

BEST PRACTICES

Email Design

The structural design of an email campaign is just as important as audience segmentation and strategy. A thoughtful marketing plan won't be successful if the design of the email itself is faulty. Stirista offers some basic email design guidelines to ensure that the structure of your email doesn't negatively affect your email campaign.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Since one email campaign is sent to a variety of servers, it's important to keep the email format simple—which means using HTML. The best way to guarantee that your content will be seen correctly is to code it using HTML. Many servers will disrupt content coded with CSS and often strip references to external information. Designs using nested tables are the most successful for emails while divs are typically used for web design.

For example: many campaigns send to emails through Microsoft Outlook, which uses Microsoft Word to render the content. Because of this, non-HTML coded emails will read poorly or not at all. There is some support for CSS in Outlook, but it varies. Before you consider using CSS, research what version of Outlook will support CSS. External style sheets are also usually disrupted in Outlook, but if you really want to use CSS, it's best to apply in-line style attributes to the element.

It's also important to remember that many people are now reading their emails on mobile devices, like smartphones and tablets. Having a plain text version of your email is a smart idea just in case the mobile phone doesn't read the HTML properly. To avoid rendering issues, it's also necessary to avoid using Flash, ActiveX, Java, and Frames.

MAKE IT SMALL AND VISIBLE

It's important to remember your audience's field of vision when they first see an email. Different email servers will only display certain parts of an email. Some will show the upper section, and others, the left vertical. Mobile phones display emails very differently from computers. The email view can vary depending on phone type and whether the message is accessed through a web page or an app. This is an important factor in email design since most people check messages with their mobile devices. Because your message will display differently depending on how it's viewed, it's important to put the most pertinent information in the spaces that your audience is most likely to see. Remember, it's far more likely that a potential customer will see part of an email than its entire content. Below are suggestions for constructing successful content.

- **Content size:** Suggested email widths range from 600-700 pixels. These dimensions are best because they display at a majority—if not all—of the message in the email preview pane. There's no “set” height, but it's important to remember your customers probably won't scroll. If they do scroll, the longer it takes, the more likely they are to lose interest. It's also important to ensure that the full email size is less than 50 kb to avoid a slow loading time.
- **Position:** The information that you want your viewers to see first should be at the top of the message. It's also worth considering placing content in the left vertical view of the emails.
- **Text content:** Your text should provide the important links within the email, not your images. Since images are often not displayed, it's crucial to have links available in the text content. The suggested amount of text for an email is up to 150 words. However, newsletters and other similar messages may contain more text.

- **Links:** As stated above, make sure that any links are contained within the text. The suggested number of links per email is one to two.

USE IMAGES WITH CARE

It's common to use images in email campaigns to incite action and make the email look better. But images can also be the root cause of a failed campaign. If you want to use images, follow these tips.

- Your image might not be seen, so don't put crucial content within them. If you do put important information in the image, make sure that it's duplicated within the text as well.
- Too many images will probably result in a spam flag. Your email will also appear completely bare if the images don't automatically download.
- Using appealing alt text descriptors in the image files may encourage a recipient to download an image that isn't automatically loaded. So try not to name your images just by their content.

MAKE IMPORTANT LINKS EASY TO FIND

You need to make it clear how the recipient can access your splash page or website. The link should be clear and easy to find in the message.

While unsubscribes aren't great, you need to make the "unsubscribe" button easy to locate. If recipients feel frustrated trying to access the unsubscribe button, they'll be more likely to identify your email as spam. Not only does a clearly indicated "unsubscribe" button comply with the CAN SPAM act as a prerequisite for compliant email marketing, but it also shows your recipients that you're a respectful and legitimate business.

Be sure not to confuse the links for your landing page and unsubscribe. Make sure you're not putting your "unsubscribe" link in a location where a recipient would expect to find a website link. If you do, several accidental "unsubscribes" may occur.

RUN A TEST

Never send out an email before testing it. Using a test run on an email design will allow you to view the content from multiple platforms and resolve any glaring issues before the deployment of your campaign.

The above steps should aid in your campaign's deliverability and the rendering of its content. Your entire campaign will be at risk if you don't follow these best practices for building an email. But if you follow Stirista's steps, your campaign should be in the clear to reach the people who matter to you.