



The Design Toolkit

*Design tips, code, and data
for better email design*



Welcome, designers!

Whether you're a tech-savvy coder, an engagement-focused marketer, or have a background in illustration and design, we're betting that you want to build better emails.

The perfect marketing email should do three things:

1. Look good.
2. Work well.
3. Get results.

This three-part Design Toolkit addresses all three, with proven tips and advice from five email experts: Chad White, Ann Marie Judson-Patrick, Tom Deeter, Kristina Huffman, and Schuyler Wareham. Read a bit more about their expertise next, and then get ready for an email foundation that will take your conversions and functionalities to the next level.



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Schuyler Wareham handles all things analytics as part of the Marketing Cloud's strategic services consulting group. His foremost objective: seeking data to provide greater clarity on consumer behavior across digital channels. Schuyler weaves these insights into strategic recommendations that help marketers and consumers alike.

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Email Design Basics

A crash course in the essentials of email design

Email Design Basics

A crash course in the essentials of email design

by Chad White

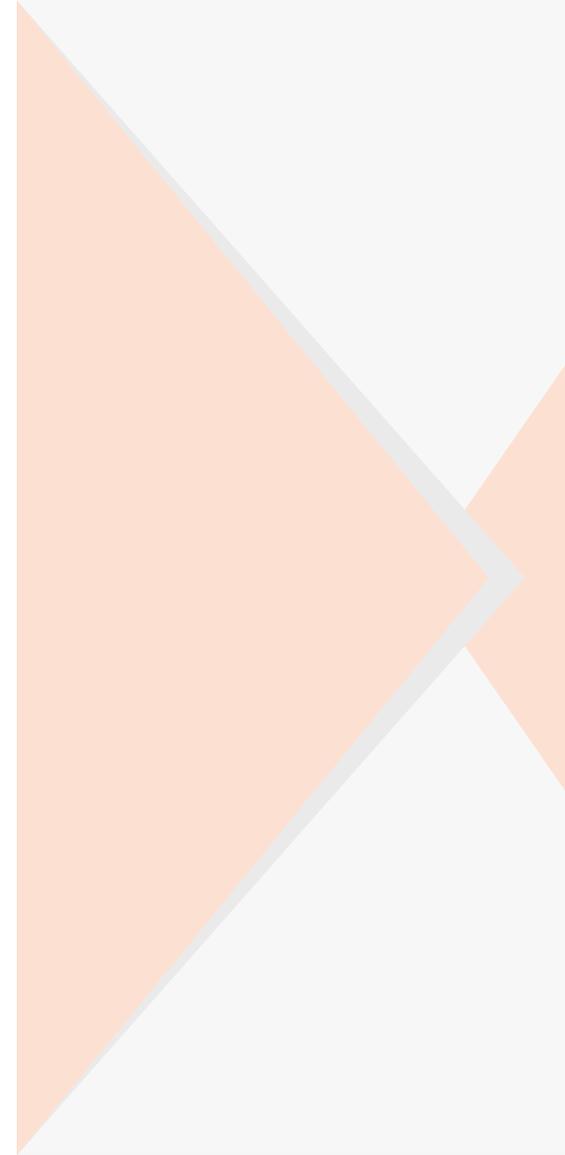
Email design is like nothing else. Here's how it's different...

Subscribers interact with emails in three stages. First, they see the envelope content. Then if they open, they see the body content. Then if they click, they see the landing page. Each element must in equal parts stand on its own, work with the next element, and work holistically with the other two elements to convey a single message and create a unified experience.

Email clients add another layer of complexity to coding and design. The number of inbox providers is growing in an environment where there are no standards for email coding. That makes it extra challenging to have your emails render and function the way you intend.

Emails render differently in different environments, especially on mobile. The majority of emails are now read on mobile devices. That's fundamentally changing email design and spurring adoption of mobile-aware and responsive email design.

The images in your emails might be blocked. A picture is worth a thousand words...but often the images in your emails aren't enabled by subscribers. That means your emails can't rely solely on images to communicate your message.



The 3 Stages of Email Interaction

Emails are a gateway, not the destination. Opens and clicks play a role, but the ultimate goal is conversions. To get to that point, it's important to understand each of the three stages of email interaction.



Stage 1: Envelope Content

Before an email is opened, subscribers see the envelope content, which is the from name, subject line, and, in some cases, snippet text.

The **from name** is the text that says who sent the email. The from name has the greatest impact on whether your emails get opened, deleted, or reported as spam, so your from name should be instantly recognizable by subscribers. Usually, this is the name of the brand the subscriber signed up to hear from.

The **subject line** tells subscribers what your email is about. Although creativity has its place (check out our roundup of [100 Inspiring Subject Lines](#)), the most effective subject lines are straightforward and predispose openers to engage with the content of an email. They should be 20-40 characters long ideally, but testing is highly advised.

Snippet text appears right after or below the subject line in several email clients—most notably the iPhone's native email client, Gmail, and Yahoo Mail—and is comprised of the first characters of HTML text in the email. Most often, it's pulled from **preheader text**, which is HTML text that comes before the header of the email. This text should extend or reinforce the subject line, giving subscribers more information about the content of the email.





Stage 2: Body Content

When an email is opened, subscribers then see the body content of the email. Most marketing emails are a mix of text and images, with promotional messages being more image-heavy and transactional messaging more text-heavy. Also, lifestyle brands tend to lean more toward images, while value brands tend toward more text.

Generally speaking, emails consist of:

1. **Preheader text**, which is HTML text that acts like a second subject line
2. A **header**, which includes your brand's logo
3. A **navigation bar**, which includes a few links to major entry points to your website
4. A **primary message block**, which contains the main message of your email
5. A **secondary message block** for an additional call to action or two
6. A **social media bar**, with links to your pages on Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks
7. A **footer**, which includes an unsubscribe link and your postal address for CAN-SPAM compliance, disclaimers, and other administrative links and text

Keep in mind that subscribers don't read emails. They scan them. So pay extra attention to headlines, use bullet points and sentence fragments to communicate quickly, and make call-to-action links and buttons clear and obvious. At a glance, subscribers should know what you want them to do next and what's in it for them.

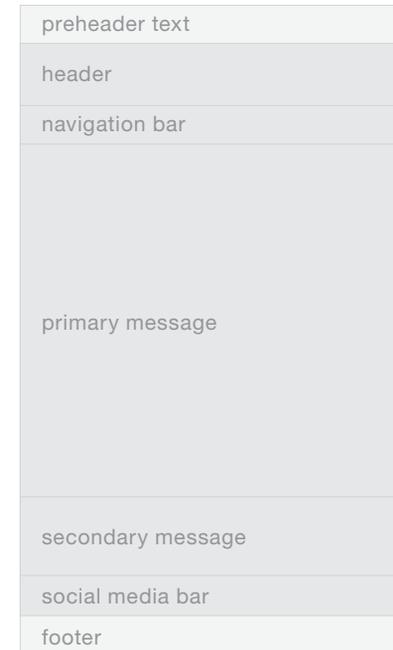


Stage 3: Landing Page

Landing pages are the web pages where subscribers arrive when clicking on the calls to action in your emails. There should be a strong connection between the email content and the landing page to reassure subscribers that they've arrived at the right place. For instance, consider repeating headlines or images from the email on the landing page.

Email Formatting

This example shows the wireframe of a typical email.



Website Complexity Multiplied by X

A lack of standards around email coding makes consistent rendering of an email very challenging.

Gmail, Outlook, AOL, Yahoo, Lotus Notes, and Beyond

Website developers have it relatively easy. They only have to deal with a number of environments equal to the number of device types times the number of operating systems times the number of browsers.

Email designers and coders have all of that, times the number of email clients—of which there are an increasing number. That means email coding is an extreme exercise in finding the lowest common denominator coding that works across all platforms.

Because your emails could potentially look different in Gmail using Firefox and Gmail using Internet Explorer, we recommend using a rendering tool or setting up test accounts and viewing emails in the most common device-OS-browser-client combinations.

No Standards

Email remains a unique challenge because of the way the email “client” or “reader” (AOL, Yahoo, Gmail, Outlook.com, Outlook, Lotus Notes, etc.) accepts HTML code. There are no consistent standards across these clients, so email design and code need to acknowledge these differences. It’s important to know what’s supported and keep testing over time to keep tabs on any rendering errors or changes.



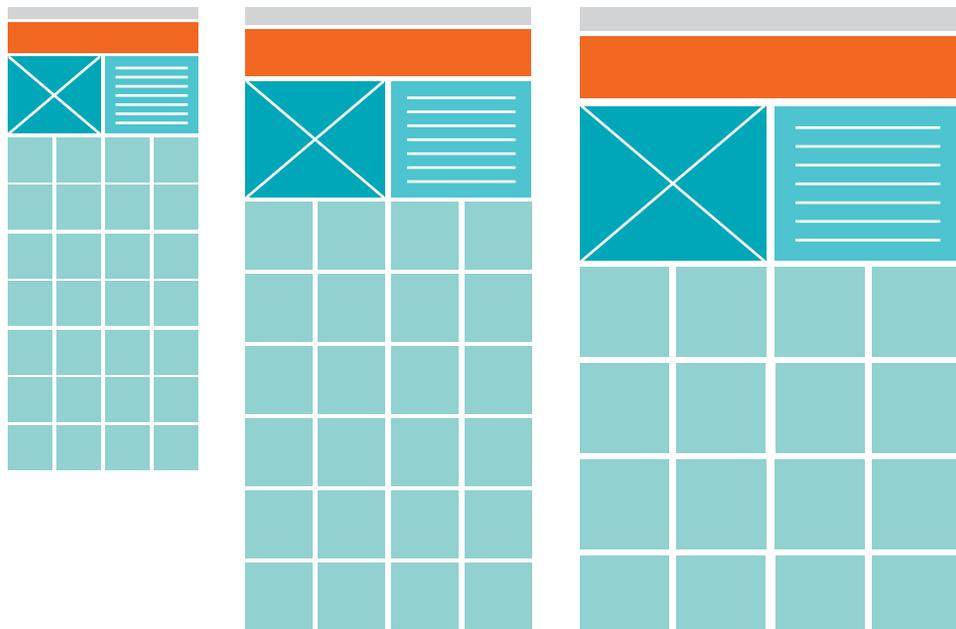
The Challenge of Mobile Email Design

Mobile is currently the biggest design challenge for email marketers because emails have typically been designed for desktop viewing, not for smartphone viewing. But desktop-centric email design is gradually being replaced by mobile-aware design and responsive design.

Desktop-Centric Design

Representing the pre-mobile status quo, desktop-centric email design is optimized for viewing on large monitors and has small, tightly clustered links and buttons well suited to mouse clicks, not fingertips. These designs require mobile users to zoom and swipe left and right as well as up and down to interact with emails.

Emails that use desktop-centric design look good on desktops, but suffer in legibility and usability on tablets and, especially, smartphones.



“The web’s moved beyond the desktop, and it’s not looking back. The number of devices we’re designing for is growing just as quickly as mobile traffic.”

Ethan Marcotte
Designer, Developer, Author:
Responsive Web Design

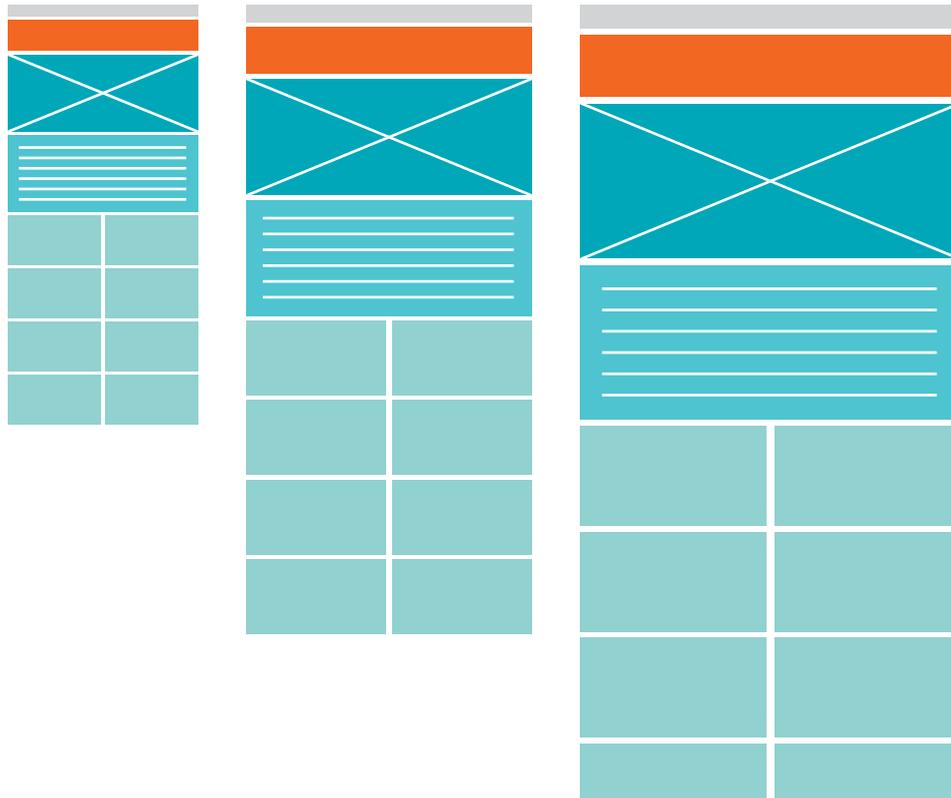
Mobile-Aware Design

Mobile-aware design uses basic techniques to create a single email that functions well across a range of screen sizes, but is deferential to smartphones.

Making your email template mobile-aware involves three key elements:

1. Employing a single-column layout (two-column product grids are okay)
2. Using large text, images, and buttons
3. Spacing out links and buttons—including those in navigation, social, and administrative bars—so they can be accurately tapped

Emails that use mobile-aware design are finger-friendly and use large text and images so they still look good when scaled down for tablet and smartphone screens.



Examples of mobile-aware design from the Email Swipe File



Amazon.com



Reiss



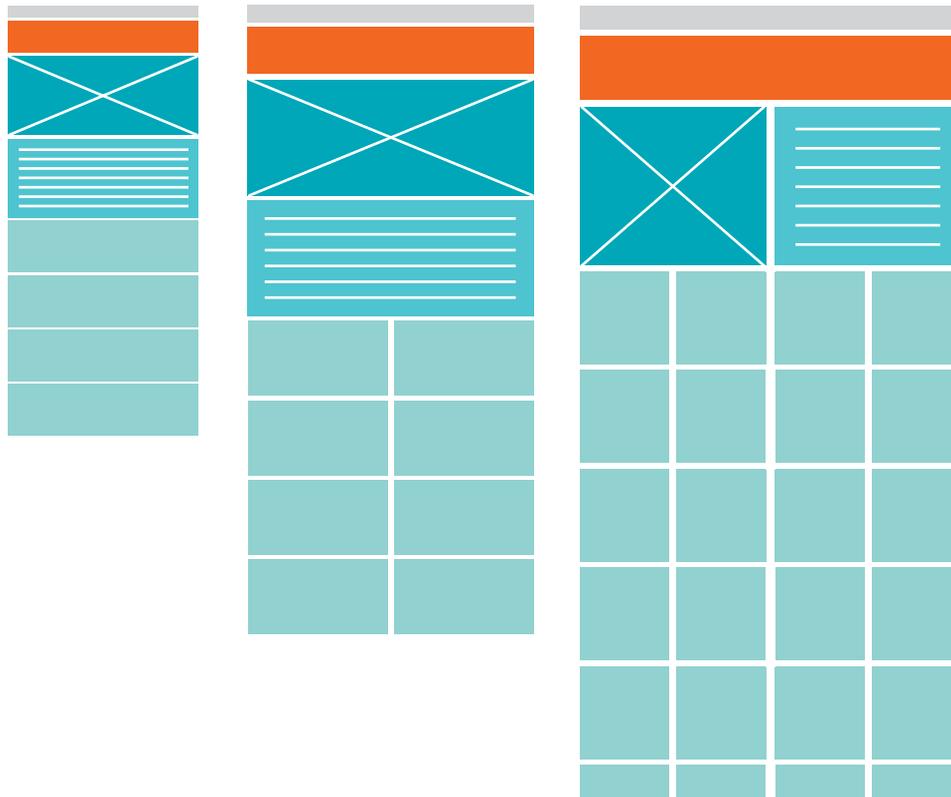
Vizify

Responsive Design

Responsive design has become a general term for a basket of advanced techniques that serve up versions or renderings of an email that are optimized for particular screen resolutions or email clients.

Whether it's fluid, liquid, scalable, adaptive, or truly responsive design or powered by live content, all of these techniques involve extra email design and coding—and often the creation of two or more versions of an email. But the result is email messaging that looks good and functions properly on a range of devices.

Emails that use responsive design techniques can look different—even radically different—when viewed on a desktop, tablet, or smartphone, creating an experience that's ideal for each of those platforms.



Examples of responsive design from the Email Swipe File



Foursquare



Toms



AT&T

Dealing with Image Blocking

A significant number of inbox providers still block the images of emails by default. That means that subscribers have to enable or turn on images—either for each individual email or for all the emails from a particular sender—for the images in your emails to be displayed.

Thankfully, there are several defensive design tactics you can use to ensure the graceful degradation of your emails when images are blocked. First, use HTML text whenever possible rather than graphical text, where text is part of an image.

Second, use alt text for your images. A common practice is to use the graphical text of an image as alt text. Keep in mind that alt text can be styled.

And third, use background color for table cells. This can help group text and even create buttons.

Pay more attention to defensive design when creating transactional emails, welcome emails, win-back emails, and re-permission emails. Since these are emails that are more likely to be viewed with images blocked, more HTML text in particular should be used.

Now for Something More Advanced

Now that you have these basic email design concepts under your belt, you're ready to take a deeper dive into coding and data-driven design.

Examples of defensive design from the Email Swipe File



Orbitz



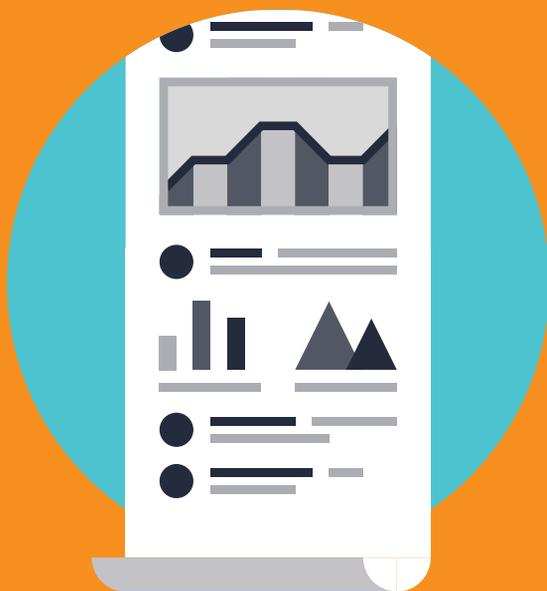
Twitter



Mothercare

salesforce

marketing cloud



Email Coding Fundamentals

A general guide to writing HTML for email

Email Coding Fundamentals

A general guide to writing HTML for email

by Ann Marie Judson-Patrick and Tom Deeter

HTML standards have long been in place for web design, but email remains a unique challenge because no universal standard exists—and subscribers increasingly open emails on more devices and in more environments.

In this guide, we provide some useful tips to help you develop the fundamentals for writing HTML for email. Keep these guidelines in mind when designing your next marketing emails. Here's a snapshot of what you'll discover:

- Code essentials for layout
- Text, links, images, video, and form usage tips and tricks
- Notes on how to tackle mobile rendering
- Ways to troubleshoot common rendering errors

“As email marketers, we’re able to continually learn, tinker, change, and find better ways to do things.”

Andrea Smith
Design Lead,
Content Marketing & Research
Salesforce Marketing Cloud

Code Essentials for Layout

- Control the layout using standard HTML tables and avoid CSS for layout (DIV, float, etc).
- Use HTML tables, but don't stack them. Nest all content and tables inside one structural table.
- Add inline CSS to the `<td>` tag. See Example A.
- Instead of CSS margins, use CSS padding or spacer GIFs to create spacing between elements.
- Specify accurate table widths: errors in math will cause incorrect display. Also, specify accurate colspans and rowspans, as extra values will create extra spaces. Avoid rowspans if possible, as they may not render correctly in some email clients.
- In Outlook 07/10/13, CSS padding applied to the top or bottom of one cell in a multi-column layout will be applied to *all* columns in that table, causing the layout to render incorrectly.
- To fix email alignment and background color issues in non-IE browsers, insert the following CSS code:

```
<STYLE type="text/css">
ReadMsgBody {width: 100%;}
.ExternalClass {width: 100%;}
</STYLE>
```

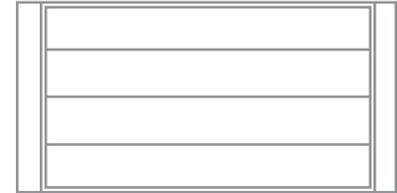
- Indent code to allow for easier troubleshooting and code-sharing across multiple resources. To turn on code-indenting in Dreamweaver, go to Edit > Preferences > Code Format and check the "Indent" box. To apply this setting to existing files, click the "Format Source Code" button and then click "Apply Source Formatting."
- Empty `<td>` cells won't render properly in Outlook 07/10, Outlook.com, and Lotus Notes. Use a 1x1 spacer GIF in empty table cells instead of a ` ` (non-breaking space) to prevent empty cells from collapsing and breaking the layout. To remove the extra space (line-height) added to spacer GIFs, use `style="font-size:0%;"`.
- Avoid using tables with multiple columns *and* multiple rows. Instead, nest tables so that a single three-column table holds a multiple column table in the center, allowing the right and left columns to control padding for the entire page. See Example B.

Example A

```
<td style="font-family:
Arial, Helvetica, sans-
serif; font-size: 12px;
color:#666666;
padding-bottom: 5px;"
align="center">
```

Example B

Use this nested table structure:



	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>													

Instead of this:



Text, Links, Images, Videos, and Forms

- Use inline CSS to force links to display with or without an underline. See Example C.
- Use inline CSS to specify a link color other than default “web” blue.
- Block level elements such <p> and <h1> are stripped out or behave unexpectedly, which can affect your layout. Enclose all text within <td> cells instead and use inline styles to control the text.
- Since some email clients block images by default, make sure important images contain an alt attribute. Use alt tags on all images, even if you don’t want one displayed. If no alt tag is needed, insert a blank tag: Alt should come before source (src) to aid with mobile rendering on Blackberry. Include font, font size, and color properties in your tag to style your alt text.
- Set border="0" in an img tag to prevent a blue border around linked images and add style="display: block;" to prevent rendering issues in Outlook.com and Gmail in Firefox. See Example D.
- Use absolute URL references for the image path rather than relative paths. See Example E.
- Don’t rely on background images for primary content, but include them only as secondary elements.
- To ensure usability in all environments, avoid rich media like Flash.
- Use animated GIFs knowing that only the first frame will display in Outlook 07/10/13. If video is desired, show a screenshot of the video, linking to your website or other channels where it can be easily played and tracked more robustly.
- Background images don’t render in Outlook 07/10/13 without a special code fix. If you use a background image, treat it as a secondary design element, using an appropriate background color to make sure any displayed text is legible (i.e., not white text on a white background).
- Image dimensions in HTML should match the actual image’s dimensions. If not, image distortion and pixellation can occur. Additionally, inline sizing is ignored by some older email clients, so this precaution will ensure consistent rendering.
- Avoid using shorthand in inline CSS. Be sure to use the full six digits for HEX color codes (#000001 rather than #000) and avoid RGB colors. Write each CSS property separately instead of combining them into one single shorthand declaration. See Example F.
- The hex code #000000 (black) on href tags is not recommended because some clients (primarily Gmail) will override it with blue. To show black, use the hex code #000001, which appears almost exactly the same.

Example C

```
<a href="" alias=""
target="_blank"
style="text-decoration:
underline;"></a>
```

Example D

```

```

Example E

```

```

Example F

Use this:

```
<td align="left"
style="font-family: Arial,
Helvetica, sans-serif;
color: #000001;
font-size: 20px;">
```

Instead of this:

```
<td align="left"
style="font: Arial,
Helvetica, sans-serif
#000001 20px;">
```

- Alt tags should not contain the greater than (>) symbol `>`. In AOL, this tag can cause HTML to be displayed until the next closing tag in the code.
- Images less than body line-height, usually 18-20px, need to contain `style="line-height:0px; font-size:0px;"` or something similar to force email clients to not add space around the image equivalent to the text line-height.
- Outlook 07/10/13 and Outlook.com don't support forms. Instead of a form, provide a link to complete the form on a landing page. If you choose to use them in an email anyway, be sure to include clear instructions on how to view the email on a web page so subscribers can complete the form.
- Use `<body style="-webkit-text-size-adjust:none;">` to control iPhone text rendering, if desired. iOS Mail doesn't natively show any fonts smaller than 13px, so this will disable the auto-scaling of HTML text.

Mobile Rendering

Your subscribers want emails to work just as well on their mobile devices as they do on their larger screens. To enhance the way an email looks and works on a smaller screen, you can adjust the standard version of the email with a few code enhancements. This may include specifying larger text sizes, resizing images, showing or hiding sections of the email, or making one side drop below the other side, to name a few. This approach is called *responsive design*, and these techniques are generally controlled by CSS. A few responsive design notes to remember:

- When coding a responsive design for email, @media queries are used to activate the mobile version of the email.
- Classes are used to adjust, hide, or introduce elements of the email on mobile.
- Mobile email apps (like Gmail and Outlook.com) as well as native email apps (like iOS Mail and Android email) behave differently.
- For some techniques, responsive code must be placed in `<style>` as well as inline.

Email clients are always evolving, so it's important to continually keep tabs (no Gmail pun intended) on how your emails render in every inbox. You can consult these coding fundamentals anytime as you build and test emails. No matter what kind of email you're creating, remember that your code framework and QA process both need to meet the specific needs of your brand and subscribers.

Additional Code, Testing, and Analytics Resources

To deepen your email coding education, bookmark these helpful links.



**Responsive
Template Shells**



**Code in Color AMPscript
and HTML Editor**



**Litmus Email Testing
and Analytics**



**Return Path Inbox
Tools Suite**

Troubleshooting Common Rendering Errors

After all that coding, what could be more frustrating than an error?! Use this table to fix common issues in HTML for email.

Error	Fix	Email Clients Affected
Extra space below images	Add <code>style="display: block;"</code> to <code></code>	Outlook.com (non-IE), Gmail, Yahoo
Embedded CSS not displaying properly	Use inline CSS	Gmail, Lotus Notes
CSS-based layout not displaying properly	Use tables for layout; "clear" and "float" attributes are not always supported	Outlook 07/10, Lotus Notes
Link color not displaying properly	Nest a <code>Link</code> within the <code><a></code>	Yahoo
Blue border appearing around linked image	Add <code>border="0"</code> to image tags	Multiple clients
Animated GIF not displaying	Ensure first frame of the GIF conveys enough, as only the first frame will display in Outlook 07/10/13	Outlook 07/10
Background image missing	Use an HTML background instead of the CSS background-image property	Gmail and Outlook.com (need fix); Outlook 07/10 and Lotus Notes (no support)
Content misaligned	Specify accurate widths and align attributes on all <code><table></code> and <code><td></code> tags	Multiple clients, primarily Outlook 07/10 and Internet Explorer
Layout broken	Verify correct syntax and no missing closing tags	Multiple clients, primarily Gmail
Email length truncating: generally occurs when downloading the message over cellular data (not Wi-Fi) if the email's HTML is larger than 15K	Remove redundant HTML, hard returns, and spaces in the code; reduce the amount of content; convert some text and image content to just images	iOS Mail, Gmail, Yahoo

Testing: A Designer's Best Friend

As you're building a new email or even revamping an existing code shell, leave plenty of time to test for proper rendering in your audience's top email clients. Testing software is hugely beneficial, and additional native testing through test email accounts can be a great way to troubleshoot specific display errors. Using both can be an important part of a successful QA process.

Ready for more?

Explore your email potential at salesforce.com/marketingcloud

salesforce

marketing cloud



Data for Designers

Using data to inform design decisions

Data for Designers

Using data to inform design decisions

by Kristina Huffman and Schuyler Wareham

Email designers are the gatekeepers for how people consume emails worldwide. As an email designer, you're constantly making decisions that affect subscribers' emotions and ability to use and experience emails. Whether you're handling branding elements and photography, or controlling how legible, clickable, and useful an email is, you directly impact revenue with these decisions.

Of course, this is a hefty responsibility, which requires plenty of research and data before you even open Photoshop. That's why we've compiled these strategic resources to help you take a data-based approach to the way you design.

To enhance your left-brain perspective on your emails, begin asking questions like:

- What inputs do I have available to me, and how was the data gathered? Is this survey-based data or open data?
- Is this statistic in its proper context? What else about the send or situation was noteworthy?
- When it comes to validity, is the data apples to apples when I compare it to my specific brand? Am I making a big decision based on someone else's A/B test?

Pull up a seat to the strategic table, and begin honing your analytical skills along with your email marketing expertise. Let's dig into the data.

“The magic formula for your brand will differ from the magic formula for your competitors.”

Jay Baer

President, Convince & Convert

Data Inputs Available to Designers

As a designer, you have two primary inputs (or sources and types) of data to consider: device-based inputs and performance-based inputs.

Device-Based Inputs

As you already know, subscribers increasingly prefer to read emails on mobile devices, and that fact must inform your email design decisions. What devices are people truly buying and using around the world? This data impacts your design and code workflow, as well as your audience profile. For example, if you have an Outlook audience, you'll adjust for the preview pane and image-blocking. If you have a predominantly iPhone or Android audience, you'll adjust for screen size, pixel density, the touch experience, and so on, accordingly.

Global Shipments of Mobile Phones, by Device Type ¹



Amount of Website Browsing on Mobile Phones, by Device Type ²



App Downloads by Device Type ³



● Android ● iPhone ● Other

Track and consider device-based data at a global and a brand level. Worldwide data may be different than your current audience data, but the global numbers may indicate shifts and trends that you'll need to design for soon.

¹ Research data: IDC Worldwide / ² Research data: Quantcast, Piper Jaffray

³ forbes.com/sites/tonybradley/2013/11/15/android-dominates-market-share-but-apple-makes-all-the-money/

Market Share Isn't Everything

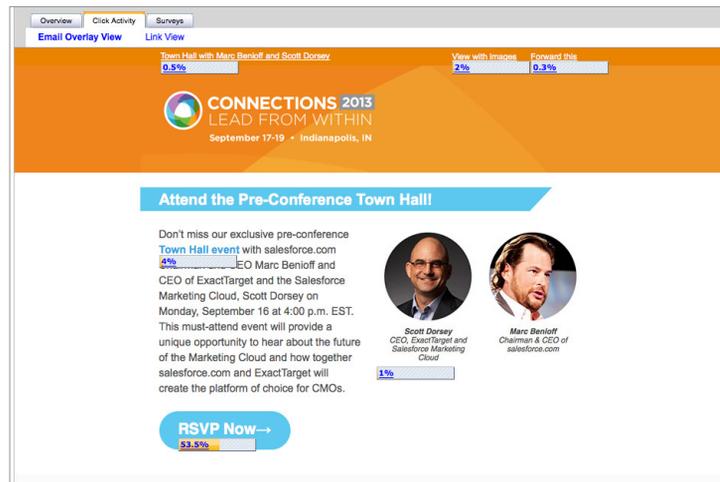
While Android apps may have dominated the market in terms of downloads, Apple still made 56% of profits in the mobile device market in Q3 of 2013.³ Depending what sources you consult (and when), market share data is different; look at all inputs to make the best decisions.

Performance-Based Inputs

When you think about how your emails perform, you probably think about conversion—your audience’s actual response to your emails, whether you measure conversion by purchases, sign-ups, shares, or something else. Performance-based data can help you make decisions and increase conversions based on how your emails are performing, but be sure your brand knows exactly what results you’re seeking from email marketing, or else performance-based data won’t be as useful.

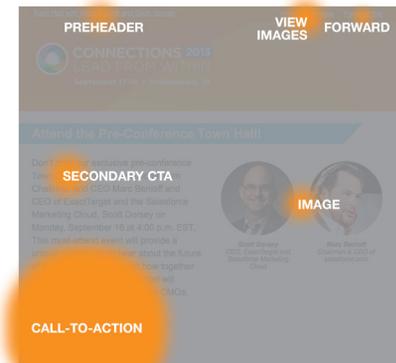
One excellent way to visualize performance-based data about your email program is a click overlay. A click overlay is like a heat map showing you the hottest areas where subscribers actually click. With each send, you should look at click overlays to check if subscribers clicked (or tapped) where you designed them to take action. This visual will also help get you buy-in from your team to make informed design decisions. Follow these steps to create one:

- After a send, go into tracking for that email, view the click overlay, and export or take a screenshot of the data.
- Determine what parts were most trafficked and which parts were overlooked.
- Visualize your click overlay. Draw circles or use brush sizes in Photoshop to place color over the links to visually depict where people are clicking. For example, use a 40px brush size to show 40% of clicks, and so on. Are those the areas you intended?



Click Overlays

Based on your goals, an overlay can illuminate the weaknesses and strengths of your email design, and help you find areas for improving conversion. Did they click where you designed them to? Were there any surprises?



User Experience and Human Behavior

In addition to your own conversion stats as explained in the previous section, your email design and user experience should factor in data about basic subscriber behavior. At the other side of every email, there's a real human—a human interacting with devices, channels, and content in his or her own way, but we do see many similarities in how people interact.

Human Behavior “Benchmarks”

While designing, remember a few essentials about human behavior in regard to email. True, there's no magical industry benchmark. But you may want to consider these key truths:

- People click without opening. For one brand we studied, 16% of click-throughs were from people who didn't even open or download images!
- People don't open later on desktop. Unfortunately, mobile triage is a myth, according to our data. Just 2-3% of emails are opened on two different platforms—so the first open is your one chance to impress.
- Peak mobile times are early morning and late evening. For a mobile-heavy subscriber base, this might bear heavily on your send times.
- People generally click less on mobile devices than they do on desktop. Many factors contribute to this: usability, trust, and time, to name a few.

One Open, One Click

For one customer's send to a one-million-plus group, 72% of opens were unique and 81% of clicks were unique. You only get one open and one click. What will you use it on?



How People Use Mobile Devices

Subscribers' relationships with their mobile devices are constantly evolving, but ponder these early learnings and the implications for your emails.

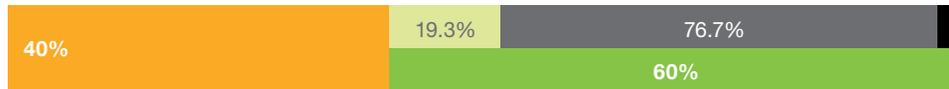
Mobile Email Opens ⁴



According to one retailer and one send, with a one-million-plus dataset, we found the following email behavior and mobile breakdown by device:



Email Opens



Email Clicks



Web Conversions



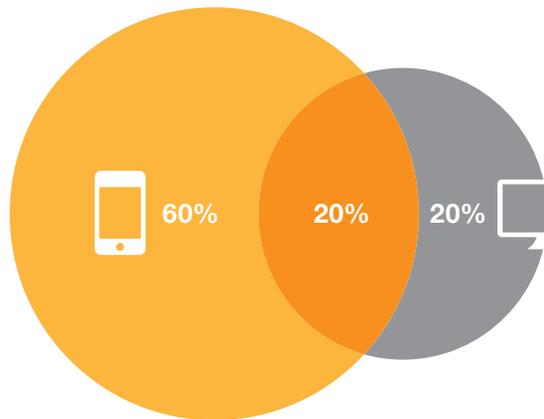
⁴Research data: emailclientmarketshare.com, Litmus
Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Opens vs. Conversion

As shown in the charts here, people opened more on mobile, but clicked and purchased less in these instances. Recall that email opens aren't necessarily a good indicator of conversions. We still see most conversion activity coming from desktop users. As an email designer, if you see this trend, you need to make sure this is because of user preference—not because of a limitation of the mobile experience.

Platform Affinity

Even though there are still plenty of desktop-only subscribers out there, we have to treat the mobile platform as a stand-alone brand experience as the preference for mobile rises. We've found that many subscribers interact with a given brand's email program over time only in one (mobile) or the other (desktop). But when subscribers do happen to open that email during their lifecycle on both mobile and desktop, they tend to prefer desktop for clicking.⁵

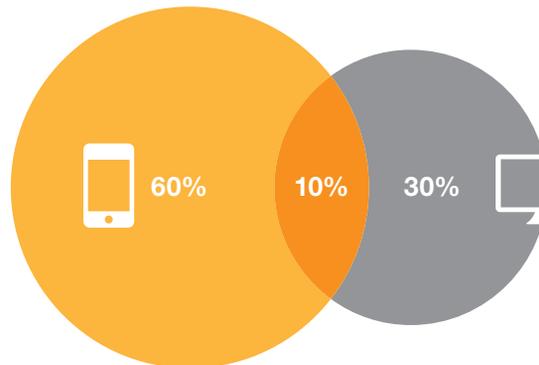


60%

of people who open emails are opening *only* on mobile, according to data based on one customer's daily sends for 30 days

60%

of people who click emails are clicking *only* on mobile, according to data based on one customer's daily sends for 30 days



Remember the Ultimate Goal

Although it's an amazing tool for securing ROI, email is merely the vehicle to guide your subscribers to a site where they can convert. Ensure click or conversion dropoff is not due to reduced content options within the email or a poor user experience—on mobile *or* desktop. Regardless of an email's quality in and of itself, that message is only as good as the site or landing page experience that's delivered.

The biggest takeaways about platform affinity: many people (perhaps 60% or more) are mobile only, and those who switch back and forth between platforms prefer desktop for clicking.

⁵Salesforce Marketing Cloud research: one customer, one-million-plus dataset, daily sends over 30 days

Making Decisions with Data

There are two ways to make design decisions: based on your own expertise, and based on data. A healthy mix of each will ensure both effective campaigns and a sustainable workflow for you.

1 Making Decisions with Your Expertise

Your experience with your brand and subscribers is something no stat can replace. Certain decisions don't need to be tested; they're clear to you, based on your experience with the brand, email industry, and design profession. Some elements that good email designers can execute without testing and data include:

- Overall aesthetics
- Typefaces
- Brand voice and tone
- Color palette
- Photography choices
- User interface elements

These, and other branding elements, fall under your own capable expertise—so don't be afraid to make a decision based on what you already know about your brand.

Workflow

As you know better than anyone, an email campaign doesn't depend solely on an email designer, but also on people in roles like campaign manager, production specialist, deployment specialist, and so on. But you have a unique skillset that can be beneficial in planning and decision-making for the larger team's overall success, so speak up, and use your expertise!

2 Making Decisions with Data

Of course, while some decisions are clear to you without research and outside statistics, other choices should be driven by data—either to confirm an approach, or change something wholesale. Common testable elements include:

- Subject lines
- Button color language
- Opt-in form layout
- Opt-in form content
- Responsive design techniques

When making a design decision, consider the difference between optimization and design innovation, as explained by Joshua Porter⁶:

Optimization means:

What works best in the current model?

Design innovation means:

What is the best possible model?

Just as you must make expertise- and data-based decisions, you'll need to both optimize and innovate for progress in your email program.

Seth Godin wisely said, “Sure, go ahead and test what’s testable. But the real victories come when you have the guts to launch the untestable.” So go forth, create, and innovate!

“Sure, go ahead and test what’s testable. But the real victories come when you have the guts to launch the untestable.”

Seth Godin
Author,
Linchpin and *Permission Marketing*

⁶Metrics Driven Design: Joshua Porter, slideshare.net/andrew_null/metrics-driven-design-by-joshua-porter

Testing Considerations

Before you run off to test every single element in your email design, wait a moment—there's a better way. Follow these steps to a truly strategic testing plan.

- **Recall that you have a large dormant audience.** They're masking the true impact of improvements and will dilute your results. For some brands, this dormant subscriber segment can be as large as 1/3 or 2/3 of the total subscriber base.
- **Test with new subscribers.** New subscribers are the perfect petri dish for testing, because they haven't been tainted by past messaging and marketing efforts. A welcome email campaign is a great place to start, as statistically, those subscribers are the most engaged during that phase of an email program's lifecycle.
- **Keep testing; change occurs over time.** Your subscribers need to be retrained when big changes are implemented, and that doesn't happen instantly or with a single redesign. When you're talking about testing, you're talking about a long-term change in the way your emails are experienced. Give it time, and don't expect immediately obvious results.

The ideas in this guide are your foundation to a data-based approach to email design. Take advantage of the inputs you have, and use data to drive change and seek ever-greater ROI—while using your creative eye and right brain to make sure everything looks beautiful in the process.

Discover the Data

Want to explore your analytics and draw data-based conclusions even more quickly?

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