

The Essential Guide to HTML Email Design



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So you are designing your own email?

Email marketing is continuously changing and expanding in all directions - from small businesses, to big international companies - the benefits are obvious - reliability, specific sector targeting and cost effectiveness are just some of the advantages compared to standard advertising methods.

Styled messages have lots of appeal for marketers, designers and consumers - but for coders, it's a real headache to create them properly.

There is a lot of misguided information regarding what is involved in sending out an email campaign. One of the major factors which is misunderstood is how to construct a HTML email.

Unfortunately, email isn't the web and need to be coded differently. Also an email design that look fantastic in one email program, might not look the same in a different email program or on a different device.

Here is a simple guide to help you through the construction of an HTML email, offering you advice as to best practices to get the best out of your email campaign. Let's get started.

These blouses have been called by attention to detail (notice the buttons, as well as the collar and cuffs).

Asymmetrical fastening is from the simple to the sport and trendy to the sophisticated.

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Free your first week's charges

Layout

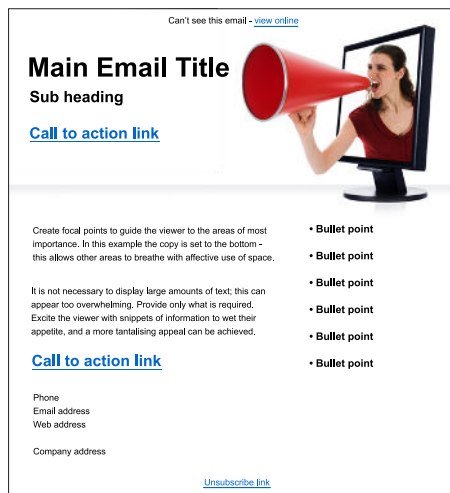
When it comes to the layout, columns are easier to read than one continuous scroll. Ensure that the maximum page width is only 650 pixels or less and use tables for layout as they are more consistently supported.

Avoid complicated layouts. Stick to simple layouts if you want your email to work across all major email applications. Never assume your email will look the same on all email programs even with necessary testing - there will always be someone using an old email program.

Use basic HTML tables for the framework of your email. Many email clients do not fully support float, margin and padding and so for the best results you need to ensure you always declare width, cellpadding, and cellspacing for all tables. Don't leave widths to chance because many email clients like to "fill in the blank" which can break the design.

Avoid using "COLSPAN" in your tables as some email clients do not fully support them or will have display issues. Chop it up into separate tables instead, also known as nested tables.

Max Page Width 650




Golden tips



Do Not Use White Text

Email providers read white text as invisible text – raising your email's spam score. Also, should the background not appear for any reason, then it will render all white text unreadable. An alternative font colour could be a light grey, such as "#CCCCCC" which works well with dark backgrounds.

Best Practice HTML Email Example




1

Main Email Title

Sub heading

[Call to action link](#)



3

4

Create focal points to guide the viewer to the areas of most importance. In this example the copy is set to the bottom - this allows other areas to breathe with affective use of space.

It is not necessary to display large amounts of text; this can appear too overwhelming. Provide only what is required. Excite the viewer with snippets of information to wet their appetite, and a more tantalising appeal can be achieved.

[Call to action link](#)


Phone
Email address
Web address

Company address

- Bullet point
- Bullet point
- Bullet point
- Bullet point
- Bullet point

6

5



- 1** HTML text headlines are the first thing the viewer will see.

2 Have a recognisable call to action.

3 Keep images to a minimum and slice up any large ones.
- 4** HTML Text used predominantly throughout in a clear and simple structure.

5 Always include your company's contact details.

6 Two columns is easier to read, rather than one continuous scroll.

Images

The best way to add imagery into your design is to host the images on a web server and then pull them into your email design using **absolute URLs** in your code. Declare both the **width and height** parameters for images. Some email programs will default to "0" for undeclared width or height.

Provide **alt tags** for all images. That way the reader will see some content in place of the disabled images, but never use spam messages in the alt tags, such as "Call now to claim your FREE DVD!!"

```

```

It is recommended that you use at least a **70:30 text to image ratio** to ensure your email does not junk. Email providers also often block images and URLs in images so more text ensures your message gets read – and also reduces spam scores.

Always **optimise the image file size**. Make sure you use GIF and JPEG correctly to get the lowest file size. Use JPEG only for photos and images containing gradient colors. GIF - for plain sharp images. Also remember to **splice large images** into sections and place them in their own table.

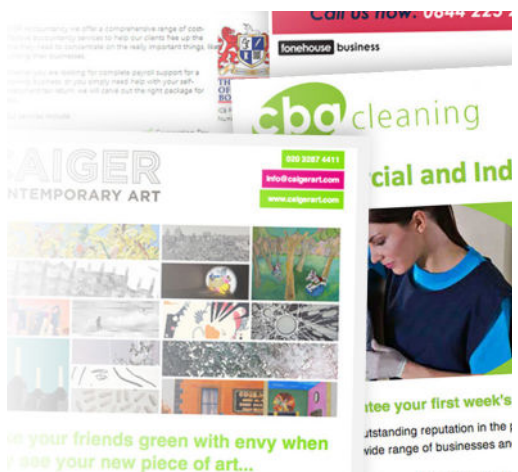
Try to avoid using background images. Gmail, among other, will ignore any url() attribute in an inline style, and the simple **background=** tag attribute. You can use background colours (**bgcolor** tag attribute)

Including the following code within the image tag can help remove table spacing problems with certain email clients... **style="display: block;"** or **display:inline-block;** if you have images in a row.

Golden tips



Don't use images for important content such as call to action, headlines and links. Outlook, Yahoo and others turn images off until allowed by the viewer. If your entire email is graphical, all your recipients are going to see is a lot of broken images.



CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)

CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) is not widely supported for HTML email as many email clients will strip it out from the <head> and <body> of an email. The only option is avoid external stylesheets and move all **CSS inline** within your HTML.

CSS is especially a problem if you're using an HTML Editor to design your HTML email, because HTML Editors insert all kinds of over-written CSS and DIVs by default. You might as well code by hand. The correct way is to use inline CSS:

```
<font style="color: #000000; font-family: arial, san-serif; font-size 12px"></font>
```

You'll have to rely on old-fashioned **<TABLES>** for your layouts in HTML email and only use CSS for simple font formatting and colors. Always design CSS to "fail gracefully." That means if someone took away your CSS, your design and content would still display well. Before you send your HTML email, **delete the CSS** and see what it looks like.

Make sure all your CSS is within the <body> tag. Everything outside <body> will be ignored. Using Inline styles ensures that **TEXT fonts, colours and sizes** do not conflict with the styles of our headers and footers.

Email clients don't always support background colours applied on the <body> tag. A work around to this is to put your design table inside of a container table with the width set to 100% and a bgcolor applied to it.

```
<table width="100%" cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0" border="0" bgcolor="#colorhere">
```

To avoid mysterious white space in Outlook email clients 2007, 2010 and 2013 set the line height on you <p> tags. If in doubt use a tag instead. These outlook clients use the own padding, margin and line-height therefore can cause large spacing in designs. You can always apply the styling to the table cell <td> tag and use tags instead of <p>

Golden tips



There is no need to use CSS excessively. There is a thin line between an email that reaches the recipient and the email that 'junks'. Many leading email clients have poor CSS support.

Animation and Scripting

Javascript is not supported in any email client as it can be malicious and blocked for your protection.

Like so many other aspects of HTML Email, animation is considered problematic. Most Email Programs simply will not be able to render it.

Don't embed videos or Flash directly into your email. Many clients will not support them and most anti-virus applications block the code used to embed **Flash movies, Javascript, Active X**, and even **background music files**. This has been used in the past to spread viruses, so it's commonly blocked now.

Animated GIFs are not fully supported. Most email clients are beginning to support animated GIFs however a few do not. An email client that doesn't support animated GIFs will probably show the first frame in your animation.

Golden tips



If you must use animation, instead of embedding your video/flash into your email consider adding a **screenshot** of a video player into your email and **create a landing page** - which will be linked through email.



How Spam Filters Think

How to Avoid Getting Your Campaigns Accidentally Junked

If you send email campaigns long enough, you will inevitably run into spam filter issues. We've found that on average, you can expect anything up to 15% of your emails to just get lost in cyberspace, mostly due to overzealous spam filters.

You don't even have to be a spammer to be spam-filtered. Innocent email marketers who send permission-based emails to people who requested them get spam filtered all the time.

Unfortunately, there is no quick fix. The only way to avoid spam filters is to understand how they work.

Spam filters look at a **long list of criteria** to judge whether or not your email is junk. For example, they might look for **spammy phrases** such as **"CLICK HERE!"** or **"FREE! BUY NOW!"** They'll assign points each time they see one of those phrases. Certain criteria get more points than others.

Golden tips



- Using spam phrases, such as "Click here!", "Free" or "Once in a lifetime opportunity!"
- Going crazy with exclamation points!!!!!!
- USING ALL CAPS, WHICH IS LIKE YELLING IN EMAIL.
- Coding sloppy HTML.
- Creating an HTML email that's nothing but one big image and no text.
- Using spam words and symbols in the subject line. Financial"

Here's a sample of criteria from **Spam Assassin**, one of the most popular spam filters out there:

Talks about lots of money (.193 points)

Describes a breakthrough (.232 points)

Looks like mortgage pitch (.297 points)

Contains urgent matter (.288 points)

Money back guarantee (2.051 points)

Why Pay More? (1.249 points)

Responsive Email Design

It is said that 48% of emails are now opened on a **mobile device** which makes it even more important that your email message is responsive to the various devices your email could be viewed.

Responsive design means designing **more than one CSS layout** of the same email newsletter, for example one layout for webmail and desktop clients and another for smaller screens such as a tablet or a mobile phone.

In the examples you can see the same email viewed on different devices and you can see the significant differences between the layouts.



- The mobile-friendly CSS layout changes:
- Single column layout, this makes the email easier to read
- Links and buttons are larger and easier to see
- Font size is larger
- Your message is kept clear and there is no need to zoom to see

To design emails for mobile devices there is a query known as **@media** that works as a special set of conditional statements or dynamic rules. Media queries detect the size of a device and use the set of rules that apply, eg. if the screen size is 470px or less then the appropriate CSS is to be used:

```
@media only screen and (max-width: 470px) {  
    table table{width:100% !important; }
```

Then with this query you can set style rules such as navigation, font sizes, colours, padding, change or hide content and more. These rules must be assigned and referenced in the HTML in order to be applied.

Responsive designs can be very simple to implement or can become quite complex depending on your preference and they require more planning and testing than a standard email. Not all email clients currently support responsive email designs.

Emailmovers Email Design Service

Emailmovers support an in-house professional email design service. All HTML email designs that are created by us are responsive and are tailored to your company's specific requirements. Our designers test all creatives across different email clients and devices as well as making sure your email passes spam checks.

Learn more about our email design services:

Standard Responsive Email Templates

Our email design service includes a range of different pre-designed HTML email templates from which to choose. These have all been specially designed to appeal to businesses of any sector and will fit your brand elements, content and images. Each design is unique to Emailmovers and have been tested and optimised for maximum delivery across all devices.

Bespoke Responsive Email Design

Have a fresh and distinctive email design created from scratch using highly skilled graphical techniques. This bespoke approach allows for a much more dynamic appearance and helps in establishing visual brand identity.

Have an email design already?

HTML Validation

If you design your own HTML email design we offer a validation check. During this process our designers will make changes where necessary and offer recommendations to ensure your design meets best practice and achieves maximum delivery.

Creative Conversion

If you have an email design in mind that you want converting into deliverable HTML format, our designers can produce that for you with the appropriate URL links and will offer advice on any changes to ensure it meets best practice guidelines.

Speak to our team today about your email design

If you need any help with your email design and want to speak to an email marketing consultant about your plans, call our team today on **0845 226 7181** or email **enquiries@emailmovers.com**. We would be more than willing to advise you!