behind its right person-right time approach.”

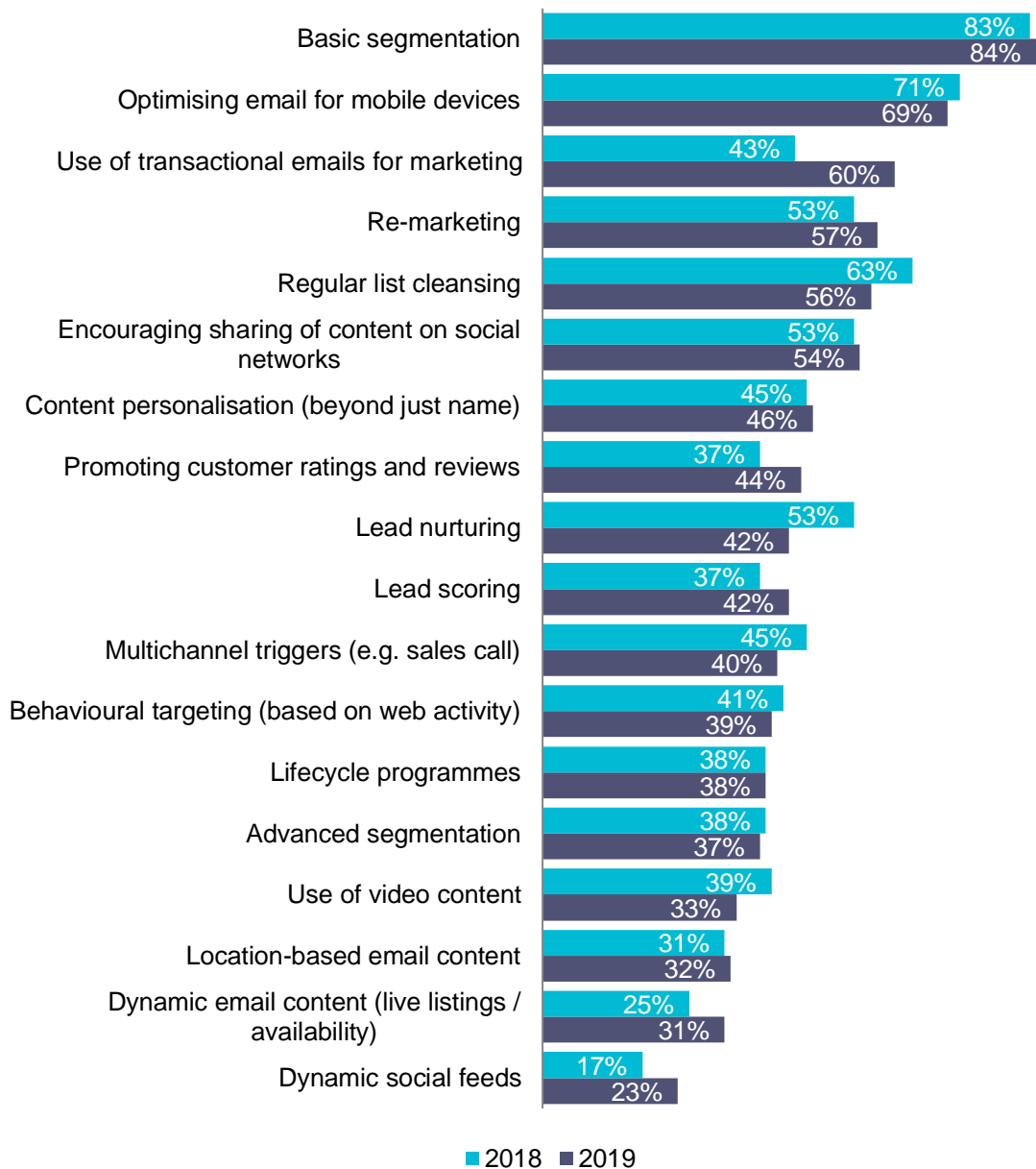
Jordie van Rijn, Founder Email Vendor Selection and eMailMonday

Mobile remains key

With email marketers focusing on user behaviour and needs, it is striking that *optimising email for mobile devices* is not more prevalent. It is, naturally, a practice employed by many marketers (72%, behind only *basic segmentation*), but with only a 2% increase since 2018, a significant proportion of businesses are still missing out on its benefits.

Company respondents

Figure 3: Proportion of respondents saying these practices are part of their email marketing efforts



Respondents 2018: 324
Respondents 2019: 229

Voice of the expert

“It’s great to see that list cleansing has increased in usage dramatically from last year. It’s so important for good deliverability and, as there are a wealth of excellent tools out there to use, it’s a wise investment. Another one I’m chuffed to see has increased is content personalisation. The more personal we can make our emails, the more value the subscriber will see in them.”

Kath Pay, CEO & Founder, Holistic Email Marketing

This might be down to a perception that use of mobile-friendly templates provided by the ESP is sufficient, but being fully mobile-oriented extends beyond this into assimilating new user habits and preferences in terms of content consumption and purchasing of goods and services. Understanding these habits and preferences is becoming ever more important.

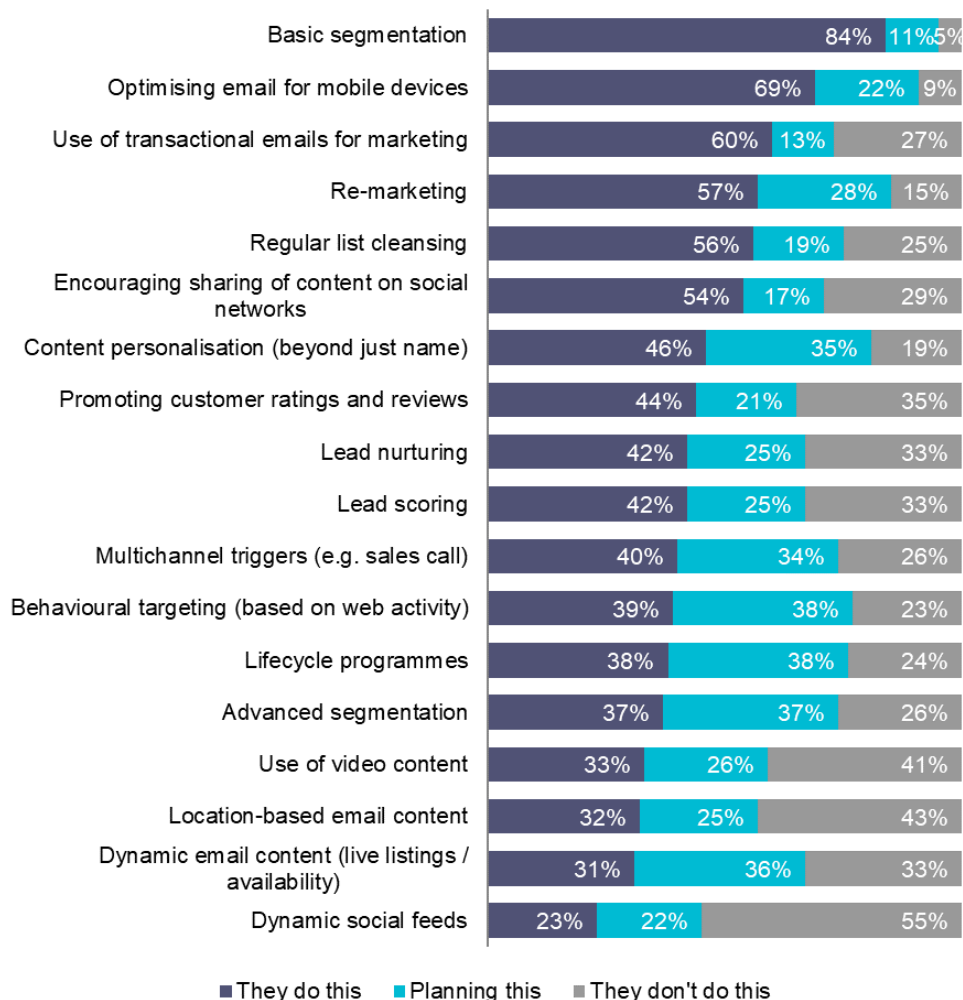
Nearly four in five (79%) UK adults now use a smartphone and more than half (54%) own tablets, according to media and telecoms regulator Ofcom³.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the supply-side perspective in terms of practices currently being employed by their clients. The picture is very much consistent with the client-side data, with basic segmentation and optimisation for mobile devices being the most widely used tactics.

Use of transactional emails for marketing has seen the biggest year-on-year jump, up from 43% in 2018 to 60% in 2019 (Figure 5). These messages are increasingly being utilised by companies to help meet commercial objectives, whether relating to building loyalty or increasing sales.

Agency respondents

Figure 4: Which of the following practices are part of your clients' email marketing efforts?

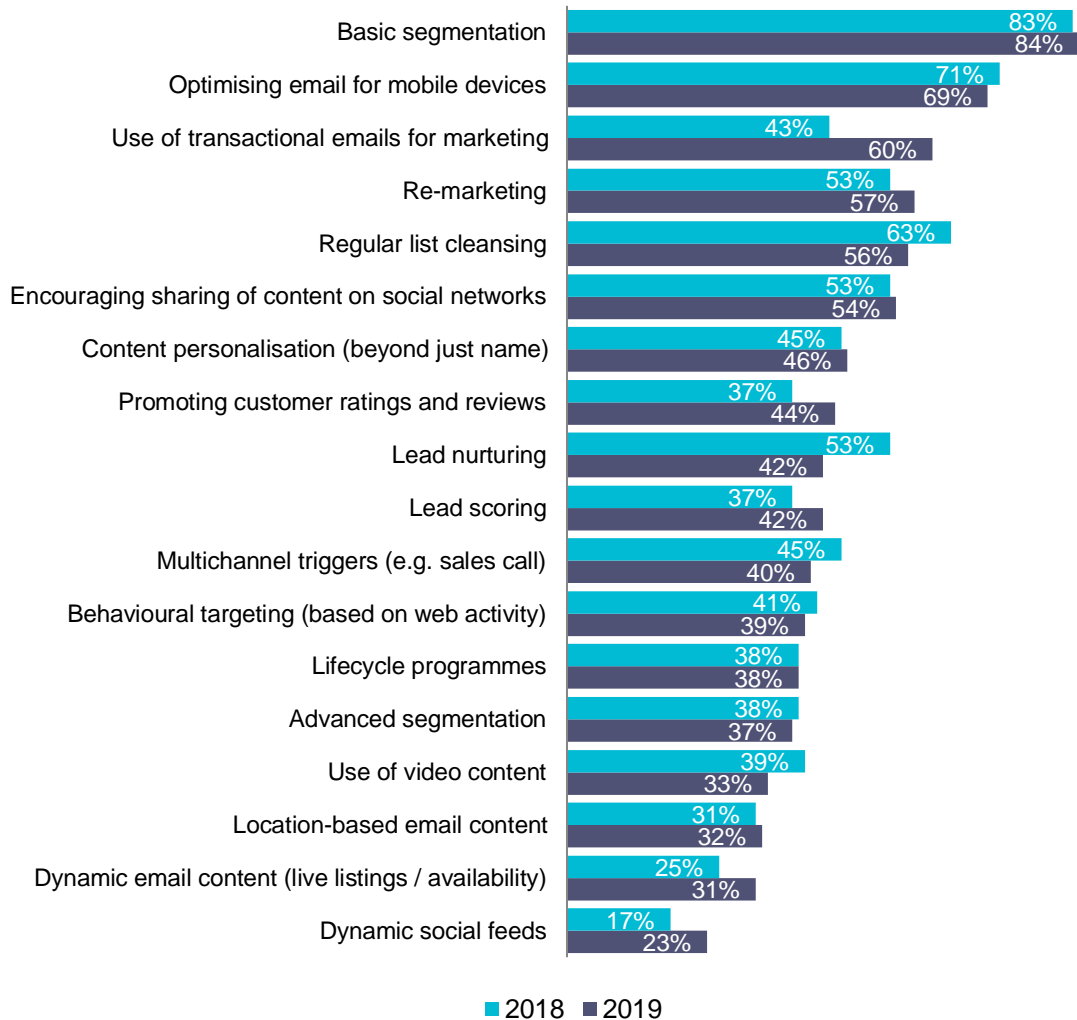


Respondents: 90

³ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/multi-sector-research/cmr/interactive-data>

Agency respondents

Figure 5: Proportion of agency respondents saying these practices are part of their clients' email marketing efforts



Respondents 2018: 129
Respondents 2019: 90

4.3 Measuring success

Email marketers continue to focus on open and click-through rates as the key metrics by which they judge the success of their activities (*Figure 6*). These are comparatively simple metrics that apply across the email space and are relatively straightforward to track and analyse, so it is not a surprise that around nine in ten company respondents are using them to measure their performance (although it's noteworthy there is still a considerable proportion of businesses *not* doing so).

Open and click-through rates also remain key for assessing the response to both marketing campaigns and operational emails such as communicating service updates or welcome messages.

Click-through rate measurement is stable as the most popular metric among client-side marketers, while open rate measurement has increased in prevalence over the past year, according to both company (*Figure 6*) and agency respondents (*Figure 7*).

A GDPR positive: list hygiene

Contrastingly, use of even more basic 'hygiene factors', such as bounce rate and delivery rate, has decreased, as highlighted by both companies and agencies, suggesting that some companies may be taking their eye off the ball when it comes to best practices around deliverability and sender reputation, areas that marketers ignore at their peril. As featured in *Figure 3*, two-thirds of companies now perform regular *list cleansing*, up from 55% in 2018 (a jump likely inspired by the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation).

Company respondents

Figure 6: What metrics do you use to measure the success of your email marketing activities?

Respondents 2018: 414

Respondents 2019: 276

Voice of the expert

"It's a little disheartening to see increased usage of the open rate as a success metric. It makes sense that it is measured and used as a benchmark, but not as a success metric, with decisions based upon it. For the majority of us, it's simply a top-of-funnel metric which can actually be manipulated quite easily e.g., stop sending to your inactives and you'll see the open rate increase, or send an email with a short, generic subject line and your opens will increase, as your subscribers will read into it what they want to – however, your conversions are likely to be reduced as you failed to meet their expectations.

"Your success metric needs to map back to the objective of the email. This is the key factor that many of us miss out... and because of this wrong focus, so many campaigns are optimised for the wrong metric. "Just because subscribers opened the email, it doesn't mean they will click and buy. To be optimising for this top-of-funnel metric, when your objective is downloads/event registrations/a sale etc., can be quite harmful to your revenue.

"Try the litmus test. Using six months of data, pull out your top ten campaigns based on opens, then do the same for the top ten campaigns based on clicks and the top ten campaigns based on conversions, however you define them. The results should be clear: you will see that they are not the same ten campaigns. By optimising for these top-of-funnel metrics, you could well be optimising for the wrong results."

Kath Pay, CEO & Founder, Holistic Email Marketing

Sales attribution: Where's the proof?

There is a mixed picture when it comes to the use of more commercial metrics that are harder to measure, especially when companies have not embraced integrated customer experience and marketing technology platforms that can make it easier to benchmark against more business-focused KPIs.

Conversion rate – crucial for monitoring email campaigns' impact on sales or other 'harder' objectives – remains popular, but has not seen an uplift in usage from the perspective of either client-side (66%, vs. 67% last year) or agency respondents (59%, down from 69%). This drop-off seems to go against the grain of email's positioning as an enabler for sales-marketing collaboration and integrated, data-led marketing. It also suggests a significant proportion of businesses are either not using email to drive sales or have an incomplete picture of ROI (likely a wasted opportunity, either way).

Perhaps more encouraging is the increased adoption of earnings per email as a metric, according to both client-side respondents (28%) and agency marketers (30%). Among agency clients, usage has jumped by more than half (up by 11% from 19%).

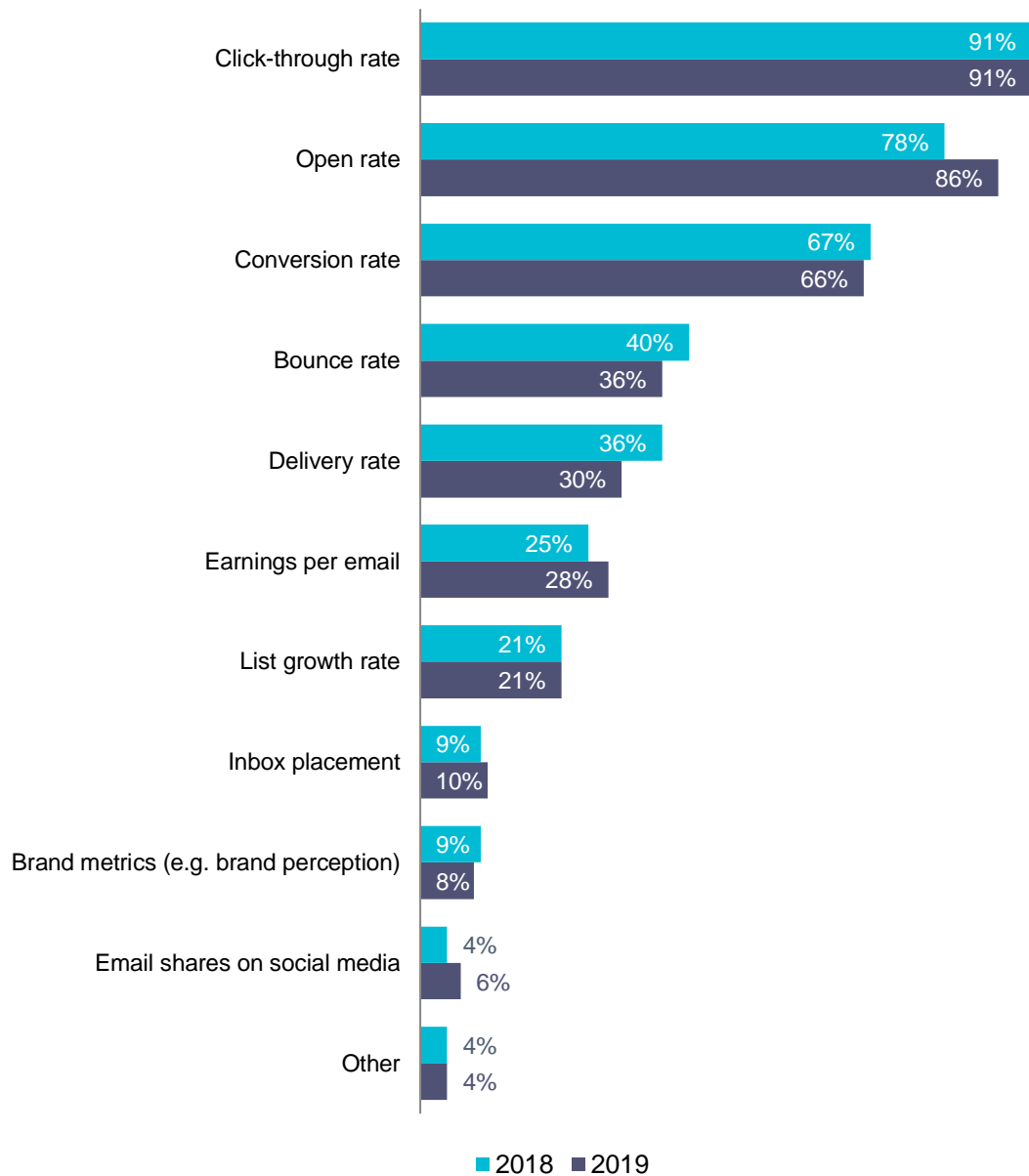
Voice of the expert

"There is a need to reflect the different goals of different email types when defining campaign performance measures. Success measures for email should be set differently for sales emails (conversion rate), marketing emails (click-through rate) and transactional/operational emails (open rate). Marketers should reflect this nuanced approach in their campaign evaluation."

Andrew Campbell, Martech Director, Customer Experience Division, The Home Agency

Agency respondents

Figure 7: What metrics do your clients typically use to measure the success of their email marketing activities?



Respondents 2018: 182
Respondents 2019: 111

5. Email effectiveness and budgets

5.1 Email campaign performance

Email still in rude health

Although often underrated, email remains in a healthy state with regard to meeting marketers' expectations. *Figure 8* shows a decent level of progress over the past year, with most companies (51%) now rating email campaign performance as 'good', up from 44% in 2018.

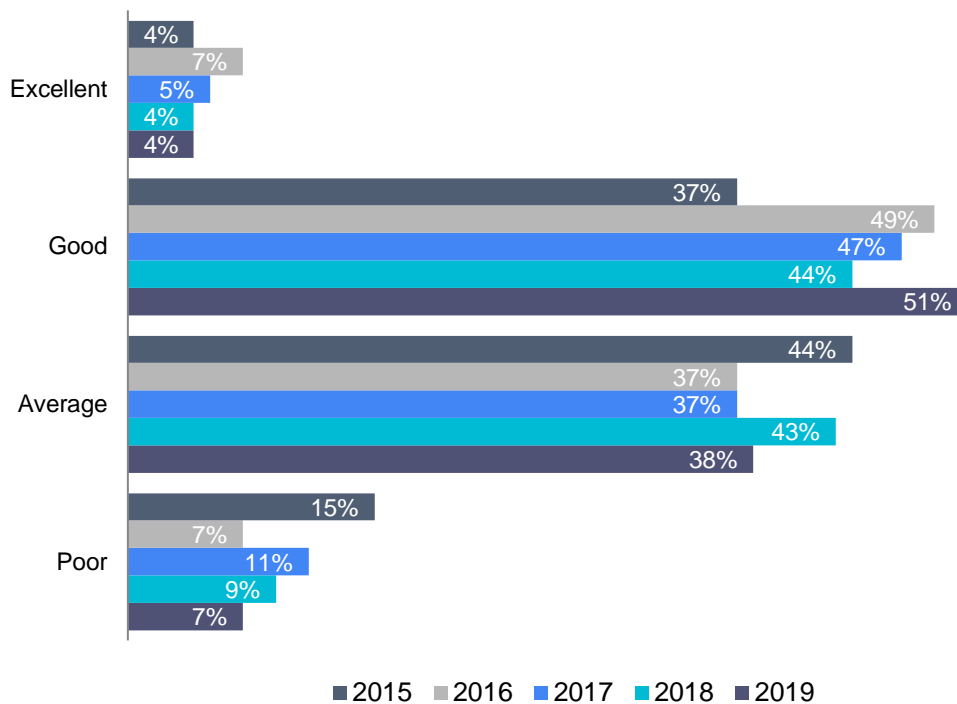
There are caveats, however. Email marketing appears to remain stuck in a bit of a 'satisficing' rut, with very few respondents seeing it as performing 'excellently' (4%), and a significant proportion deeming results 'average' (38%). As discussed in *Section 4.3*, there are questions over the depth with which marketers are actually tracking outcomes from their email activities, especially with regard to linking operational metrics to commercial objectives. This appears to be a growing issue, as competition for budget increases.

A positive take on this is that, in spite of its maturity, email marketing still has a decent amount of room to grow its perceived commercial contribution. Looking across *Figure 8* and *Figure 9*, client-side marketers are much more likely to view ROI from email as 'excellent' than rate its overall performance as 'excellent'. This gives the impression that many practitioners underrate email; too many companies view it as a cost-effective and reliable (but perhaps staid) medium, rather than a highly strategic vehicle to meet customer experience and engagement objectives.

This misconception may disappear as email campaigns become increasingly data-driven and personalised, and more embedded within broader customer experience technology platforms. Greater sophistication in how organisations measure results should also do more to demonstrate email marketing's worth and add more sparkle to how marketers view the channel.

Company respondents

Figure 8: How do you rate the performance of your company's email campaigns?



Respondents 2019: 277 | 2018: 424 | 2017: 727
2016: 665 | 2015: 600

5.2 Ranking of channels for return on investment

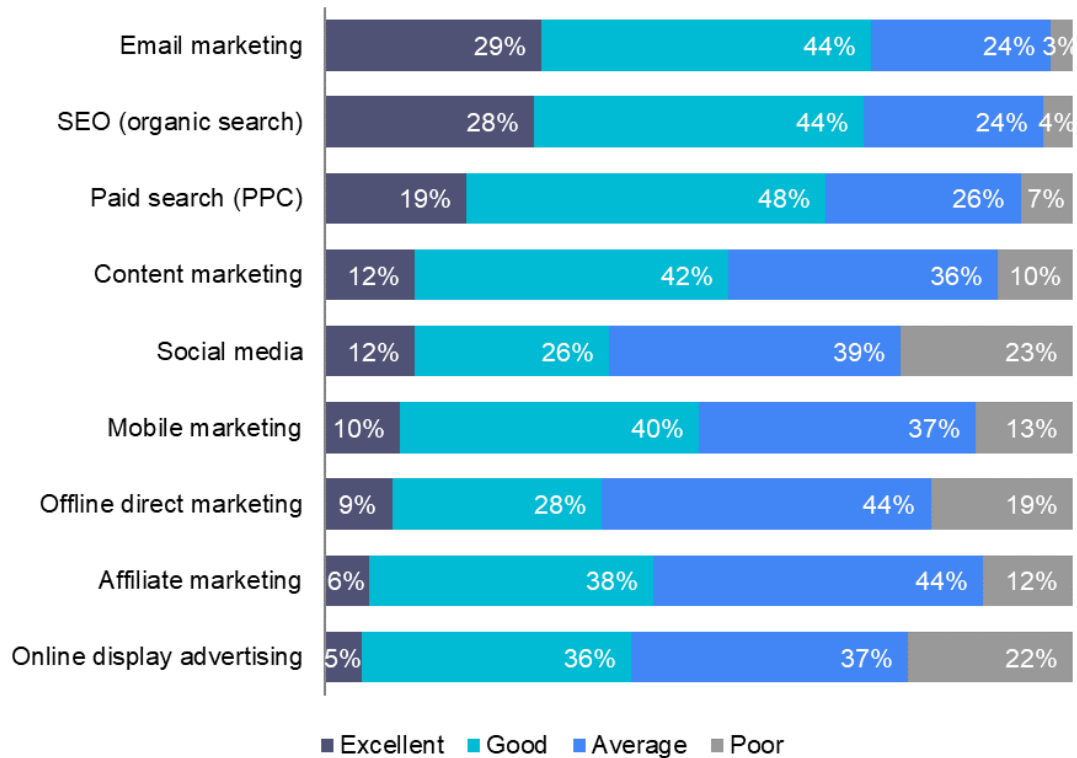
As noted above, email marketing maintains a strong reputation for ROI performance. By offering low costs of entry, scalability and a direct, 'one-to-one' link with customers, it continues to be seen as an efficient and effective medium. Collectively, nearly three-quarters (73%) of company respondents describe ROI from email as 'excellent' (29%) or 'good' (44%) – essentially on a par with the 2018 census.

Email continues to outperform other channels

Further, email continues to compare very favourably with other marketing channels and disciplines. *Search engine optimisation* (SEO) – its traditional main ROI rival – is snapping at email's heels (at 28% and 44%, respectively) after an uptick in perceived performance since last year (see *Figure 10*). However, ROI ratings drop away steadily after email and SEO, with respondents far less likely to report returns from *mobile marketing*, *offline direct marketing*, *affiliate marketing* or *online display advertising* as excellent.

Company respondents

Figure 9: How do you rate the following channels or disciplines in terms of return on investment?



Respondents: 260

Voice of the expert

“Email still offers a high level of return on investment thanks to its relatively low barriers to entry and its proven ability to engage customers. In fact, in January 2019, marketers reported a further increase on the levels of ROI from email, which now stands at over £42 for every pound spent – a rise of almost £10 since the previous Marketer Email Tracker⁴.”

Tim Bond, Head of Insight, Data & Marketing Association

“Each year, email’s budget is the smallest when compared to other digital channels, yet consistently achieves the highest ROI. Email marketing’s ROI is £10 higher after GDPR came into force. Email continues to generate results, and that’s with an increasingly smaller proportion of the overall marketing budget, as highlighted in the results of this research. Imagine the results if more budget was allocated to email!”

Jenna Tiffany, Founder & Strategy Director, Let’sTalk Strategy

⁴ <https://dma.org.uk/research/consumer-email-tracker-2019>

Voice of the expert

“Great to see that email marketing retains its place yet again at the top of the ROI by channel list. We shouldn’t allow ourselves to get complacent though. There are always ways to increase the effectiveness of any email marketing activity – whether they’re solus campaigns or email automations. Running an email audit is a great place to start; I guarantee there will be opportunities you haven’t considered yet.”

Natalie Rockall, Email Consultant, Eleven11 Digital

“I believe this is the 12th year in which email marketing and SEO are in first and second places and boy is it close this year! As I’ve often said, if we could only measure the true attribution of email, I believe it would tell a different story.”

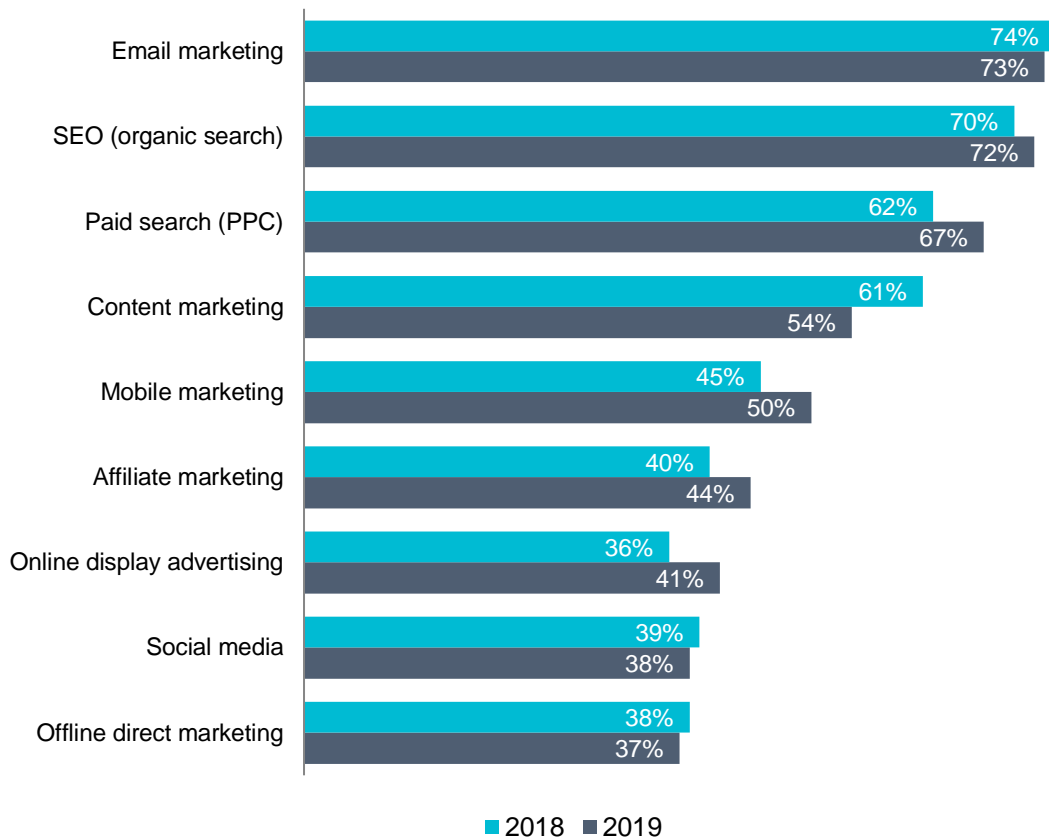
Kath Pay, CEO & Founder, Holistic Email Marketing

“Email retains its top position as the channel driving the most ROI. From a B2B perspective, content marketing dropped by 10%, suggesting B2B marketers are increasingly seeing the increasing amount of content being created not equating to historic returns. In B2B, content marketing and email marketing work hand in hand to nurture prospects. With the rise of account-based marketing, greater personalisation and optimisation of content will result in more rather than less content being created. Email remains the primary delivery method for that content during the nurture phase.”

Riaz Kanani, CEO, Radiate B2B

Company respondents – change since 2018

Figure 10: Proportion of company respondents rating channels or disciplines as 'excellent' or 'good' for ROI



Respondents 2018: 402
Respondents 2019: 260

Excellent ROI from email not a given

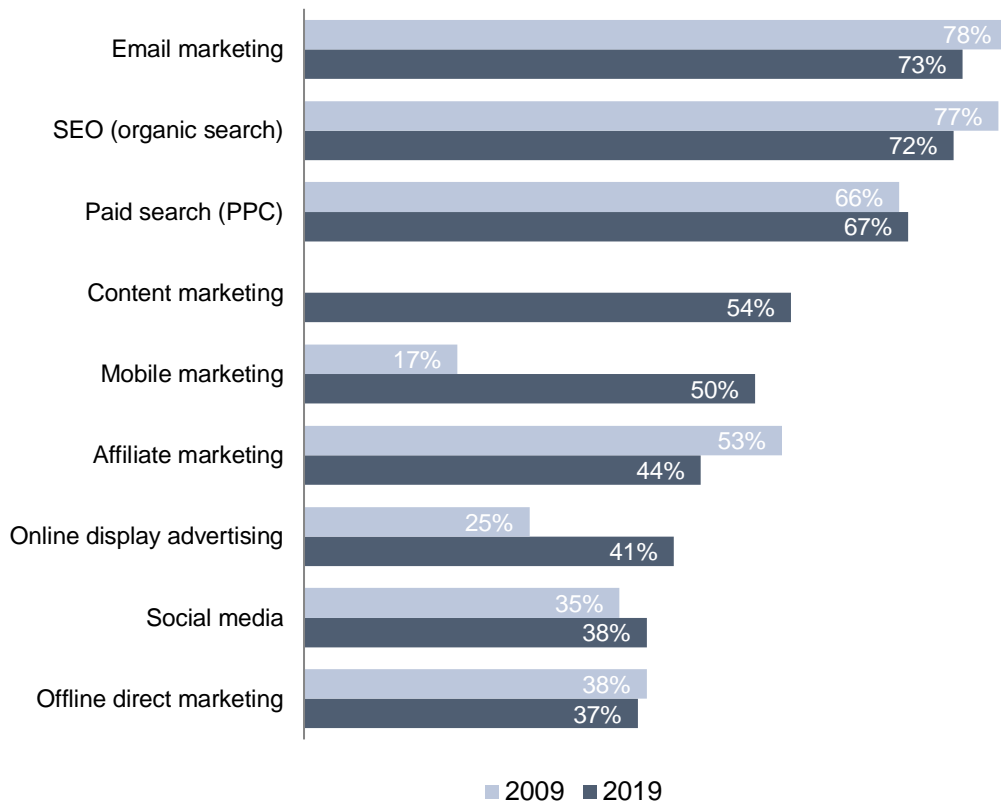
While email marketing ROI continues to stand up well against other channels and disciplines, the industry must continue to invest in ways to drive and measure clear commercial outcomes. A solid performance today might be seen as substandard tomorrow, and the constantly changing state of digital business and consumer behaviour means other types of engagement are always coming to the fore.

While email has a large base of strong proponents – those describing ROI as 'excellent' or 'good' – and one that outnumbers those in other categories, it is notable that this segment has slightly diminished in size over the past decade (*Figure 11*). In 2009, 78% of census respondents rated ROI from email as 'excellent' or 'good', five percentage points higher than now.

While the responses show there is no current issue with email ROI, vendors, agencies and other players in established disciplines like email marketing and SEO need to continually evolve, to stay relevant and maintain their share of spend.

Company respondents – change since 2009

Figure 11: Proportion of company respondents rating channels or disciplines as 'excellent' or 'good' for ROI



Respondents 2009: 368
Respondents 2019: 260

Note: 'Content marketing' wasn't an option in 2009.

Email's competition increasing

Accentuating the need for email marketing to retain impetus is the flexibility with which marketers can switch to 'rival' channels. Recent years have seen some of these expand their support base, as companies have worked to improve accountability and visibility (such as in online display advertising) or user behaviour has shifted (such as mobile marketing).

Proponents of mobile marketing as an 'excellent' or 'good' ROI channel have nearly trebled over the past ten years (from 17% to 50%), another reminder of the importance of mobile-led thinking for email marketing. The proportion of those with the same view of display advertising has also increased significantly (from 25% to 41%). It grew by five percentage points in the last year alone (*Figure 10*) – a vote of confidence, perhaps, for the increased focus on transparency in digital advertising, following various public alarms.

The threat of staleness and displacement is demonstrated by diminishing excitement about *affiliate marketing* (down nine points since 2009) and *content marketing* (down seven points since 2018). *Social media* (up only three points over the past decade, and down one since 2018), has stuttered somewhat, reflecting increases in competition (and costs) to reach audiences on those platforms.

5.3

Proportion of marketing budget spent on email marketing

Email's perception problem

While email continues to be seen as very strong on delivery, it has something of an ongoing perception problem when it comes to getting front of mind for marketers and attracting its share of budget. The ROI data suggests email should be the first name on the team list, but demonstrating that to the coach is hard, given its place in the sales mix. It is not always the player highlighted as scoring the goal or providing the assist, but still plays a crucial role in the build-up.

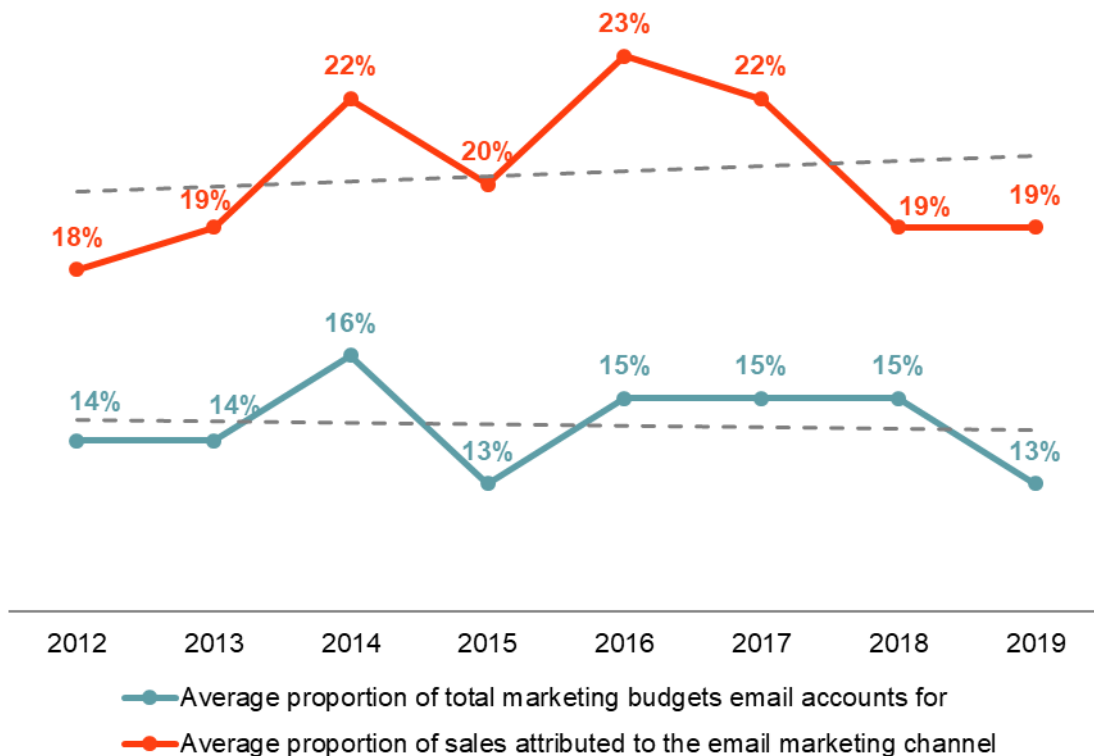
Figure 12 illustrates this point, showing a gaping divide between the proportion of sales that email is perceived to generate and the slice of marketing budget that proponents are able to attract. This shortfall grew to 6% in 2019, with email attracting only 13% of marketing spend – the joint-lowest figure seen across the eight years featured.

“Marketers should be taking to the streets, cheering for a channel with this kind of revenue generation to budget ratio,” says Email Vendor Selection’s van Rijn. *“This is exactly what you’d like to see for every channel if given the choice,”* he adds.

Van Rijn says email marketing’s ROI strength indicates brands should be spending more on the channel, but blames the conservative nature of how many businesses consider cost variability. *“The tragedy of a marketing channel that converts so well [is that budget is] still seen as cost instead of investment,”* he said. *“If I gave you £42 for each pound invested (the reported average ROI from email), would you take that deal? All day, every day.”*

Company trends: 2012-2019

Figure 12: Average proportion of total marketing budgets email accounts for vs. average proportion of sales attributed to the email marketing channel



Voice of the expert

“I love this finding. As it can be clearly seen, email marketing is the channel that just keeps on giving. The correlation between sales and budget is astounding, and I’m yet to work with a brand which has invested time, resources and budget in email that doesn’t reap the rewards. What is the tipping point? I’m not sure that any company I know has reached it yet. Because email delivers such high ROI, they literally can’t believe it can be improved and as such do not invest more budget – as we’re seeing with the reduced budget in 2019 highlighted by both companies and agencies.”

Kath Pay, CEO & Founder, Holistic Email Marketing

“Email marketers aren’t making the most of the channel yet – often, as we see from this research, because a lack of budget and resources is holding them back. A high ROI is a tell-tale sign you could be doing more. The work for creating and setting up email campaigns is the same, no matter if you send that email to 100, 1,000, 100,000 or 100 million people. Email is scalable and the variable cost is extremely low. So the ROI should skyrocket once you get to a certain scale. But a high ROI actually means that you are not using the channel to its full potential – there is more in the jar.”

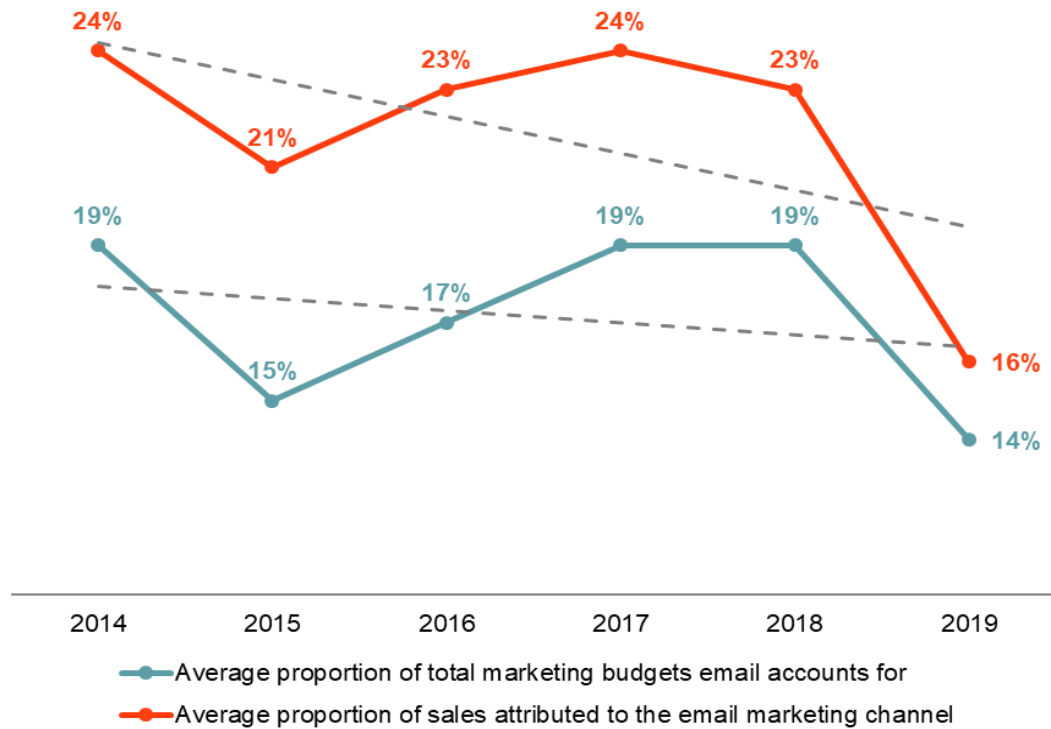
Jordie van Rijn, Founder, Email Vendor Selection and eMailMonday

Demonstrating value

Looking at agency data (*Figure 13*), a further concern for email marketers is that in the last year, the channel’s contribution to sales has taken a dip. The average proportion of sales pegged to email marketing has dropped 7%, to 16%, since 2018 (among company respondents, things are steady at 19%, however).

Agency trends: 2014-2018

Figure 13: Average proportion of total marketing budgets email accounts for vs. average proportion of sales attributed to the email marketing channel



While agencies continue to report that email punches above its weight, in terms of the results-to-spend ratio, its level of perceived 'over-achievement' has narrowed for each of the past three years, and stood at just two percentage points in 2019.

Viewed in light of marketers' confidence in email's performance versus other channels, it is clear that this 'slowdown' does not result from an actual slide in results from email marketing.

Instead, it again suggests email is working against the tide, somewhat, in terms of proving its value. As a channel that often influences sales, rather than directly drives them, discerning how large a role an email has played in a particular purchase is highly complex. But with budget on the line, it is clearly becoming more and more important that email marketers tighten up in terms of attribution model selection and ensure clear linkage between their email activities and commercial results.

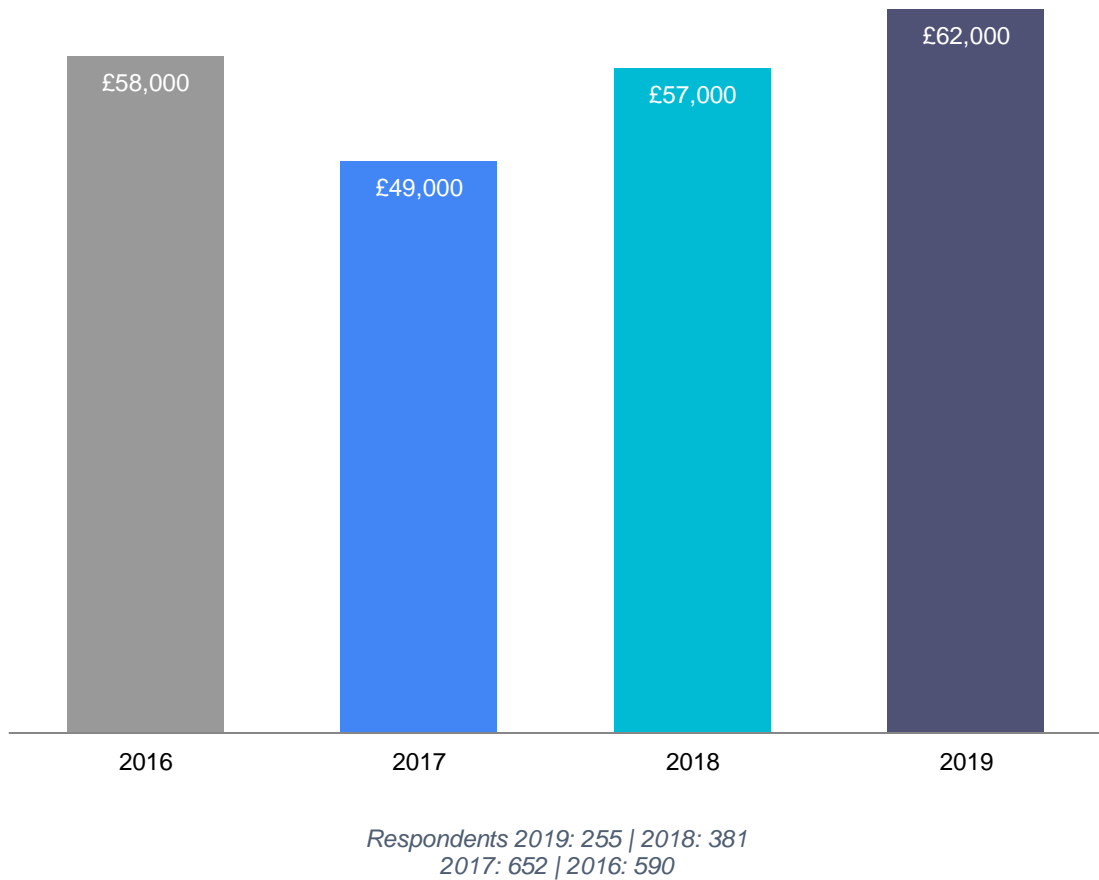
This area of weakness was highlighted in *Section 4.3*, showing a dip in the proportion of email marketers tracking conversion rates and an ongoing low level of usage of earnings per email as a metric.

5.4 Annual spend on email marketing

Contrasting client-side and agency perspectives on email spending trends

The ramifications of email's evident attribution problems and undervaluation are reflected in *Figure 14* and *Figure 15*. Among company respondents, average annual spend on email marketing is increasing, but among agency clients, it has taken a sharp turn downwards over the last two years.

Company respondents
Figure 14: Average annual spend on email marketing



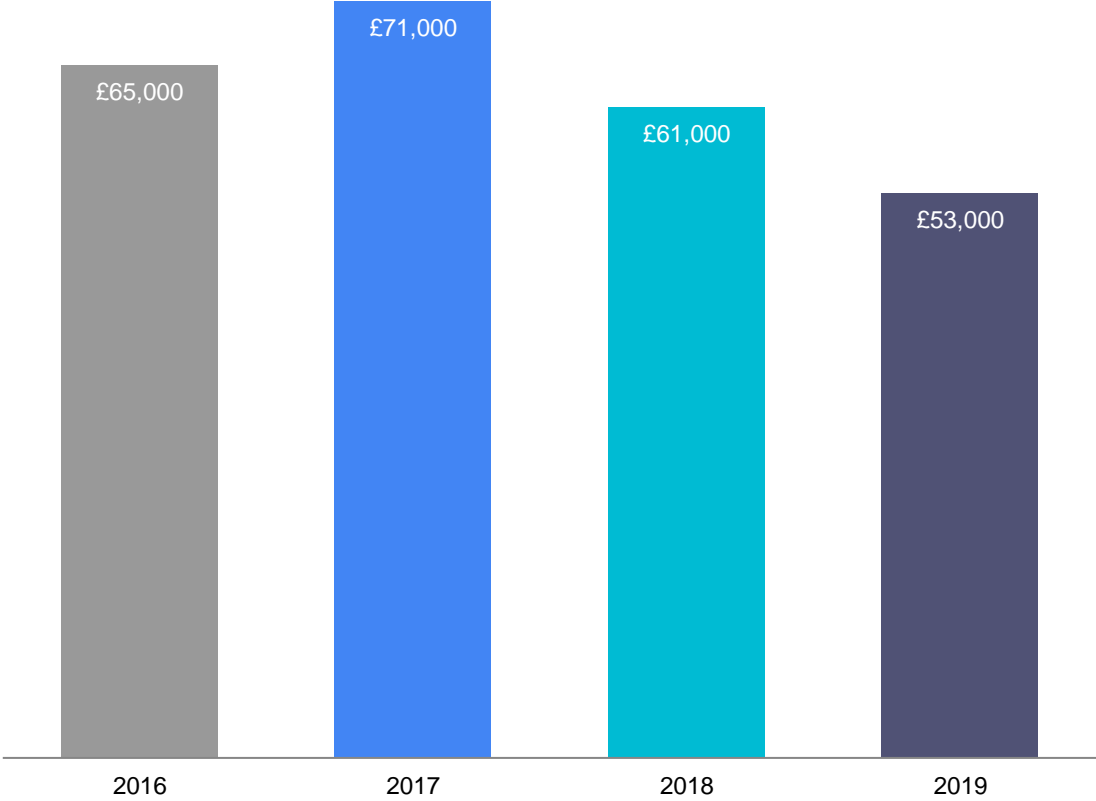
Voice of the expert

““Marketers need to understand the factors driving increased email budgets: setup, data management, content origination/management, QA/QC and analytics. As technology matures, productivity and efficiency should improve, thereby reducing the first four, delivery-oriented cost lines. This should enable more time and effort (and budget) to be focused on value-adding analytics.”

Andrew Campbell, Martech Director, Customer Experience Division, The Home Agency

Agency respondents

Figure 15: Clients' typical average annual spend on email marketing



Respondents 2019: 102 | 2018: 149
2017: 275 | 2016

6. Place in the Organisation

6.1 Responsibility for email marketing

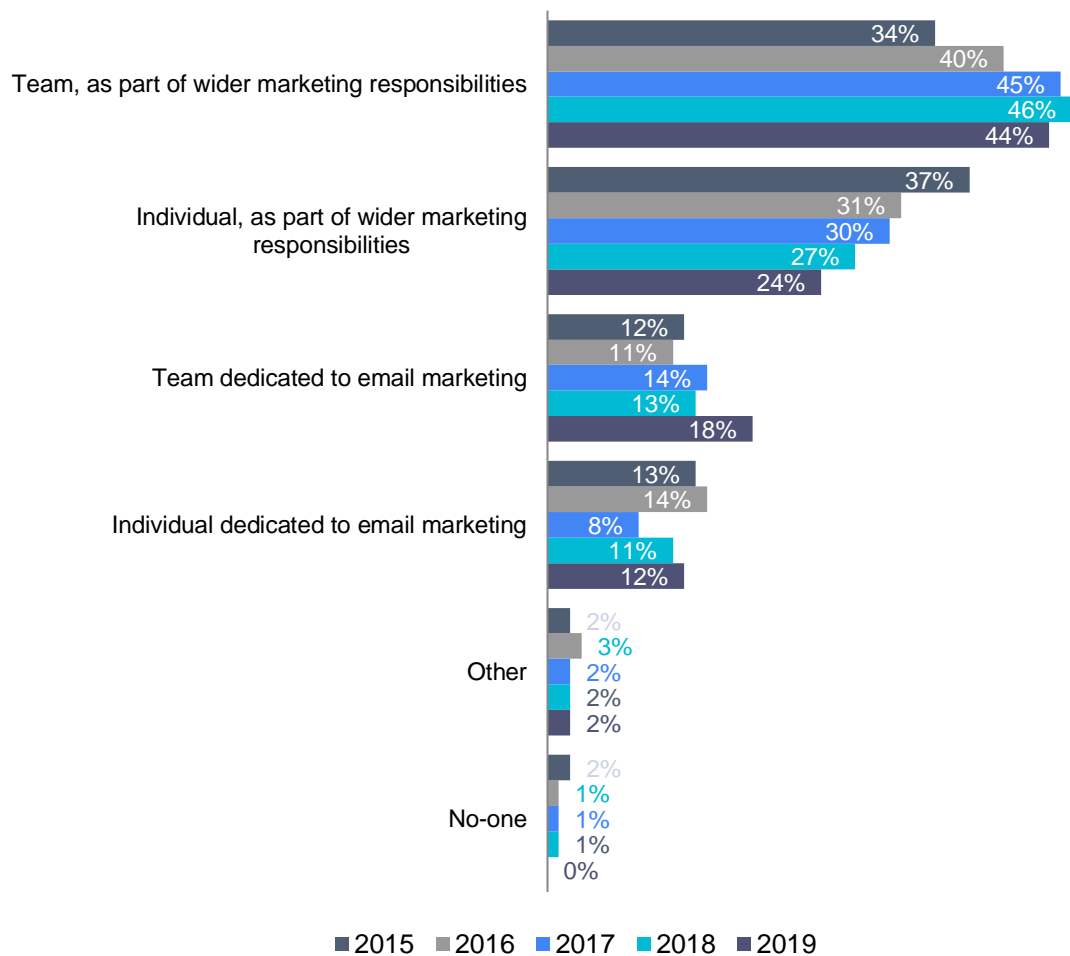
Figure 16 shows the different approaches businesses take when organising themselves to perform email marketing, and that despite shifts over time, there is still no definitive answer about the best way to manage the channel.

One trend witnessed over the last few years has been the growth in the number of businesses that opt to assign email marketing responsibilities across a team, rather than one individual. This, as noted previously, is likely a response to the increased complexity of email marketing as a practice, with success in campaigns requiring companies to exploit a mix of skills across multiple disciplines, such as creative and data. The days of one-size-fits-all, broadcast communications have long gone.

This theme has continued into the present day, with well over half of client-side respondents (62%) now running email marketing on a team basis. This is up from just 46% back in 2015. Only 12% of companies continue to operate email marketing through a single, dedicated individual.

Company respondents

Figure 16: Who is responsible for email marketing within your organisation?



Respondents 2019: 256 | 2018: 389
2017: 664 | 2016: 589 | 2015: 451

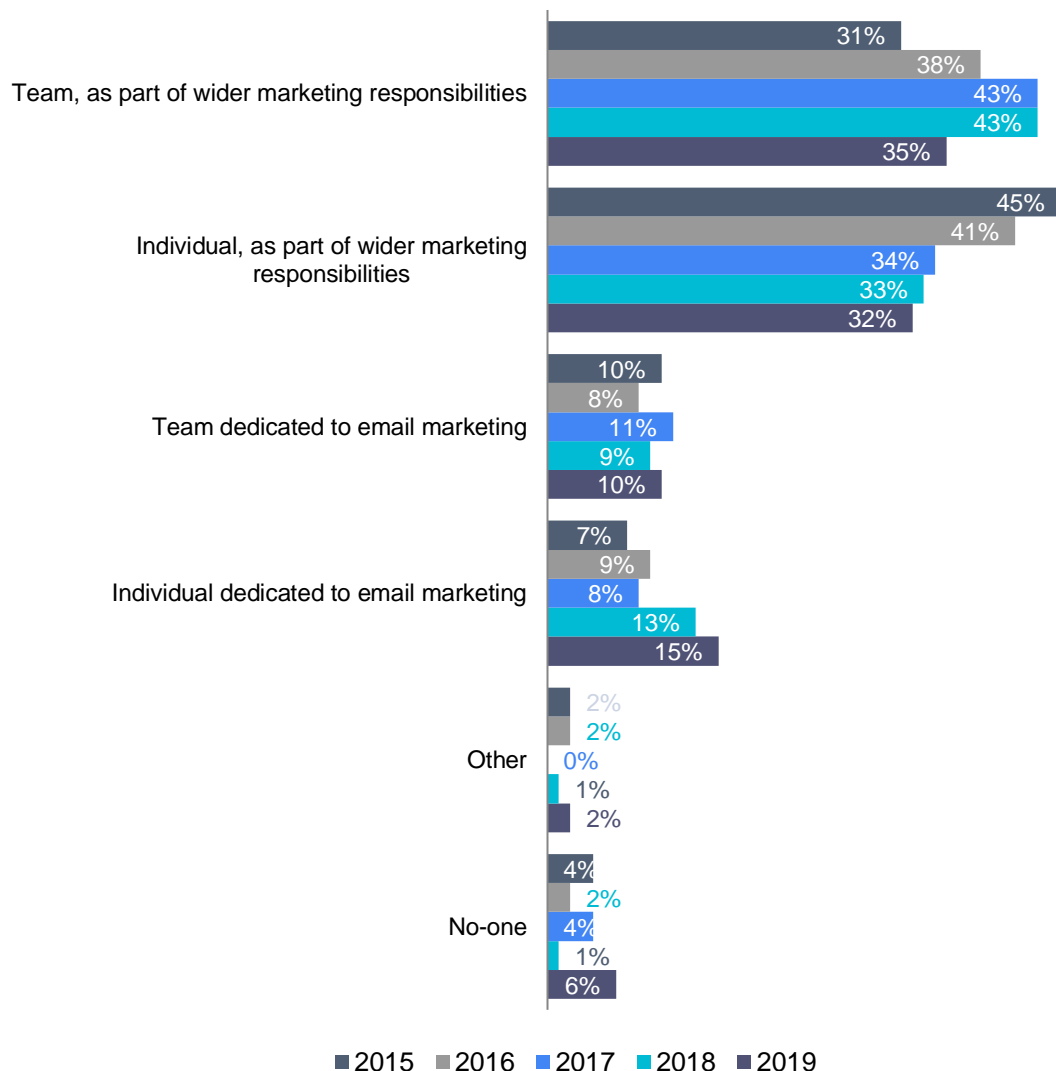
Generalisation versus specialisation: a subtle shift

Where the picture has altered slightly in the last year is that more companies look to have set up teams dedicated to email marketing, rather than melding email tasks with wider marketing responsibilities. The latter remains the most popular way of doing things, with 44% operating in this way. However, 18% of companies now have dedicated email teams in place, up from 13% in 2018.

There seems to be a groundswell of businesses that see email as a distinct practice that requires its own skills and capabilities (but remains, by necessity, closely aligned with other marketing functions). These businesses evidently do not hold fears that they will lose out on efficiencies and synergies that arise from running fully integrated, cross-channel marketing teams, and see specialisation gains as more significant.

Agency respondents

Figure 17: Who is typically responsible for email marketing within your clients' organisations?



Respondents 2019: 101 | 2018: 153 |
2017: 280 | 2016: 276 | 2015: 246

A similar shift towards specialisation is also perceptible from the agency perspective (*Figure 17*), although the trend seems to be more towards having an individual dedicated to email marketing, rather than a team. The proportion of agency respondents who say their clients operate email through one specialised individual has more than doubled over the last five years, to 15%. This might be tied to automation and efficiency progress.

It is striking that the last year saw a rise in the proportion of agency respondents saying that ‘*no-one*’ has responsibility for email marketing in their clients’ organisations. This is the case for 6% of agency clients, up from 1% in 2018.

Voice of the expert

“There are so many strategic approaches for where the responsibility of email marketing can sit in an organisation. However, it’s interesting to see the biggest jump this year comes from organisations reporting the responsibility sits across a team dedicated to email marketing. Could this be due to the varying skills needed across email marketing? From data to technology, to copy and coding it can be hard to find a blend of the required skills in just one individual.”

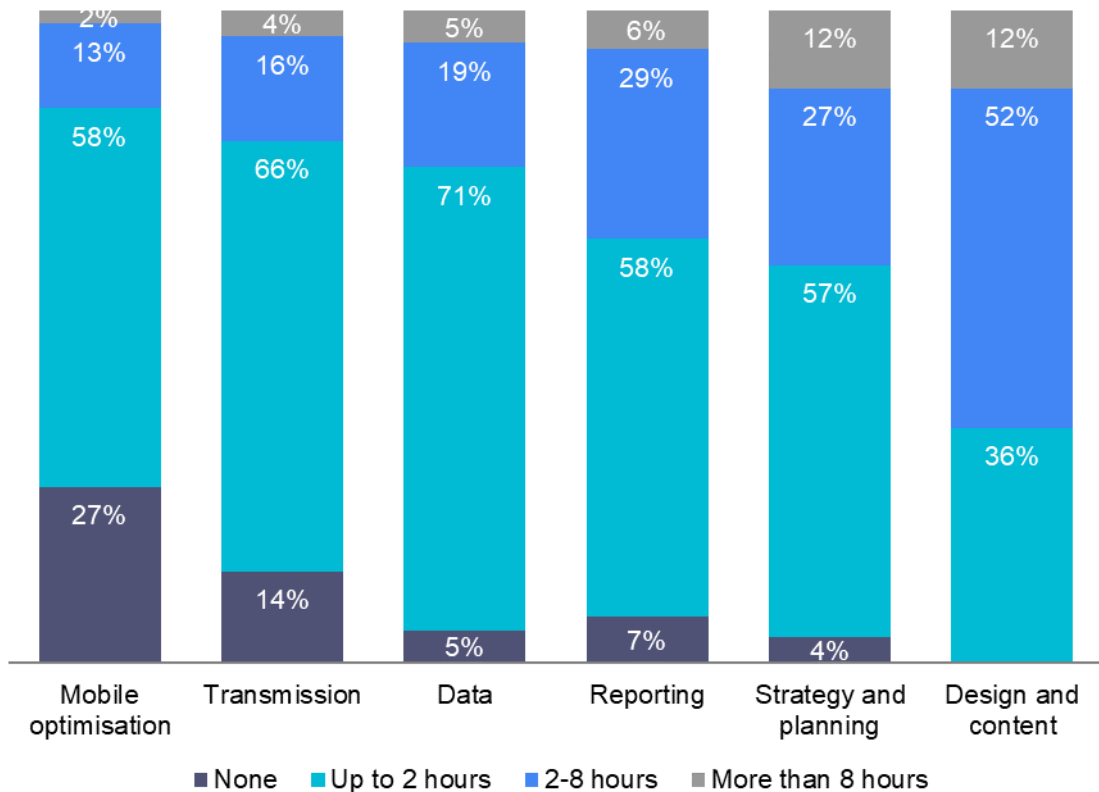
— Natalie Rockall, Email Consultant, Eleven11 Digital

6.2 Time spent on email activities

Figure 18 and *Figure 19* show how email campaigns have evolved over time, now seeking to provide a personalised experience for customers, rather than just convey information and sell products.

Company respondents

Figure 18: For a typical campaign, how many hours are spent internally on the following email-related activities?



Respondents: 249

Growing customer expectations require marketers to raise their game

Customer expectations have risen, as digital media has become more sophisticated, and the aesthetic elements of messages are now of crucial importance. As a result, nearly two-thirds (64%) of brands say they spend two hours or more on *design and content* for a typical campaign. No responding company spends zero time on this.

As noted previously, nearly four in ten (38%) brands now implement *video content* in their emails and a quarter stress *design tools/support* as important elements of their email platforms (Section 4).

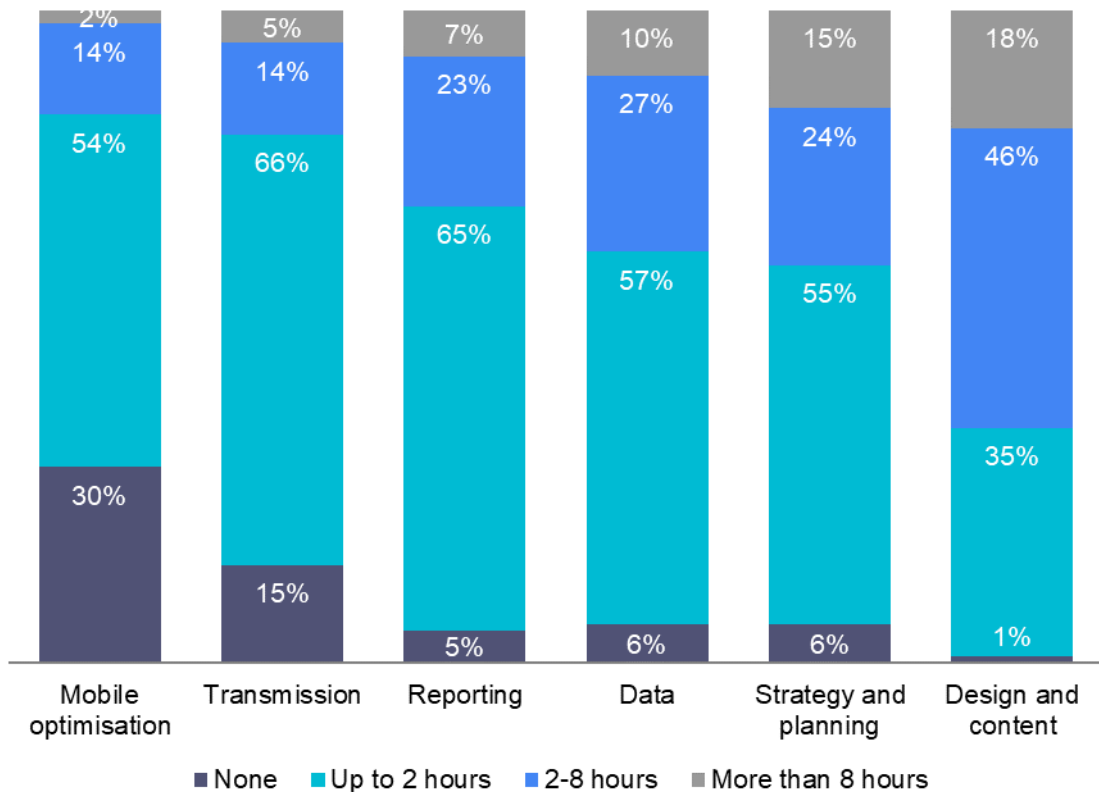
As email marketing has become more complex and more closely integrated with other marketing disciplines, the onus has increased on brands to devote greater resource to preparation of campaigns.

This appears to be an area where businesses could be doing more to improve performance. Nearly four in ten client-side respondents say they spend two hours or more on *strategy and planning* for typical campaigns. There has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents saying they are investing as much as eight hours-plus to *strategy and planning* (12% versus 15% in 2018).

It is clear there remains ample room for many email practitioners to improve effectiveness and efficiency by understanding their customers better and engaging more closely with them. Almost three-quarters (71%) are spending up to two hours on *data* for standard campaigns.

Company respondents – 2018 results for comparison

Figure 19: For a typical campaign, how many hours are spent internally on the following email-related activities?



Respondents: 362

Voice of the expert

“As email evolves as a channel, it’s vital that marketers place greater emphasis on design and content to deliver enhanced email experiences. This goes beyond graphic design/layout aspects of the email and should embrace use of personalisation, video, dynamic content and user interaction.

“Email experiences should no longer be passive consumption of images and text, but should be viewed (and designed) as a digital experience. This is mirroring the evolution of websites from one-size-fits-all brochures to web journeys that serve the needs of key personas at different stages of their purchase journey. Get your UI/UX teams involved in email design and they will transform your email programmes.”

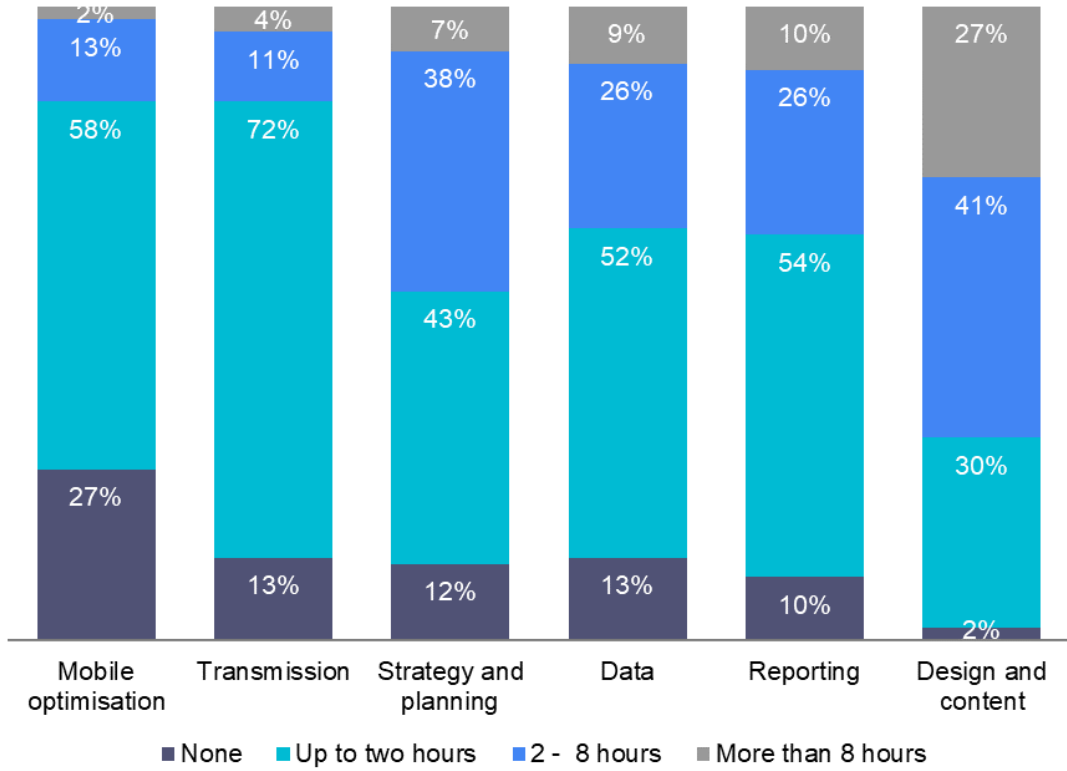
Andrew Campbell, Martech Director, Customer Experience Division, The Home Agency

Some companies appear to have bottlenecks that are holding them back when it comes to progressing campaigns through strategic planning, design and insight. Some brands, for example, seem to be struggling to make significant time savings on more basic tasks, such as *transmission*. 20% of brands are still spending two hours or more on transmission, in a typical campaign, up from 19% in 2018.

Agencies perceive companies to be spending less time on transmission of emails (Figure 20). Only 15% of supply-side respondents say their clients are spending two hours or more on transmission-related tasks. Agency clients devote more resource to *design and content*, with 68% backing standard campaigns with two or more hours of work in this area.

Agency respondents

Figure 20: For a typical campaign, how many hours do your clients spend on the following email-related activities?



Respondents 96

7. Optimising for Different Devices

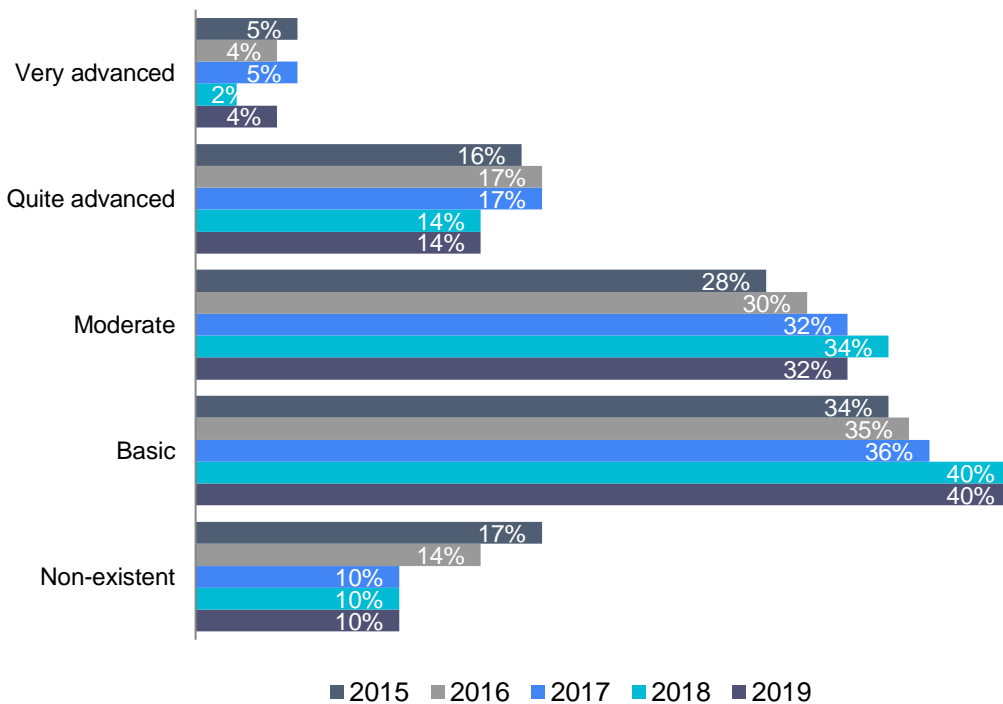
7.1 Strategy for optimising email for different devices

In the age of mobile, marketers need to understand that consumers no longer interact with a single device. It is vital for marketing communications to be device-agnostic. Without optimisation in place, marketers risk losing out on valuable interactions and conversions. By focusing primarily on desktop users, marketers may be sacrificing key conversions that tangibly impact on revenue and the bottom line.

Figure 21 disappointingly shows that there has been very little improvement in the level of optimisation for different devices. As was the case last year, 40% of companies describe their strategy for optimising email on different devices as *basic*, with a further 10% describing it as *non-existent*. At the other end of the scale, just under a fifth of companies (18%) say their strategy for optimising email on different devices is *very* (4%) or *quite advanced* (14%), up fractionally from 16% in 2018 but down from 22% in 2017.

Company respondents

Figure 21: How would you describe the extent to which your company has a strategy for optimising email marketing for different devices?



Respondents 2019: 248 | 2018: 361
2017: 635 | 2016: 556 | 2015: 464

Note: In 2015 and 2016, this question was phrased as follows: 'How would you describe the extent to which your company has a strategy for optimising email marketing for mobile devices?'

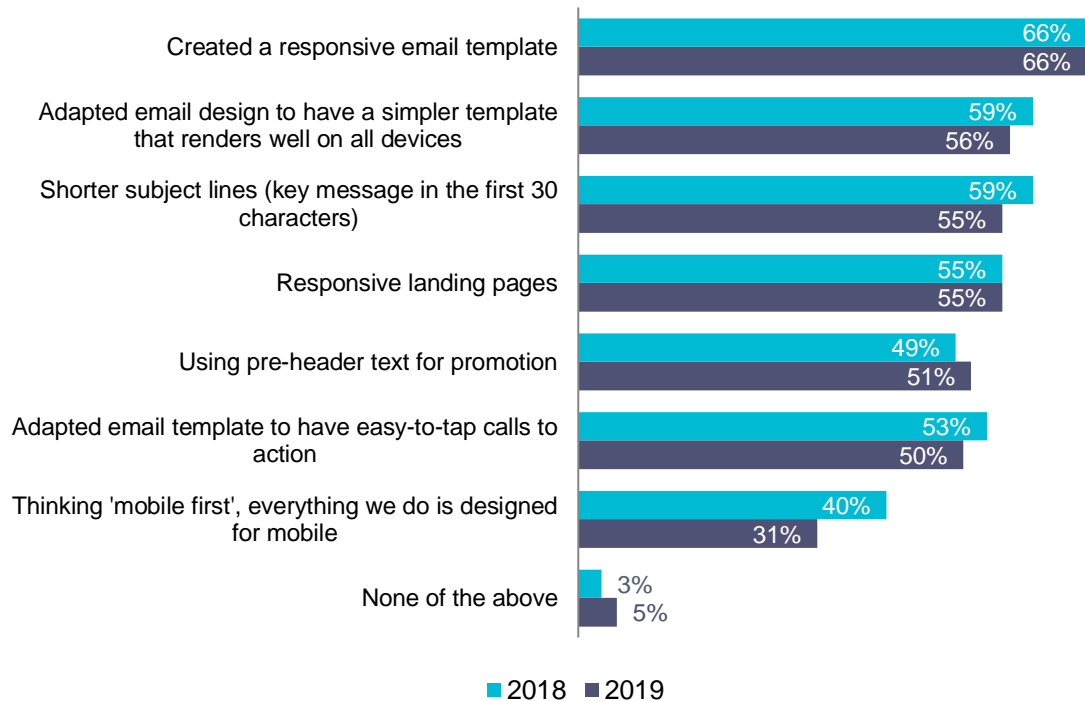
The results show that mobile optimisation is not yet on the list of priorities for marketers, even though research indicates that if companies are not optimising email marketing for mobile devices, they could be losing out on significant opportunities.

7.2 Tactics used for device optimisation

The chart below shows the tactics employed by companies to optimise their email marketing campaigns for different devices, with most respondents combining a range of different tactics.

Company respondents

Figure 22: What have you done to optimise email marketing for different devices?



Respondents 2018: 346
Respondents 2019: 240

Note: Respondents could select all the options that applied.

Responsive email design as a means of optimisation

The most noteworthy change since 2018 is the drop in the number of companies who are committed to a 'mobile first' approach (from 40% to 31%). For many companies the bias towards mobile was a reaction to the enormous impact of the smartphone on our lives, as marketers sought to move away from a desktop-centric approach to digital marketing. The change since last year reflects growing recognition that companies need to adopt a device-agnostic approach as part of an omnichannel strategy, ensuring that they cater for customers appropriately, depending on the context of an interaction and their needs at a specific moment in time.

Two-thirds of marketers (66%) say they have created a responsive email template that works across different devices, the same proportion as last year. The vast majority of email marketing platforms now make use of responsive design, allowing companies to choose from a variety of templates which are then automatically optimised for mobile, tablet and desktop.

Over half of companies (56%) have adapted the design of their emails so that the template renders well on all devices, 3% since last year. For example, given that mobile devices typically load images and visual elements slower than the desktop, marketers must be mindful of the size of images. Testing is crucial for a successful strategy; marketers must test to ensure that their emails do not end up in the spam folder.

Coding with responsive design ensures emails render well on all devices. For companies with staff who are not well versed in HTML, there is now a wealth of email marketing platforms and tools that allow marketers to automate the process.

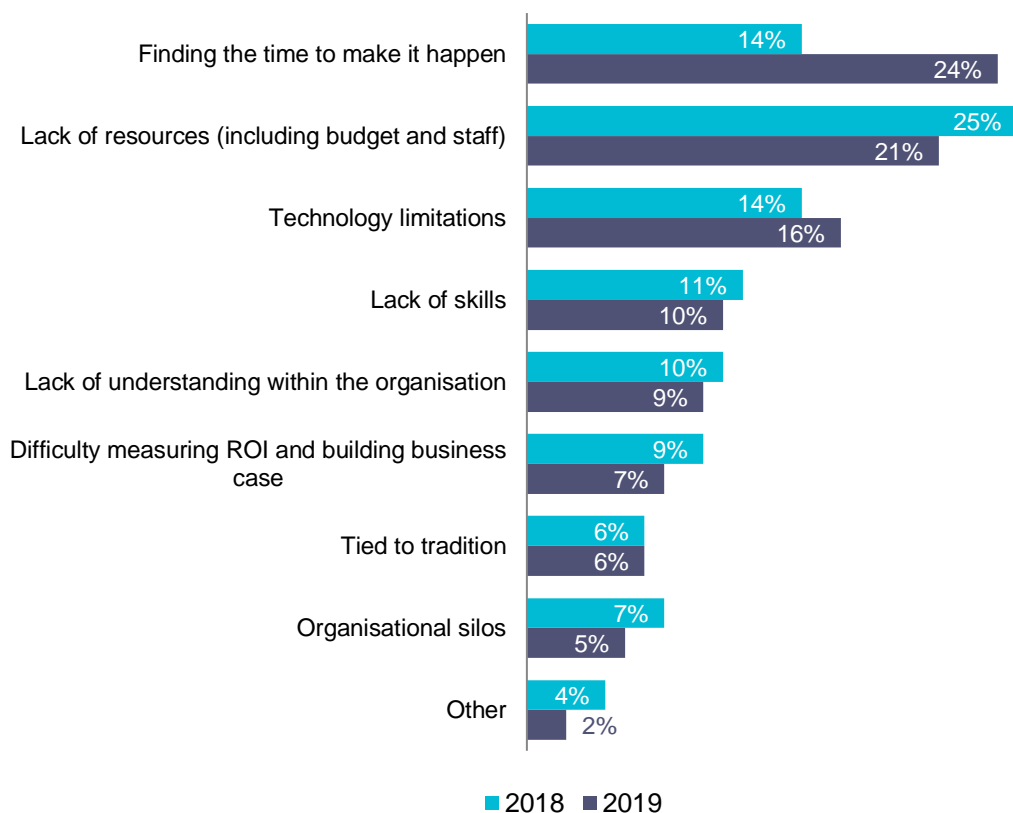
Over half of companies (55%) say they include shorter subject lines in recognition of how this crucial messaging shows up on mobile devices, a drop from 59% last year. While subject lines are no doubt of crucial importance, it is also important to use pre-header text. Just over half of companies (51%) report they are focused on using pre-header text for promotion, up from 49% last year. Some 55% of companies say they are focusing on making responsive landing pages, the same proportion as in 2018.

7.3 Barriers to optimisation success

Email best practice and rules of engagement are well established, and most marketers have a fundamental understanding of how to optimise their email campaigns. However, as *Figure 23* indicates, a lack of time and resources is holding back many marketers from optimising across different devices.

Company respondents

Figure 23: What is the main barrier to success when it comes to effectively optimising your email campaigns for different devices?



Respondents 2018: 336
Respondents 2019: 239

Companies fail to prioritise optimisation of email for mobile devices

The proportion of respondents citing a lack of *time to make it happen* (24%) as the main barrier to email optimisation across devices has almost doubled from 14% to 24% since 2018. As marketers are now focused on other areas, optimising email for different devices may be further down the list of priorities.

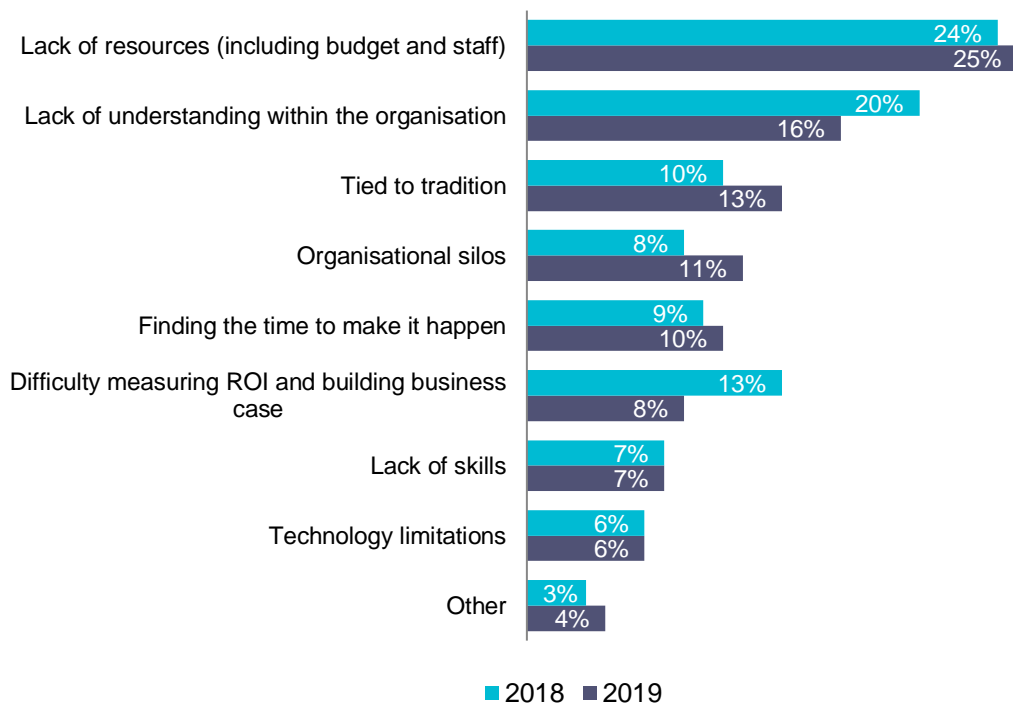
A *lack of resources* is now the second most significant obstacle, holding back 21% of companies from optimising their emails for different devices (down from 25% in 2018). It is noteworthy that technology is the principal barrier for 16% of companies, up from 14% last year. But it is evident that time and resources, including budgets and staff, are more significant barriers to email optimisation.

Through the lens of agencies surveyed (*Figure 24*), the biggest barrier is a *lack of resources* (25%), significantly ahead of *lack of time* (10%). While these challenges are inter-related, it is noteworthy that supply-side respondents are more conscious of resourcing issues. Agency respondents are also significantly more attuned to the *lack of understanding* among their clients (16%, compared to 9% of client-side respondents), and the fact they are more *tied to tradition* (13% vs. only 6%).

Agencies, who are often ahead of the curve when it comes to marketing strategy due to their broader perspective across the market, are often in a better position to pinpoint where companies could improve and innovate. In-house marketers can benefit from partnering with agencies and consultants for email-related services and best practice, as well as access to technology.

Agency respondents

Figure 24: Thinking about your clients, what is the main barrier to success when it comes to effectively optimising their email campaigns for different devices?



Respondents 2018: 128 / Respondents 2019: 92

8. Personalisation

8.1 Ability to provide personalised email campaigns

Personalisation of email is the future

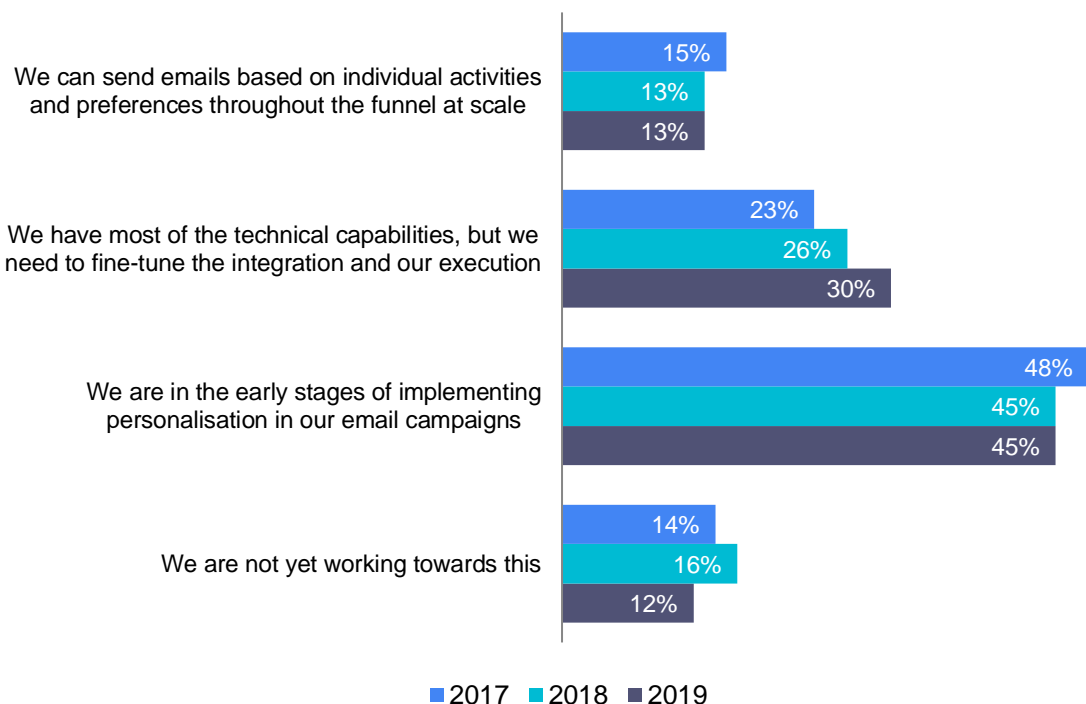
Personalisation represents the future of email marketing. With the majority of companies now comfortable with the basics of email best practice, personalisation is a valuable differentiation tactic.

Marketers also have access to a vast repository of customer data, which means they are able to provide a far more tailored customer experience that takes into account individual needs and preferences. The tremendous amount of noise in a congested inbox, together with shorter attention spans, makes it essential to grab the customer's attention with tailored offers. Customer-centric data (including past purchase history and trends in customer behaviour) is the backbone of personalisation.

Almost half of companies surveyed (45%) are reportedly in the early stages of personalisation, the same percentage as in 2018 (*Figure 25*). This year nearly a third (30%) say they have the technological capabilities, but are still in the process of fine-tuning the actual execution. This represents an encouraging 4% increase since last year. At the more advanced end of the scale, only 13% of companies report they send emails based on individual customer preferences throughout the funnel, the same figure as in 2018, and down from 15% in 2017.

Company respondents

Figure 25: Which statement best describes your ability to provide personalised email campaigns?



Respondents 2019: 229
2018: 325 | 2017: 585

There is clearly still a long way to go, as many marketers are missing out on quick wins (such as higher conversion rates) by providing a more tailored and personalised experience. Various pieces of research indicate that personalisation means that customers are more likely to open emails and click through, and also have a higher propensity to purchase. With consumers now flooded with a wealth of marketing emails, personalisation offers companies a chance to stand out in an already overcrowded inbox.

Benefits of personalisation

As companies become better equipped to follow the customer journey more closely, they can send special offers based on data such as the customer's browsing history, real-time location or upcoming special dates such as birthdays or anniversaries.

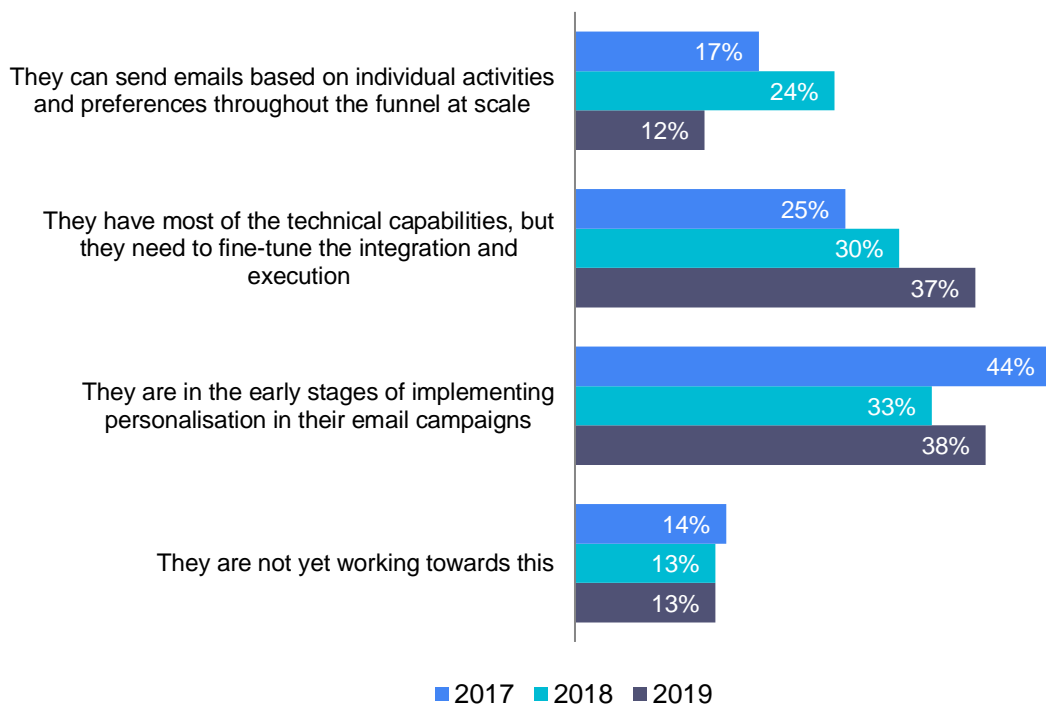
Personalising emails strengthens customer relationships, as sending the right content at the right time can be highly effective for customer engagement. There is now a greater focus on optimising the customer experience across the whole customer journey, which enables deeper engagement and long-term customer relationships.

The email marketing channel already has a vast volume of data and information about customer behaviour built in, and can be the initial step on the journey towards greater personalisation. Tailoring emails to individual customers is often a good place for companies to start as they embark on more tailored and targeted communications.

The agency results benchmarking email personalisation maturity (*Figure 26*) are similar to the company results, but with agencies more likely to report that their clients are fine-tuning personalisation techniques (37%, compared to 30% of company respondents). Just over a third of agencies (38%) report their clients are at the beginning of the journey.

Agency respondents

Figure 26: Which statement typically describes your clients' ability to provide personalised email campaigns?



Respondents 2019: 88
2018: 129 | 2017: 219

8.2 Personalisation challenges

Companies wrestle with integration

Integrating data (51%) continues to be the most significant challenge for companies trying to implement personalisation (Figure 27). With a plethora of different marketing platforms and tools available, many marketers are struggling to unify different sources of information. Data must be democratised within the organisation to facilitate more collaborative working and more effective cross-channel marketing campaigns with email activities at their core.

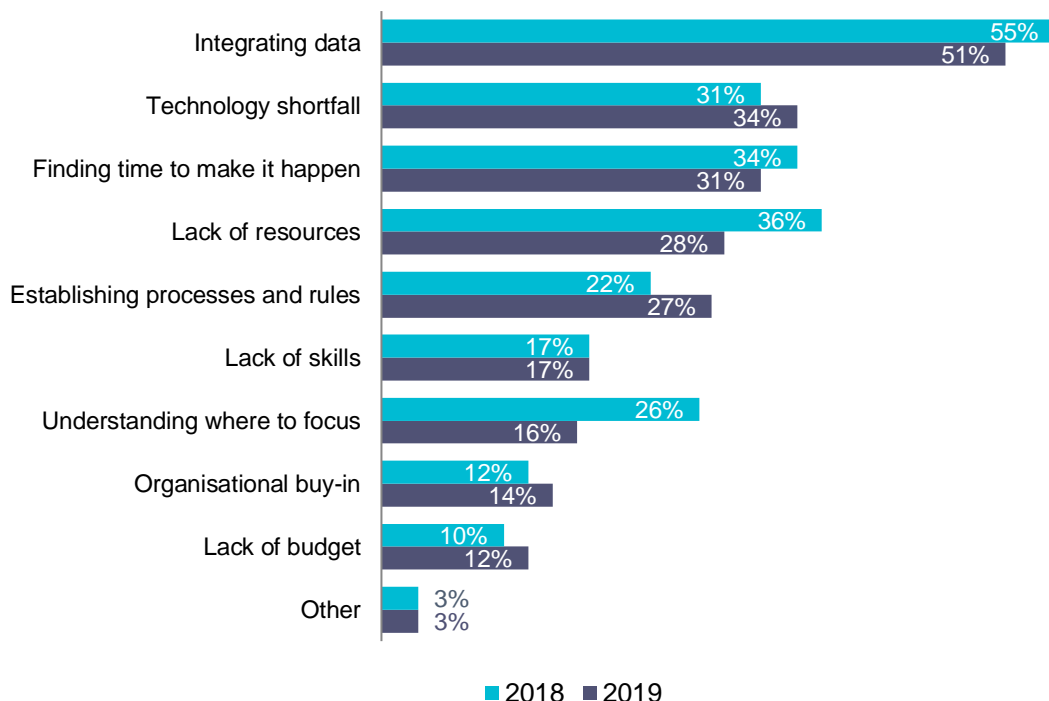
The savviest digital marketers have moved from a campaign-based approach to becoming more customer-centric, but this is difficult without a single customer view, or at least something close to it. A joined-up approach is vital for creating a more personalised, targeted experience.

However, legacy technology has created data silos preventing companies from attaining a complete view of their customers. Over a third of companies (34%) report that inadequate technology is holding them back from trying to implement more email personalisation. Companies are lumbered with antiquated software that does little to facilitate a more personalised approach that focuses on individual customer journeys. As personalisation becomes a greater priority for marketers, it is essential to eradicate data silos, as this will allow companies to initiate more relevant, targeted email campaigns aimed at specific groups of customers.

That said, data integration is by no means a quick and easy process. It is part of the company's drive for continuous improvement, but just under a third (31%) of companies report that the main challenge is finding the time to make personalisation actually happen.

Company respondents

Figure 27: What are the main challenges you have faced in trying to implement more email personalisation?



Respondents 2018: 322

Respondents 2019: 227

Note: Respondents could select up to three options.

Voice of the expert

“Integrating data remains a significant barrier to expanding personalisation capabilities. Despite huge progress in terms of integration between many cloud -based platforms, all too often legacy systems remain, which require both time and investment to integrate.

Riaz Kanani, CEO, Radiate B2B

“It’s perhaps no surprise that data integration is the biggest challenge. Working across many brands, I can say everyone has this challenge.

“A lot can be done with relatively little data by focusing on tracking recent activity only. Full history of browse, purchase, quote, visit is great. But just integrating simpler things like date of last visit, purchase, login, quote and last interest area already gives many options to improve email.”

Tim Watson, Email Marketing Consultant, Zettasphere

“I’m not surprised to see integrating data is still the biggest challenge brands face when trying to implement more email personalisation. This is often the case when I first meet new clients. Often data sits outside the direct responsibility of those working on email. Data integration is really the crux of a successful email marketing strategy. Data owners and email teams/individuals must work together to ensure there is a common understanding on what data is available, where data resides, the quality of said data and what the agreed plan is for making it work more effectively for both sides.”

Natalie Rockall, Email Consultant, Eleven11 Digital

A comparison of 2018 and 2019 data suggests that *lack of resources* and *understanding where to focus* are less likely to be personalisation barriers (down by 8% and 10%, respectively). But there is evidently a greater awareness of the difficulty of *establishing processes and rules* (up from 22% to 27%). This suggests more engagement with the nuts and bolts of personalisation, rather than looking for reasons not to embrace it.

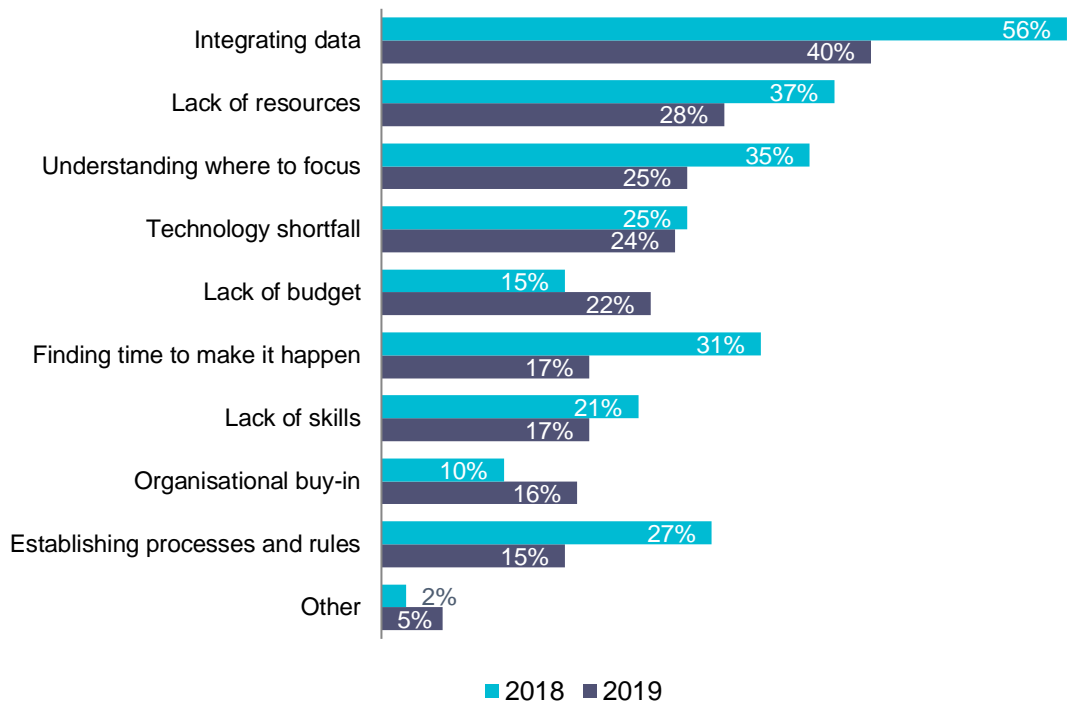
The agency viewpoint

According to the agencies surveyed (*Figure 28*), the main challenge for their clients is also the integration of data, though there has been a sharp drop since last year in the proportion of respondents reporting this as the top barrier (down from 56% to 40%). It is encouraging that clients are seen to be taking steps to join up data from different systems.

The second most reported issue by agencies is a *lack of resources* (28%), and a further quarter of agencies (25%) say their clients have difficulty *understanding where to focus* their personalisation efforts.

Agency respondents

Figure 28: What are the main challenges your clients have faced in trying to implement more email personalisation?



Respondents 2018: 126
Respondents 2019: 88

Note: Respondents could select up to three options.

Voice of the expert

“The data and technology challenges holding back email personalisation are largely addressed. The biggest barrier now is securing budget to make it happen. The key here lies in rigorous testing, analysis and campaign optimisation to prove that personalisation works. Follow the money! Companies will always find budget for campaigns that deliver incremental sales/ROI.”

Andrew Campbell, Martech Director, Customer Experience Division, The Home Agency

Agency respondents are less likely than their client-side counterparts to see technology as a main barrier to personalisation (24% vs. 34%). Econsultancy’s *Bridging the Customer Experience* report⁵ highlights that 25% of companies don’t have the technology needed to deliver great customer experiences, with two-thirds (66%) of respondents to that survey reporting that technology platforms are not sufficiently joined-up.

Personalisation of online content, and email messaging in particular, is now expected as a given by the majority of consumers. Personalisation should be thought of as a hygiene factor when it comes to providing a relevant experience, but many companies are still struggling with the basics.

With a lack of resources cited by 28% of both companies and agencies, it is clear that personalisation is still not receiving adequate budget and dedicated staff to make it happen. As

⁵ <https://econsultancy.com/reports/bridging-the-customer-experience-gap/>

Econsultancy's *Harnessing the Power of Personalisation Best Practice Guide*⁶ highlights, a common challenge relates to seeking investment and senior management buy-in.

8.3 What would email marketers like to improve?

With most companies now on solid ground with the basics of email marketing, it is illuminating to explore the areas that marketers are focused on improving and optimising in the future. The chart below (*Figure 29*) shows the areas that companies would like to prioritise to improve their email marketing efforts.

Over two-thirds (67%) of marketers want to practise *better personalisation*, an almost identical figure to last year's 68%.

Employing a more data-centric approach

Part of email marketing success involves keeping an eye on the bigger picture, which means companies must employ a data-centric approach across the organisation more broadly. When data is made available to all teams and departments, and shared across the organisation, it leads to improvements across the whole spectrum of touchpoints and channels, not just email alone.

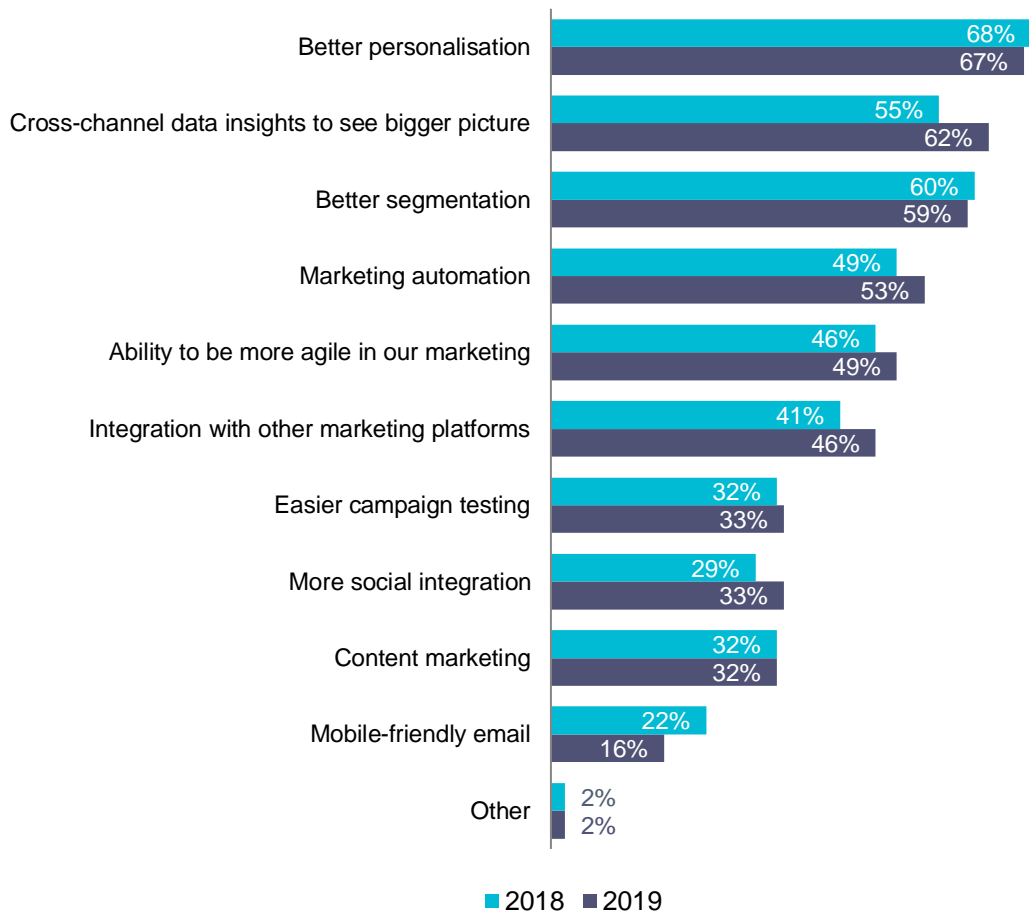
Just under two-thirds of companies (62%) reported they would like to garner *cross-channel data insights to see the bigger picture*, up from 55% last year. Successful email marketing means recognising that email is one of many channels that shape the customer experience, so keeping an eye on the overall picture and organisation's long-term goals and objectives is essential.

Better segmentation is cited by 59% of companies as an area where they would like to improve, and this is itself a route to better personalisation. Putting customers into more targeted groups allows marketers to create more relevant and individual customer experiences based on real-time data and past customer behaviour.

⁶ <https://econsultancy.com/reports/harnessing-the-power-of-personalisation/>

Company respondents

Figure 29: What would you like to do with your email marketing that you currently cannot do to your satisfaction?



Respondents 2018: 296
Respondents 2019: 220

Note: Respondents could select all the options that applied.

Focus on automation frees up marketers' time

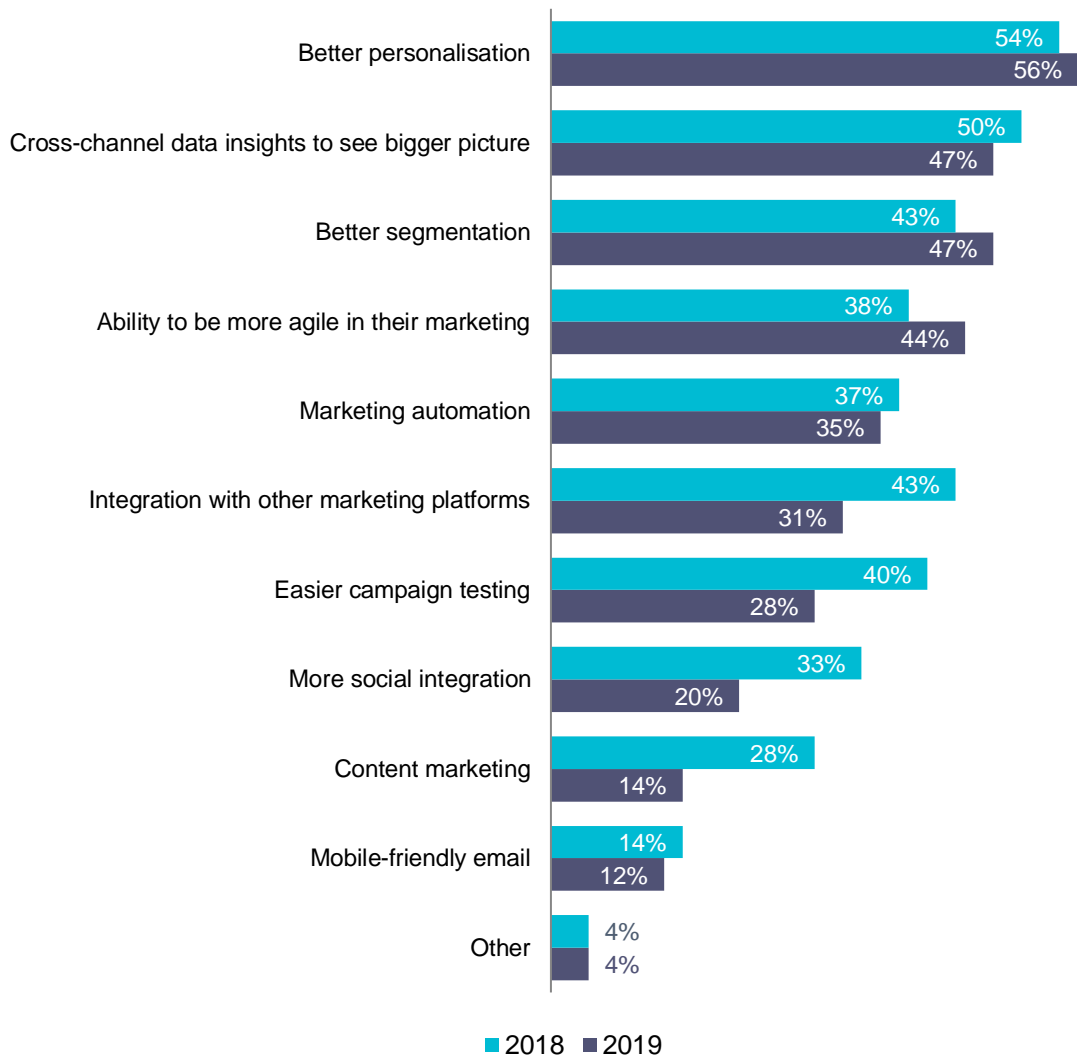
Over half of companies (53%) said they would like to improve their *marketing automation* efforts, up from 49% last year. By automating basic processes, marketers are free to focus on broader marketing strategy and increasingly advanced tactics for email optimisation.

As the agency results below indicate (*Figure 30*), more than half of supply-side respondents (56%) say their clients want better personalisation, up from 54% last year. Almost half (47%) report their clients are focusing on garnering cross-channel insights, while the same proportion say their clients would like their email marketing to incorporate better segmentation (up from 43% last year).

The proportion of agencies saying their clients would like to be *more agile in their marketing* has also increased, up from 38% in 2018 to 44% this year. An agile environment can only happen if companies have access to real-time data and are able to measure marketing's impact on the bottom line. They can respond effectively if they have visibility on the effectiveness of each channel and, ultimately, which actions result in tangible ROI.

Agency respondents

Figure 30: What would your clients like to do with their email marketing that they currently cannot do to their satisfaction?



Respondents 2018: 112

Respondents 2019: 81

Note: Respondents could select all the options that applied.

9. Marketing Automation

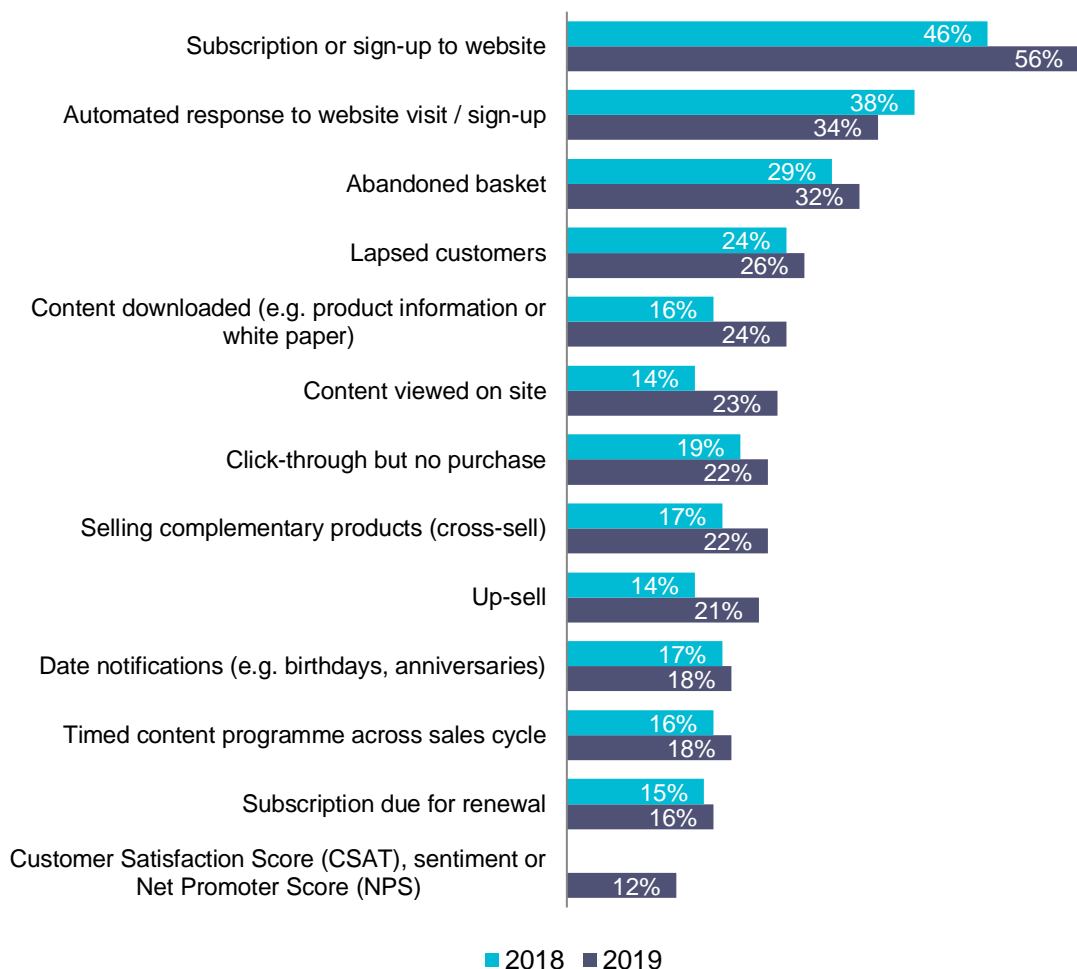
9.1 Automation triggers

As more companies seek to engage prospects and customers with more relevant and personalised experiences, they are increasingly harnessing the power of marketing automation. In the context of email, the data is readily available to allow marketers to automate campaigns in a way that increases efficiency and improves performance.

What kind of automated emails are companies employing in 2019? As *Figure 31* indicates, over half of companies (56%) send out emails based on customer sign-ups and subscriptions, a significant jump from 46% last year.

Company respondents

Figure 31: Do you send out automated emails based on the following triggers or behaviour?



Respondents 2018: 314
Respondents 2019: 225

Methodology note: 'Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT), sentiment or Net Promoter Score (NPS)' was a new option in the 2019 survey.

An indispensable tool for customer retention

More companies are focused on nurturing existing customer relationships and enhancing the customer experience. As a well-established channel, email remains an indispensable tool for customer retention, forming part of a long-term strategy for enduring customer loyalty.

It is essential that after initially signing up new customers, companies take steps to foster these interactions into long-term relationships. Research shows that the cost of attracting a new customer can be five times higher than the cost of retaining an existing customer⁷. In addition, customer retention has been shown to have a tangible and sustained impact on the bottom line; increasing customer retention by 5% can increase profits by upwards of 25%.

Part of inspiring long-term loyalty means understanding the influence of each and every touchpoint, with research showing that 96% of customers will not make a purchase the first time they visit the website⁸. However, an effective strategy for initiating a relationship with an interested customer (who is yet to purchase) is to encourage them to subscribe to marketing emails.

Some companies missing a trick with triggered emails

Once the customer's email address has been captured, companies can send automatic triggers based on particular behaviours exhibited. The results show that just over a third (34%) of companies send out automated emails based on website visits and sign-ups, down from 38% last year. For example, if the customer visits the FAQ page on the website, companies could follow up with an email asking if they require further assistance in relation to a particular product or service.

Many companies send out emails based on whether the customer has been shopping or browsing for a particular product, and as *Figure 31* shows, just under a third (32%) send out emails based on abandoned baskets (up from 29% in 2018). Marketers need to strike a balance between being relevant and targeted, and not sending too many marketing emails. However, research shows that triggered emails have a 70.5% higher open rate than normal emails, resulting in 53% more conversions⁹.

Although many companies are doing the basics, such as sending out emails to new customers and subscribers, there is still room for improvement with opportunities to reap significant benefits if companies ramp up their triggered emails. For example, just over a quarter of companies (26%) send out emails to lapsed customers. 'Sleeping subscribers' who haven't transacted for a while can be incentivised and welcomed back to purchase through tailored offers based on past purchasing behaviour.

Effective email triggers are built on a solid foundation of customer data

Email triggers are more effective when marketers have access to a wealth of customer data that is joined-up and shared across the organisation. A data-centric organisation will be able to formulate an effective strategy, as access to a greater volume of data will enable them to personalise and individualise customer interactions at each touchpoint.

More than half (56%) of supply-side respondents say their clients send out emails based on subscriptions or sign-ups (*Figure 32*). The proportion of agencies reporting their clients send basket abandonment emails has significantly increased since 2018, from 33% last year to 47% in 2019.

⁷ <https://www.outboundengine.com/blog/customer-retention-marketing-vs-customer-acquisition-marketing/>

⁸ <https://www.campaignmonitor.com/resources/guides/email-automation/>

⁹ <https://blog.chamaileon.io/trigger-emails/>

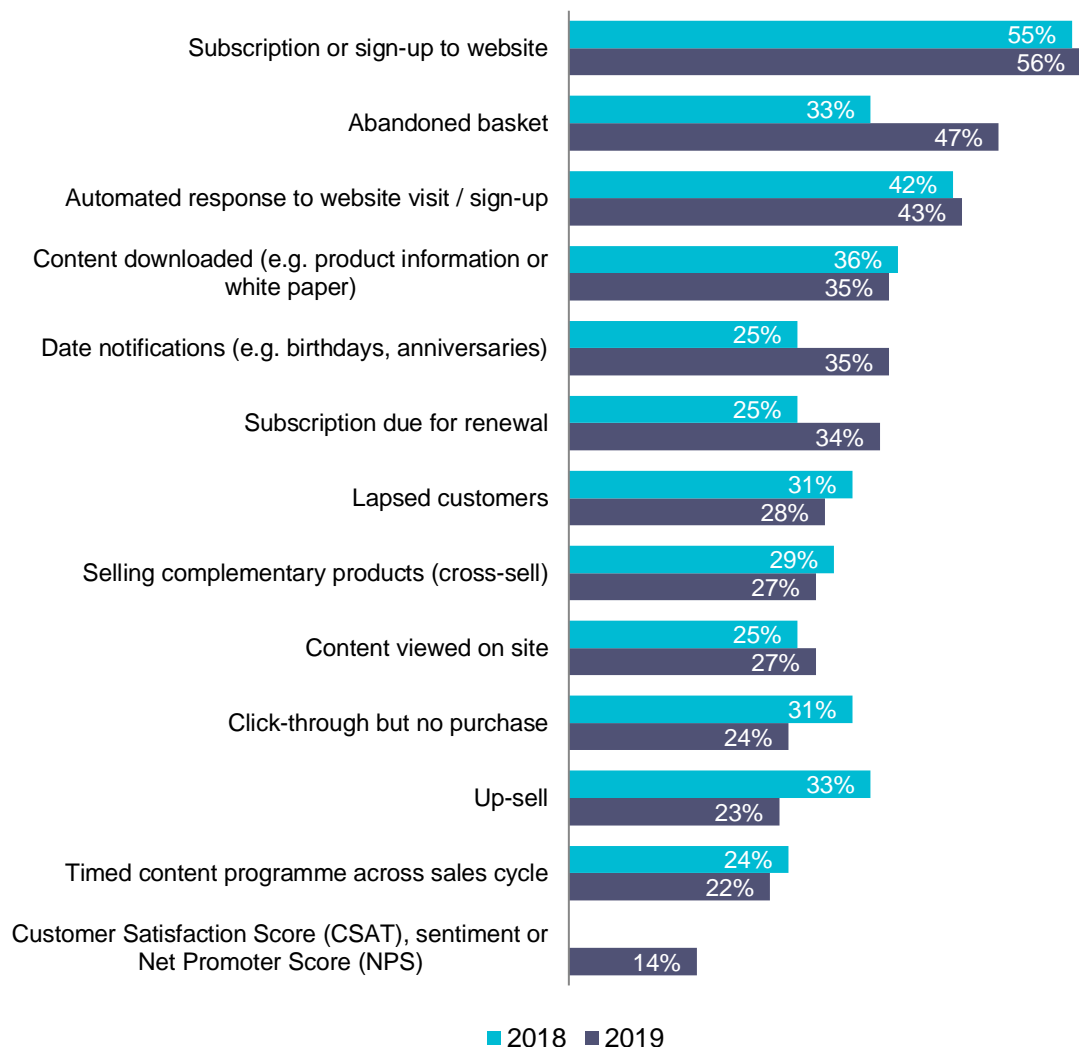
Voice of the expert

“It’s great to see a slight increase in the use of triggered welcome journeys sent to new subscribers. A welcome email will be one of, if not the top-performing, email campaign ever sent. The new subscriber is highly engaged, they have taken time to subscribe, and it’s essential to capitalise on that attention and set the expectations with the new recipients. From my experience, it is also the email journey that is the most under-optimised. The welcome journey should be at the top of the list to continuously test and refine to achieve its maximum performance potential.”

Jenna Tiffany, Founder & Strategy Director, Let’sTalk Strategy

Agency respondents

Figure 32: Do your clients send out automated emails based on the following triggers or behaviour?



Respondents 2018: 126

Respondents 2019: 86

Methodology note: 'Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT), sentiment or Net Promoter Score (NPS)' was a new option in the 2019 survey.

Some 43% of agencies report their clients are sending out emails based on an automated response to website visits or sign-ups (compared to 42% last year), while just over a third (35%) say their clients send out emails in response to content downloaded from the website (compared to 36% in 2018).

Apart from basket abandonment emails, the biggest increases since last year according to agencies surveyed are for *date notifications* (up from 25% to 35%) and *subscription due for renewal* (up from 25% to 34%)

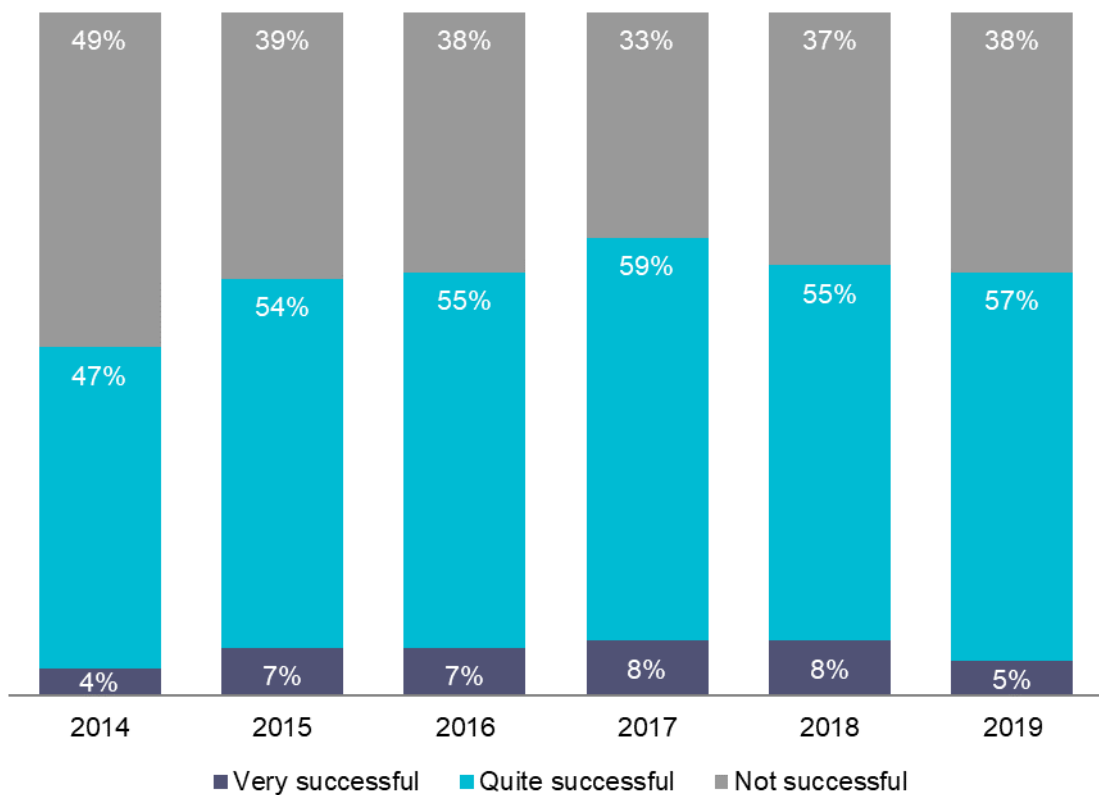
Email triggers allow companies to be timely, relevant and engaging. Attracting customers at the right time can result in higher conversion, but the results show companies could be doing more to make the most of triggered emails. Companies can increase the effectiveness of email triggers if they are taking the right steps to capture the relevant data in the first place.

9.2 Success with automation

Figure 33 looks at the level of email marketing automation success, with trending data going back to 2014. Perceived success in this area peaked in 2017, but has deteriorated slightly in the last two years. According to our 2019 survey data, 57% of companies have been *quite successful* with implementing automated email marketing programmes, with a further 5% reporting they have been *very successful*. The remaining 38% of companies say they are struggling with unsuccessful programmes, up from 33% two years ago.

Company respondents

Figure 33: How successful would you say you have been in implementing automated email marketing programmes?



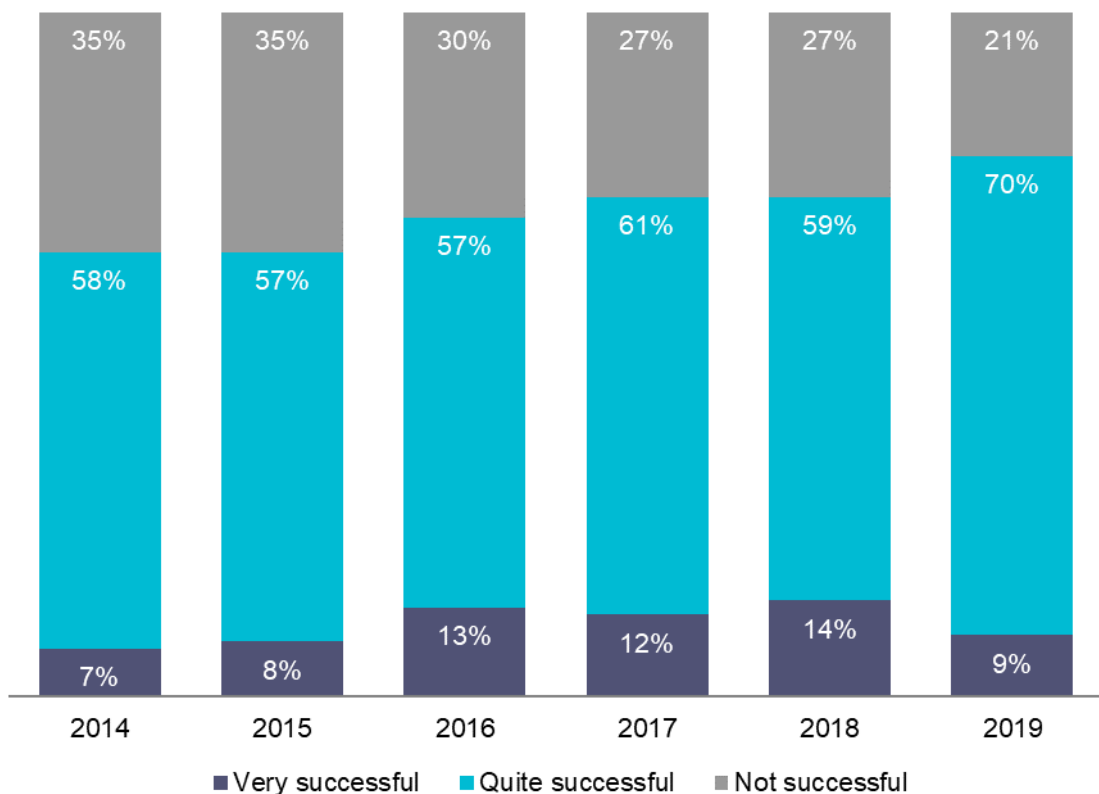
Respondents 2019: 223 | 2018: 316 | 2017: 567
2016: 492 | 2015: 472 | 2014: 410

Four in five supply-side respondents (79%) say their clients have been successful with automated email marketing programmes (Figure 34), the highest percentage to date. Agencies may be better positioned to provide additional support in terms of technology, knowledge and consulting services, which enable companies to be more successful with their automated email marketing activities.

It is important for marketers to demonstrate the ROI of automated email campaigns so they can lobby internally for more investment in technology and agency services if required. Initial success with an ESP can justify further investment and resources, so that the marketing team can win over senior management and attain buy-in from all parts of the organisation.

Agency respondents

Figure 34: How successful would you say your clients have been in implementing automated email marketing programmes?



Respondents 2019: 86 | 2018: 122 | 2017: 206
2016: 210 | 2015: 254 | 2014: 227

10. Improving Email Marketing for the Future

10.1 Use of predictive and intelligent marketing

More predictive and intelligent marketing fuelled by AI machine learning presents a sizeable opportunity for commercial growth, boosting the effectiveness of email and other marketing channels. State-of-the-art marketing technology is helping to power better personalisation, segmentation and automation, resulting in more efficient email marketing campaigns.

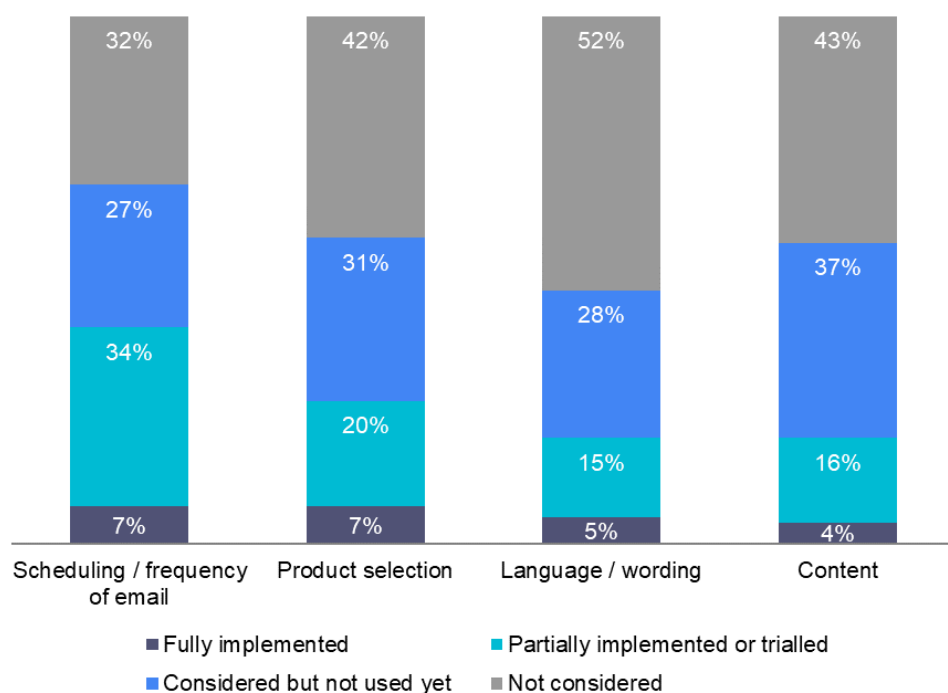
Greater use of predictive technology as part of data-driven marketing trend

The chart below shows how organisations are using predictive solutions. Some 41% of companies have *fully* or *partially implemented* intelligent solutions for email scheduling in place of manual processes, while 27% are using AI for product selection. Meanwhile, only a fifth of companies (20%) are using AI for language/wording and content. Marketers are significantly more likely to have considered predictive solutions for content (37%) than specifically for language (28%), suggesting AI will be employed more for the former than the latter over the next 12 months.

Greater use of predictive marketing technology is part of the trend towards more data-driven and personalised marketing. Predictive data uses customer-related analytics surfaced by machine learning to make smarter decisions and predict which marketing strategies are more likely to be successful.

Company respondents

Figure 35: In which of the following areas have you implemented predictive or intelligent solutions (including artificial intelligence) in place of manual marketing processes?



Respondents: 222

Voice of the expert

“There is a lot of hype about AI. Even some providers are re-labelling their rule-based logic as AI. That intelligent solutions and AI have a place in marketing is not in question. But one thing they are not is a fix-all solution. They are just tools, albeit better tools than five years ago.

“Product selection is the best place to start for brands that have a large number of different products (large SKUs) with revenue across the majority of those. Brands with 80% of revenue from 20% of SKUs or a very small number of SKUs should look at other areas where intelligent solutions can help.”

Tim Watson, Email Marketing Consultant, Zettasphere

“There is a pattern of decreasing resources and, as a result, limited availability to get things done that in turn is creating an increased focus on ease of use and automation. The increasingly mainstream awareness of AI is making marketers more open to the benefits that these tools can provide in terms of automation and optimisation. Marketers should be wary about losing insight about why decisions are made by AI so that they can make more informed decisions in the future.”

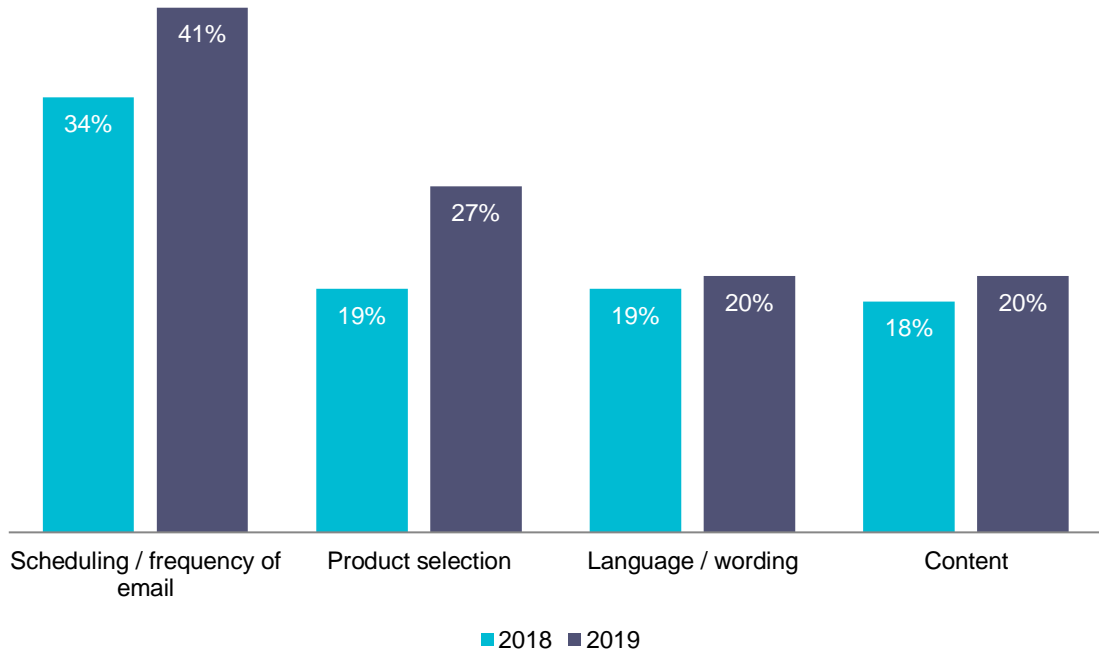
Riaz Kanani, CEO, Radiate B2B

Figure 36 highlights that the use of predictive analytics solutions for scheduling and product selection has significantly increased since 2018, with the uplift for language and content less pronounced. Some 41% of respondents have fully or partially implemented AI for managing the frequency of email marketing, compared to 34% in 2018. For product selection the percentage has increased from 19% to 27%.

By making use of individual customer data, marketers can send emails featuring the products and services that are most likely to appeal to a specific prospect or customer.

Company respondents

Figure 36: Proportion of company respondents who have fully or partially implemented predictive or intelligent solutions (including artificial intelligence) in place of manual marketing processes



Respondents 2018: 311
Respondents 2019: 222

Voice of the expert

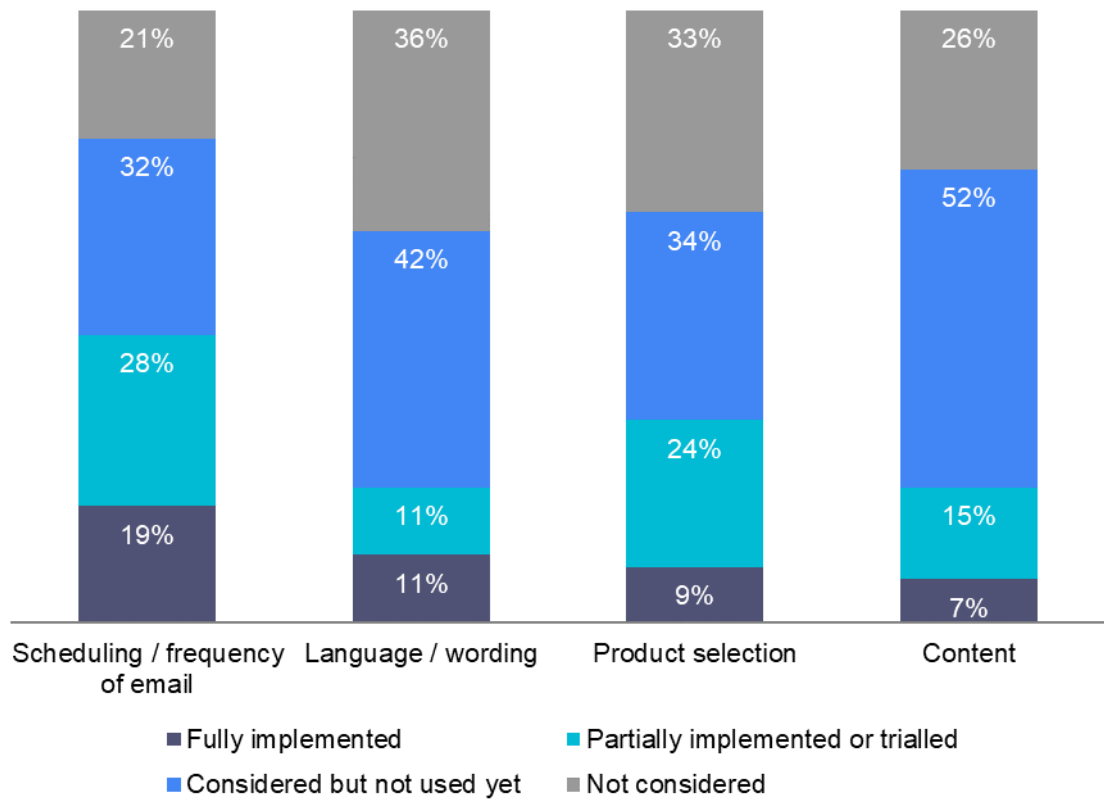
“It is exciting to see the increased use of AI and predictive solutions in email marketing. This is one of the most exciting areas for email marketing as a channel, in my opinion, and provides unlimited possibilities to email marketers to improve the experience for recipients at scale. AI language is an area Let’sTalk Strategy has consulted on with clients and received outstanding results, in some cases an ROI of 5:1 in driving more revenue. AI and voice technology are two areas to watch, with the ability of Alexa to read emails aloud creating a whole new customer interaction with the inbox.”

Jenna Tiffany, Founder & Strategy Director, Let’sTalk Strategy

From the perspective of agencies (*Figure 37*), almost a fifth (19%) of companies have fully implemented email scheduling with an automated, intelligent solution, while a further 28% have partially implemented or trialled this. As with client-side respondents, this is the most popular use case for predictive solutions, suggesting that this is the easiest place to start for many companies seeking to harness AI.

Agency respondents

Figure 37: In which of the following areas have your clients typically implemented predictive or intelligent solutions (including artificial intelligence) in place of manual marketing processes?



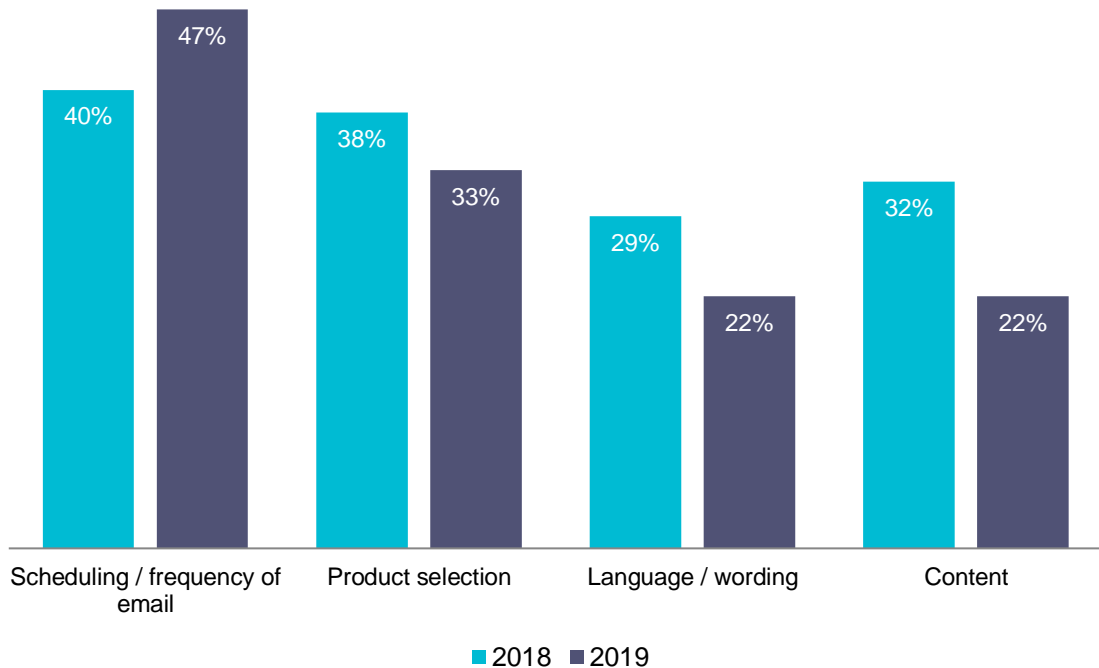
Respondents: 85

Although predictive solutions are by no means new, many companies are not yet implementing the technology. In fact, *Figure 38* suggests that fewer agency clients than a year ago are using AI for product selection, language and content.

Experimenting with basic processes initially will allow marketers to demonstrate the benefits of predictive technology, helping them attain senior management buy-in to justify further investment. Marketers can start out with email scheduling and then move on to other areas that also benefit significantly from predictive solutions.

Agency respondents

Figure 38: Proportion of agency respondents saying their clients have fully or partially implemented predictive or intelligent solutions (including artificial intelligence) in place of manual marketing processes



Respondents 2018: 119
Respondents 2019: 85

10.2 Email innovation

When looking ahead at further email innovation anticipated by companies in the next 12 months (*Figure 39*), more than two-thirds of marketers (68%) are focused on experimenting with *more creative uses of behavioural triggers*, a jump from 60% in 2018. This fits into a wider strategy of a more relevant and targeted customer experience. Understanding behavioural triggers is essential for every email marketing strategy to help build a deeper understanding of customer behaviour and the barriers to successful conversion.

Marketers have access to a vast and growing repository of data; they need to use this more effectively and incorporate it into a joined-up strategy. Part of this involves creating a highly individualised experience, with marketing automation helping to facilitate targeted and relevant customer communications. Just under a half of marketers (49%) report they intend to use *automation to enable one-to-one conversations* (down from 53% in 2018).

Experimentation important to keep email fresh

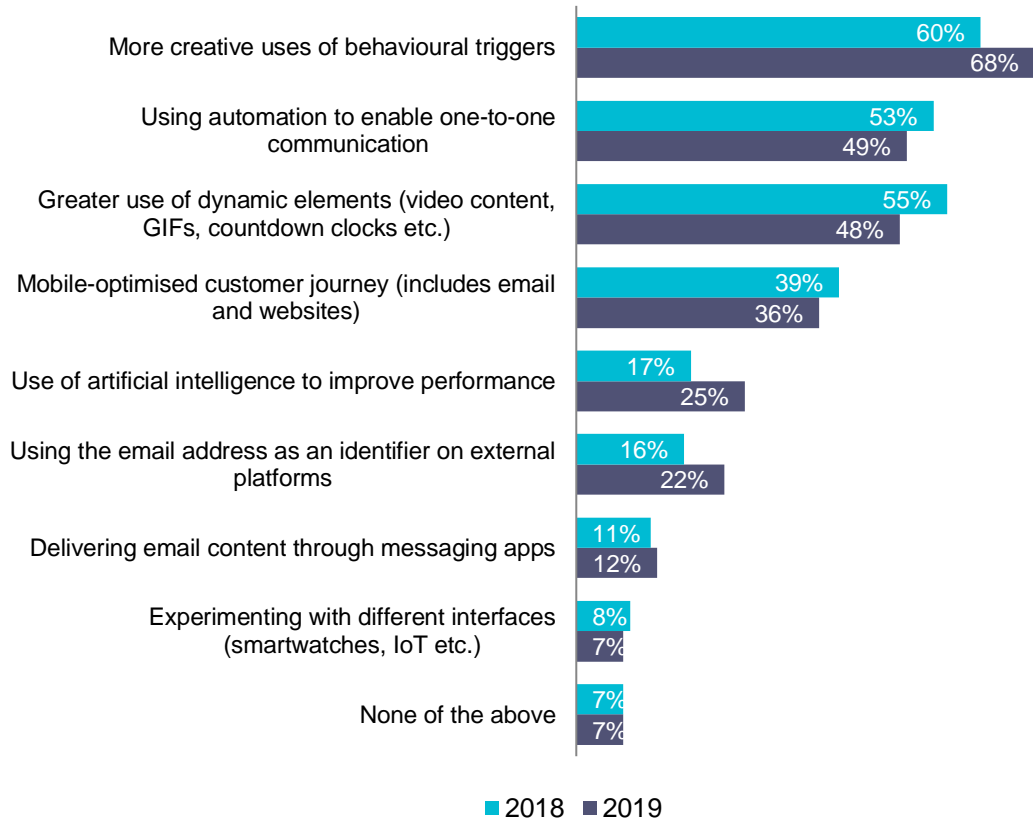
A similar proportion of respondents (48%) point to the *greater use of dynamic elements* within their email campaigns, including video, GIFs and countdown clocks. This figure has dropped from 55% in 2018, but this may reflect greater uptake of dynamic email components over that period, rather than a decrease in interest. Email is a well-established content channel, but to keep customers engaged, companies must experiment with different types of content formats to attract new customers and refresh their communications.

One area where marketers could be doing more is mobile. Although mobile email is by no means in its infancy, marketers could be demonstrating more ambition to innovate in this area, especially

given that more consumers check email on their phone than on the desktop. Just over a third of marketers (36%) say they intend to innovate with a *mobile-optimised customer journey* over the next 12 months, down slightly from 39% in 2018.

Company respondents

Figure 39: How do you intend to innovate with email in the next 12 months?



Respondents 2018: 294
Respondents 2019: 217

The technology is there to enable marketers to use behavioural triggers, but success is about more than software alone. Marketers must view email as an essential component of the bigger picture; success means the organisation's overall approach must be data-centric.

Marketing automation enables email practitioners to set up workflows that activate the most appropriate next steps in response to specific customer behaviours. To some extent, triggers such as sending a confirmation email upon purchase are expected by the customer and necessary for building trust. Other triggers, such as an email in response to an abandoned basket, are becoming more common and expected. Companies now have access to a vast volume of data, but they need to understand how it can be incorporated into creative email marketing campaigns.

The agency perspective

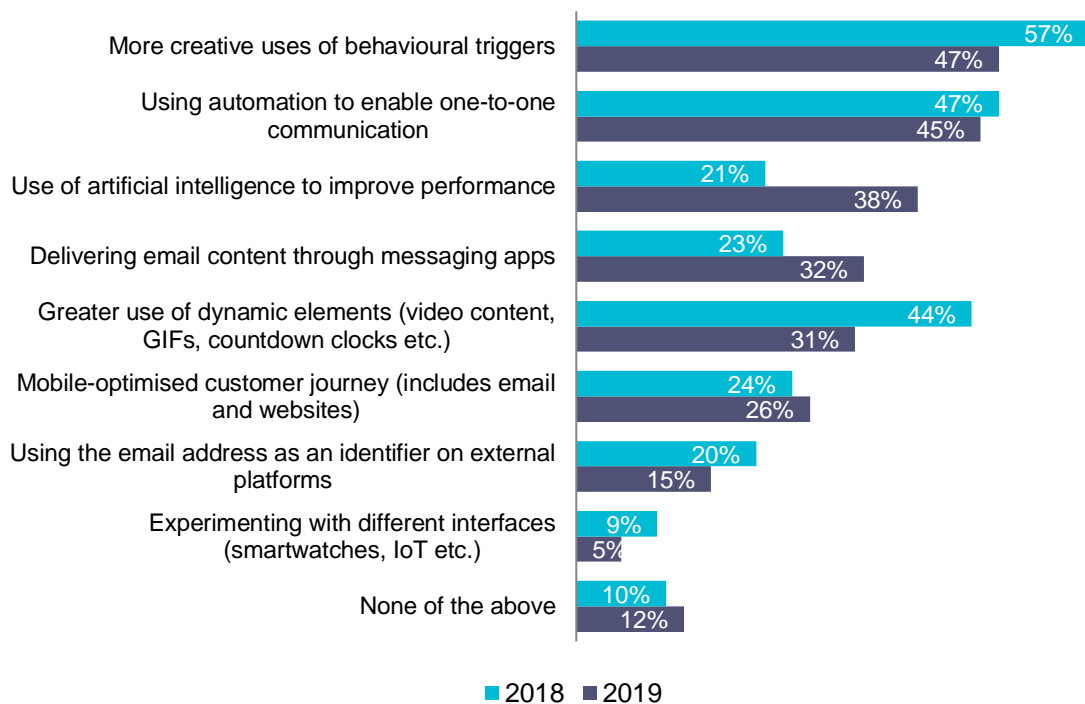
Looking at the supply-side responses (*Figure 40*), just under half of agencies (47%) said their clients are focused on more creative uses of behavioural triggers, although this figure has dropped from 57% in 2018. The next most reported email innovation tactic is automation, with just under half of agencies (45%) reporting their clients will be using it over the next 12 months.

It is encouraging to see more agencies reporting that their clients will be aiming to utilise AI. The proportion of agency respondents reporting that their clients are planning to ramp up the use of AI to improve performance has almost doubled since 2018, from 21% to 38%.

Conversely, the proportion of agencies reporting an intention among clients to make greater use of dynamic email elements has declined from 44% to 31%. Although this suggests less innovation, the drop-off may be due to their clients already incorporating these tactics into their business-as-usual email marketing practices.

Agency respondents

Figure 40: How do your clients intend to innovate with email in the next 12 months?



Respondents 2018: 113
Respondents 2019: 78

Messaging apps versus traditional email messaging

Almost a third of agencies (32%) report their clients intend to experiment with messaging apps over the next 12 months - almost three times more than the 12% of company respondents planning innovation in this area.

There is research to suggest that consumers are divided when it comes to their choice of channel preference. Although apps overall now show little year-on-year growth, the growth of social media and messaging apps specifically is accelerating.

The advantage of messaging apps (such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or Viber) is that they allow for voice, video, GIFs and text. Although the client-side results suggest this is not yet on the radar for the majority of companies, it is certainly worth at least considering.

In general, supply-side respondents are slightly ahead of the curve when it comes to innovation, but this is a good example of why the use of technology must be combined with the use of customer data.

Certainly, messaging apps could be a useful way of reaching customers, but brands need to understand their audience and be aware of the types of behaviour exhibited by their customers. Companies should strive to understand whether messaging apps (or, indeed, other emerging channels) provide significant benefits for their core customer base and even whether their customers prefer this communication method over other more well-established channels.

Voice of the expert

“Innovation is great, as long as it’s not for the sake of innovating. The two most popular ways of innovating in this research are at their heart subscriber-focused, personalised and helpful to the customer – in other words, improving the customer experience. That is very encouraging to see and indicates that the phrase ‘customer experience’ is no longer just a buzz phrase, but is being actioned.”

Kath Pay, CEO & Founder, Holistic Email Marketing

How can artificial intelligence be used to improve email marketing performance?

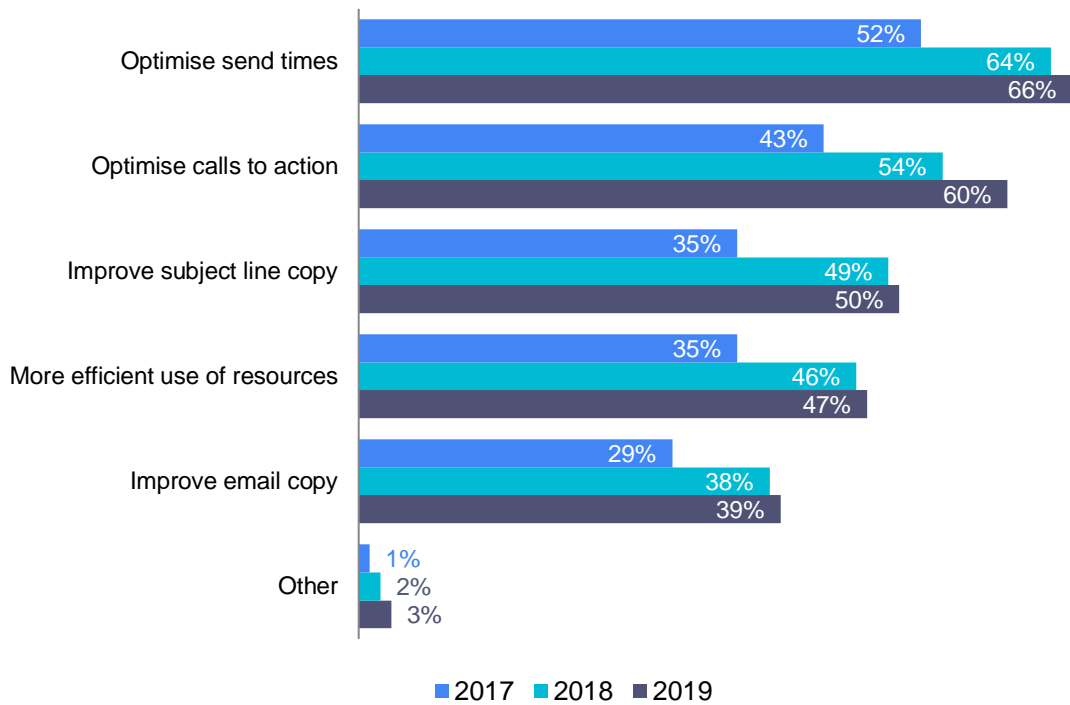
Building on the findings from *Figure 35 and Figure 36*, *Figure 41* shows the ways in which AI can enhance email marketing performance. It is clear that the message is getting through, with greater awareness in 2019 around how AI can improve email marketing performance across a range of use cases.

Two-thirds of companies (66%) said that AI could be used to *optimise send times* (up from 52% in 2017), while another 60% said it could be used to *optimise calls to action* (compared to only 43% two years ago). Half of respondents (50%) said that artificial intelligence could be used to *improve subject line copy*, up from just over a third (35%) in 2017.

Despite competition from other channels, email remains a steadfast and reliable component of the marketing mix that delivers provable and measurable results impacting the bottom line. However, the future of email marketing lies in behaviour-based real-time personalisation. AI allows marketers to manage a vast amount of data to make real-time decisions about email marketing content, enabling them to gain deep insight about customer behaviour and subsequently tailor and target their email marketing communications accordingly.

Company respondents

Figure 41: In what ways do you think that artificial intelligence could improve email marketing performance?



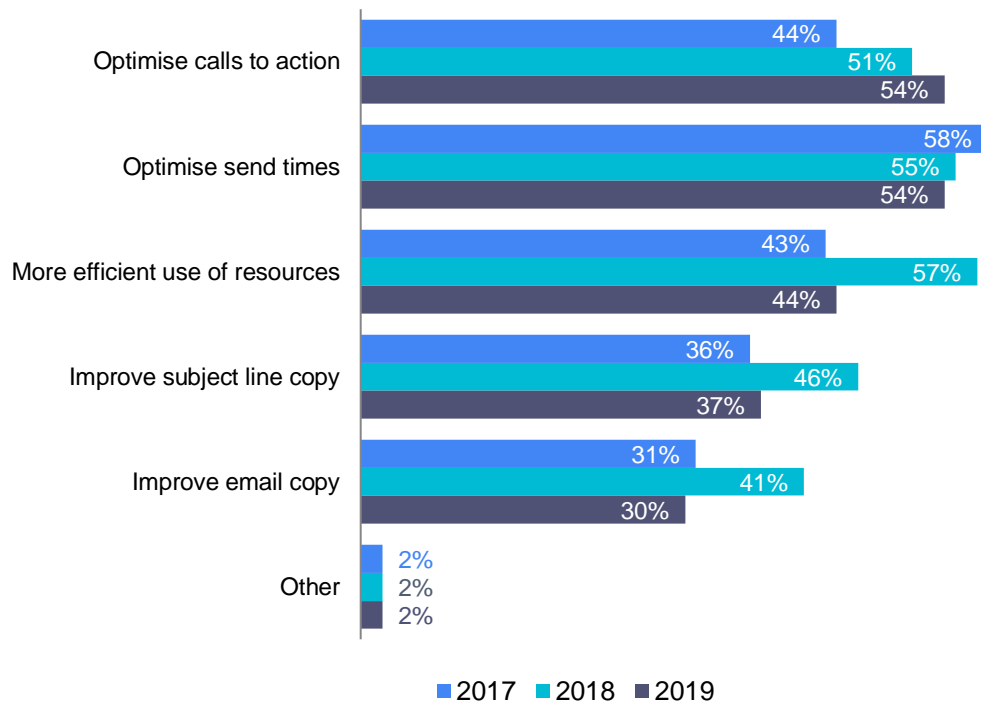
Respondents 2019: 221
2018: 295 | 2017: 547

Over half (54%) of agencies surveyed say that artificial intelligence could improve calls to action and optimise send times (*Figure 42*).

Some 44% of agencies report that AI could be used to make more efficient use of resources, although the proportion of agencies citing this has dropped significantly since 2018 (from 57%). Similarly, just over a third of agencies (37%) said that AI could be used to improve subject line copy, compared to 46% in the previous year's survey.

Agency respondents

Figure 42: In what ways do you think that artificial intelligence could improve email marketing performance?



Respondents 2019: 81
2018: 110 | 2017: 203

10.3 Email marketing focus

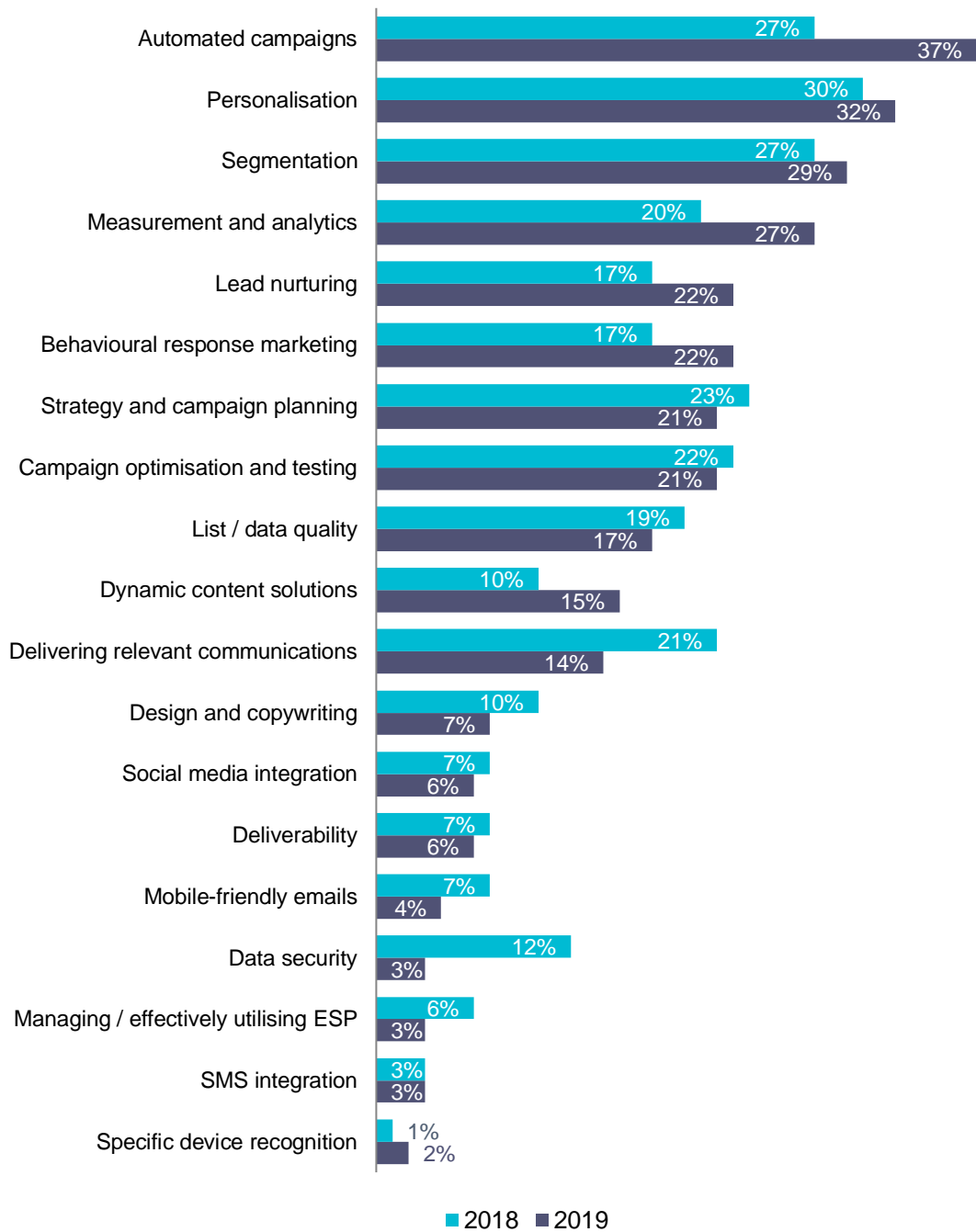
As has become customary for the Email Census, marketers were asked about their main areas of focus over the next 12 months (Figure 43). Over a third (37%) report a greater focus on *automated campaigns*, while *personalisation* is a top-three priority for 32% of respondents. *Segmentation* (29%) is the next most cited tactic. All three areas are set to get more attention as marketers seek to create more tailored, individualised customer experiences, through better use of data. The biggest year-on-year jump is for automation, up from 27% in 2018 to 37% this year.

Welcome focus on measurement and analytics

As well as making marketing more customer-centric, marketers also need to have the appropriate strategies in place to measure results in order to demonstrate the wins and uplift from automation. This can only happen when *measurement and analytics* are prioritised, and it is encouraging to see a jump in the proportion of marketers reporting a greater focus on this area (from 20% to 27%).

Company respondents

Figure 43: Which three areas of email marketing do you really need to focus on in the next 12 months?



Respondents 2018: 296
Respondents 2019: 220

Note: Respondents could select up to three options.

Fewer marketers are focused on basics such as *list quality* (17%), *deliverability* (6%) and *mobile-friendly emails* (4%). As email is a well-established channel, most marketers have a firm grasp of the basics of best practice and a larger proportion are focused on optimisation, testing and achieving the best results from email marketing.

Voice of the expert

“It’s somewhat disheartening to see data security edging towards the bottom of the list of areas to focus on in the next 12 months (having dropped from 12% to 3%). We are now over a year on from the launch of GDPR. Nevertheless, brands must still remain vigilant about data security and not let standards slip. Recent fines by the UK’s Information Commissioners Office should serve as warnings to ensure sufficient focus is retained in this area.”

Natalie Rockall, Email Consultant, Eleven11 Digital

10.4 Use of animated or interactive modules

Delivering interactive modules in emails can help marketing communications stand out from the noise in an overloaded inbox and enrich the customer experience.

Many companies are using simple animations and dynamic elements in their email campaigns, but few are employing more advanced interactivity. Just under half of companies (46%) say they currently use *animated GIFs* in their email marketing, with 14% planning to use this tactic.

The advantage of using GIFs in emails is that they are very simple to use, and easy to insert compared to embedded videos, which are more difficult to host. Compared to other interactive elements, GIFs render well across most email clients.

Animation to create sense of urgency

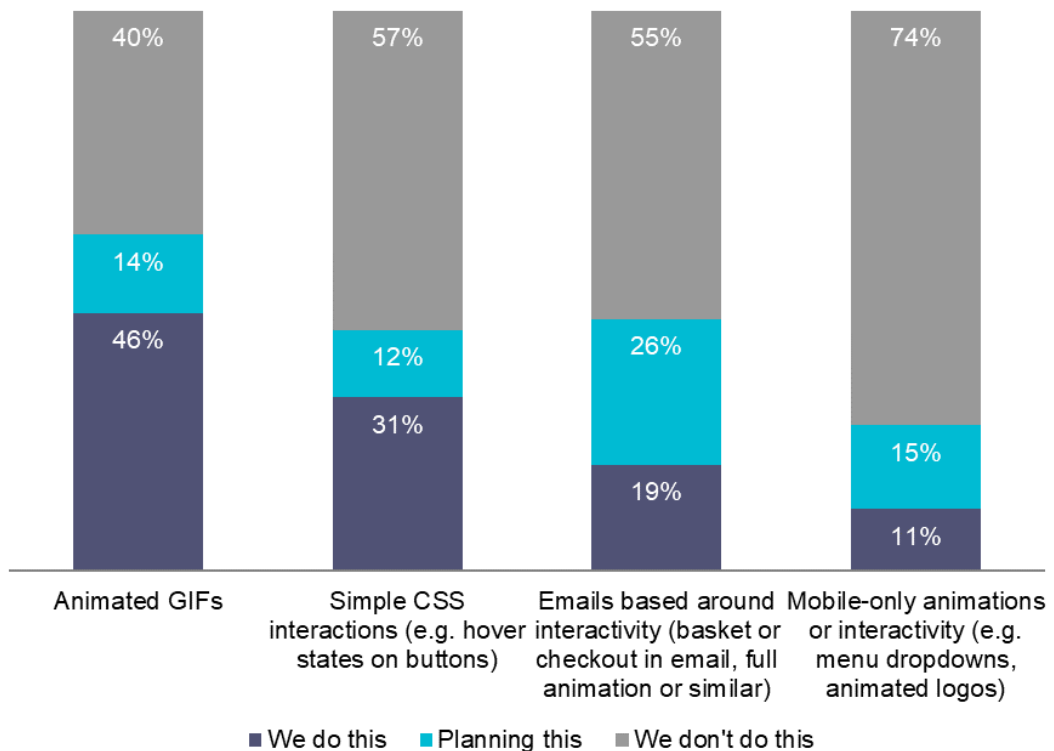
One example of an effective tactic is to use an animated countdown clock, for time-limited special offers or a sale. This creates a sense of urgency for the consumer and grabs their attention.

Just under a third (31%) of companies are using *simple CSS interactions*. The advantage of using CSS is that the file size is usually smaller than GIFs. Although emails with simple CSS interactions load much quicker than emails with animated GIFs, they do not render as well across as many email clients. However, CSS interactions are responsive to customer behaviours, such as hovering or tapping on a specific element within the email.

Fewer companies are using more sophisticated animation within their emails, with only 19% making use of *emails based around interactivity* (such as checkout and full animations), and only 11% using *mobile-only animations or interactivity*.

Company respondents

Figure 44: Is your company using (or planning to use) any of the following animated or interactive modules in its emails?



Respondents: 248

Increased use of GIFs and simple CSS

Compared to 2018, the proportion of companies using GIFs and simple CSS interactions has increased, which indicates that interactive emails are here to stay. Marketers need to strike a balance between interactive elements and ensuring emails load quickly and render well across different clients.

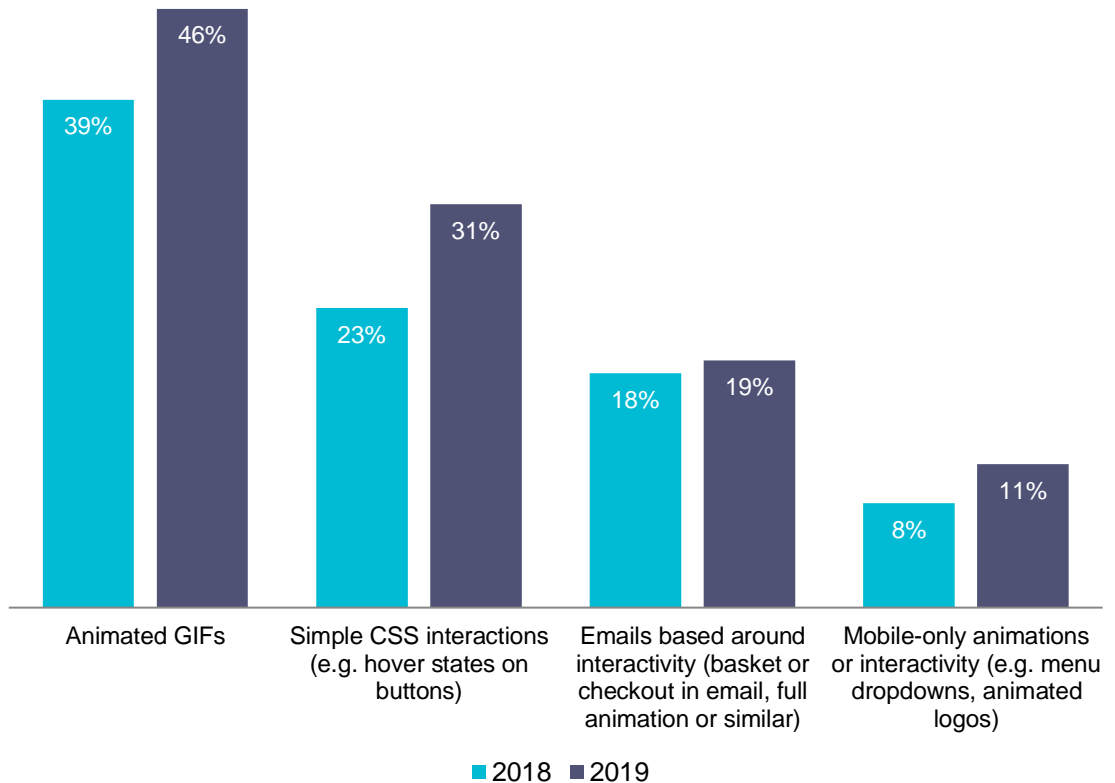
Some 46% of companies are now using animated GIFs, compared to 39% in 2018. Similarly, the proportion of companies using CSS has increased to 31%, up from 23% in 2018.

As users become familiar with animated GIFs across social media and in apps and chat clients, it is more natural for them to engage with GIFs in their inboxes too. GIFs work well in the attention economy, as they do not require watching a lengthy video or even any further clicks from the customer. They are a quick, easy way to grab the reader's attention and make emails stand out in the increasingly deluged inbox.

Although fewer companies are using these elements, as *Figure 44* highlights, over a quarter (26%) are planning emails based around interactivity, and it may be that full interactivity is the next logical step after experimenting with GIFs and CSS.

Company respondents

Figure 45: Proportion of company respondents using these animated or interactive modules in their emails



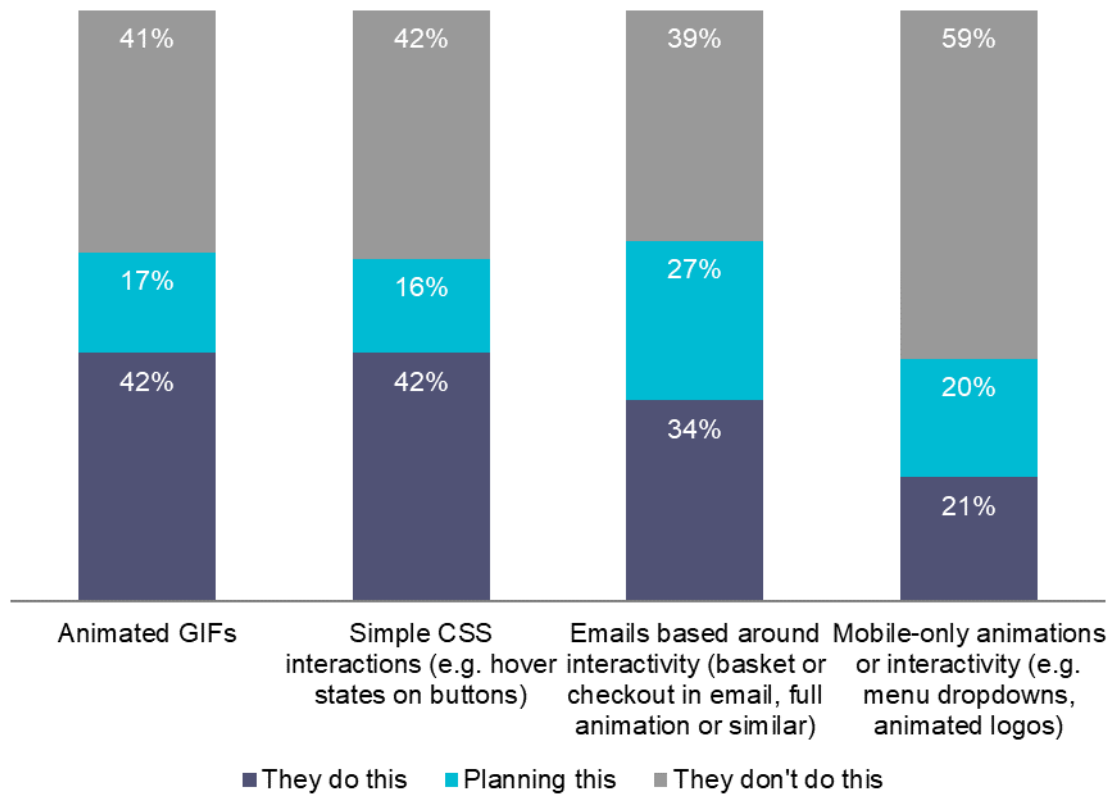
Respondents 2018: 358
Respondents 2019: 248

As can be seen in *Figure 46*, 42% of agency respondents say their clients are currently using animated GIFs and simple CSS. Just over a third (34%) of agencies say their clients are using fully interactive emails.

The majority of agencies (59%) report their clients are not yet using mobile-only animations or interactivity, although a fifth (20%) report their clients are planning this.

Agency respondents

Figure 46: Are your clients using (or planning to use) any of the following animated or interactive modules in their emails?



Respondents: 97

11. Email marketing success: five tips for better results

1. Build the business case for further investment by using more sophisticated measurement

Although email is the highest-ranked medium for ROI, it continues to compete with other channels (most often SEO) for its share of spend. Misconceptions about the channel typically hold back those who control the purse strings in organisations, but there's also a lack of supporting evidence provided by those at the coalface.

- **Move away from solely relying on non-commercial metrics** such as open and click-through rates – metrics your CFO certainly doesn't get excited about!
- **Outline the strategic objective** of the email campaign as precisely as possible, with **clearly defined success metrics** mapped back to that objective.
- Once your metrics are tied to your campaign or overall objective, you'll make sure you're **optimising for the right metrics** and you'll be able to use tangible figures when estimating the level of uplift your organisation can expect to benefit from.

2. Prioritise device-agnostic email campaigns

With the majority of consumers now accessing emails on the go rather than from a desktop, mobile optimisation has become a necessity. Keeping subscribers engaged so they either end up purchasing from you or simply recognise you as an expert in your field is increasingly dependent on how well your emails load on a mobile device.

- **Keep pushing the mobile optimisation agenda** within your organisation to stand out from the crowd and avoid losing out on valuable interactions and conversions.
- Using a responsive design template provided by your ESP is a good starting point but **look beyond the design** and optimise the content of your emails as well. **Don't be afraid to experiment** with shorter subject lines, pre-header text and different images.
- **Have a good testing strategy in place** to ensure a smooth experience that renders well on all devices.

3. Personalisation is key to creating deeply engaging experiences

Consumers are increasingly looking for more tailored experiences built around their individual needs and preferences, and this is particularly the case in the world of email, where inboxes are brimming with generic, mass messages. Your organisation probably sits on a vast repository of customer data – it just needs to be adequately joined-up, disseminated and activated.

- Remember that **data integration is not an easy or quick process**, but the rewards are commensurate.
- Data can be a transformative asset when it is properly integrated, so **work closely with data owners** (if they're outside the marketing team) to get a good grasp of what data is available, where it resides and what you can do to increase its quality and availability.

- Once you have all the data you need, **put it to good use** by personalising emails based on the recipient's browsing history, location or upcoming special dates such as birthdays and anniversaries.

4. Harness the power of marketing automation

Integrated data can also be used to automate campaigns, enhance email performance and increase overall efficiency. While basic triggered emails are increasingly common, many organisations rarely delve deeper into the whole range of customer behaviours they can use to fuel marketing automation programmes.

- As you start to engage your subscribers with more relevant and personalised experiences, explore how you can use **automatic triggers to support your customer retention strategy**.
- **Don't just rely on using website visits or sign-ups as triggers**; look into how various behaviours and actions exhibited by your subscribers can help you increase the effectiveness of your email campaigns.
- Keep in mind that effective email triggers are built on a solid foundation of customer data, so **work with the relevant departments to eradicate data silos**.

5. Look into the potential of predictive solutions and AI

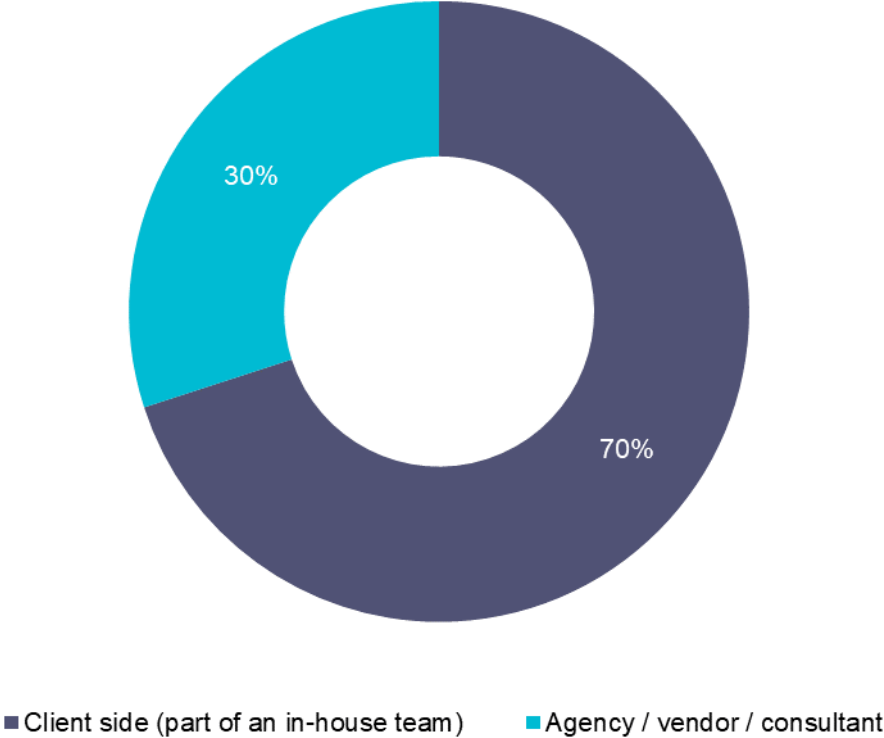
Whether your organisation is well versed in the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning or just getting started, you need to understand how predictive solutions can enhance email programmes, improve the experience for recipients at scale and free up your team to perform higher-value tasks.

- Use of predictive technology is part of the trend towards more data-driven and personalised marketing, so make it your business to **get a good grasp of how AI-driven automation of activities can help optimise your email campaigns**.
- Don't know where to start? **Explore how AI can automate basic processes and surface customer-related analytics**, enabling you to make smarter decisions and gain deeper insight into which strategies are the most effective.
- Once you have the basics down, **look into more complex AI use cases**, such as email frequency optimisation, automated workflows, advanced segmentation and predictive personalisation.

12. Appendix

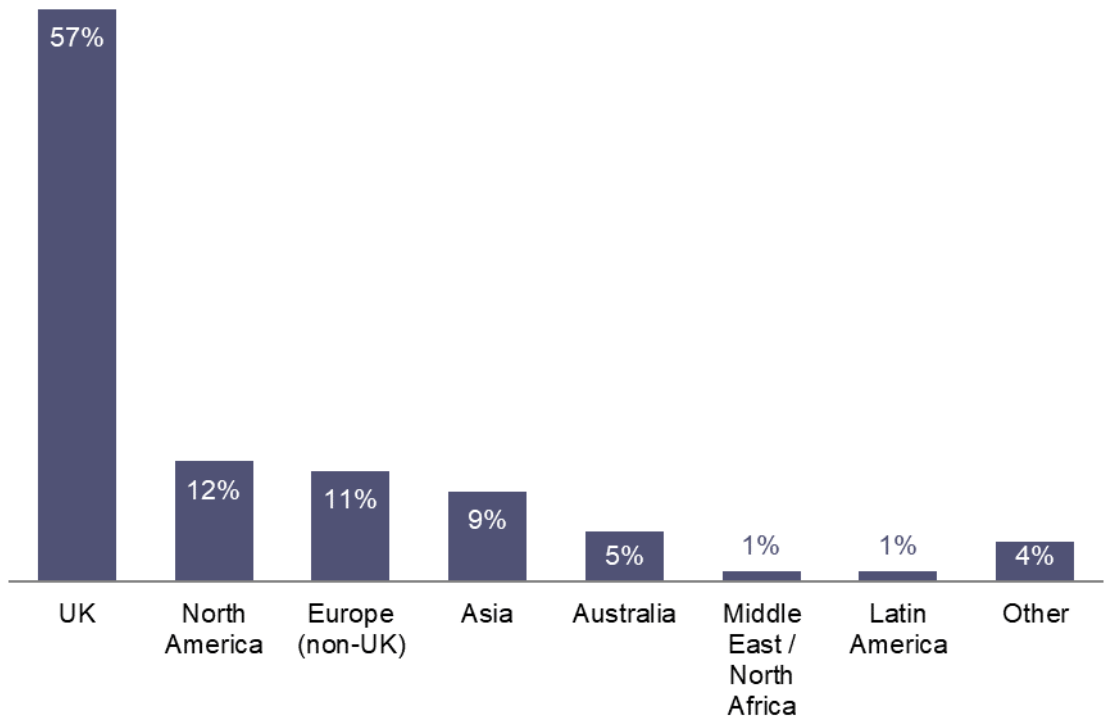
12.1 Respondent profiles

Figure 47: Which of the following best describes your company or role?



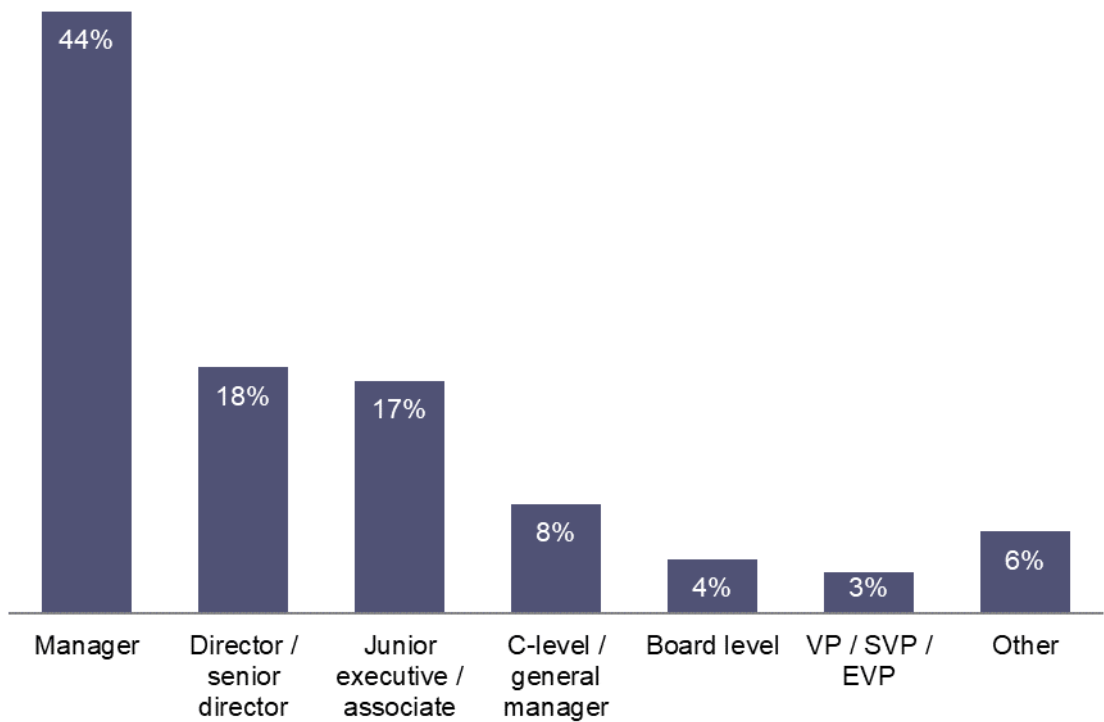
Respondents: 435

Figure 48: In which country/region are you (personally) based?



Respondents: 421

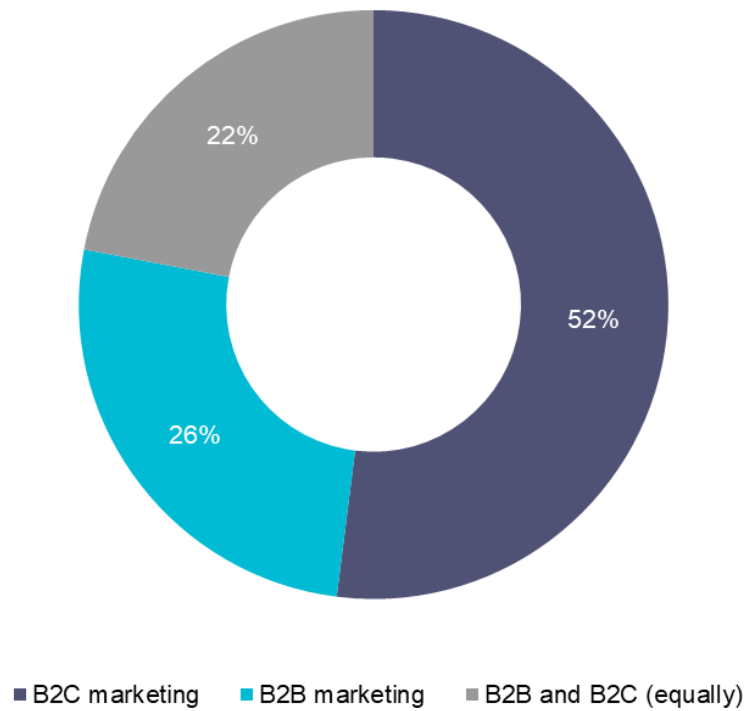
Figure 49: What best describes your job role?



Respondents: 420

Company respondents

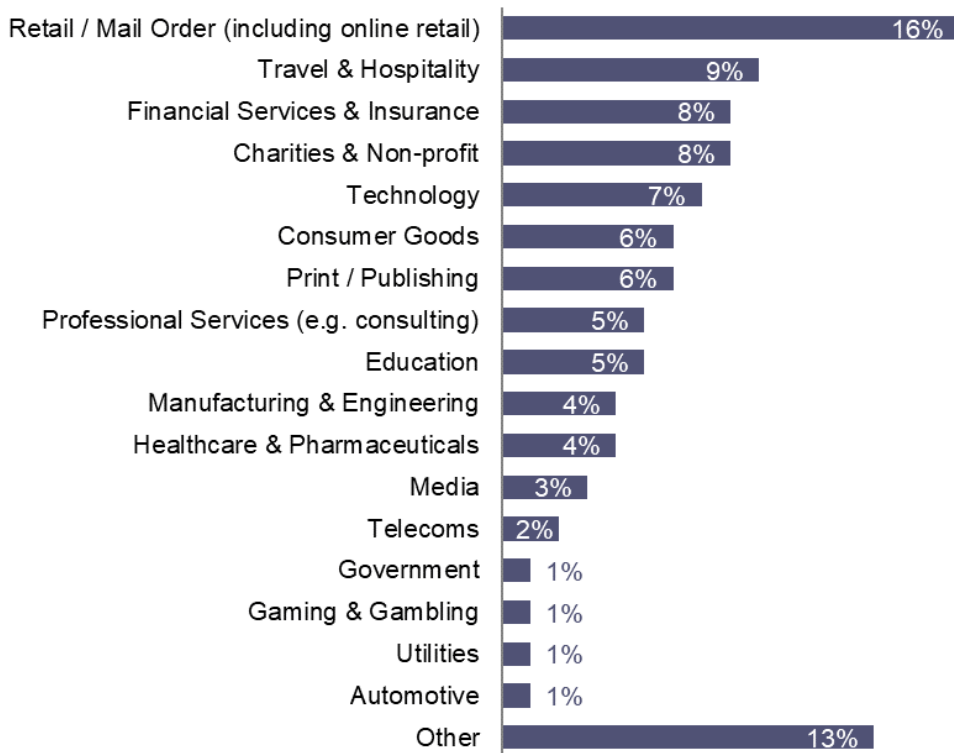
Figure 50: Are you more focused on B2B or B2C marketing?



Respondents: 296

Company respondents

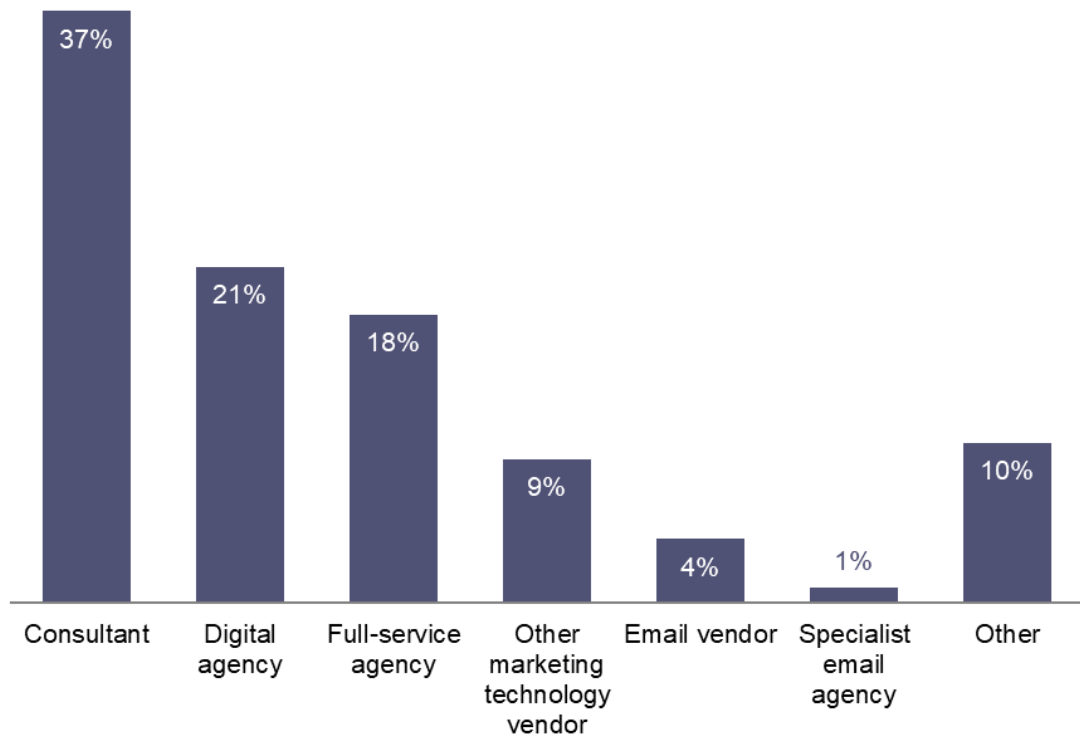
Figure 51: In which business sector is your organisation?



Respondents: 296

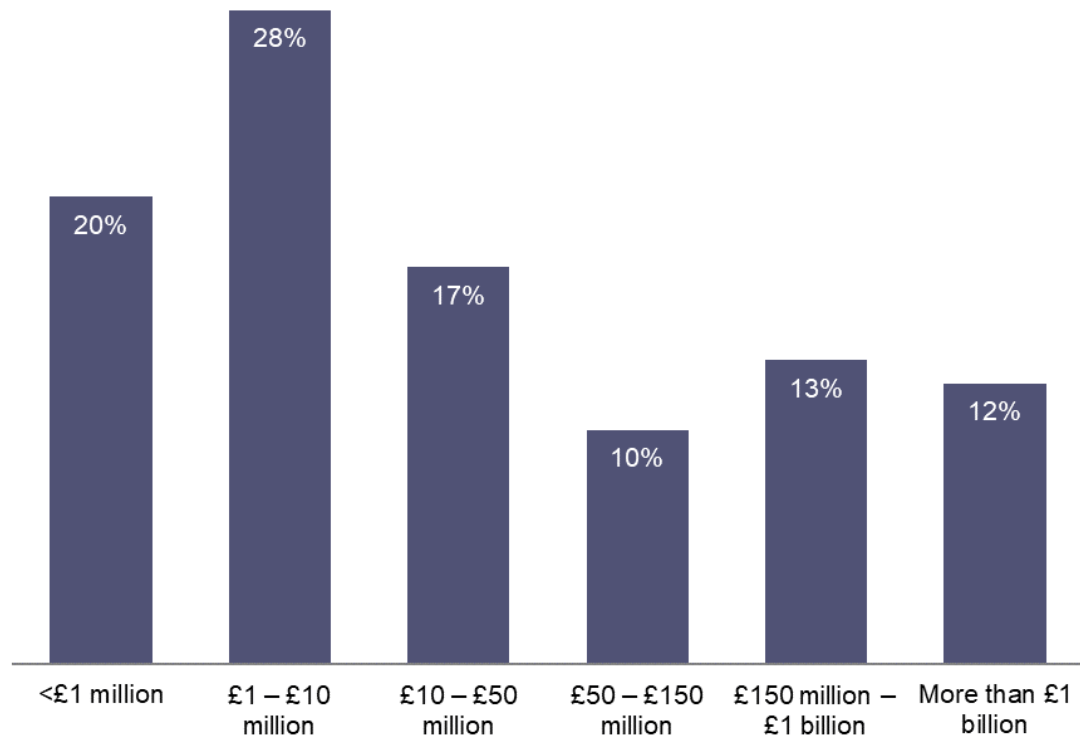
Agency respondents

Figure 52: What type of company do you work for?



Respondents: 122

Figure 53: What is your annual company revenue?

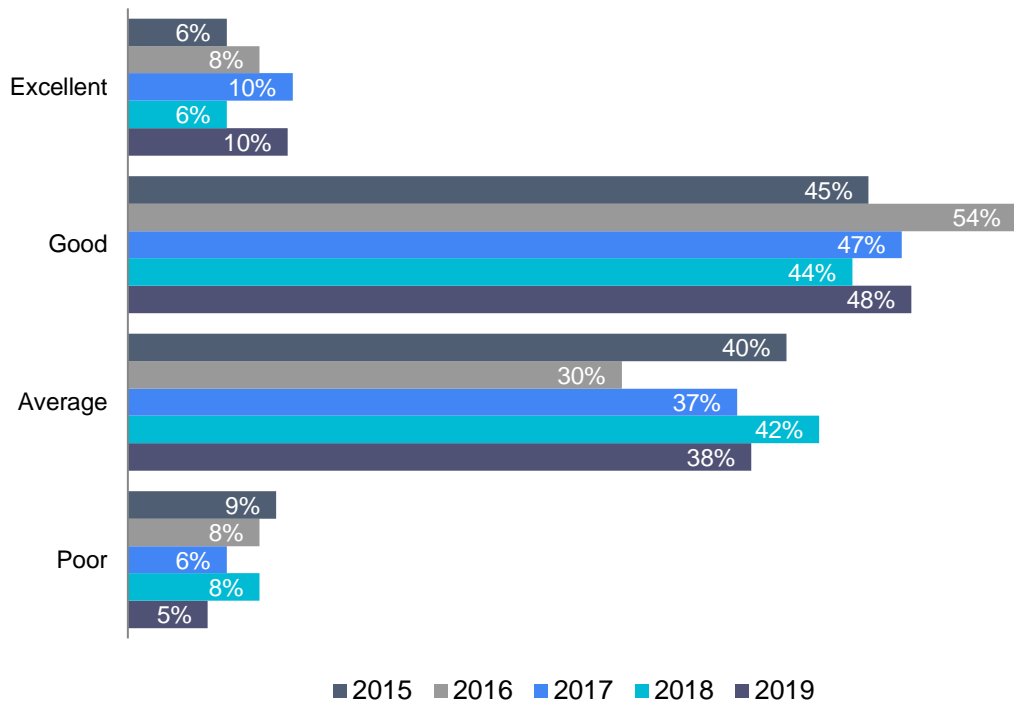


Respondents: 302

12.2 Additional data

Agency respondents

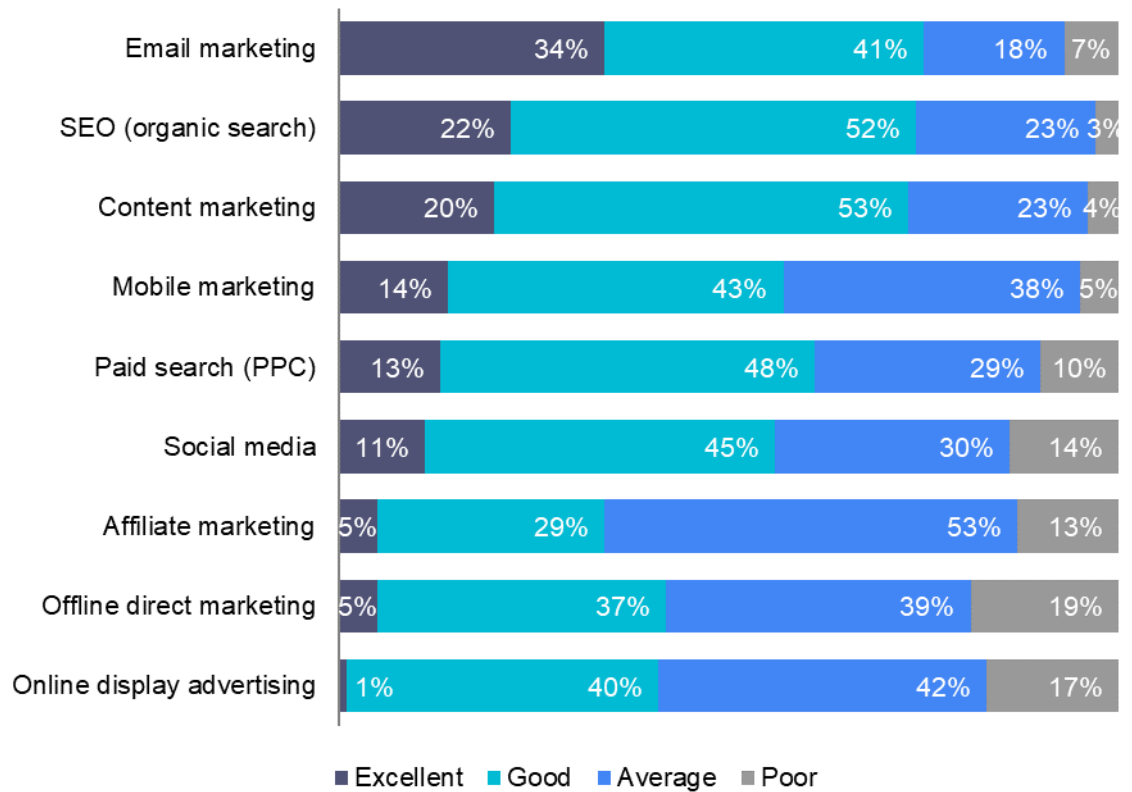
Figure 54: How do you rate the performance of your clients' email campaigns?



Respondents 2019: 111 | 2018: 192
2017: 329 | 2016: 284 | 2015: 343

Agency respondents

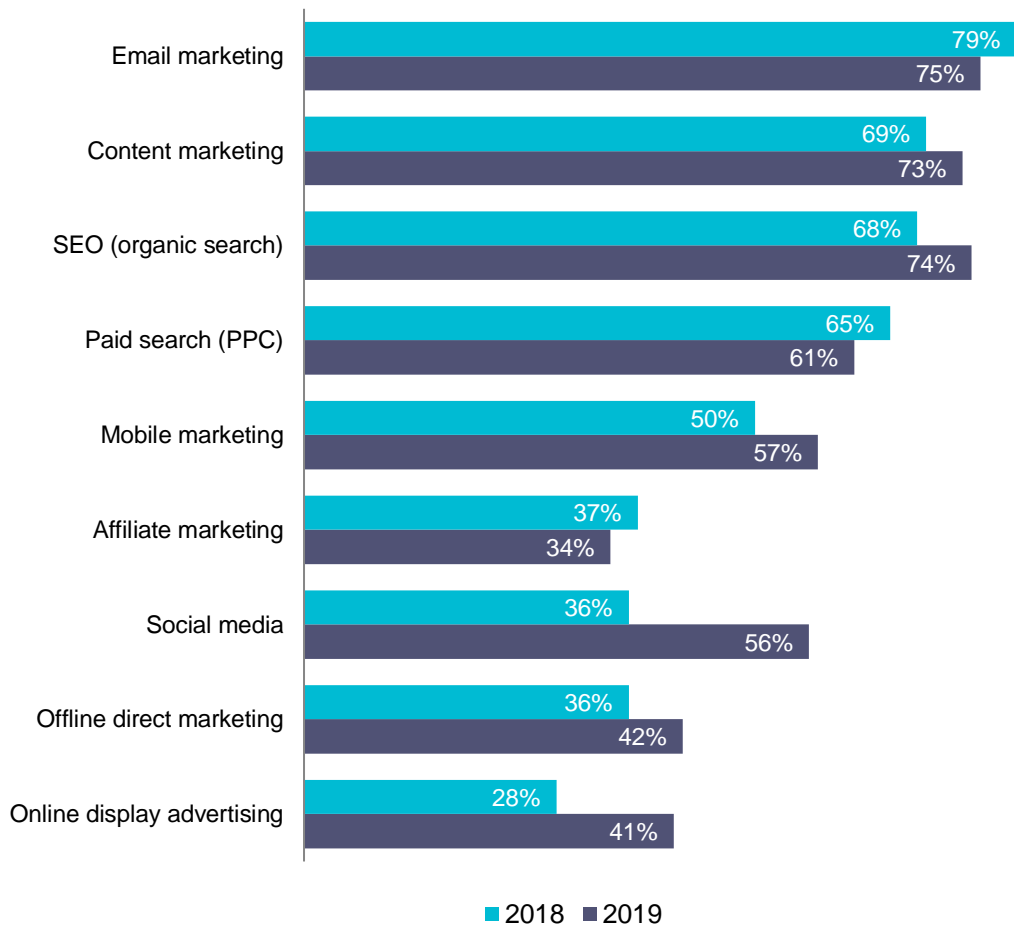
Figure 55: How do your clients typically rate the following channels or disciplines in terms of return on investment?



Respondents: 104

Agency respondents – change since 2018

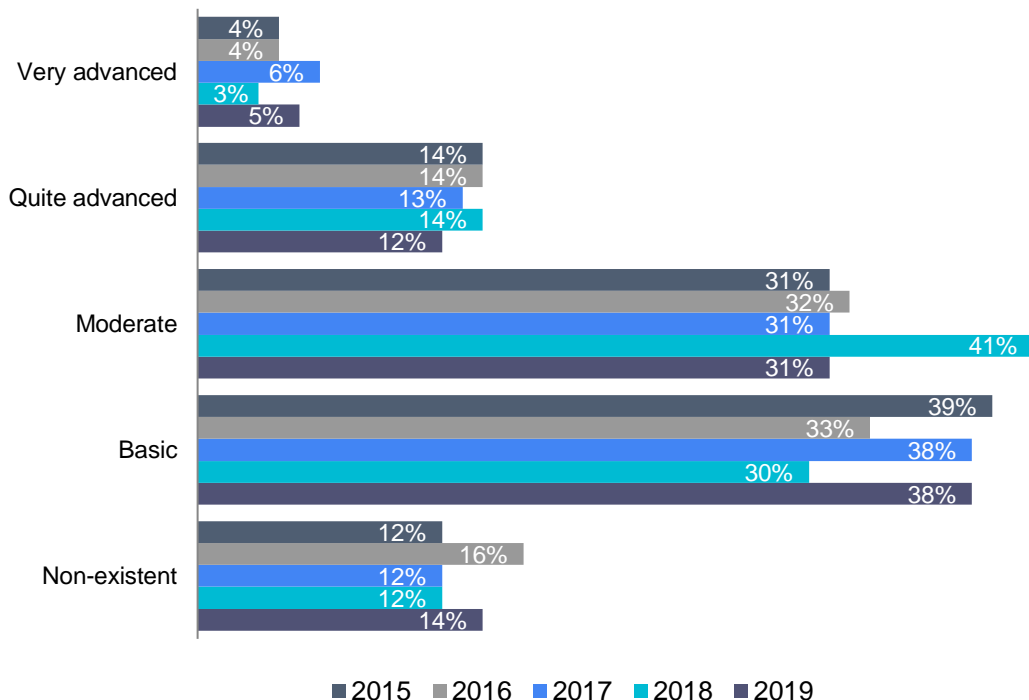
Figure 56: Proportion of agency respondents saying their clients rate channels or disciplines as 'excellent' or 'good' for ROI



Respondents 2018: 166
Respondents 2019: 104

Agency respondents

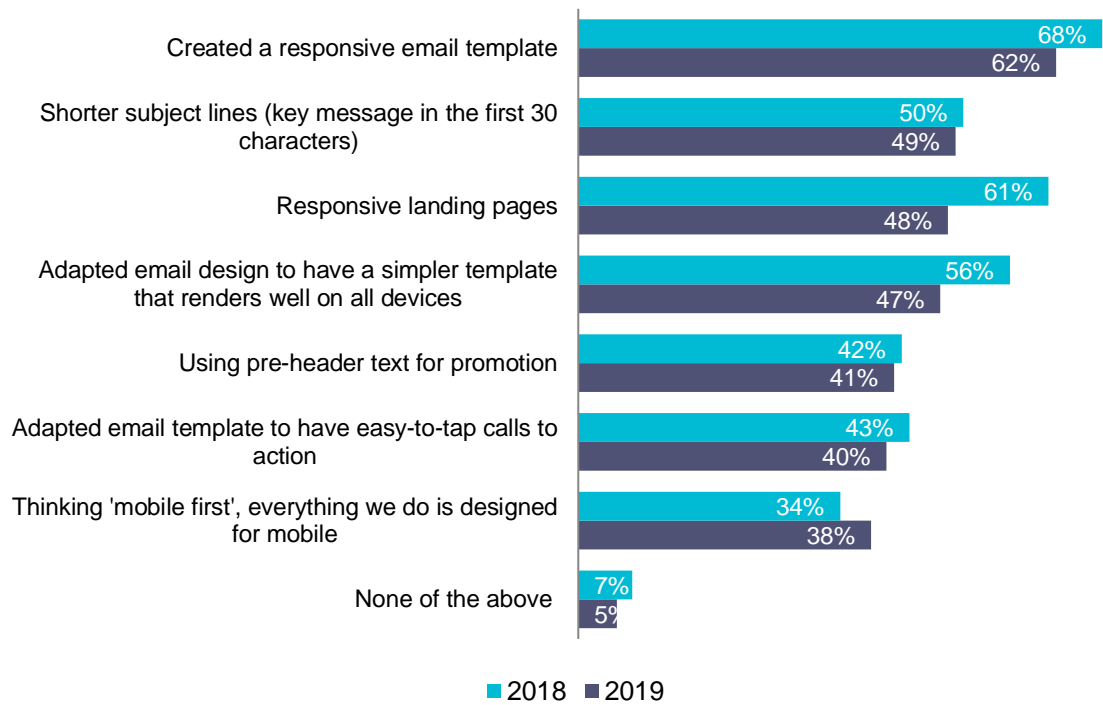
Figure 57: How would you describe the extent to which your clients have a strategy for optimising email marketing for different devices?



Respondents 2019: 93 | 2018: 141
 2017: 252 | 2016: 258 | 2015: 251

Agency respondents

Figure 58: What have your clients done to optimise email marketing for different devices?

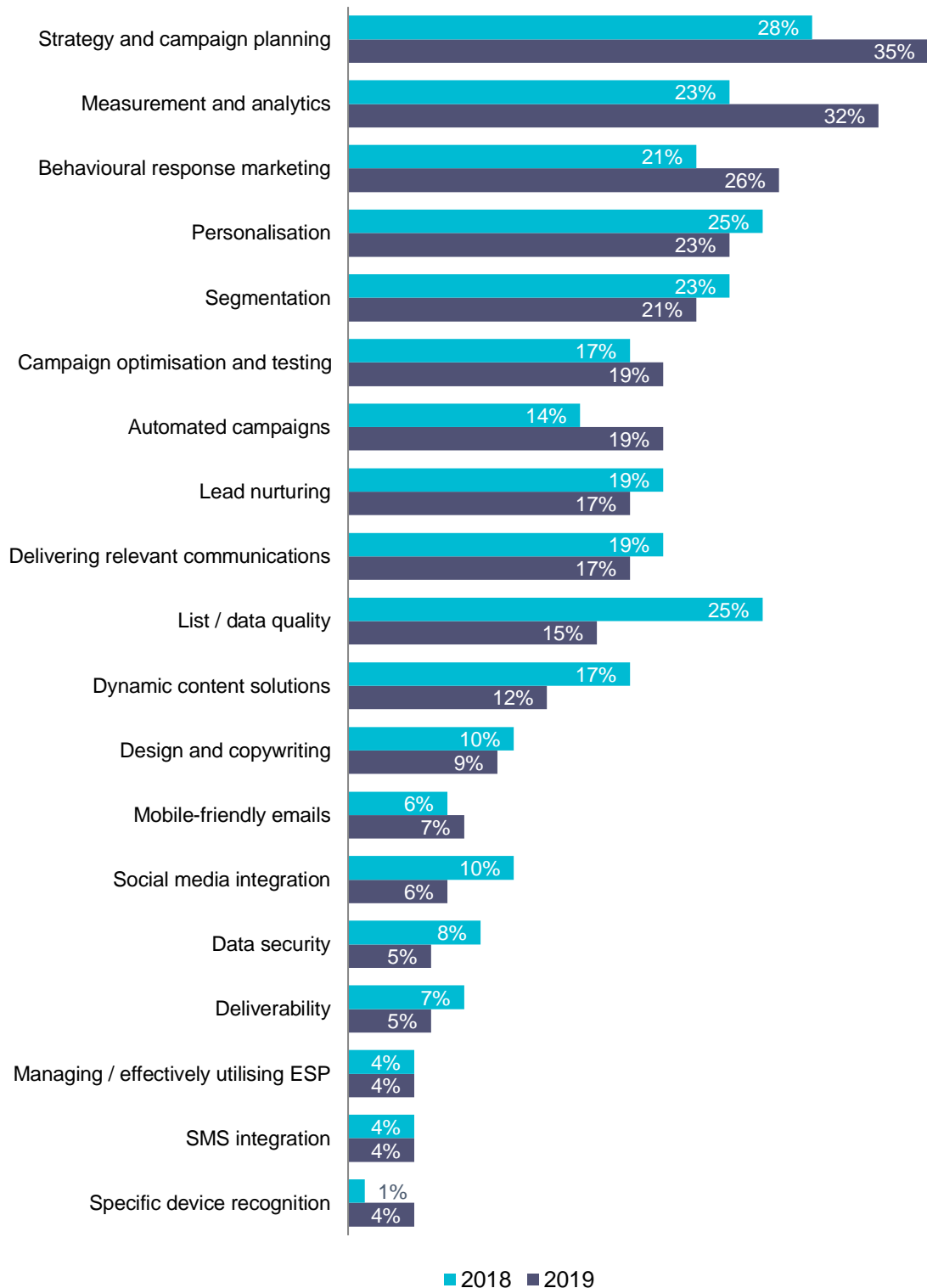


Respondents 2018: 135
Respondents 2019: 91

Note: Respondents could select all the options that applied.

Agency respondents

Figure 59: Which three areas of email marketing do your clients really need to focus on in 2018?

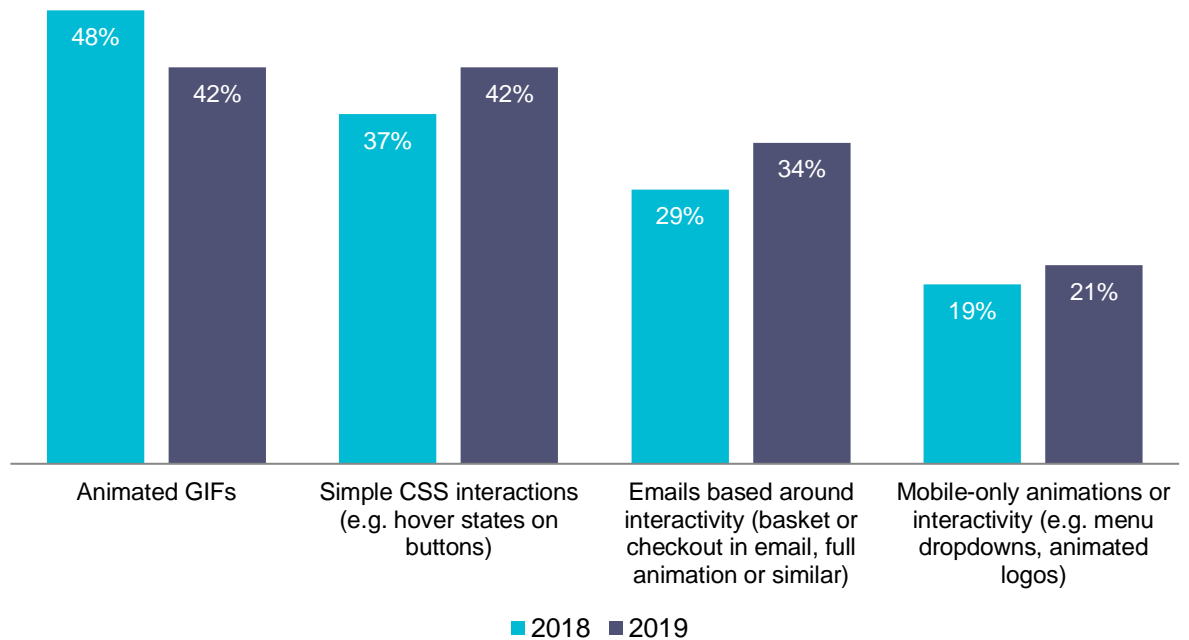


Respondents 2018: 115
Respondents 2019: 81

Note: Respondents could select up to three options.

Agency respondents

Figure 60: Proportion of agency respondents saying their clients are using these animated or interactive modules in their emails



Respondents 2018: 137
Respondents 2019: 97



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