

Why

# REAL-TIME DATA ACCESS

is critical for  
email marketing at scale



# The Importance of Real-Time Data Access for Enterprise-level Marketers

In email marketing, sending messages that use the freshest, most up-to-date data available about the content and the recipient is essential. Enterprise-level marketing teams seem to realize this and are prioritizing efforts to improve speed and accuracy of data. In this report, we'll examine further how our survey suggests that satisfaction with real-time data is a terrific gauge for satisfaction with email service providers overall.

It's relatively clear that the importance of real-time data is under little dispute, but what does "real-time data" actually mean? At small- to medium-sized companies, marketers are typically able to have virtually all their data living within their email vendor or marketing cloud, meaning live data is being pulled into their email automation programs.

## But a funny thing happens at scale.

The more customer data that's pouring into a company's database, the less of that data can be accessed in the marketing cloud at any given time while putting together emails. It's too expensive and cumbersome to try and store it all with their email vendor. So the business has to copy the pieces that are relevant to a particular message, then send that to their provider in order to build and send the email. That wastes time and money.

Meanwhile, live data is still streaming into the company's database, and some of that data is likely to contradict what's been copied to the vendor. The lag between one system talking to the other means emails are sent that are out of date, and a company's personalization efforts take a hit.

## True real time vs. vendor-speak.

When we stress the importance of real-time data access, this is the situation we're trying to steer marketers away from. Our research suggests that the larger the company, the more likely their marketers are to grasp the importance of real-time data. Because of the ubiquity and limitations of the CRM marketing cloud in today's email marketing world, though, the very meaning of "real-time data" has become muddled, especially at the enterprise level.

Since building emails in the cloud means sending data away from a company's centralized database — and single source of truth for customer information — something has to give. Either marketers and email service providers themselves acknowledge that the data being used to build emails at that level isn't actually live and in real time, or "real time" has to be defined down to mean something other than "100% live."

# 100% Live Data Access is Critical for Meeting and Exceeding Customer Expectations

We believe 100% live, actually real-time data is essential for email marketing in the world we live in today, as inboxes fill with more marketing messages, and customer expectations for personalization and experiences continue to grow more sophisticated. The lag of hours between when new customer information lands in a company's database and when it's reflected in the data being used to build and send emails in the cloud may not have been a significant problem 10 or even 5 years ago. But today, those are hours a company can't afford to let slip through their fingers.

Ironically, as the volume of data grows and increases the challenges involved with producing those experiences via email, customer expectations don't fall — they rise. The harsh reality for marketers is, the more complex your dataset makes effectively delivering world-class email marketing, the more your customers expect you to do exactly that. And if you're not raising your own standards right along with them, demanding the data you use for building emails be just as live and real time as the data on your website, meeting those expectations on a regular basis is going to be virtually impossible.

Read on to dive deeper into our recent survey of enterprise marketers to understand some of the key points of their views on real-time data, and how that impacts their email marketing programs.

## Methodology

This survey was fielded in partnership with Survata in October 2017 to a panel of 101 marketing professionals representing business-to-consumer (B2C) organizations sending at least 10 million email marketing messages per month.

### Role in the Company

Manager	47%
Director	30%
C-Level Executive	10%
Senior Manager	10%

### Monthly Email Marketing Messages

10M to 50M	42%
Over 100M	35%
50M to 100M	24%



## Satisfaction With Access to Real-Time Data Is Fleeting for High-Volume Senders

For marketers at small- and medium-sized companies, all the talk of prioritizing real-time data access could be hard to understand. After all, if your organization isn't sending more than 10 million emails a month, there's a good chance the pain of data lag and syncing issues hasn't touched your work with any regularity. Even once companies start crossing that 10 million threshold — the lowest number for a company we surveyed — the difficulties start out relatively minor at the lower ends of that.

But they ramp up fairly quickly as a company's data needs and the size of the database grow. The more customer data that's pouring into a company's internal database, the more likely their marketing team is to run into all sorts of challenges when they try to put automation and personalization efforts in place across their email marketing program. At scale is where the big promises of the CRM marketing clouds really start to break apart.

And that's reflected in the numbers from our survey. Among those sending 50 million or more emails each month, just 17% said they were "very satisfied" with the speed and accuracy of their access to real-time data, while 38% of those sending under 50 million said the same. That's more than a two-fold difference between marketers at the smaller enterprise organizations and ones at the largest organizations when it comes to their standards for real-time data.

*How satisfied are you with the speed and accuracy of real-time data access with your company's primary ESP?  
Displaying percentage of those who answered "Very Satisfied"*

**38%**

10M-50M  
Emails/mo.

**17%**

50M-100M  
Emails/mo.

**17%**

Over 100M  
Emails/mo.

In a way, that sort of number is heartening for those in the email industry who preach the importance of real-time data when it comes to doing email well. It shows that marketers at the companies that need to hold their ESPs to the highest standards with regard to real-time data are tending to do so. They recognize that, as they send more emails, email marketing at a world-class level becomes more challenging, and they owe it to their organizations to keep pushing their standards higher.

## Size Matters: Larger Organizations Stress the Need for Real-Time Data Access

The same sort of correlation happens when we look at revenue rather than email volume, and consider marketers' attitudes toward real-time data. 60% of marketers at companies with annual revenue of more than \$50 million said real-time data is very important, versus 25% of those making less than that. Once again, the difference is more than double, this time about how they view real-time data access in the context of their jobs.

*Question: Please rate how important the following factors are when deciding on email technology.  
Filtered by answer: Real-Time Data Access*

	Annual Revenue			
	< \$50M	\$50M-500M	\$500M-1B	> \$1B
Slightly Important	13%	6%	4%	6%
Somewhat Important	63%	29%	35%	39%
Very Important	25%	65%	62%	55%

Related to that, 34% of marketers at companies making \$500 million — and 42% of those making \$1 billion or more — chose real-time data as the factor they'd most like for their ESP to improve, while only 12% of those at under \$500 million agreed.

*Question: If you could get your company's primary ESP to improve one thing, what would it be?*

	Annual Revenue			
	< \$50M	\$50M-500M	\$500M-1B	> \$1B
Real-Time Data Access	13%	12%	23%	42%

It's a sign that the bigger a company gets, the more likely their marketers are to get it. They understand that email marketing is all about data, it's complicated to get them full access to it, and doing so needs to be a priority for the ESPs they work with. The marketing teams at these companies have experience dealing with the challenges involved with data access, and they've seen the results that come from simply relying on the legacy marketing cloud providers instead of taking a critical look at the ESP landscape and finding the best overall solution for their needs.

If this is an indicator of where large enterprise organizations are headed with their email marketing teams, it's excellent news for those who care about email continuing to thrive in the coming years, as customers demand more sophisticated communications. Email still has the highest ROI of any marketing channel, and it'll stay that way if enterprise marketers keep their standards for real-time data access high.

## Satisfaction With Real-Time Access and Overall ESP Performance Go Hand-in-Hand

For email service providers, as with nearly every business, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty are some of the most important growth factors to consider. When customers are pleased with the products, service, and value they receive from a company they do business with, they're not only more likely to continue to spend money with them, but also to be an advocate for the brand on social media and in their industry.

As our [previous findings](#) indicated, this has been a challenge for ESPs, who have seen marketers at enterprise organizations generally shrug when asked about their satisfaction level toward the ESPs they work with. There's a variety of reasons why that could be true, but the bottom line is that the majority of the loyalty granted ESPs over the years has been more structural than merit-based — It's so hard to change that marketers shudder at the thought of making a switch, so they re-up with another contract despite being lukewarm toward their current ESP.

*Question: How do you feel about the overall performance of your company's current primary ESP? Crossed with: How satisfied are you with the speed and accuracy of real-time data access with your company's current primary ESP?*

		Satisfaction with ESP Overall			
		Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied
Satisfaction with Real-Time Access	Very Satisfied	85%	13%	6%	0%
	Satisfied	10%	70%	25%	0%
	Neutral	5%	16%	56%	100%
	Unsatisfied	0%	2%	13%	0%

But our research also indicates that providing access to real-time data access may be a path to earning that customer loyalty ESPs crave. Among those in our survey who said they were “very satisfied” with the overall performance of their ESP, 85% were also very satisfied with the speed and accuracy of their access to real-time data. Across the board, real-time data satisfaction and ESP satisfaction tracked in near lockstep, with 70% of those merely “satisfied” with overall performance saying the same about real-time data, and 56% of those neutral on overall performance taking the same stance toward real-time data access.

## Dissatisfaction with Real-Time Data Access is Testing Marketers' Loyalty With ESPs

Those numbers suggest that ESPs that can deliver on the elusive promise of real-time data access will tend to have more satisfied customers, and more satisfied customers tend to be more loyal by merit rather than fear of change or simple inertia. That panned out in our survey as well, in fact, with 58% of those who were at least satisfied with real-time data access saying they don't expect to change ESPs in the next year, versus 38% of those neutral or unsatisfied with real-time data.

*Question: How satisfied are you with the speed and accuracy of real-time data access with your company's current primary ESP? Crossed with: Do you expect your company to change your current primary ESP in the next 12 months?*

		Satisfaction with Real-Time Access			
		Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied
Will Change ESP	Yes	27%	18%	14%	33%
	No	62%	57%	38%	33%
	Not Sure	12%	25%	48%	33%

Those numbers do draw us back, though, to the original question of what real-time data really is, and how marketers understand it. Overall, more than 75% of those we surveyed said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the speed and accuracy of their access to real-time data. Given how few ESPs provide their customers with 100% live access to their data as they build emails, this suggests the muddled definition of "real time" is playing a part in these numbers.

## Companies That Stress Importance of Real-Time Access Find Vendors That Deliver It

So we wanted to look more deeply at what the best indicator is of who would be satisfied, and perhaps the best correlation was how important they deemed real-time data to their organization. Once again, these percentages tracked almost perfectly — 73% of those who were “very satisfied” with the speed and accuracy of their real-time data access also said that was “very important” to them, versus 57% of those merely satisfied and 38% of those who were neutral toward their real-time data access. Nearly 1 in 5 of those who were neutral said real-time data is only “slightly important,” while only 6% overall said that.

*Question: How satisfied are you with the speed and accuracy of real-time data access with your company’s current primary ESP? Crossed with: Please rate how important real-time data access is when deciding on email technology:*

		Satisfaction with Real-Time Access			
		Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied
Importance of Real-Time Data	Slightly Important	4%	2%	19%	0%
	Somewhat Important	23%	41%	43%	33%
	Very Important	73%	57%	38%	67%

It’s not entirely clear what that means. It could be that marketing teams that recognize the importance of real-time data to their email marketing efforts seek out ESPs that prioritize it. Or it could be that marketers justify their poor data access by downplaying its importance. What’s clear, though, is that real-time data satisfaction is one of the clearest indicators of ESP satisfaction, and data-focused marketers will seek out solutions that give them the live access they need. However you define real-time data, its importance to email marketing is difficult to dispute.

## Conclusion

It's easy to still be asking yourself why this is all so important. After all, if 100% live, truly real-time data were such an imperative for enterprise marketers, wouldn't more of them be demanding it from their primary ESP?

It's important to understand that there's an aspirational aspect to the concept of true real-time data access for building customer messages. To see the potential for what you can accomplish while building messages using the freshest data possible, you need to want to do more than you can right now.

If you can deliver that next-level experience consistently and with the creativity it requires, you'll find customer satisfaction and loyalty growing steadily. Customers have seen so many emails that aren't relevant to them or their interests that many of them don't even bother to open them anymore.

That means there's a market out there that can be exploited, for the marketers who are bold enough, a largely untapped reservoir of customers who delight in communications that are genuinely helpful, that treat them like a person rather than a credit card number. Everybody talks to the customer, about an upcoming sale, some new merchandise, or an event that's coming up. That's easy.

But, with truly real-time data access, there's another path. It allows marketers to better understand the customer as the individual she is, the one who's hunting for the right set of heels to match the outfit she just purchased. It's a path that allows marketers to not have a miscue that comes with data that may take a full day to sync, missing an opportunity to connect with a customer in a meaningful way.

Still looming over this discussion, though, is the question of what exactly marketers were thinking of when they heard "real-time data." We think it's important to acknowledge that the definition isn't ironclad, and the near-absolute way we intend the phrase to be interpreted may not be the way some of them were using it when they answered these questions.

Some of their definitions may not have evolved since 10 or more years ago, when true real-time data really was virtually impossible. But, as technology and consumer expectations have evolved, so have the possibilities — and the necessity — of real-time data for marketers who want to make the most of their hard work on email marketing.

Real-time data access allows brands to interact with consumers in a personalized way, and — importantly — in a way that's helpful to the consumer. Over time, that sort of interaction builds trust and loyalty. When customers not only open your emails but actively look forward to seeing messages from you, that's a huge win for your brand. That means you've moved beyond basic messaging blasts to a place where you're building a relationship. And that's nearly impossible without keeping the standards for "real time" as high as possible. Once you do, we think you'll wonder why you waited so long to do so.

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