

Mailbox Reputation Recovery Runbook

Stage A - Freeze the evidence

FIRST 15 MINUTES

☐ **Pause new campaign expansion**

Stop increasing volume while the failure mode is unknown. Keep inbound replies accessible.

☐ **Preserve the timeline**

Record DNS edits, provider changes, list imports, queue retries and the last known-good batch.

☐ **Capture fresh message evidence**

Save Authentication-Results, exact SMTP failures, recipient-domain concentration and reply changes.

☐ **Stop duplicate harm**

Apply hard-bounce suppression and dedupe queue state before any diagnostic resend.

Do not reset everything

Rotating domains, rewriting copy and changing providers at once destroys the comparison that could tell you what broke.

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Stage B - Classify the failure

DNS / DATA / VOLUME / STATE

LAYER	EVIDENCE	FIRST ACTION
Authentication	SPF/DKIM/DMARC failure, selector mismatch, alignment change	Repair and retest with a very small controlled send.
Recipient data	Hard bounces, stale list, catch-all concentration	Suppress permanent failures and re-verify the affected segment.
Provider / rate	4.x.x deferrals concentrated at one receiver	Hold increases; preserve code text; retry only after the cause is understood.
Queue state	Duplicates, reply race, follow-up after response	Fix idempotency and send-time state checks before resuming.
Behavior change	Large unplanned volume spike or long quiet period	Return below the last peak and establish a current baseline.

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Stage C - Resume from a known-good state

NO CLIFF

☐ **Re-test authentication from a fresh message**

Do not rely on cached DNS dashboards or old headers after a change.

☐ **Use a verified small recipient tranche**

Do not use the full prospect list as the first proof that recovery worked.

☐ **Compare raw events with the prior baseline**

Hard failures, transient failures, replies and complaint signals should be explainable.

☐ **Increase only after repeatability**

One clean batch is a checkpoint. A second clean batch at slightly higher exposure is stronger evidence.

☐ **Keep a rollback point**

Write down the known-good configuration, send envelope and list version before the next increase.

Primary references

Google Gmail sender guidelines; Microsoft Outlook.com high-volume sender requirements; RFC 7208, RFC 6376, RFC 9989, RFC 9051 and RFC 3463.