

Email Deliverability: How Spam Filters Work



Introduction

Spam filters are programs run by **Internet Service Providers (ISPs)** and mailbox providers—Gmail, Yahoo, Microsoft (Outlook, Hotmail, Live), and others—that decide whether your message is accepted, which **folder** it lands in (Primary, Promotions, Updates, or Spam), or whether it is rejected. Help article **10452** explains how those filters think so you can send from systeme.io with realistic expectations.

Deliverability is your email's ability to reach the **main inbox** without being filtered as junk ([article 157](#)). Filters do not use one simple rule—they combine **authentication**, **sender credibility**, **list hygiene**, **engagement**, and **content** into a score. Since February 2024 (and strengthened Microsoft requirements in 2025), providers evaluate **the whole sender**—domain, behavior, and engagement—not only the body of a single email ([4247](#)).

Where Spam Filters Run

- **Inbound at the ISP:** Every message you send from systeme.io passes through the receiver's filters before the subscriber sees it.
- **Multiple layers:** Large providers often run **several filters** with different algorithms (connection checks, authentication, content, reputation, user-specific rules).
- **Not the same as Promotions:** Landing in Gmail **Promotions** is tab sorting, not necessarily spam—but it still reflects how the provider classifies marketing mail ([369](#)).
- **Platform checks:** systeme.io also enforces rules (e.g. disallowed links) so one bad campaign does not damage shared infrastructure ([3730](#)).

Layer 1: Authentication (SPF, DKIM, DMARC)

Filters ask: **Is this server allowed to send for this domain, and was the message altered?**

- **SPF** — authorized sending paths.
- **DKIM** — cryptographic signature on the message.
- **DMARC** — policy + alignment; bulk senders are expected to publish it.

Without authentication, mail is often treated as **unverifiable or fraudulent**—Gmail and Yahoo have been especially strict since 2024 ([2923](#)). On [systeme.io](#), [authenticate your domain](#) (316) before scaling volume.

Layer 2: Sender & Infrastructure Reputation

Filters score **who** is sending, not only **what** was written:

- **Domain reputation** — history of complaints, bounces, and engagement on your branded domain.
- **IP reputation** — reputation of sending servers (systeme.io manages infrastructure; your practices still affect pool placement).
- **Professional From address** — free Gmail/Yahoo sender addresses trigger stricter scrutiny for marketing mail; use a **custom authenticated domain** ([363](#)).
- **Sending pools on systeme.io** — accounts are grouped by **open rate, spam rate, and bounce rate**; high spam or bounce rates can move you to a restricted pool and hurt inbox placement ([4472](#)).

Sudden volume spikes from a cold domain or IP can look abusive and trip rate limits ([2923](#)). [Warm up](#) gradually (4247).

Layer 3: Engagement & Complaints

- **Opens and clicks** — weak engagement over time signals low value; providers may filter more aggressively.
- **Spam complaints** — when a user clicks “Report spam,” the provider may suppress similar mail for that user and factor complaints into your sender score.
- **List quality** — mail to people who never opted in produces complaints and bounces; permission-based lists only (157).
- **Personalization** — filtering can differ **per recipient** for the same campaign based on individual history.

Monitor **Email** → **Statistics** in systeme.io and remove bounced/unsubscribed contacts regularly ([bounced contacts](#)).

Layer 4: Content & Links

Providers **scan the entire message** to classify inbox vs Promotions vs spam (363 / 1643). Modern detection uses **AI**, weighing:

- **Context** around phrases—not a naive “banned word” list alone.
- **Frequency and placement** of promotional language (subject vs body).
- **Spelling and formatting** — ALL CAPS subjects, rainbow text, excessive punctuation.
- **Text/image balance** and heavy HTML—overly image-only mail can look suspicious.

Links are heavily examined (3730):

- Must match email content; one clear destination per link.
- Avoid blacklisted domains, suspicious redirects, or “rotating” URLs.
- Risky links can cause systeme.io to **block the send** to protect everyone’s deliverability.

What Filters Decide

Outcome	Meaning
Primary inbox	High trust + personal/conversational signals (harder for pure promos).
Promotions tab	Accepted mail classified as marketing—common for newsletters.
Spam/Junk	Failed trust threshold—authentication, reputation, complaints, or content.
Blocked / bounce	Rejected at the server—list bombing, policy violation, or severe reputation damage.

Promotions is not failure—but **spam folder is**. Aim for authentication + clean lists + relevant content; optimize Promotions separately if needed (369).

Practices That Satisfy Filters on systeme.io

1. **Authenticate** domain + confirm sender address.
2. **Send only to opted-in contacts**—no purchased or scraped lists.
3. **Clean lists** (bounces, unsubs, inactive re-engagement or removal).
4. **Stable sending rhythm**—avoid random huge blasts on a new domain.
5. **Honest subject lines** and one-click **unsubscribe** (ISP bulk requirements, 4247).
6. **Review links** before send (3730).
7. **Watch pool metrics** and spam rate in statistics (4472).
8. Use [DMARC reports](#) (10240) to verify legitimate mail passes SPF/DKIM.

Deeper playbooks: [Good practices](#) (363), [advanced tips](#) (1643).

Troubleshooting

Symptom	Likely filter signal	Action
Everything in spam	Missing/invalid auth	Re-check 316 + DMARC; wait for Verified status.
Sudden spam after growth	Volume spike / list quality	Slow down; audit import source; warm up.
High spam rate in stats	Complaints	Tighten targeting; improve relevance; sunset cold subs.
Blocked send on systeme.io	Forbidden link or policy	Fix URLs per 3730; contact support if needed.
Only Gmail Promotions	Marketing classification	More conversational copy, fewer promo clichés (369)—not a auth bug.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a spam filter?

ISP software that scores each message for folder placement or rejection.

Can I skip authentication?

No for serious marketing—major ISPs expect SPF, DKIM, and DMARC.

Do trigger words alone kill deliverability?

Rarely—context and overall sender reputation matter more.

Same email, different folders?

Normal—per-recipient engagement and complaint history differ.

systeme.io pools?

Automated grouping by your open, spam, and bounce metrics (4472).

Related Resources

- [How to Improve Your Email Deliverability](#)
- [DMARC Reports: How to Read and Use Them](#)
- [Don't Risk Getting Blocked: Compliant vs Non-Compliant Lists](#)
- [How Can I Prevent List Bombing?](#)

Spam filters reward **transparent, authenticated senders** with **clean lists** and **wanted content**. On [systeme.io](#), treat deliverability as ongoing hygiene—not a one-time DNS task—so your campaigns stay on the right side of ISP scoring (10452).

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