



## Email Blast Best Practices Guidelines

### Writing Subject Lines

#### **Sell the Email, Not your Product:**

The best email subject lines are short, descriptive, and provide the reader with a compelling reason to open your email campaign and explore further. Recipients' natural reaction is to delete campaigns that are obviously just trying to sell something. Vague teasers won't cut through inbox clutter – be specific in articulating the value of viewing your campaign.

#### **Don't use Spammy Words:**

|                    |                        |                  |                 |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 100%               | Don't delete           | Hidden           | Online pharmacy |
| 50% off            | Double your            | Herbal           | Only            |
| Act now            | Earn \$                | Home based       | Open            |
| Amazing            | Earn extra cash        | Hot              | Opportunity     |
| Amount             | Easy term              | Instant          | Promised you    |
| Apply now          | Eliminate debt         | Insurance        | Refinanced      |
| As seen            | Extra income           | Levitra          | Removes         |
| Avoid              | e.x.t.r.a. punctuation | Life insurance   | Reverses        |
| Be your own boss   | Fast cash              | Limited time     | Satisfaction    |
| Buy                | Financial freedom      | Loans            | Search engine   |
| Call now           | For only               | Lose             | Serious cash    |
| Cash bonus         | For you                | Lose weight      | Starting with   |
| Cialis             | Free                   | Lower your rate  | Stop or Stops   |
| Click here         | Free gift              | Make money       | Teen            |
| Collect            | Free instant           | Medicine         | Test            |
| Compare            | Free offer             | Mortgage         | Valium          |
| Consolidate        | Free samples           | Notspam          | Winner          |
| Contains \$\$\$    | Friend                 | Now only         | Work from home  |
| Contains word "ad" | G a p p y text         | Numerical digits | Xanax           |
| Credit             | Get                    | Offer            | Your family     |
| Dear friend        | Get out of debt        | Online degree    | Your own        |
| Discount           | Hello                  | Online marketing | You're a winner |

#### **More to Avoid:**

Most email marketers are well aware of words that should be avoided such as "free" as they tend to trigger spam filters. We have found these three words won't necessarily trigger spam filters, but they will negatively affect your open rates:

Help

%Off

Reminder

Also, avoid any punctuation in your subject lines.!?>

#### **Keep your subject line under 50 characters: (including spaces)**

Many spam filters will penalize you for being over 50 characters including spaces

## Designing Solo Email Blasts

### **More Text than Image:**

Do not send an email as one giant graphic. First of all, that's what spammers do and spam filters are set up to send these emails to junk folders automatically. Plus, email programs now turn off images by default. That means recipients have to click a button to "download pictures" in order to view images.

Images do enhance the power of an email campaign – the trick is motivating the recipient to download them. That's where your text comes in. Your text should educate and entice the recipient to open the images to learn more. Offers should especially be in selectable text. A great offer will significantly increase your opens as it motivates recipients to down the images.

As a rule of thumb, images should take up no more than 40% of the real estate of your campaign. Ideally, there should be twice as much text as images. It may be counter-intuitive when a picture is worth a thousand words, but text volume is critical in effective email marketing.

As a test, make sure the recipient gets the message you're trying to communicate without any images. The recipient should be able to clearly identify the purpose and value of your message without downloading images. This increases engagement and accordingly, results.

### **Include a Compelling Offer:**

If you really want someone to act you have to give them a good reason to move. In the case of email marketing, you need to give your recipients good reasons to act – whether it is to click to your site, or call an 800# or email you.

This offer should always be in selectable text, not in an image, so it shows up before pictures are downloaded. It should also be high up in the design so it displays in the top part of the desktop pane.

### **Avoid Spam Filtering:**

These are common mistakes resulting accidental spam filtering:

- Spammy phrases like "click here" or "once in a lifetime opportunity". Put click here in an image to direct the recipient without triggering a spam filter
- Going crazy with exclamation points!!!!!!!!!!!!
- USING ALL CAPS, WHICH IS LIKE YELLING IN EMAIL (especially subject line)
- Coloring fonts bright red or bright green
- Coding sloppy HTML (usually from converting a Microsoft word file to HTML or using the create code functionality with InDesign – spam filters hate this code)
- Using the word "test" in the subject line

### **Design for the Alert Pane and the Preview Pane:**

All emails are first read based on what they see in their inbox. In order to survive the desktop alert and not be deleted or filed away for later review, you must use those few lines to create interest.

Desktop alert panes show only 3 plain text sentences:

- Sender Name
- Subject Line
- First email sentence (if an image in on the first line of the email, it will display the HTML code – so if you must have an image in the first line use an alt tag to describe the image)

These first 3 lines are essential to results. Get rid of admin copy or company history and put a compelling offer, powerful WIFM benefits statement, or relevant call to action in the first line.

## **Designing for Optimum Impact:**

- Be useful to the recipient. Include helpful tips, ideas, or how-tos. They'll actually look forward to your next email.
- Enable skimming: Most won't read every word in your copy. You need your copy to educate, explain and keep the spam filters happy – but using subheads to summarize and highlight copy will make your message more effective.
- Include different reasons to click to your site. The more reasons you have to click to your site – the more people will click. Examples for click options include:
  - o Special offer landing page
  - o Product detail & specifications
  - o More products
  - o Testimonials
  - o Video
  - o Online Survey
  - o Download whitepaper or such
  - o Any interactive components of your site
- Make sure there is a clear call to action. This is critical if you want to measure results.
- Make sure your layout is consistent with your branding and online identity.

## **Code for Deliverability:**

- CSS is not very well supported in the newer browser-based email programs like Yahoo! Mail, Gmail, Windows Live, Mac Mail, and AOL Webmail. Those web services tend to only allow inline styles. Don't even try to use CSS positioning (internal or external). Sorry, but with HTML email, you're still stuck using a lot of tables.
- The text version should closely resemble or mirror the copy of the html version. If they don't, you trigger spam filters.
- Do NOT hide text (ie., white text on white background).
- Avoid JavaScript and embedded videos (make them links)
- See our mechanical specs to ensure your coding it properly.

## Email Blast Mechanical Specifications

### Make your email no wider than 600 pixels

Most recipients will be looking at your email through their 'preview pane' which is usually a small portion of their available screen. Even in full view most email software viewing windows are smaller than the typical web page therefore *you will want to code your email blast no bigger than 600 pixels wide. You do not want to have recipients have to scroll left or right to see the entire message.*

### Code your email blast using tables

There are many reasons why you should *not use DIV tags within the message structure* including compatibility with personal email software, link re-write problems, shifting of images or text with in the DIVs. Create a proper table structure instead.

### Style sheets (CSS) in your email blast

Style sheets are not supported (internal or external). Please code out your email blast using in line CSS applying the style directly to the tag itself. For example: `<td style="font-size:14px; font-family:arial; color:#000000; padding-left:10px;">` We do not support `<style></style>` blocks.

You can use span tags that use in line styles. I.e. `<span style="font-size:22px; color:#111111;">Example</span>`

Include the font styles in the in line style - do not use the font tags `<font> </font>`.

*Personal email software such as Outlook do not support background images within email messages.* You can use background colors in cells or tables.

### Images in your email blast

Host images off your web server or you can include an email message images folder along with your HTML file and we will host the images off our web server.

Do not use free image hosting services.

If possible have all your images be jpg files. Lotus notes tends to do some funny things with gifs that can include adding a border around it or just having it not show up at all.

*Add style="display:block;" to all image tags in your email blast.* This will keep from slices shifting and breaking apart in your email blast. I.e. `` *Also if the image is a link, make sure that the border is set to 0,* otherwise blue borders will show up around your images.

### Things to avoid in your HTML email blast

*Content that does not work in a HTML email includes Flash, JavaScript, ActiveX and movie files.* If you want to use JavaScript, ActiveX or movies the best way is to have it on your web page and then have a link to that page in your email message.

*Anchor links - do not work, avoid using them.* Recipients will simply just have to scroll down to read it all.

Avoid using empty table cells in your email blast. Use spacer images if necessary (make sure they are the proper height and width). If you need to use a border, apply it to the cell or table that has content within it.

*Use clean code - do not use the create HTML buttons in Photoshop or word to create your email blast.*

**Keep in mind the best practices guidelines when designing and coding your email.**

## Checklist

**Subject Line:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Best Practices:

- Sell the email, not the product
- Don't use spammy keywords
- Keep under 50 characters (including spaces)

### Design Elements:

- More text than images
- Includes a compelling offer
- First email line is compelling - "What's in it for me" - headline or offer
- At least 3 different reasons/places involving links or clicks
- No spammy keywords as text
- No text in bright red or bright green colors
- Text version mirrors HTML copy

### Mechanical Specifications:

- Width is 600 pixels, or less
- Layout uses tables (not div tags)
- CSS styles are inline
- Images are formatted properly
- Does not contain any Javascript, Flash, ActiveX or movie files
- Does not use anchor links