



Email Hints & Tips

CustomerMinds
Simply Powerful

“Email is almost 40 times better at acquiring new customers than Facebook and Twitter.”
(Source: McKinsey & Company)

The single most important way you can improve your email performance is to increase relevance through greater use of segmentation and relevant content. By using behavioural segmentation, you can map your campaigns to recipients’ buying cycles.

To comply with Data Protection Regulations, use a system that automatically manages your bounces and unsubscribes - your contacts should be able to opt-out from any email with one simple action. In addition, The Companies Act stipulates that all electronic communications must include your registered company number; company telephone number and physical address.

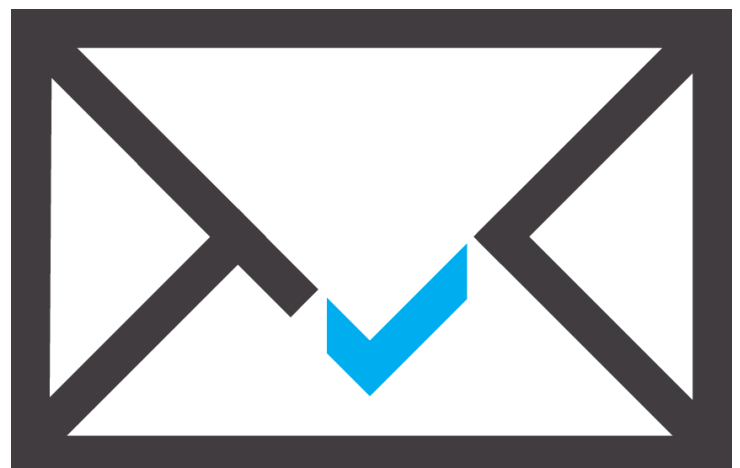
Get into the Inbox

The single biggest challenge for email marketers is ensuring that emails are delivered to recipients’ inboxes (rather than getting caught by Spam filters and ending up in junk folders).

Email content that looks great but doesn’t actually reach the inbox cannot be called successful. Therefore, it is necessary to optimise your messages for successful delivery, a key issue in today’s highly charged anti-spam climate. Even a very modest improvement in the deliverability rate will yield substantial response and revenue improvements.

The days of using a desktop email client and sending a “BCC” message (or worse, a “CC” message) are over; even if you only have a couple hundred people on your list, don’t do it!

Use a service that offers proper data management and you’ll save administrative time, minimise the risks of alienating your contacts and getting blacklisted by ISPs. Your provider will be able to advise you on the technical and content things you can do to prevent your email being classified as spam.



Here are a couple of things to watch out for:

- ✓ Your mail can appear to be spam if you inadvertently use certain words or formatting that's indicative of unsolicited email. These days, words such as "free", "mortgage", and "prescription" are so commonly used by spammers that your mail may be undifferentiated if you use them without abandon.
- ✓ The best practice is to create messages that have a good balance of text, graphics, and links, avoiding excessive use of words that are typically associated with spam. You might be able to gauge this on your own, but we always recommend testing email messages against spam filters. The best Email providers will have a quality Spam Scoring tool built into their platforms.
- ✓ Use a recognised, expected, consistent sender name. When scanning overloaded inboxes, recipients may look at the sender line, subject line, or both. Use, and stick with, a sender name that's simple, easily recognised, trusted, and expected by subscribers. It's best to use a sender email address that's recognisable and in plain English, such as newsletter@companyabc.com.

Design & Layout of your Email

Email design is far more restrictive than design for web or other media. What you see on your screen will probably not be what recipients will see on their screens.

Remember, many readers will first see your email in their preview pane with graphics switched off.

To further complicate matters, every email reader (e.g. Outlook, Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, Lotus etc) has different technical restrictions. Most do not support CSS, Flash or rich media and forms.

On top of this, Web-based email services typically present 500-650 pixels – depending on the user's screen resolution settings. HTML messages that are wider will frustrate recipients by forcing them to scroll horizontally.

As recipients initially scan or partially read emails, you should put your most important content vertically along the left hand side of the email as eye track studies have shown that this is where people scan first. Keep images to the right hand side where they won't be taking up valuable real estate or distract eye movement.

The key to good email is to design for smaller spaces. Get to the point quickly and practice brevity at every turn (readers should know "what's in it for me" in 2-5 seconds – even with graphics switched off). The content must be relevant and you need to keep the reader interested throughout the whole email.

More Design Tips:

- ✓ Always put the call to action in the top half (i.e. “above the fold”). Repeat at the bottom if necessary.
- ✓ Put the call-to-action in headline and text - not in images (which may be switched off in certain client servers).
- ✓ Use short copy blocks with bullet points highlighting key points.
- ✓ Use Alt tags - this is the text that appears in place of images before images are turned on in inboxes. You have complete control over what text is placed in the tags so it should be used to promote your offers.
- ✓ Consideration must also be given to smartphone and tablet device users.

Email Subject Lines

The subject line is your first point of contact with your reader, and you need to ensure that it won't be the last. Recipients will decide whether or not to open the email based on the subject line. Research has shown that shorter subject lines (less than 50 characters) generally produce higher open rates.

However, the superiority of shorter subject lines isn't solely a function of consumers' busy lives and short attention spans. There are also technical reasons for limiting the length. Some email providers limit the number of subject line characters displayed by default in the inbox:

- AOL limits subject lines to roughly 38 characters
- Yahoo has an approximate limit of 47 characters per subject line
- Hotmail uses word wrap to display subject lines on multiple lines, allowing approximately 45 characters

A good subject line must be newsworthy and eye-catching. It must grab the readers' attention and evoke an emotive response such as appeal, controversy or intrigue.

An intriguing subject line will capture the readers' curiosity, ensuring they read on. However, be careful that the subject line is not misleading or you will lose their trust.

Best performing subject lines succinctly communicate the benefit of opening the email (“what's in it for me”). The use of personalisation has also been shown to increase open rates significantly.

Timing is everything

- We have found that Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays seem to be the best days to send an email campaign. On Mondays, email spam is already clogging recipients' inboxes and Fridays, most people are already in weekend mode.
- The best timings are generally between 10:00-12:00 and 14:00-15:00. At these times, recipients are generally in front of their computers and have already emptied their inboxes from the overnight/post lunch collection of mail.

Go beyond Open and Read Rates

At a minimum you should track delivery, open, read and click rates. However, we would also encourage you to integrate with web analytics to understand what recipients do on your web site.

Clickstream data is a record of a user's internet activity, including the landing page and exit point, the order of the page views, and the amount of time spent on each page. This information is becoming increasingly valuable as it shows you how visitors from emails are interacting with your website.

Don't believe a word we say!

The great strength of email is that you can test every variable such as subject line, offers, design, day of week and time of day. So you don't have to take our word for it. Instead, we encourage you to drive continuous improvement by testing different aspects of your message with random test groups ('cells') before you deploy the message to your entire list. That way, you'll have proof of what works best so you can send that version to the rest of your subscribers.