How to Strengthen Your CX Program When Survey Response Rates Are Declining

It's not just you. Survey rates are dropping across industries.

Survey response rates have been declining for 20 years, a downward trend that's affected participation in everything from opinion polls and the U.S. Census to U.S. Bureau of Labor and other federal surveys and patient feedback surveys.

This presents a huge challenge for survey-centric customer feedback programs.

Not only that, customer feedback programs that are driven either entirely or largely by email-based surveys have another issue to contend with that's had a major impact on email open rates and engagement.

That is, email providers like Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, and now Apple using machine learning and AI to sort messages into groups of priority and secondary emails, completely reshaping how consumers find and engage with their emails. For example, Google automatically organizes user emails into different inbox tabs based on a variety of factors, including who the email sender is, what the contents of the email are, and how users have interacted with similar emails in the past.

These algorithms working behind the scenes have been introduced with the goal of providing a better experience for the end user, removing clutter and making essential messages easier to keep track of. But for CX-focused brands that are trying to connect with consumers, it could also mean that emails meant to help improve the customer experience get lost in the mix as email providers determine the importance — and placement — of these kinds of messages.

While this tabbed inbox experience has been around for more than 10 years on Gmail with the debut of its primary tab and secondary social, promotions, updates, and forums tabs in 2013 and for many years on Microsoft and Yahoo, leaders across industries are buzzing about the impact of tabbed inboxes once again now that Apple is joining the mix with the rollout of Apple Mail's Apple Intelligence features, including distinct primary, transactions, updates, and promotions tabs.

X

Tabs are the norm for many consumers.

About 50% of users use Gmail's tab feature.

X

Secondary tabs impact email open rates.

Having an email land in a primary inbox tab has been found to boost open rates by 30%.

X

Tabs mean that some emails could slip through the cracks.

A survey of Gmail users found about 80% check their promotions tab at least once a week and 51% check it every day.

With email engagement on the line, brands that rely heavily on this channel for their customer feedback survey programs are likely to feel the effects.

That's why we've put together this guide, to share actionable steps you can take to increase your email engagement and survey participation rates and reveal the next steps you can take to evolve your customer experience strategy.
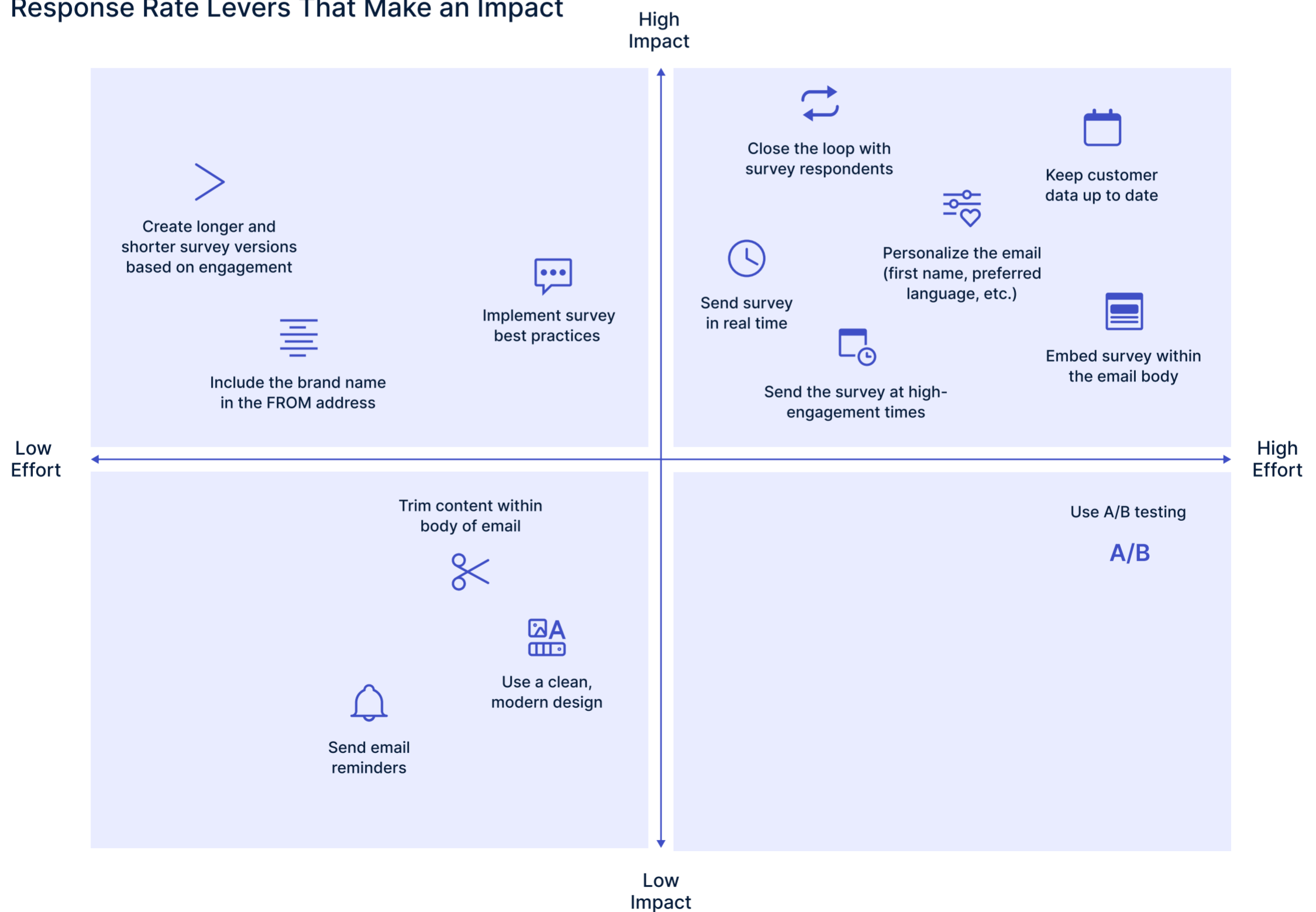
Declining survey participation rates and the evolving email inbox may seem like difficult challenges to tackle, **but they also present a massive opportunity for organizations to transform and elevate their overall CX programs, leaving siloed, reactive, and overly survey-centric approaches behind.**

Assess your current customer feedback survey program.

Are you doing everything you can to improve survey response rates?

Response Rate Levers That Make an Impact

High Impact

Create longer and shorter survey versions based on engagement

Include the brand name in the FROM address

Implement survey best practices

Close the loop with survey respondents

Keep customer data up to date

Send survey in real time

Personalize the email (first name, preferred language, etc.)

Send the survey at high-engagement times

Embed survey within the email body

Low Effort

High Effort

Trim content within body of email

Use A/B testing

A/B

Use a clean, modern design

Send email reminders

Low Impact

✓ Are Your Surveys Optimized?

Do you have a strategy for minimizing SPAM complaints?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you keeping your contact list up to date?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you keeping an eye on your email deliverability and performance?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you sending too many surveys?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

↑ Higher Response Rate Best Practices

- Offer a clear unsubscribe option.

- Monitor complaint rates.

- Keep your subscribers' information (name, email address, etc.) and statuses (including opt-outs and hard-bounce addresses) up to date — and ensure these updates are made across your various systems.

- Ensure your emails are authenticated to pass email providers' filters.

- Monitor deliverability, open, and click-through rates and make adjustments as needed.

- Be sure to review how many times you're asking for feedback and set up appropriate rules to not over-survey your customers. Programs that struggle the most with this typically do not have a consolidated way of distributing surveys across business lines.

> **Medallia Customer Insight:** One Medallia customer was sending four surveys from four different areas of the business after a guest stay at a hotel. We were able to design one short survey to help all four business areas gain insights.

✓ Are Your Surveys Optimized?

Are you sending your surveys at the right time?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are your surveys too long?

☐ Yes ☐ No

↑ Higher Response Rate Best Practices

- Survey customers in real time, immediately following a given interaction while it is still fresh in their minds.

- Otherwise, send your surveys on the following high-engagement days and at the following high-engagement times.

- Avoid low-engagement time periods like the ones listed below.

When is the best time to send your surveys?

📆 Best Days:

☐ Monday (Highest completion rates)

☐ Friday (Second-best)

⏰ Best Times:

☐ Morning (6 AM – 12 PM)

☐ Late Afternoon (3 PM – 6 PM)

⚠ Avoid Sending Surveys During:

☐ Holidays

☐ Customer/Client-Specific Busy Periods (e.g., end of quarter for sales teams)

- Ideally, the survey should take no longer than 5 minutes for participants to complete.

> **Medallia Customer Insight:** One Medallia client found that moving to a flex survey (a short survey with an optional longer version) TRIPLED responses for the shorter part of the survey without decreasing responses to the longer version.

✓ Are Your Surveys Optimized?

Are you demonstrating the value of providing customer feedback via a survey?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are your emails and surveys well-designed?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you giving customers the option to share feedback using video?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you closing the loop with customers?

☐ Yes ☐ No

↑ Higher Response Rate Best Practices

- Share how customer feedback will be put into action and will directly translate into outcomes consumers care about.

- Make it clear who the survey is from and why you're sending the survey.

- Use a concise subject line that states how long it will take to complete the survey upfront.

- Make sure your emails and surveys are optimized for different devices and browsers.

- Use a clean, modern design

- Limiting your feedback capture to text-based surveys may also limit who can (or is willing to) participate. Giving customers the choice of providing open-ended comments could offer new perspectives.

- If you're worried about response rates, focus on following up with customers who do respond to build up trust in your brand's use of the feedback they provide.

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>
> One Medallia study found that 51% of people say they don't fill out surveys because they don't believe the company will act on their feedback.

✓ Are Your Surveys Optimized?

Are you making users click before they see what the survey is about?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are your emails personalized?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

...but not too personalized?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

↑ Higher Response Rate Best Practices

- Embed the first survey question directly in the email, like in the example below.

Hi Claire,

Thank you for visiting us at the AR Mountain View Branch on August 23, 2020.

We'd love to hear your feedback on your experience with us. This survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance!

How likely are you to recommend [BRAND] to a friend or family member?

Not likely at all   Extremely likely

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Sinserely,

[BRAND]

This survey invitation will expire on September 01,2020 at 11:03 AM.

For technical assistance, please visit the support website at Medalia, an independent research firm conducting this survey.

> **Medallia Customer Insight:** One Medallia client that began adding their first survey questions into the body of their customer emails saw click-through rates increase by 63% and response rates increase by 40%.

- Address recipients by name.

- Send the email from a real person at your company (e.g., Head of CX).

- Tailor the message and survey to the recipient based on their experience with your brand.

- Don't ask for overly sensitive information.

✓ Are Your Surveys Optimized?

Are you sending a reminder at the right time?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

...with enough time to respond before the survey expires?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you using A/B testing?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Are you using a variety of touchpoints to gather survey responses?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

↑ Higher Response Rate Best Practices

- Send a reminder within 4 days of the first survey email and when there are more than 2 days left to complete the survey.

- But be sure to balance the potential to increase response rates by sending a reminder with the risk of over communicating with your customers.

> **Medallia Customer Insight:** On average for transactional survey programs, reminder emails sent 4 days after the first email account for more than a third (36%) of all responses and these reminder emails take 2-3 days to generate the majority of responses.

- Test the impact of changes to your email and survey design and content on overall performance.

- Embed survey links in other messages with higher engagement rates, such as receipt emails.

Evolve beyond an email-based customer feedback program.

Email shouldn't be the only channel brands rely on to collect survey responses. Survey campaigns across more channels see higher engagement rates than single-channel efforts. You should use a variety of channels in addition to email to share your surveys with customers, including:

- [ ] Web- and app-based chat
- [ ] In-browser messages
- [ ] In-app messages
- [ ] Push notifications
- [ ] SMS
- [ ] In-person kiosks, QR codes, and signage

Embrace the power of omnichannel CX.

Brands can add the most value to their customer experience programs by combining existing survey-based programs with capturing <u>customer signals</u> across the customer journey as customers interact with brands in person, via the contact center, and across digital touchpoints.

| Notes | Speech | Behavior | Point of Sale | Video | Forums | IVR | CRM |

| Social and Third Party Reviews | Benchmarking Data | Customer Attributes | Customer Feedback | SMS / Chat / Text | Operational Data | Employee Feedback | Support Tickets |

If your CX program relies heavily on surveys, you're missing out on much of the insight and experiences that expose real opportunities to increase revenue, save money, and reduce risk.

By listening to customer conversions across channels, observing customer behaviors across digital interactions, and adding cross-channel engagement to your data set, you can generate a wealth of untapped intelligence, address root-cause issues, and enable agile decision-making that fuels growth.

↗ <u>Learn how Meta has embraced the next evolution of CX and goes beyond surveys to drive more action.</u>