

Q&A with email reputation specialist Lindani Tshabangu



By [Nina Joubert](#)

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In a world where legitimate email senders are mistaken as spammers sneaking their way into the inbox, some describe Lindani Tshabangu as the "[lawyer of the accused](#)". Tshabangu is Everlytic's reputation manager and so little is known about her role as email delivery expert. Her title is often confused with that of an online reputation management specialist.

Tshabangu explains what exactly email reputation is and why it's important...

Question: What's your role at Everlytic?

Answer: One of Everlytic's goals is to make sure their clients' emails reach the inbox. I make sure our clients are authenticated for maximum email delivery. I assist and educate clients on database acquisition best practice. A lot of my time is invested in monitoring their sending reputation and making sure we have the best relationships with the ISPs (Internet Service Providers).

When our clients have issues getting to the inbox, I get to the bottom of deliverability by speaking to the ISPs as well as the clients' IT staff, in case the problem happens to be theirs. I also follow up with complaints to make sure we send for legitimate clients only.

Q: What is reputation management?

A: Email senders have to maintain a certain reputation and credit score to keep sending emails. In the filtering phase, ISPs will look at the reputation of the sender before they receive their emails. People sometimes confuse email reputation with online reputation management, but that's brand specific. Email reputation is specific to email communications, making sure email senders are not mistaken for spammers and helping them get their emails delivered to the inbox.

Q: Why reputation management?

A: I landed this job three years ago, not knowing entirely what was expected of me. I figured it was something interesting to grab a hold of and it is; every day I learn something new. It's a unique skill and my role as reputation manager is a rarity, it's like owning a pair of shoes no one else has. For the layman, it's a huge technical obstacle, but I've pretty much grown into a specialist. That's why I love it!

Q: How do Email Service Providers (ESPs) measure up against international counterparts where email reputation management is concerned?

A: In South Africa, very little is known about managing email reputation and reputation specialists are practically unheard of. South African ISPs are generally surprised and unsure of what to do with follow-up queries.

The US has had more experience with this than us in the past. We're only getting into email reputation management now. In the US, they even have abuse departments, whereas in South Africa, it's rare for an ESP to have even one reputation specialist. What sets us apart is that we have relationships with our local ISPs, which makes it difficult for international ESPs to compete here.

Recently, sorting out deliverability issues has become a key element with regards to email communications in South Africa. Companies are beginning to spend more money on email communications and have become more concerned with tracking their ROI (return on investment) on email campaigns. This is why getting mail to the inbox is so important.

Q: Where is SA heading with regards to email reputation management?

A: More and more clients will begin seeing email reputation management as an important investment for their email marketing strategies. Resulting in them putting pressure on their ESPs for more reports of their email campaigns. Those reports will reveal deliverability issues, which clients will want resolved. The effect being that ESPs and marketers in South Africa will start looking for email reputation skills.

Q: What innovations and improvements can we expect from Everlytic's email reputation management department?

A: In reputation we're constantly strategising about the best ways of advancing reputation for clients and are always researching the tools that assist us with this. Because we're a company growing internationally, we've had to step up our reputation strategy to be on par with advanced reputation departments abroad. We have to have the kind of reputation well known ISPs like Yahoo, Gmail and Hotmail expect from ESPs.

We educate ourselves through advisory councils where we have membership and educate clients with value added workshops so they're always in the loop every step of the way. We also have an in-house built reputation reporting tool. This tool is real-time and keeps us up to date with our sender's reputation tracking bounces and unsubscribes among other important variables.

Everlytic belongs to several organisations, one of them being the Messaging Anti-Abuse Working Group (MAAWG) (<http://www.maawg.org>) - an advisory organisation concerning email, mobile, reputation and best practices. You've got your big guns like Google Inc, Yahoo Inc, Facebook and Time Warner Cable belonging to this council. MAAWG comes up with relevant training material, documents and assistance on how to track delivery issues. Being a member is a privilege that sets us apart, as we had to qualify by their best practice standards to join and have access to their resources.

Reputation management has to be fluid, adapting to ISP changes and the ever changing email environment. Of course, Everlytic has to always be on top of its game by accurately processing email delivery and measuring bounces and unsubscribes.



Lindani Tshabangu

Q: How does one know what their delivery rate is like?

A: By your campaign reports, which give you a bounce, unsubscribe, read and click through rate. Everlytic provides these reports in figures and percentages, allowing you to measure whether the number is worth celebrating or worrying about. A more than 8% bounce rate for example, is a cause for concern and a further bounce rate of 15% is treading on dangerous delivery grounds.

Q: Work aside, what other reputations do you manage?

A: My zero spam tolerance translates really well into my personality. I'm pretty straight laced, no-nonsense kinda gal. Admittedly, I'm a recovering shop-aholic, but I blame that habit on my rep as a social butterfly. Working up a storm in the kitchen comes as easily to me as battling spammers. I also closely monitor my spiritual reputation by going to church.

ABOUT NINA JOUBERT

Nina Joubert is a Copywriter at Everlytic. She enjoys working at the company and describes it as a minefield filled with content ideas that simply need to be triggered. When she's not there, she's strumming away at her guitar and finishing off the last lines of her Children's Storybook about a cowboy named Addison. Contact details: website www.everlytic.co.za | Twitter @ninajewbear | LinkedIn

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