boing!

everything you ever wanted to know **about why emails bounce**

You worked hard to create the perfect email. You hit the launch button. So what happens next?

Once your email is launched a few different things can happen. Most of the time the email is delivered as planned. But, there are some situations where it doesn't quite make it into the inbox. This is what we call a bounce - when the email comes back to us (boing!). How and why does this happen, you might ask? Luckily we have some answers for you.

There are two types of bounces - hard and soft.

- **Hard Bounces:** A permanent delivery issue like a non-existent email address
- **Soft Bounces:** A temporary delivery issue like a full mailbox or technical issue

When an email is bounced back to us, it usually comes in a standard form. The bounce will include computer code for our automated system, and a text explanation for us humans to read. In the world of bounces, the bounce code 4XX frequently means that the bounce is temporary and should be treated as a soft bounce. When the bounce code returns with 5XX it usually indicates a permanent (hard) bounce. But it's important to note that there is no universal standard for bounce codes, which is why we check them and make sure they are being processed correctly.

We have specific rules in place that allow our system to read the code and text bounce messages correctly, and recognize incoming bounces as soft or hard. These rules are intregal because they prevent you from unnecessarily losing bounced email addresses from your lists. Here's an example that illustrates this for you:

A mail server "hard bounces" a "Mailbox Full" message back to us with the code *552 MAILBOX FULL* and *550 mailbox temporarily disabled.* The 5XX code states that these bounces are permanent; however, the text of the bounce further explains that the issue is that the mailbox is full. Because this could be a temporary issue, we process those specific "mailbox full" bounces as soft bounces so that the address will stay mailable in your VR Account and you can mail to it again in the future.

How Are Bounces Processed By VerticalResponse?

VerticalResponse processes most hard bounces immediately so you can't mail to them again in the future. This is necessary because mailing continually to hard bounced addresses can trigger spam traps, and is a waste of money because the email can't be delivered. Also, the ISPs (Internet Service Providers) don't respond too fondly to bad bounce management. It is a drain on their resources when they have to process tons of bounces from the same sender (ESP). This is another reason why VerticalResponse is so diligent with its bounce management. The better the bounce management, the better the relationship between ESP and ISP, and the better it is for you!

Soft bounces in an individual email get 72 hours in which we try to deliver it again. If the address still isn't delivered for temporary reasons, we will keep the email address mailable in your account for future campaigns. Also, if the email hard bounces right away but triggers one of our rules (like the example above), we change it to a soft bounce and the email address remains mailable in your account.

Our **Customer Support** team has the ability to pull these bounce reasons if there is ever a concern that an email address may have been hard bounced incorrectly. This scenario is rare but can happen if a bounce is returned with a permanent (5XX) bounce code that doesn't have special rules enabling our system to treat that specific bounce as a temporary bounce. In these cases we can troubleshoot the bounce reason and debounce the address (aka mark as mailable) as necessary.

Looking for more information on bounces?

Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) Service Extension for Delivery Status Notifications (DSNs)

Enhanced Mail System Status Codes

An Extensible Message Format for Delivery Status Notifications

VerticalResponse Free Marketing Guides

VerticalResponse Lounge Delivery Group