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Read receipts and tracking pixels in e-mail: what they tell you and what they do not

E-mail

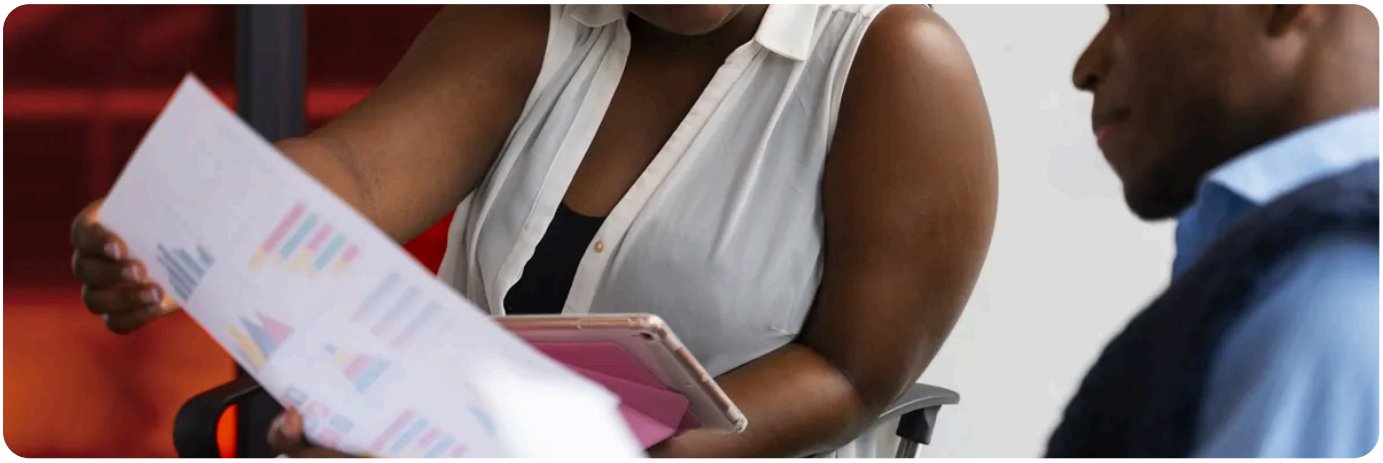
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Read receipts and tracking pixels in e-mail: what they tell you and what they do not

E-mail Created on **October 15, 2026** 2 min read



The short answer: knowing whether someone read your e-mail seems useful, but it is **unreliable**. A read receipt depends on the recipient agreeing; the "tracking pixel" (a tiny image) is blocked or preloaded by many programs. "Open" numbers mislead. **Clicks** and **replies** count for more.

The two mechanisms

Mechanism	What it is worth
Read receipt (requested in the message)	The recipient chooses whether to send it. Many refuse. It only proves someone agreed.
Tracking pixel (invisible image)	It counts an open when the image is requested. It fails if images are blocked.
Programs that preload images	Some load them on their own, without the person opening it. It inflates opens.
Clicks on tagged links	More reliable: someone did something. **UTM links**.
Replies	The clearest sign it was read.

Using this well

1. **Do not depend on read receipts** in everyday messages. If you need to know, ask, or ask for written confirmation.

2. **On sends to a list,** measure clicks and replies, and treat opens as an indication, not an exact number: **E-mail marketing without burning your domain**.

3 **Say that you measure.** If you use tracking pixels, the privacy policy should say so: **Personal data protection**.

4 **Respect consent:** where it is required, the list must have agreed to receive and to be measured: **Consent**.

5 **If a message seems badly delivered,** look at the header: **Reading an e-mail header**.

Too many images, message in spam.
An e-mail with many images and tracking links looks like advertising and risks spam; a pixel that fails is not a sign the e-mail did not arrive. Use the measurement to improve the text, not to nag those who do not reply.

To build an HTML e-mail that displays well: **HTML e-mail**. To send to a list: **Subscribers and newsletter**.

NEED A HAND?

Want an opinion on how to measure your sends? Open a ticket with what you use today.

Open a support ticket →

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- **Personal data protection: what applies to your website**
- **The cookie notice and consent: what your site collects without you knowing**
- **Reading an e-mail header: did SPF, DKIM and DMARC pass?**
- **UTM links: finding out which campaign brought each visit**

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