E3 DESIGN

A free checklist from E-3 Design

Email deliverability checklist

SPF, DKIM and DMARC set up in the right order, plus the senders people forget.

Last updated October 31, 2026

The latest version is always at e-3design.com/downloads

e-3design.com

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Last updated October 31, 2026. Each item links to the page on e-3design.com that explains it.

List every service that sends email as your domain. Publish one SPF record that names them all, turn on DKIM in each one, then add DMARC at p=none and tighten it to quarantine and reject as the reports show your real mail passing. Include website forms and newsletter tools, and recheck after every change.

The short version

- **One SPF record** on your domain that names every service that sends as you.
- **DKIM turned on** in your mailbox provider and in every other tool that sends as your domain.
- **A DMARC record,** starting at `p=none` with a reporting address, then tightened to quarantine and reject as the reports allow.
- **Website forms and newsletter tools** send through authenticated services, never straight from the web server.
- **Recheck** whenever you add a tool, change providers or someone reports a missing email.

All three are DNS records, added wherever your domain's DNS is managed, not inside your email account. Authentication gets your mail considered; it doesn't guarantee the inbox.

1. List every service that sends as you

Your mailbox provider is the obvious one. The usual forgotten ones: the website's contact form, a newsletter tool, invoicing or accounting software, a booking system, a CRM and the office scanner. Every later step uses this list.

Service	Sends as (address)	In SPF	DKIM on	Passes DMARC
Mailbox provider				
Website contact form				
Newsletter tool				
Invoicing or accounting				
Booking system or CRM				

2. Set up SPF, DKIM and DMARC, in order

Each step depends on the one before.

- [ ] 1. **Publish one SPF record.** Microsoft gives `v=spf1 include:spf.protection.outlook.com -all` for a domain that sends only through Microsoft 365; Google gives `v=spf1 include:_spf.google.com ~all` for Google Workspace. Add other senders to that same record, never as a second one.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/spf-record-microsoft-365-google-workspace
- [ ] 2. **Turn on DKIM everywhere you can.** Microsoft 365 uses two CNAME records and a toggle in the Defender portal. Google Workspace generates a TXT record under **Apps, Google Workspace, Gmail, Authenticate email.**
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/dkim-microsoft-365-google-workspace
- [ ] 3. **Add DMARC in monitoring mode.** Let SPF and DKIM run for at least 48 hours first, then add a TXT record at `_dmarc` with `p=none` and a reporting address.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/dmarc-policy-rollout
- [ ] 4. **Read the reports and fix gaps.** They list every server sending as your domain and whether each passed. Fix any real sender that fails.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/read-dmarc-reports
- [ ] 5. **Tighten in stages:** move to `p=quarantine`, and later `p=reject`, only when every real sender passes.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/dmarc-policy-rollout

3. Fix the senders people forget

- [ ] **Website forms** send through your email provider or a sending service, not straight from the web server.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/website-form-mail-smtp
- [ ] **Newsletter and CRM tools** each have their own domain authentication steps. Adding several can push SPF past its limit of 10 DNS lookups.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/spf-lookup-limit-multiple-senders
- [ ] **The bulk-sender rules:** check whether they apply to you. Gmail requires SPF, DKIM and DMARC from anyone sending about 5,000 or more messages a day.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/bulk-sender-rules
- [ ] **Recheck after every change** with our free email deliverability checker.
  e-3design.com/tools/email-deliverability

4. Check for these problems

- [ ] **Two SPF records.** Now SPF fails for everything. Merge them into one.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/spf-record-microsoft-365-google-workspace
- [ ] **Records added at the wrong company.** Records added at a registrar whose DNS you don't use do nothing.
  e-3design.com/help/dns-records-new-service
- [ ] **DKIM published but never switched on** in Microsoft 365 or Google.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/dkim-microsoft-365-google-workspace

- [ ] **DMARC stuck at `p=none` for years,** with reports going to an address nobody reads.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/dmarc-policy-rollout
- [ ] **Jumping straight to `p=reject`** before every real sender passes.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/dmarc-policy-rollout
- [ ] **The website still using built-in PHP mail.** Form notifications land in junk or disappear.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/website-form-mail-smtp
- [ ] **Too many includes.** More than 10 DNS lookups makes SPF return an error instead of a pass.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/spf-lookup-limit-multiple-senders
- [ ] **Unused domains left open.** Microsoft suggests `v=spf1 -all` for parked domains.
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability

What has changed recently

As of October 31, 2026.

- **DMARC is now a full internet standard.** RFC 9989 (May 2026) replaces RFC 7489, removes the `pct` tag and adds a `t` (testing) tag.
- **Microsoft 365 DKIM records look different** for custom domains added since May 2025. Both formats work; copy whatever your portal shows.
- **Password-only sending is ending.** Google turned off sign-in with a normal account password for SMTP on March 14, 2025 (app passwords are the stated exception). Microsoft plans to switch off password-based SMTP AUTH by default at the end of December 2026. Website plugins and scanners that sign in with a plain password need moving to OAuth or a sending service.

If mail still goes to spam

- [ ] 1. **Read the bounce or headers.** In a delivered message, the **Authentication-Results** header shows whether SPF, DKIM and DMARC passed.
  e-3design.com/help/email-bounces
- [ ] 2. **Check blocklists and sender reputation.**
  e-3design.com/learn/email-deliverability/check-blocklists-and-reputation
- [ ] 3. **Look at what you send.** Bought lists, missing unsubscribe links and heavy attachments to new contacts all hurt.
  e-3design.com/answers/emails-going-to-spam
- [ ] 4. **Check the receiving side.** If it's one customer's junk folder, they can mark you as safe.
  e-3design.com/help/good-email-in-junk

Sources

1. Set up SPF to identify valid email sources for your Microsoft 365 domain (Microsoft Learn)
2. How to use DKIM for email in your custom domain (Microsoft Learn)
3. Set up SPF (Google Workspace Admin Help)
4. Set up DKIM (Google Workspace Admin Help)
5. Set up DMARC (Google Workspace Admin Help)
6. Email sender guidelines (Gmail Help)
7. RFC 9989: DMARC (IETF, May 2026)
8. Exchange Online to retire Basic auth for Client Submission (SMTP AUTH) (Microsoft Exchange Team Blog)
9. Transition from less secure apps to OAuth (Google Workspace Admin Help)

About E-3 Design

E-3 Design builds, hosts and looks after websites for small businesses. Larry Davis has been building on the web since 2000. Most of our clients are around Dayton, Ohio and Somerset and Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and we work with businesses anywhere.

What we do

- Websites and redesigns
- Website care: uptime monitoring, tested updates, daily backups and security alerts
- Hosting, with SSL included
- SEO and AI search, including Google Business Profiles
- Leads and follow-up

How we work

- Accounts we set up are in your business's name, with E-3 added as a user
- Domains we manage are registered to you
- Redesigns and speed fixes are tested on a staging copy first
- For redesigns and site moves, you approve the plan and the preview before launch
- We save your DNS records before changing them

Rather we did it for you?

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