Why all the talk about iOS 15?

With the release of iOS 15 in September 2021 Apple introduced new features allowing users to block common tracking practices for email marketing campaigns.

What Happened?

While iOS 15 included several new features designed to protect user privacy, these two are having the greatest impact on all businesses that rely on email marketing:

- **Mail Privacy Protection**: "Mail Privacy Protection stops senders from using invisible pixels to collect information about the user. The new feature helps users prevent senders from knowing when they open an email and masks their IP address so it can't be linked to other online activity or used to determine their location." [1]
  - Apple's intent is to protect users from behavior tracking across the internet (3rd party data) being tied to their email address. As a result, Mail Privacy Protection makes it much harder for email marketers to accurately track email open rates. Note: it does not impact WATT's ability to collect other 1st party behavioral data.
  - For iOS 15 users and above, Apple's proxy server will download a pixel when the Apple Mail application is opened, and the mailbox is updated. This pixel "pre-load" makes it appear to Email Service Providers (ESP) that every single iOS 15+ user's email was opened. WATT's ESP has confirmed the impact: inflated open rates.
- **Hide My Email:** "Instantly generates unique, random email addresses that forward to your personal inbox — so you don't have to share your real email address when filling out a form." [2]
  - This is essentially a junk-mail management tool that allows users to use a unique "dummy" email (ex: abc123@icloud.com versus name@icloud.com) for each website registration.
  - Apple's intent is to protect the user's email from being shared with third-party services, a practice   WATT does not employ.

What Does It Mean?

Long-standing marketing attribution KPIs are impacted with respect to iOS users of Apple Mail who have opted-in to these services by upgrading to iOS 15.

Mail Privacy Protection: Consider adjusting optimization and attribution approach and analysis.
- Open rates are now inflated and are no longer reliable as an email marketing key performance indicator. While WATT Global Media will still provide "opens" in campaign reports, marketers should now treat the KPI as a directional metric rather than an exact measure.
- **Branding:** Subscriber profiles and counts can be provided to measure market coverage. Remember that WATT's Newsletter and Audience Targeted Message audiences "opt-in" to receiving our emails and we have an established history of engagement.
- **Direct Response:** Clicks will be more variable than open rates, so calculate averages over the course of a campaign and look for outliers while paying close attention to calls-to-action.

Hide My Email: Adoption remains to be seen.
- This feature is not expected to have a big impact on trusted B2B publishers from whom users do not typically want to hide their identity.
- There have been minimal anonymous icloud.com emails added to WATT's database. And WATT utilizes a CDP (customer data platform) that allows for multiple email addresses for each individual customer.

[1,2]Apple Announcement: https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2021/06/apple-advances-its-privacy-leadership-with-ios-15-ipados-15-macos-monterey-and-watchos-8/