



Email Marketing January 28, 2021

The History of Email: Major Milestones from 50 Years

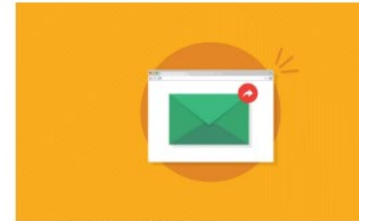
Call it a birthday celebration. Call it a golden anniversary. Email has been around for a half-century and we're marking the occasion with a look back at how far it's come!

The history of email is full of interesting stories and groundbreaking technology. We've highlighted 24 major milestones from the last 50 years in the timeline below. Click through the slideshow to travel through the years and explore email history. Read on for more insights into the history of email.

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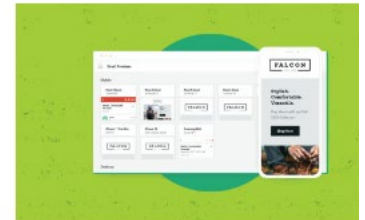
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50 YEARS OF EMAIL



Computer engineer **Ray Tomlinson** creates the earliest version of electronic mail while working on the ARPANET system in 1971.

1971



50 YEARS OF EMAIL



1976



Queen Elizabeth becomes the first head of state to use ARPANET's electronic mail.



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

1978

Gary Thurek earns the title "father of spam" after sending the first unsolicited email marketing message. It generated \$13 million in sales.



50 YEARS OF EMAIL



1978

14-year-old **V. A. Shiva Ayyadurai** develops an interoffice electronic mail software he calls "EMAIL."



50 YEARS OF
EMAIL

SMTP

Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) is defined as an internet standard, simplifying communication between servers.

1982



50 YEARS OF
EMAIL

Microsoft releases its first commercial email client, **Microsoft Mail**, a precursor to Outlook.

1988



50 YEARS OF EMAIL



1989

Elwood Edwards

records AOL's iconic "You've Got Mail" notification on a cassette tape in his living room.



50 YEARS OF EMAIL



1991

The crew of the **Atlantis shuttle** sends the first email from space using a Macintosh Portable.



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

MIME defines standards for representing data beyond ASCII text, allowing multimedia attachments.

1992



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

1992

Early ISP, **CompuServe**, introduces the first WYSIWIG email editor with fonts, colors, and emoticons.



50 YEARS OF EMAIL



Computer scientist and cyber-security expert, **Phillip Hallam-Baker**, develops the first webmail client at CERN.

1993



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

Hotmail and **RocketMail**

(later Yahoo! Mail) become the first free webmail services.



1996



50 YEARS OF EMAIL



The Oxford Dictionary adds a definition for the word “**SPAM**” as electronic junk mail to its new edition.

1998

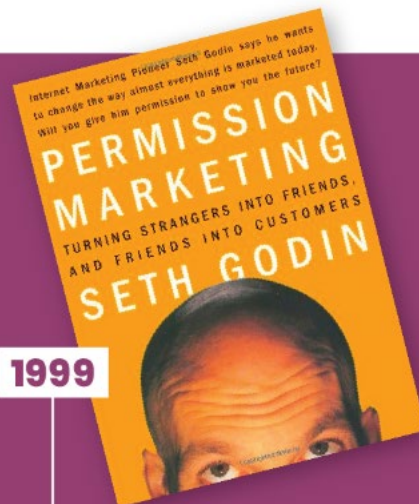


50 YEARS OF EMAIL



Seth Godin defines the practices of “ethical email marketing” in his book *Permission Marketing*.

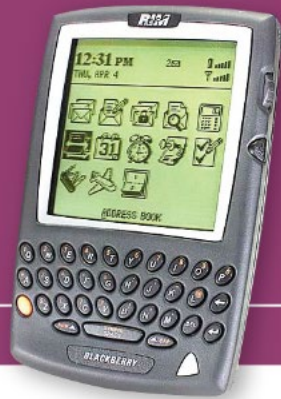
1999



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

Blackberry introduces a mobile phone with wireless email support.

2002



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

2003

President George W. Bush signs the CAN-SPAM Act, establishing rules for commercial email in the U.S.



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

Gmail enters the scene with inbox search, threaded conversations, and one gigabyte of storage space.

2004



Gmail
by Google



50 YEARS OF EMAIL

Siblings **John Thies** and **Michelle Klann** found Email on Acid to help marketers deliver email perfection.



Email on Acid

2009



50 YEARS OF EMAIL



2010

< **Responsive emails** are introduced. (Today, nearly half of all emails are opened on mobile devices.) >

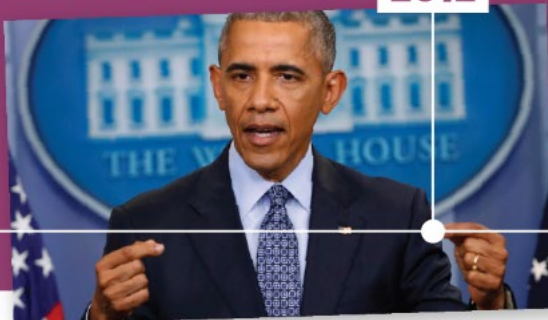


50 YEARS OF EMAIL

President Barack Obama's

reelection campaign collects 13 million email addresses. The most-successful subject line was "Hey."

2012



50 YEARS OF
EMAIL

**Canada's
Anti-Spam
Legislation**
(CASL) goes
into effect.

2014



50 YEARS OF
EMAIL

Founding of the
professional
network **Women
of Email.**

2016





*Radicati Group, Email Statistics Report, 2017-2021



1971: The Invention of Email

Most people give Ray Tomlinson the title of email's inventor. He came up with the idea while working for ARPANET, the government-funded research project that eventually became the internet. At the time, you could only leave messages for people using the same computer. Tomlinson created a program that gave users the ability to send messages between connected computers on the ARPANET system.



The first email was sent between these two ARPANET computers

Among Tomlinson's most notable contributions to email as we know it today is the use of the @ symbol. Tomlinson passed away in 2016, but he lived to see his idea adopted by people all over the world.

In 2012, Tomlinson told [The Verge](#) ...

"I see email being used, by and large, exactly the way I envisioned."

1976: The Queen's First Email

Queen Elizabeth II was the first head-of-state to use email. She tried out ARPANET's electronic mail program during a visit to the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment in Malvern, England. They gave her the username HME2 for "Her Majesty Elizabeth II."

As [WIRED magazine](#) put it, the Queen of England beat all of us to the internet. And, she's still using the latest technology to communicate!



Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign was the first to use email this same year. More recently, however, the former president has avoided email because [he thinks the NSA is spying on him](#).

1978: The First Spam Email

It didn't take long for someone to find a way to use email to make money. Gary Thurek earned the title "father of spam" after sending an unsolicited email marketing message to hundreds of ARPANET users. He was promoting a new product for Digital Equipment Corporation. Thurek claims the email earned \$13 million in sales.

With that kind of success, you might question whether this was truly spam or just some clever email marketing. You might ask the same question about the [most ironic email campaign](#) ever.

1978: The Other Inventor's EMAIL Program

There is an ongoing [debate over the inventor of email](#). V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai claims a program he created as a 14-year-old is the true first version of email. Ayyadurai built his interoffice software program for the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. He called "EMAIL."

Intuit Inc. / Samesurf, Inc.

Exhibit 1011

Page 15

Ayyadurai went on to earn four degrees from MIT, found tech companies, and get involved in politics. While his claim to be the inventor of email is contested by many, it's very possible that he coined the term.

1982: Making Email Simpler

Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) standardized the way mail servers send and receive messages. It's partly based on the SNDMSG program that Tomlinson created at ARPANET. SMTP is what email clients use to send messages to mail servers and on to the recipients.

Other protocols include the Internet Message Access Protocol (IMAP) and the Post Office Protocol (POP), which would emerge in the mid '80s.

1988: Outlook's Ancestor

Towards the end of the decade, Microsoft released its first commercially available email product, MSMail. There were versions for both Macintosh and PC computers. It was seen as the predecessor for the Exchange and Outlook products.

Microsoft has been causing headaches for email developers ever since! Troubles [creating emails for Outlook](#) is one of the main reasons to use [Email on Acid's features](#).

1989: The Voice of Email in the '90s

Elwood Edwards' voice likely helped the masses get hooked on checking email. He's the guy behind AOL's "You've Got Mail" notification. It was probably one of the earliest ways to get a dopamine hit online. At the time, Edwards was working in broadcasting and his wife worked at AOL. She asked him to record a few lines, which he did on a cassette tape in his living room.

While he didn't get rich from the recording, he's received plenty of attention. In 2016, Edwards was driving for Uber. Occasionally, people still recognize that unmistakable voice.



1991: Email in Space

Email went galactic in the early '90s. That's when the crew of the *Atlantis* Shuttle used a Macintosh Portable to send the first email from space. The message read:

"Hello Earth! Greetings from the STS-43 Crew. This is the first AppleLink from space. Having a GREAT time, wish you were here, ...send cryo and RCS! Hasta la vista, baby, ...we'll be back!"

The crew was all about Apple products on this mission. According to [Cult of Mac](#), the astronauts were also fitted with WristMacs, which were predecessors to today's Apple Watch.

1992: Making Email More than Text

Multipurpose Internet Mail Extension (MIME) made email much more flexible, supporting text in character sets other than ASCII. It also made it possible to include multimedia attachments such as images, audio, and videos.

1992: What You See is What You Get

Formatting emails without knowledge of code became a reality thanks to CompuServe. The early ISP introduced a WYSIWYG editor for email and online forums that allowed different fonts, colors, and emoticons.

1993: The Birth of Webmail

The history of email moved so quickly, it's easy to forget that, for quite some time, you had to send and receive email on a specific software program. Phillip Hallam-Baker, a cyber-security expert working for CERN developed the first version of webmail. But his version was only a test and never got released to the public.

1996: The Rise of Webmail Clients

Of course, the idea of being able to access your email from any computer with an internet connection would take off quickly. ISPs began bundling webmail into their offerings in the mid-'90s. Hotmail and RocketMail, the latter of which became Yahoo! Mail, were the first free webmail services.

1998: Defining Spam

One of the unfortunate side effects of email being an inexpensive way to reach the masses was spam. Unwanted messages that often came from unsavory operations became a prolific problem, and it's probably the ugliest scar in the history of email. In 1998, [spam went into the New Oxford Dictionary](#) along with several other internet terms.

Many believe the origins of calling junk email “spam” can be traced back to a classic Monty Python sketch. In the sketch, patrons of a diner get inundated with annoying chants of spam, which they do not want.



1999: Ethical Email Marketing

Email marketing doesn't have to be annoying. Seth Godin and his agency Yoyodyne believed email could be used effectively and responsibly when you build a list of subscribers who actually want to hear from you. (Imagine that!)

He published a book on this type of strategy called *Permission Marketing*, which got him kicked out of the Direct Marketing Association, likely because of how much it challenged the status quo. Today, Godin is in the Direct Marketing Hall of Fame. He gave us a few insights for today's email marketers in our [blog post on *Permission Marketing*](#).

2002: Email Goes Wireless

Early adopters of smartphones loved their BlackBerrys. The devices surged in popularity thanks in part to BlackBerry's focus on mobile email. Released in 2002, the BlackBerry 5810 was the first device marketed as a mobile phone with email capabilities (rather than a pager).

2003: The CAN-SPAM Act

The United States set standards for regulating commercial email with legislation called Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing – better known as the [CAN-SPAM Act](#). President George W. Bush signed it into law in 2003, 32 years after email's invention.

Some critics say the law didn't go far enough. CAN-SPAM makes it a misdemeanor to spoof a “From” field and requires a way for people to opt out. However, the law did not make it *illegal* to send unsolicited email marketing messages. That prompted some to call it the “You-Can-Spam” act.

2004: Gmail Changes the Game

When Gmail launched in 2004, it raised the bar among webmail competitors. For starters, Gmail offered one whole gigabyte of storage space, which doesn't sound like much now, but it was way more than normal at the time. Gmail also brought improved search and threaded conversations to webmail. It introduced the [tabbed inbox in 2013](#), which added new challenges for [email deliverability](#).

[As the story goes](#), computer engineer Paul Buchhelt (Google employee #25) created his first version of Gmail in just one day.

2009: Delivering Email Perfection



Email marketing isn't easy. In 2009, siblings John Thies (an email developer) and Michelle "Miki" Klann (a designer) launched a new endeavor to help marketers deliver email perfection. The challenge John and Michelle faced was explaining to their clients why email clients rendered campaigns differently. So, instead of explaining the problem, they chose to create a solution.

Email on Acid provided [Email Previews](#) so teams could check out their campaigns and fix issues before hitting send. That's still an important feature. But the platform expanded over the years to include many other pre-deployment checks, including [Inbox Display](#), [Email Accessibility](#), and much more!

2010: Emails Get Responsive

By 2010, Apple was already releasing the iPhone 4, and smartphones had become a must-have item. The rise of smartphones presented another challenge for email marketers. How do you optimize campaigns to be mobile-friendly?

The idea of designing and developing responsive emails emerged around 2010. According to [EmailMonday](#), around half of all emails are now opened on mobile devices.

2012: Presidential Email Success



☐	5/10/11	☆ SUBJECT:	Fixing what's broken
☐	6/15/11	☆ SUBJECT:	Dinner?
☐	8/31/11	☆ SUBJECT:	Frustrated
☐	9/14/11	☆ SUBJECT:	Let's meet
☐	9/30/11	☆ SUBJECT:	Stronger for it
☐	12/31/11	☆ SUBJECT:	Hey
☐	3/27/12	☆ SUBJECT:	If you're ready
☐	3/31	☆ SUBJECT:	Hey
☐	4/30	☆ SUBJECT:	Last call
☐	5/11	☆ SUBJECT:	My best friend
☐	5/22	☆ SUBJECT:	Wow
☐	5/31	☆ SUBJECT:	Not going to happen
☐	5/31	☆ SUBJECT:	Hey
☐	5/31	☆ SUBJECT:	Hey again
☐	5/31	☆ SUBJECT:	Aloha
☐	6/11	☆ SUBJECT:	I'm saving you a seat
☐	6/11	☆ SUBJECT:	Meet me for dinner
☐	6/15	☆ SUBJECT:	Rain check?
☐	6/25	☆ SUBJECT:	I will never stop fighting
☐	6/28	☆ SUBJECT:	Say you're with me
☐	6/28	☆ SUBJECT:	Today
☐	6/28	☆ SUBJECT:	Change is possible
☐	6/30	☆ SUBJECT:	To be frank
☐	6/30	☆ SUBJECT:	This is important
☐	7/26	☆ SUBJECT:	Hey
☐	7/26	☆ SUBJECT:	I don't get to tell you this enough
☐	7/26	☆ SUBJECT:	How grateful I am
☐	7/31	☆ SUBJECT:	So
☐	7/31	☆ SUBJECT:	This is critical
☐	8/2	☆ SUBJECT:	Are you in?
☐	8/2	☆ SUBJECT:	Say you're with me
☐	8/9	☆ SUBJECT:	This isn't going to stop

Courtesy: NeilPatel.com

Many marketers have praised President Barack Obama's use of digital marketing to motivate voters and donors. Check out Neil Patel's [email marketing lessons from Obama](#). The president's 2012 reelection campaign embraced social media and email marketing with great success.

The Obama campaign's most-opened subject line simply said "[Hey](#)." The strategy seemed awfully similar to spammy emails to former [Daily Show](#) host, Jon Stewart. An interesting fact about the CAN-SPAM Act? Political campaigns are not subject to it.

2014: Canada Fights Spam

No, folks in Canada [do not call ham Canadian bacon](#). They do, however, know spam when they see it. Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation ([CASL](#)) went further than CAN-SPAM to curb unsolicited email. As the [Cakemail](#)

[blog](#) points out, Canada's law requires permission or some sort of action before receiving an email, but CAN-SPAM does not. CASL also applies to text messaging, social media, and other digital communications.

2016: Women of Email

The practice of email marketing has grown immensely over the years. Self-described “email geeks” come in all forms. In 2016, veteran email marketers Jen Capstraw, April Mullen, and Kristin Bond co-founded the [Women of Email](#) professional network to promote female leadership in the industry.

You can read [more about Women of Email](#) here on our blog, and you can hear Jen Capstraw talk about the history of email in our [webinar with emfluence](#).

2018: Protecting Privacy

While Europe's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act may have caused some headaches for email marketers, it's also encouraged us to get better at our jobs.

Most people actively avoid email marketing. Convincing people to opt-in (and stay in) is tough to do, especially with all the noise out there. But it's worth the effort. So is protecting the data and privacy of the people who willingly subscribe to your emails. Transparency, security, and empathy are important if we want email to continue to be an effective channel in the future.

2020: A Year that Changed Everything

While email has gone through many evolutions over the decades, the entire world changed in 2020, and email marketing changed with it.

Email was extremely important for crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Plus, there were changes like the shift to remote work and online learning, the increasing adoption of eCommerce, and the impact of economic ups and downs.

Find out how all of these things and more affected the practice of email marketing and make a plan for the future. Download our special report, *Email Marketing and the Next Normal*, to get a 10-step [email marketing action plan](#) for 2021 and beyond.



STOP EMAIL DISASTERS BEFORE THEY STRIKE!

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AUTHOR: KASEY STEINBRINCK

Kasey Steinbrinck is a Sr. Content Marketing Manager for [Sinch Email](#), which includes the brands Email on Acid, InboxReady, Mailgun, and Mailjet. He understands how email and content work hand-in-hand to create a strong strategy. Kasey has also spent time working in traditional media, e-commerce marketing, and for a digital agency.

5 thoughts on “The History of Email: Major Milestones from 50 Years”



John Yalcin says:

[March 26, 2021 at 2:00 pm](#)

Interesting tidbits of facts and useful email history included here, thanks Kasey!

[Reply](#)



Dave Crocker says:

March 29, 2021 at 2:24 pm

Ray did not invent 'email', as your headline states. As your copy notes, it already existed. There's no documentation of its origins, but roughly 1965 is the usual reference. Again, as your copy notes, what Ray did was to /network/ the service. In fact he did not create the messaging software. Rather he upgrading the existing SNDMSG program for multi-machine messaging. That's not a small benefit, of course.

For more details on the history of email, take a look at

<http://emailhistory.org>

[Reply](#)



Dave Crocker says:

March 29, 2021 at 2:31 pm

The 'controversy' you cite lacks industry support, though it might have quite a lot of marketing effort to sustain in. As an exercise, look for other email professionals who support the view of invention in the late 1970s. I haven't found one, yet.

The claims about what distinguish that later work requires being very specific about the technical details of what there was before and what was innovative in the later work. The article I wrote for the Washington Post is worth considering, in that regard:

A history of e-mail: Collaboration, innovation and the birth of a system

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-innovations/a-history-of-e-mail-collaboration-innovation-and-the-birth-of-a-system/2012/03/19/gIQAOfEPS_story.html

also the Rand Report, written earlier than the purported, later invention — and it really only documented existing practice on the Arpanet:

Framework and Functions of the "MS" Personal Message System

<https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2007/R2134.pdf>

[Reply](#)



Josh Nelson says:

March 30, 2021 at 4:22 am

Though Email is widely used medium of communication, many of us don't know the history of Email till today. This article helps us to know about Email from the day of innovation till today, including how it has evolved and transformed as the most effective tool.

[Reply](#)



sagar says:

January 13, 2022 at 6:18 am

Interesting email history

[Reply](#)

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Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Name *

Email *

Website

☐ I'm not a robot


reCAPTCHA
[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

POST COMMENT