



Golden Rules of Email Design



#1 Email Subject Line... your gateway to success

1.9 billion non-spam emails are sent everyday. To break through this noise, you must develop a compelling email subject line that inspires your audience to click on and read your email. Remember, if you don't capture your target's attention in the subject line, they are never going to see any of the other parts of your email.

#1: Email Subject Line

Here are a few guidelines to ensure your subject lines entice your readers to click.

- Address your readers concerns: Put yourself in your audience's shoes and write your subject lines to address their needs. What is interesting about your product and service from their perspective? The key to generating clickthroughs is answering questions that your prospects care about.
- Use actionable language: Use action words to inspire your readers to click. As you are writing actionable subject lines, remember this requires a bit more than checking your thesaurus. You want your action verbs to inspire your audience to immediately click on your email by instilling urgency and excitement for people reading your subject lines.
- Be explicit: Clearly spell out what the email contains. You want the reader to understand exactly what they will get when they open your email. For example, the subject line "Free download - 10 ways to drive online sales" tells my reader exactly what they will get by downloading our article. Similarly, if you are running a

#1: Email Subject Line

special 20% off special, allude to that specific number in the first third of your subject line.

- Scan your subject lines for clarity: Clarity trumps persuasion when writing online copy. A clear, easily-understandable subject line is vital for generating email clickthroughs. Occasionally, when marketers try too hard to be clever, they end up just making the reader think "huh"? You want your emails to grab attention, but not at the expense of clearly conveying the email's content.
- Deploy Brevity: Email subject lines will get cut off if they're too long, particularly on mobile devices. We recommend using subject lines with fewer than 50 characters to make sure readers scanning their emails will read the entire subject line.
- Be consistent: Your email subject line is making a promise to your reader about what you will deliver in your message. Make sure that you make good on that commitment.

Do not promise a 50% off coupon in your subject line unless that coupon is prominently displayed in your email. Similarly, don't

#1: Email Subject Line

advertise 50% off, if that discount only applies to a small segment of your products. A "bait and switch" email engenders too much distrust to be worthwhile.

If people think they have been cheated by your subject lines, they will stop opening your emails, which leads to lower open-, clickthrough-, and conversion rates, as well as higher unsubscribes. No good.

- Avoid SPAM triggers: Email spammers rely heavily on certain words to boost their open rates. Because of these dark hat practices, email providers employ special spam filters to keep out any emails containing certain words. Email marketers should be careful about using words like "Cash,"

"Quote," and "Save" to make sure they don't inadvertently get caught by a spam trap. We recently wrote a blog article that includes a full list of spam trigger words that you can review. Spam traps look at more than just subject lines to determine if they will deliver your email. here are several tools online you can use to test if your subject lines will raise any red flags.



#2

Actual Person as the Sender

The name you include in the "From" field of your email can have a huge impact on your overall open rates. People feel a more personal connection to your email when they receive it from "Alan Johnson" than they do from Company X, or worse, some version of "donotreply.com". You can even consider adding the sender's picture to the bottom of your emails, and signing off the email with their signature.

#2: Actual Person As Sender

Experiment with how to position your "from" sender. Watch your open rates to determine if people prefer someone they hear from frequently, such as the relationship manager or sales rep, or if your company CEO nets more clicks. You may find that your best email open rates actually come from a combination of a person's name and company name. Including both a name and a company brand can help to put context around your email marketing.

If you are creating quality content, people will frequently look forward to your regular email communications, and open your messages because it comes from your company – so let them know it's you!

Finally, whomever you choose to include as your sender, be conscious that people will expect an answer to any emailed replies, so have someone tracking your email accounts, and be prepared to address any questions or concerns you receive from your list.



#3

Company Branding

Make sure your email marketing templates echo your overall company brand. You want the people opening your email to recognise who you are, and remember why they clicked on your email. While they don't need to be identical, the design elements in your emails should echo your company style. A consistent brand image, language, and tone helps your audience relate to your content and expands your overall brand experience.

#3: Company Branding

Consistent brand style also conveys the professionalism and planning that goes into your email marketing efforts – or at the very least, it's a great step toward faking it!

The easiest way to ensure a consistent email style is to create, and regularly utilise, email templates! In your template design, include your company colors, logo and any other important corporate branding elements. When designing your branded templates, don't overdo it, and pay attention to how long it takes to download your email messages. Emails with tons of design elements – big images or video, for example – can create problems in prospects' inboxes than more basic HTML emails.

Some of your recipients' inboxes will default to prevent images from downloading, or in other words, it will take too long to find and download all those images. You want the visual design of your emails to enhance the overall experience, not get in the way of the content, so make sure your design doesn't inadvertently decrease your open rates.



#4

Personalised Content

According to research, personalised emails improve clickthrough rates by 14%. This is an easy win! Simply include a person's first name in your email greeting to net a double-digit boost in email clickthroughs. Despite the impressive benefits of email personalisation, a surprising 68% of marketers aren't utilising personalised content in their email marketing – despite the fact that a third of marketers believe personalised campaigns are highly effective.

#4: Personalised Content

As a result, developing personalised emails is a great way to gain a competitive advantage in your email marketing. With 72% of B2B firms reporting that a top priority for this year is to deliver highly relevant content, this is the time to employ personalisation tactics and get ahead of your competition. Think about how to leverage personalisation for your lead nurturing or sales strategies. Beyond simply adding a first name to your email greetings, develop targeted content for each list segment.

Delivering personalised email messages or specific offers based on your audience behaviors, interests, or buying stage is a terrific way to set your content apart. Just like a five-star restaurant would remember and cater to their top customers' preferences – for example whether you like red or white wine – you can use smart lists and dynamic email templates to deliver individualised content based on your contacts' form responses or past purchase history.



#5

Customer Database Segmentation

Your database most likely includes both customers and prospects – all of whom are at varying stages of their buying cycles. When designing an email campaign, pay attention to how you segment your list and align your email strategies to capitalise on your list's needs.

#5: Customer Database Segmentation

Segmentation is extremely effective in boosting email performance metrics. 39% of email marketers who practice list segmentation see better open rates, while 28% have reduced optout and unsubscribe rates. On the other hand, companies that sent email to a single list had a lower average email click-through rate (7.3%) than those that segmented their overall email database into two to six lists (8.3%).

As you can imagine, in reaction to these results, 84% of B2B marketers use some kind of segment targeting in their email campaigns. If you are looking to start segmenting your list, consider the following to begin your list parsing:

- Demographic data: Personal data such as geography, age, gender, job function, industry, seniority, etc. can all offer insight on what kind of email content will be most interesting to your target audience.
- Personas: The best marketing strategies are built around detailed buyer profiles that help inform their content development. Once you have defined your profiles, use

#5: Customer Database Segmentation

them to design email content that appeals to their distinct challenges and concerns.

- Purchase history: Any past purchase or browsing history can also help focus email sends to specific interests. Purchase history can be used to target thank you and cross-sell emails. In your secondary CTAs, recommend additional services or complementary products your audience might enjoy based on past purchases.
- Lifecycle stage: Even if you don't have explicit profiles, segment your list based on your customers' purchase cycles. Set up separate lead nurturing tracks for those at the top of your sales funnel, in the middle of your sales funnel, and at the bottom of the sales funnel. By providing information linked to questions your prospects face along their decision-making process, your content will better push your leads down the funnel, and ultimately close sales.

#5: Customer Database Segmentation

- Content engagement: Look at your email analytics. Is there a specific segment that always downloads a certain kind of content? What can you infer about these content trends to improve your email list performance?

Look at your lists to see if similar trends emerge, and incorporate these insights into your email strategy. As its popularity grows, segmentation is becoming more efficient. New marketing automation, email workflows and triggered smart lists make collecting and segmenting your email database more streamlined.

Use these ideas above to begin cutting up your database. You will learn along the way, and you can improve your practices as you watch what works. When thinking about your segmentation, consider how people will open your messages. To work, your email needs to be readable on all devices. First, check to see that your email messages are mobile optimised.

#5: Customer Database Segmentation

As iPad and SmartPhone technology evolve, more people are bypassing their laptops reading your emails on a mobile device - email opens rates on smartphones and tablets have increased 80% over the last six months. Another viewing best practices is to create a textonly version of all your email messages, for those on your mailing list with less advanced technology.

This additional step ensures that your good content will be delivered to even those without HTML enabled inboxes. Most email tools make it relatively painless to create a text-only version of your send.



#6

Value Proposition and Content

Your email content should immediately address what your offer is, and why it's valuable to your audience. Adding a value proposition for your offer as the first sentence in your email copy is the best way to accomplish this.

Your value proposition should clearly address the key points of your offer in brief, compelling language. For a standout value proposition, utilise these tactics:

#6: Value Proposition and Context

- Clearly highlight what email recipients will get from downloading your ebook, purchasing your product, etc. For example, the sentence "10 free downloadable Direct Marketing strategies" informs the reader in several ways. We explicitly tell people the number of strategies they receive, as well as how to access them (downloadable), and how much they cost (free).
- Incorporate statistics to emphasise what problem your offer is solving. For example, we know that companies who tested and optimised their value propositions saw a 15% increase in their marketing ROI.
- There are also multiple visual elements that can improve your emails. For example, minimise page friction by keeping your emails clean of clutter and multiple messages. Prominently feature a button to download your offer. We do this after we position the value proposition so that people are excited to download. You should also add multiple links for your offer in the email content, in the event that your audience prefers clicking on hyperlinks.

**#6:
Value
Proposition
and
Context**

In addition to developing a compelling a value proposition, you want your email copy to provide context on why your reader has received this email. People have notoriously short memories when it comes to what links they've clicked or what pages they've visited. Acknowledging why they are receiving your email reduces anxiety. For example, in a welcome email, you want to remind a new subscriber specifically how, when and where your reader signed up for your email list.



#7

Obvious, Focused Call-to-Action

Your email should have a single conversion goal, whether it is to download an offer, sign up for a webinar or purchase a product. The call to action button is the link that triggers this action – so make sure that your call-to-action is prominently displayed in your email.

#7: Focused Call-to-Action

Because of their vital importance, marketers pay a lot of attention to their CTA buttons. In fact, 41% of marketers found optimising their CTAs extremely valuable. Whether you are looking at a CTA in your email or landing page, it's clear that marketers need to think about how they are positioning their CTA buttons.

Your call to action button includes two elements:

- The button itself: Make sure your button is visually distinct from the rest of your email template, and place it in the top third of your email layout – what we call "above the fold". You want the reader to immediately download our link before they get distracted.
- The button copy: Most people scan their emails rather than actually reading them, so minimise the copy to ensure people will read it. As a general rule of thumb, CTAs should run between 90 and 150 characters and include explanatory subjects and verbs.

#7: Focused Call-to-Action

When designing this minimal button content, keep these key items in mind:

Tell the reader specifically what action they must take to receive the offer (e.g. "Download")

Create a sense of urgency using words such as "Now," "Today," etc.

Tie the CTA to the offer itself (e.g. for a live webinar, say "Register For the Webinar Now" or "Reserve Your Seat Today"). Avoid vague language such as "Submit", which doesn't inspire the reader or tell them anything new.

Call-to-action buttons are intended to get noticed. To boost your email clickthrough rates, you want your CTAs to stand out on the page, communicate a clear value, and compel your visitor to click on them. Great design, strong word choice, and concise sentences will get you there.



#8

Relevant Image

Incorporating images is another tool to differentiate your email marketing. Visual cues are great tools to ensure every element of your email template engages your audience.

#8: Relevant Image

65% of people prefer emails with mostly images rather than text. People simply like pictures - probably because 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual, and visuals are processed 60,000 times faster in the brain than text. With so many people scanning your emails online, breaking up your text with a professional looking image is a good way to increase your email engagement.

Matching our emails with relevant images significantly boosts our conversion numbers. We recommend matching your images with the content of your offer. Because people literally judge your books by their covers, if you're offering an ebook, include a picture of the cover page. If you're offering a webinar, include a screenshot of the cover slide from your presentation.



#9

Social Sharing Buttons/Links

Social sharing buttons and links are great tools for expanding your email marketing and reaching new potential leads, with very little effort on your part.

#9: Social Media Buttons / Links

A few years ago, social media proponents foretold that the rise of social media would spell the death of email. Rather than seeing the two channels as competitors, however, smart digital marketers learned to use social media channels to magnify the reach of their email marketing. Today, 78% of organizations integrate their email and social media strategies.

You spend so much time developing valuable content – make it easy for your list share your offers with their own networks. Add social sharing buttons to your email templates so that readers can share all of your material with their networks.

In addition to making your content shareable, use email campaigns to grow your social media reach by adding follow buttons or links to your email templates. You developed five-star content, which means people will want to further engage with your brand. Give your email list a chance to do so by encouraging your subscribers to follow you on Twitter, "like" your Facebook page, subscribe to your YouTube channel, or follow your company updates on LinkedIn.



#10

Secondary Call-to-Action

If your email recipients have successfully read all the way through the bottom of your email, make sure you provide some way for them to dive deeper into your content. The best way to do this is by adding a secondary call-to-action button at the bottom of your page – sort of like the P.S. on a handwritten letter or a complimentary dessert at a great restaurant.

#10: Secondary Call-to-Action

Use this secondary CTA to provide additional information on your product, push people further down your funnel, or to promote a cross-selling opportunity. If your email subscribers are ready for a more product-focused offer, such as a free trial of your product or a personal consultation, you want to be sure to provide that information, rather than asking a potential conversion to go hunt for your pricing – they probably won't.

The key to a secondary call-to-action is to make sure it compliments, but doesn't compete with, the primary objective of your email. If you clutter the page with too many CTAs, you will confuse your reader, and they will likely become frustrated and stop reading. Still, adding a smaller secondary CTA will boost engagement among your more inspired readers.



#11

Unsubscribe Link

The final element of a five-star email is also the only mandatory element in your email templates. You **MUST** add an unsubscribe link to the bottom of every email marketing message. Sending an email without an unsubscribe link violates CAN-SPAM regulations, can significantly damage your email sender credibility, and can even potentially leave your marketing open to costly fees or litigation.

#11: Unsubscribe Link

In addition to being a legal requirement, adding an unsubscribe link is smart email practice. You only want to send emails to people who actually want to hear from you. Don't try to trick people into staying on your list – make your unsubscribe link clearly visible and offer a simple unsubscribing process. As we mentioned before, online "readers" scan most of your content. Rather than hunting for an unsubscribe link, 47% of recipients just click the spam button in their email. Someone opting-out of your email marketing will not hurt your deliverability reputation, but a complaint for neglecting the unsubscribe link certainly will.



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