

The Business Guide to Choosing an Email Delivery Service

8 Questions Every Project Leader Should Ask

By powering customer engagement, email is a key driver of business growth in today's cloud economy. Selecting the right email delivery service is a critical decision that will help you achieve that success—or lead to a seemingly never-ending string of technical and support problems. So it's important to make the right choice.

Whether you use email for traditional email marketing or for real-time, transactional notifications, your answers to the following questions will help you understand what's at stake—and how to find the right solution to your business' needs.

1

Does the service have a robust email API?

A well-designed and robust application programming interface (API) is a fundamental requirement for any email delivery service. It's the only way that real-time, data-driven transactional email can really work. Indeed, any modern technology stack for email delivery should be built API-first.

So it's surprising that some providers of email delivery still offer surprisingly limited APIs. In many cases, it's a sure-fire giveaway that the notion of API-driven email has been bolted onto an older platform. In others, it's a sign that the provider doesn't understand the needs of technically-savvy customers.

Another way to think about it is this: was the service built by developers, for developers? Whether it's a high-performing RESTful API or a powerful and flexible SMTP injection, email delivery must be integrated into the experience and flow of an app or web site, not treated as an afterthought. A robust email API makes that real-time integration possible.

SparkPost: an email API built for developers, by developers

We have deep roots in the building and maintenance of high-performance email platforms, and we've created SparkPost specifically with the needs of developers and devops teams in mind. SparkPost offers:

- RESTful API for control of every SparkPost feature: manipulating templates, generating messages, sending emails, and reporting performance data
- Powerful SMTP injection, including the ability to invoke nearly every API feature with SMTP X-Headers
- Client libraries for Node, PHP, Python, Java and many more, as well as pre-built integration with key cloud platforms like Heroku, Microsoft Azure, and others
- Webhooks for rich data streaming and inbound message processing
- A UI built on our own APIs

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Does the service supply real-time data and analytics?

Savvy senders understand that email metrics go way beyond "sent," "opened," and "clicked." In fact, it's table stakes for a modern email delivery service to be able to report on nearly every quality of a message—campaign, yes, but also customer, geography, time zone, template, and much more.

But the analytics an email delivery service provides aren't simply a question of more detailed demographic results. Modern growth marketers understand that measuring email's impact often means stepping outside the campaign-based

model of aggregate demographics altogether and assessing customer engagement in an different way: triggers, activation, user state, and more.

That insight requires the ability to capture individual message performance in when you need it. That's why an email delivery service simply must have the ability to supply detailed event history for each message, with the ability to access data via API. And for businesses that truly rely upon data-driven insights, the ability to stream all message activity with webhooks to any number of webhook endpoints provides the ultimate real-time access to message events.

SparkPost gives you the data you need

Need discrete data points? SparkPost offers every user real-time, actionable information about the state of your emails. We have 37 different email metrics, which includes everything from injections to opens and from bounces to clicks. No more scraping through logs or old summarized data—our API-accessible data gives you everything you need to manage your email streams.

In addition, SparkPost has the ability to use multiple webhooks with any number of endpoints; there are 18 different events that can be sent to your warehouses. You choose what information goes where, so any combination of our webhooks can go to any number of your applications.

“The deep knowledge and customer focus of the SparkPost implementation team made our successful transition possible.”
- Kenneth Chan, Tobi

Does the service truly understand email deliverability?

Email deliverability—getting email to the inbox—is a deceptively complex subject. Not just anyone can manage it well. Deliverability requires dedicated professionals with deep technical expertise and long-term experience working with global ISPs. Ask a prospective service provider about deliverability and see what they have to say. If an ESP's answer seems glib or just too good to be true, it probably is. Dig deeper. They should be able to tell you about the differences between “delivery” and inbox placement rate, how they measure the difference, and why they're able to achieve their claimed results.

Their answer should start with their people—but it also should include discussion of automated deliverability optimization that scales and shapes your email sending in real-time, adjusting the parameters of your message streams based on real-time feedback, bounce codes, and feedback loops (FBLs) from inbox providers. Doing so helps establish and maintain a solid reputation with those providers, and helps ensure efficient mail delivery.

No one delivers better than SparkPost

Reliable delivery is fundamental to how we built the SparkPost service. We're built on years of experience developing the world's highest-performing email technology. It's no accident that SparkPost has earned the industry's proven best inbox placement.

From former postmasters to anti-abuse experts, our team has worked in the email trenches at the world's largest senders and ISPs alike. These experts have seen it all and know how to solve nearly every deliverability challenge.

Our team leverages sophisticated technology for global email delivery. The Adaptive Email Network (AEN) compiles email data from global ISPs and the world's largest senders and processors of email. Combined with sophisticated bounce and FBL handling, AEN allows SparkPost to analyze message disposition data and create intelligent sending rules so senders have far higher rates of compliance with ISP use policies.

And of course, SparkPost has dedicated IP address options available at all sending volumes and offers full support for email authentication and security standards.

“The SparkPost service has allowed us to achieve high levels of reliability and performance. We are very excited to work with SparkPost.” - Tara Clark, Zillow

Is the service a true cloud platform?

Implementing an on-premises solution made sense a decade (or longer) ago, but it doesn't today. And even many service providers still rely on an increasingly untenable data center model.

A cloud-based email delivery service provides infrastructure for generating and sending messages—while you take care of the things that lie within your core competency. And a true cloud platform provides increased performance and lower cost than any data center operation can sustain.

When considering email delivery options, look at its:

- **Scalability:** Can it meet your company's needs as it grows, and can it do so quickly if your business suddenly needs extra capacity? If it can't, you could encounter a crisis when your business volume increases.
- **Latency:** How long does it take from message generation to delivery? Emails that sit in a queue for hours can hurt your business when customers wonder what happened to the messages they were supposed to receive.
- **Elasticity:** When you need to send unexpected high-volume bursts of email, can you do so without waiting for your provider to spin up another server? You also don't want to pay for extra "just in case" capacity that sits unused.

SparkPost is cloud-native

SparkPost is a true cloud service. That cloud-native architecture means that SparkPost can offer customers immediate on-demand capacity and cloud auto-scaling, with the ability to send messages across our network in just seconds, even when demand increases. SparkPost even

backs up its performance capabilities with a burst-rate guarantee.

Our cloud platform also gives you flexibility to deploy email infrastructure in whatever way your business needs. Whether you're looking to leverage your existing on-premises infrastructure by implementing a hybrid cloud, diversify your message streams among multiple vendors, or are already all-in on the cloud, SparkPost gives you the performance and cost benefits far exceeding any alternative.

Those aren't simply words: our service runs on the Amazon Web Services (AWS) infrastructure because it offers better security, reliability, and resilience than any data center. That adds up to enabling us to do what we do best: ensuring your email is delivered at the right time, to the right people.

"The proactive support we get from the SparkPost team is second to none."

- Penny-Merelle Gray, Intercom

Does the service incorporate security by design in every aspect of its business?

When you're considering email security, it's natural that topics like spam, malware, and phishing come to mind. In the past, perimeter defenses like spam filters and virus scanners were the only real line of protection. Today, support for email authentication standards and a strong perimeter defense is just the start (but ask about it anyway).

The state of the art in security—and the threats—have moved well beyond this front. A modern email platform must incorporate security by design throughout its service—a perimeter defense is not enough. Instead, a secure system will be built assuming the worst and taking the threat of malicious practices for granted. Systems built from the ground up to compartmentalize the layers and components of the service will limit runaway vulnerabilities.

But technical architecture is just the beginning; the strongest services are built with secure operations from the start. An integral information security team that supports a culture of security across the company is essential.

SparkPost embodies security by design

SparkPost's robust and secure email delivery service sets the standard for the industry. Our across-the-board support for features such as two-factor authentication or key standards such as STARTTLS, DMARC, DKIM, and SPF are obvious examples, but our commitment to security goes far deeper.

SparkPost's cloud-native platform ensures our customers receive the benefit of the Amazon

Web Services infrastructure's deep security features. Our email security expertise is backed by AWS' stringent platform- and network-layer security, including intrusion detection and denial-of-service mitigation.

But good security means more than hardened technology or messaging best practices; it also requires sound business processes that support technical systems. At SparkPost, that business control underlies how we implement technical infrastructure. Ensuring the integrity of our customers' messaging streams underlies every aspect of how we do business.

Does it provide a meaningful service level agreement (SLA)?

If email drives revenue for your business, you need to have confidence that your email delivery service has your back. That includes SLAs with teeth, burst rate guarantees, and publicly available uptime history.

Ask any service provider you're considering to explain what is covered by their SLA. Does it address just a narrow piece of their infrastructure—or if they cover the things that really matter, like end-to-end service and business continuity?

Moreover, ask what types of fail-safes they have in place when infrastructure crashes or is taken offline. Do they have multiple availability zones around the world? How much system redundancy do they have in place? Will they scramble when a data center goes down? Your business needs email delivery that walks the walk on reliability and uptime, so be sure to push if it seems a service provider is simply making empty promises. When it comes to reliability, it's not in an SLA, it doesn't count.

SparkPost walks the walk with guaranteed performance

SparkPost's uptime SLAs go deep, covering the SparkPost web app UI, data feeds, webhooks, and even business continuity. And for enterprise senders with high volumes of time-sensitive email, SparkPost even delivers a guaranteed burst rate backed by SLA.

Our SLAs are the best in the business—and they make others' promises to cover narrowly-tailored portions of their sending infrastructure sound a little toothless.

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Does the service offer the support you need?

Whether you're looking for great API docs and developer-friendly communities like Slack or dedicated account management by a team you know and trust, the right support can make all the difference to your success. So ask a prospective provider whether they'll give you support on your terms.

If a problem arises, will you know who you're talking to, and will they understand your business? Just as importantly, do they understand the complexity of sending email at scale? Great support is hard to find, but it's a key aspect of a quality email delivery service.

SparkPost delivers real email expertise on a first-name basis

SparkPost's support team are email pros with deep knowledge and experience. Whether it's advice on deliverability best practices, message performance, or developer support for our API, you can count on the hardest-working team in the email business.

Even better, SparkPost doesn't require you to purchase unneeded sending volumes just to get the support features you want. The extra support and hands-on expertise that comes with our Priority, Premium, and Enterprise support add-on plans are available at any sending volume.

Premium and Enterprise customers enjoy the benefit of working with a dedicated Technical Account Manager (TAM) who knows them, their email implementation, and their business requirements in great detail. Our TAMs deliver proactive, hands-on guidance through onboarding, implementation, and ongoing support.

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Does the service's history and customers give you confidence?

Don't overlook intangibles like business growth. A track record of success backed by happy customers who are willing to publicly sing its praises is better than any marketing claim. And when you speak to references, be sure to ask what other email delivery services they've left in the past. You might notice a pattern that should tell you something.

SparkPost is the trusted leader in email delivery

There's a reason SparkPost is world's fastest-growing email delivery service. Our customers—including Pinterest, Twitter, CareerBuilder, LinkedIn, Salesforce, Zillow, and Comcast—range from the biggest senders in the world to start-ups and smaller companies that are just beginning to make a mark. Today, our customers send over 3 trillion messages a year—more than 25% of the world's non-spam email.

But what our customers also share is understanding of the business value of email—and the confidence that comes from working with an email delivery service that is 100% committed to helping them succeed.

SparkPost's with email runs deep. In fact, our team built Message Systems, the preeminent developer of on-premises email infrastructure, including the Momentum and Port25 high-performance MTAs.

SparkPost Makes It Easy to Get Started

Your answers to the questions we've posed should help guide your decision to choose the right email delivery service for your business needs. Whether you're a bootstrapped startup ready for growth or an established enterprise with mission-critical email, SparkPost can handle your needs.

In fact, we make it easy to get started with a free account that includes 100,000 emails per month. And all of our sending volume tiers, from free to millions of emails sent each month, receive the full scope of SparkPost features, and small senders aren't excluded from any add-on services.

Ready to see what SparkPost can do for your business?

GET STARTED TODAY!

Call **877-887-3031** or email **hello@sparkpost.com**.

Follow us on Twitter **@SparkPost**
or go to **sparkpost.com**.

