Demystifying Inbox Deliverability

Changes Coming in 2024

MARIGOLD™

What you need to know about Google and Yahoo's New Inbox Privacy Protections Beginning February 2024

Spammers everywhere are losing sleep about Google and Yahoo's new inbox protections coming in 2024 – and it shouldn't be that big of a surprise. These new rules were created to prevent bad players from getting into inboxes. Consumers have grown tired of receiving messages they never recall signing up for, and have become even more frustrated when they can't unsubscribe from these pesky messages... or worse, the brand keeps emailing them long after they've unsubscribed.

Google and Yahoo have heard consumers loud and clear, and all bulk email senders are impacted by the new policies. **Before you begin to lose sleep, remember: these inbox privacy protections are intended to make inboxes a safer, less spammy place.** That's exactly what Google said when they released the news.

So, think about it like this – tighter inbox controls mean your messages will continue to land in inboxes, while those unwanted spam emails never even make it in.

It's easy to get caught up in all the noise about what Google and Yahoo's February 2024 privacy changes mean, what you need to do and how you need to comply. To help you navigate the changes, we've organized an FAQ to help you get up-to-speed about the new regulations and how you can work with your teams to ensure your emails always make it to the inbox.

MARIGOLD
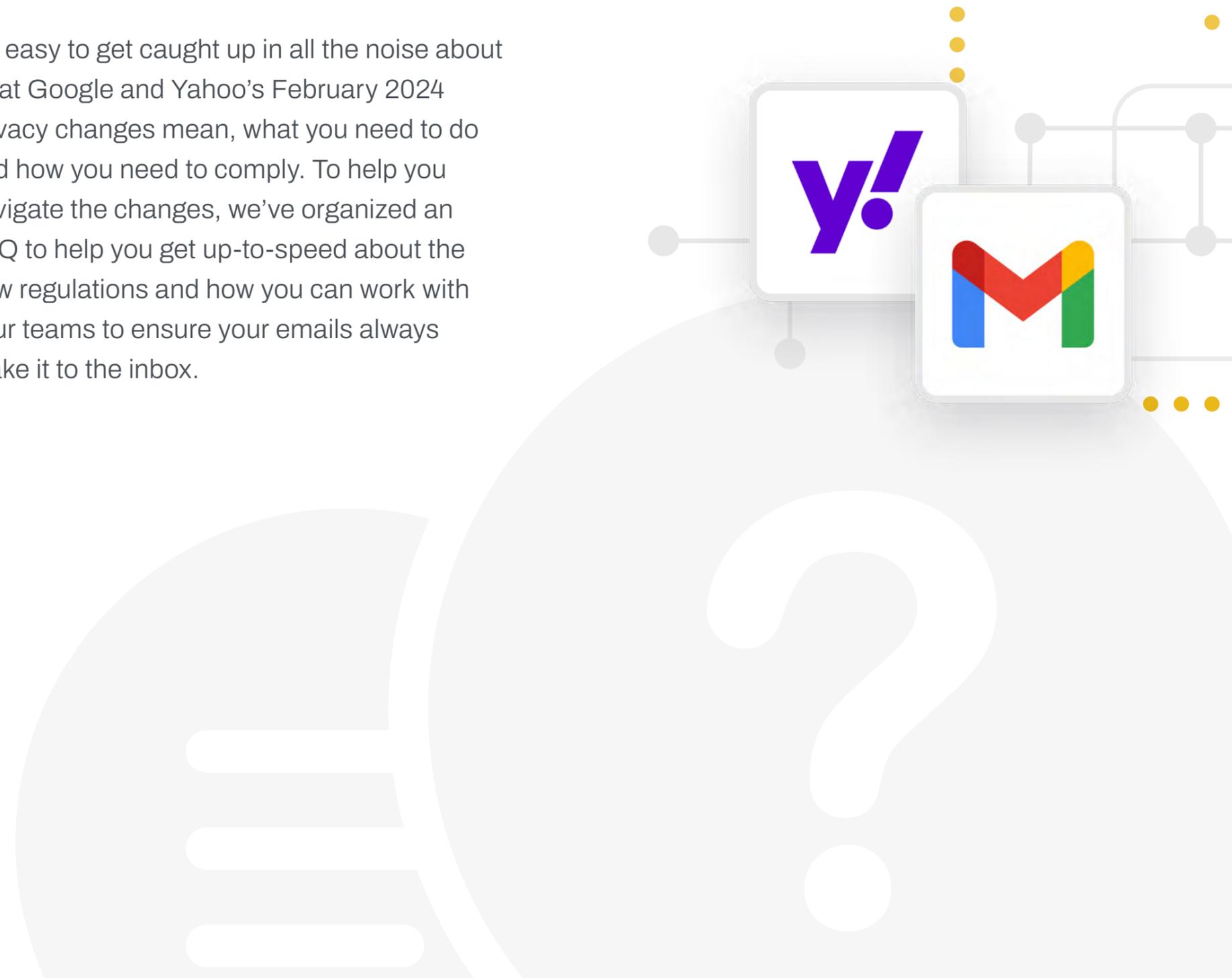
Q: What did Google and Yahoo! Announce?

On October 3, 2023, Google and Yahoo announced three big changes bulk senders must comply with by February 2024. These changes include new standards for:

1. Email authentication
2. Unsubscribe links
3. Opt-out links

We all know email authentication has been a best practice for email marketers for more than a decade, and unsubscribe links have been a standard legal requirement for almost 20 years.

However, as authentication and unsubscriptions are changing, the details mean the difference between an email being delivered or rejected. We expect additional mailbox providers – outside of Google and Yahoo – to follow their lead in implementing these requirements for delivery.

Depending on which email service provider (ESP) you use, you might need to act now to avoid landing in the spam box. Or, even worse, not getting delivered at all.

Now let's get into the nitty-gritty details, so you know what to do.
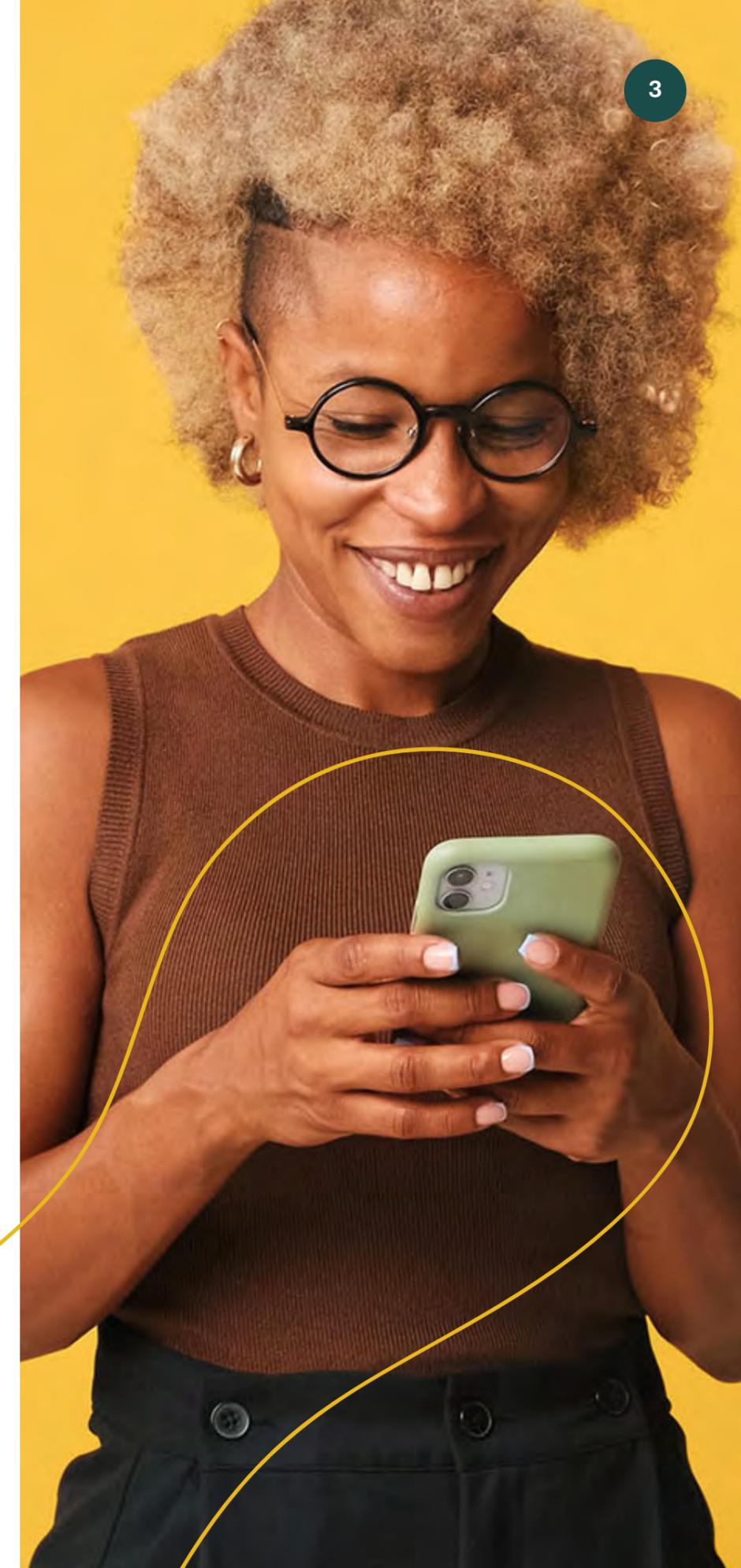
Q: What is changing about email authentication?

Gmail and **Yahoo** will now require bulk senders to authenticate their emails.

If you are unfamiliar with sender policy framework (SPF), domainkeys identified mail (DKIM) and domain-based message authentication, reporting and conformance (DMARC), these standards work hand-in-hand to allow senders and inbox providers to work together to eliminate spam and reduce fraud.

- **SPF** is an authentication method that checks whether the sending server is an authorized sender.

- **DKIM** is a method that detects forged sender domains by creating digital fingerprints that can be verified.

- **DMARC** extends SFP and DKIM by allowing the administrative owner of a domain to publish policies that protect their domain from email spoofing.

Starting in February 2024, all bulk senders must set up SPF and DKIM and publish DMARC policies. If you're unsure of how to configure your SFP, DKIM, and DMAC policies, we recommend you speak with your IT team. This is set up on your company's domain name system (DNS), which is typically managed by IT.

Q: What is changing about unsubscribe links?

As a consumer, how annoying is it to receive unwanted emails, unsubscribe from them and then continue to receive emails? It's frustrating, and we imagine as an email marketer who understands best practices and compliance standards – you must roll your eyes every time it happens. That time is coming to a close in 2024.

Gmail and Yahoo announced recipients **must be able to unsubscribe with ease – and senders must process and honor unsubscribe requests within two days.**

As you're well aware, the CAN-SPAM mandate allows senders a ten-day grace period to process opt-outs. If you're using multiple email marketing platforms, tools or vendors to send emails, honoring the two-day unsubscribe might introduce complexities. Which means it's time to act now.

Starting in February 2024, all bulk senders must adhere to specific one-click unsubscribe protocols, which include adding a specific one-click unsubscribe code in your email headers.

It's important to note – you can still give subscribers the option to manage their subscriptions. One-click unsubscribe does not mean it's the only option for consumers to unsubscribe or indicate which email lists and messages they prefer.
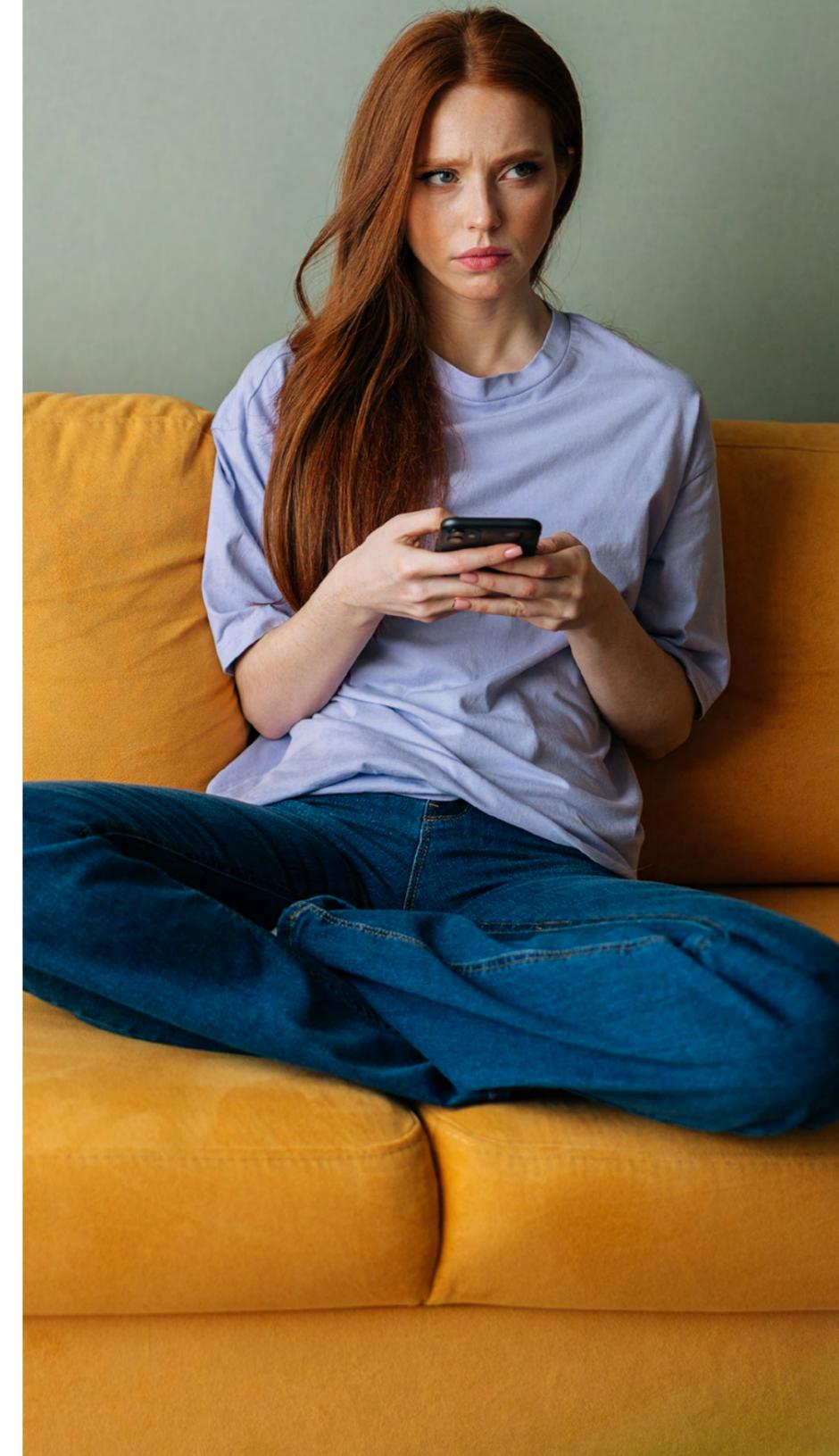
Q: What is changing about email spam rate thresholds?

New spam rate thresholds are coming. According to Google, all bulk email senders must establish and stay below a "clear spam rate threshold of 0.3%" in order to be delivered to inboxes. Meaning if your spam rate threshold is more than 0.3%, your emails will never even make it into the spam folder, let alone an inbox. Yahoo has also indicated they will enforce spam threshold compliance. As with the other two changes mentioned already, this concept isn't new. Google and Yahoo have always had a spam rate threshold, and the penalty for violating that threshold is restricted email delivery.

It's really important to note that – according to Google – it takes time for improvements in spam rates to reflect positively on spam classification.

We strongly encourage email senders to look into their spam rate thresholds. If you're close to or above the 0.3% rate, it's time to rethink your email marketing strategy moving forward and work with a deliverability expert – like Marigold – who can help you improve your deliverability.

MARIGOLD

Q: Why are Google and Yahoo! Making these changes?

When spam and unwanted promotions muddy up inboxes, no one wins. In the announcement, Google stated, "Gmail's AI-powered defenses stop more than 99.9% of spam, phishing and malware from reaching inboxes and block nearly 15 billion unwanted emails every day." These rules are intended to declutter and remove spam from inboxes so consumers don't miss the messages important to them – which includes the promotions and offers coming from your brand.

Playing by the rules, respecting privacy and sending messages to your subscribers that resonate with them will only help your brand stand out in the inbox.

Privacy provides a competitive advantage, and respecting privacy and preferences is essential for everyone.

MARIGOLD

**Q:** How can bulk emailers satisfy new Google and Yahoo! authentication requirements?

Step one is to understand your company's current email authentication. If you are proactive with deliverability, you may already adhere to the **standards Google has outlined** for email authentication. Has your company established *both* SPF and DKIM for *all* of the applications you utilize for bulk email delivery? Has your company already published DMARC policies, and if so, are they still valid and appropriate? Your ESP is the best place to start asking questions if you aren't sure where else to turn.

Once you have successfully audited your existing email authentication policies and protocols, you must take the appropriate action to comply with the new standards.

Here's what you need to do for Google and Yahoo!

- Set up SPF and DKIM email authentication for your domain.

- Ensure that sending domains or IPs have valid forward and reverse DNS records, also referred to as PTR records. **Learn more**.

- Format messages according to the Internet Message Format standard.

- Set up DMARC email authentication for your sending domain. Your DMARC **enforcement policy** can be set to none. **Learn more**.

- For direct mail, the domain in the sender's From: header must be aligned with either the SPF domain or the DKIM domain. This is required to pass **DMARC alignment**.
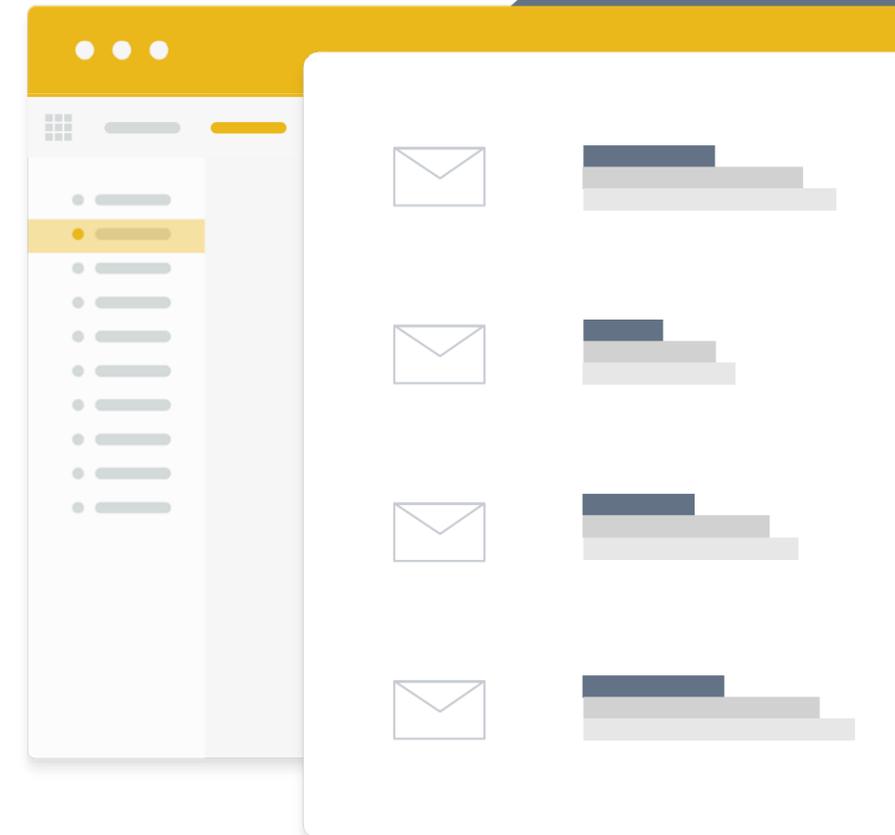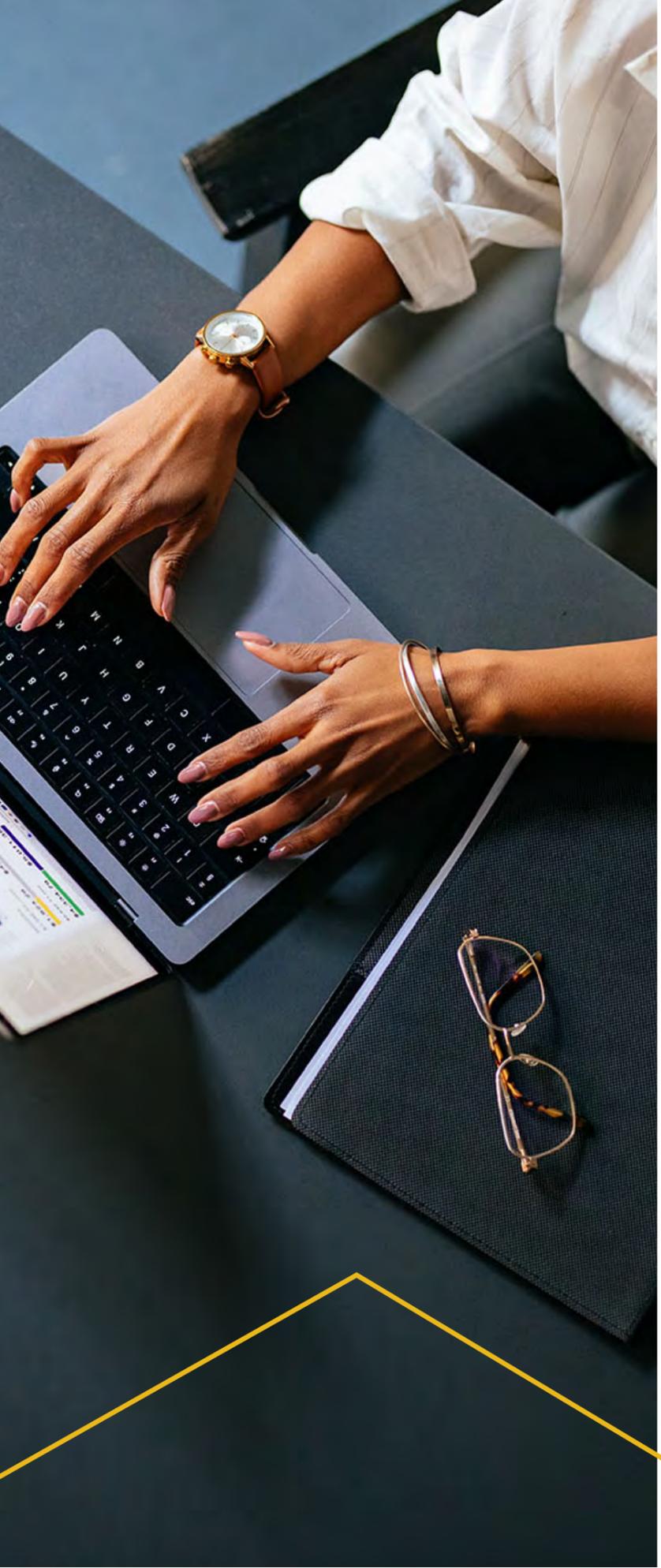
Q: **How can bulk emailers satisfy new Google and Yahoo! unsubscribe requirements?**

It should be easy to opt out of unwanted emails. Clicking a link labeled "unsubscribe" should end the flow of emails, not produce another email asking me if I am sure. But this is where the waters might get a little muddy. The best practice for any bulk email sender is to provide a preference center allowing subscribers to modify which messages they receive – rather than simply severing all communication. **As such, each email marketer must consider the implications to their audience when they enable a one-click unsubscribe.**

The update to unsubscribe functionality may be the most confusing change announced. However, Google's guidance for a one-click unsubscribe is not specific to the unsubscribe link that you place in the body of an email.

Google is instructing bulk senders to put explicit code in the header of the email. This header code allows the inbox provider to incorporate unsubscribe functionality into their inbox application.

We have confirmed (at a recent **M3AAWG** meeting) one-click unsubscribe functionality can apply to either a preference stream or an entire email marketing program. What does that mean? Let's explain using an example...

You're a retailer, and you have captured new preferences about your subscribers' favorite types of electronics. With that information in hand, you decide to send a one-time offer email to your electronics enthusiasts. If someone clicks the one-click unsubscribe link in the header of the email, the code/link you place can either:

1. Globally unsubscribe your subscribers from all emails.
2. Unsubscribe individuals from specific preferences they no longer want to receive, which, in this case, is electronics.

In addition to the one-click unsubscribe change, we want to reemphasize the other adjustment to unsubscribe requirements. **Google has shortened the CAN-SPAM ten-day processing window to two days to process unsubscription.** Thankfully, this shouldn't concern bulk email senders because your ESP should maintain opt-status in real-time and always check opt-status during delivery. If you have multiple systems tracking user subscription status, you need to ensure they are kept in sync within that two-day window or before your next send.

What Google Requires:

• For subscribed messages, enable one-click unsubscribe and include a clearly visible unsubscribe link in the message body. **Learn more**.

What Yahoo! Requires:

• Support one-click unsubscribe, a method for signaling a one-click function for the List-Unsubscribe email header field. Refer to **RFC 8058** for details.

• Provide an obvious and visible unsubscribe process that doesn't require users to log in.

• Requests should be processed promptly.
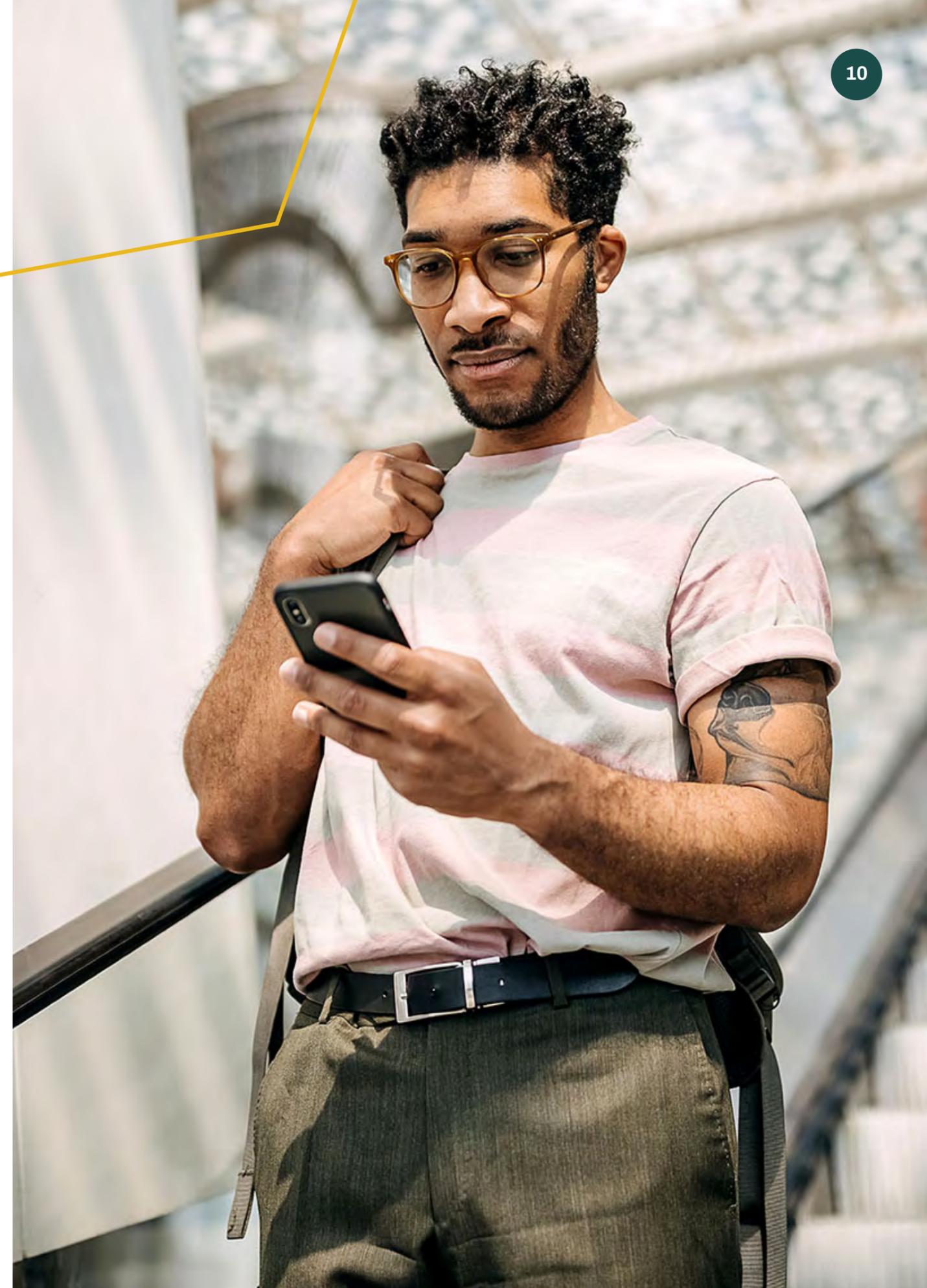
Q: How can bulk emailers satisfy new Google and Yahoo! spam rate requirements?

First, you need to understand your current spam rate in order to plan accordingly. Your spam rate – or spam complaint rate – is the percentage of emails reported as spam relative to the total number of emails delivered to the active inboxes of a specific inbox provider. **While Yahoo does provide feedback on your spam rate, Gmail leaves the task to senders to monitor their own rates with postmaster tools. Many bulk senders rely on deliverability experts or deliverability services to monitor rates and respond accordingly.**

At Marigold, we have dedicated deliverability teams that work with clients to ensure their emails always make it in inboxes.

Google provided additional details regarding spam rates, but has yet to outline the consequences. They advise all bulk senders to keep spam rates below 0.10%. They also encourage bulk senders to avoid a spam rate of 0.30% or higher – especially for any sustained period of time. Google suggests they may give more leeway to bulk senders with healthy spam rates by making them more resilient to irregular spikes in spam complaints and warned bulk senders that maintaining a high spam rate will result in prolonged spam classification or blocking.

If the guidelines described above give you pause – or if you currently have a spam rate that will negatively impact your deliverability by February – **let's talk**.

0.10%
↓ Spam Rate

Only 5
Unsubscribes
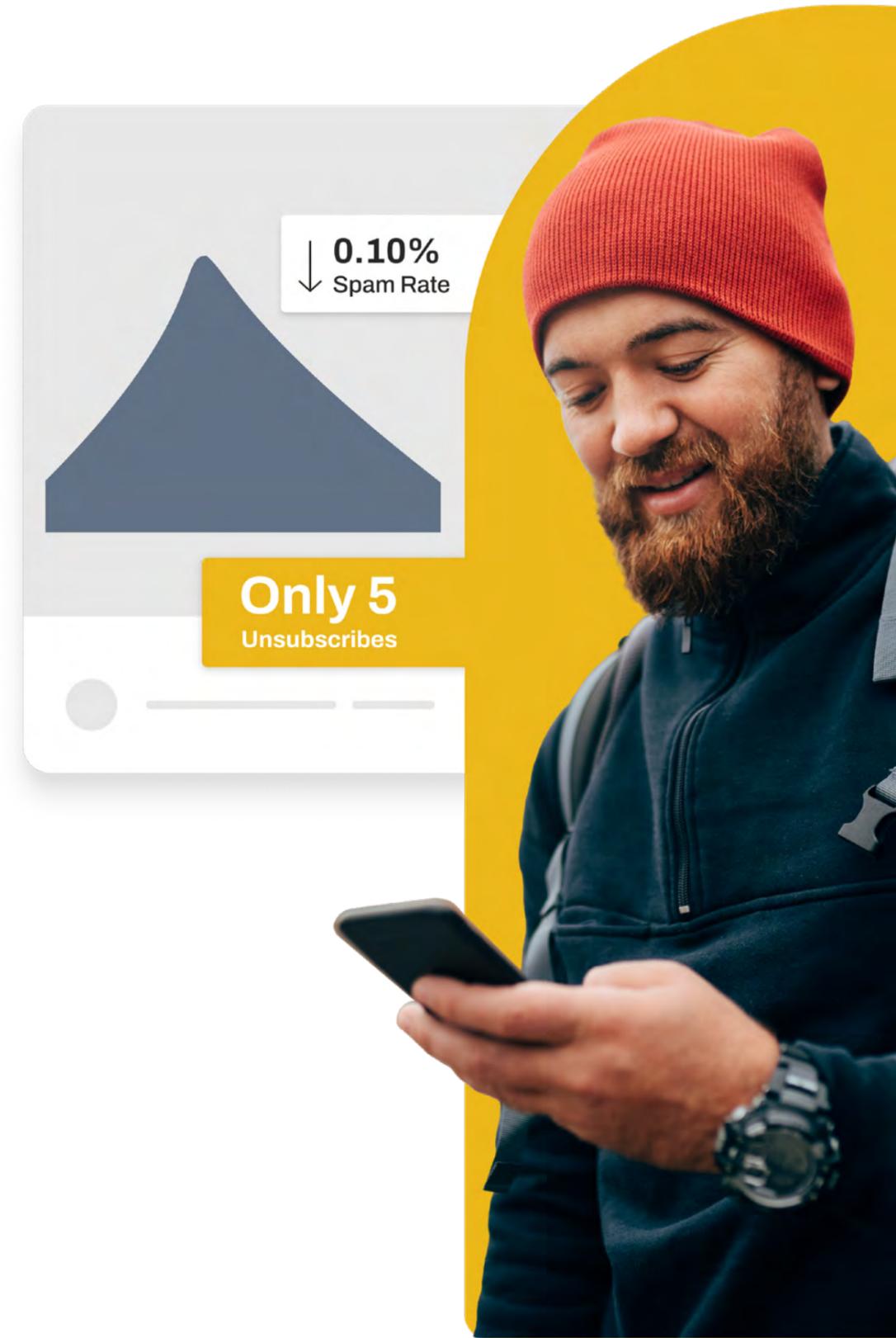
How can Marigold help email marketers *improve their deliverability?*

At Marigold, we believe brands should proactively monitor and fine-tune privacy, security and preferences. Our deliverability experts work hand-in-hand with our product and engineering teams to ensure our customers establish trust and transparency with their subscribers.

If your business or your marketing team requires some additional support as you prepare for the new standards, our team of dedicated deliverability experts is here to help. **Contact us** to learn more about our email marketing platforms and deliverability services.

Where *relationships* take root.

Marigold's approach to Relationship Marketing stands alone in a world of one-size-fits-all marketing technology companies. Our solutions are designed for your specific size, industry, and maturity, giving you the technology and expertise you need to grow the relationships that grow your business, from customer acquisition to engagement to loyalty. And, with a team of strategists that provide insights into what's working, what's not, and what's changing in your industry, you're able to maximize ROI every step of the way.

Great marketing isn't just about conversion, but true connection. Learn why 40,000 businesses around the world trust Marigold to be the firm foundation they need to help relationships take root.

Find out more at **MeetMarigold.com**

MARIGOLD™