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Bounce message 550: user unknown, relay denied and rejected, what each one means

E-mail

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Bounce message 550: user unknown, relay denied and rejected, what each one means

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You sent an e-mail and got back a message that says “Mail Delivery Subsystem”, “Undelivered Mail Returned to Sender” or “Delivery Status Notification (Failure)”. That is a **bounce**, and what matters is at the bottom of it, on a line like `550 5.1.1 ...`. The first digit says a lot: **5 is a permanent failure** (no point trying again without changing something), **4 is temporary** (see **error 421 and 451**).

The 550s you will see most

What the line says (wording varies from server to server)	What it means	Who has to act
`550 5.1.1` **user unknown; the account does not exist**	The destination address does not exist, or has a swapped letter.	You: confirm the address with the recipient another way.
`552 5.2.2` **or mailbox full**	The recipient’s mailbox has reached its quota.	The recipient. See **your mailbox is full**.
`550 5.7.1` **relaying denied; relay access denied**	The server your program sent to will not send outward without identification. It happens when sending authentication (SMTP) is switched off in the program.	You: switch authentication on and check the ports. See **why your e-mail is not sending or receiving**.
`550 5.7.1` **blocked, rejected by policy, blocklist**	The recipient’s server refused your sending address because of reputation, or because the IP is on a blocklist.	Both. See **your server IP on a blocklist**.
`550 5.7.26` **unauthenticated (SPF/DKIM)**	The destination demands that the domain proves the message is yours, and the proof did not pass.	You: **SPF, DKIM and DMARC**.

What the line says (wording varies from server to server)	What it means	Who has to act
`554` or `550` with the word DMARC	The domain published a reject rule and the message failed it.	You: **creating your DMARC record**.

How to read a bounce, step by step

1. **Go to the bottom of the message** and look for the technical part: it usually has “host ... said” or “Remote server returned”. That line is the reply of the server that refused, word for word.

2. **See which server refused.** If it was the recipient’s, the failure is the destination’s or your reputation. If the refusal comes from the server you sent through, it is your program’s configuration.

3. **Compare:** does it fail for one recipient only, or for all? One: address, full mailbox or their block. All: something on your side (authentication, SPF, blocklist).

4. **If you need to know what happened after sending,** cPanel keeps the trail: **Track Delivery** shows the reply to each attempt.

Getting bounces for messages you never sent?
Someone used your address as a fake sender, and the bounces from that person’s errors landed on you. In general there is no break-in to your account. What protects your domain in the long run is DMARC: **creating your DMARC record**.

Do not resend ten times.
On a 5 error, resending the same does not help and, for some blocklists, even makes it worse. First change what the technical line points at.

NEED A HAND?

Paste us the technical line of the bounce (the one starting with 550) and tell us the destination address.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Why your e-mail is not sending or receiving**
- **Error 421 and 451: temporary failures, and why the message is delayed**
- **Track Delivery: finding out what happened to a message you sent**
- **SPF, DKIM and DMARC: why your e-mail lands in spam**

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