

Email Guidelines



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Email Guidelines - Check list

Do

- Validate your email creative.
- Use HTML 4.0 as your coding platform.
- Make the width of the email fit within the parameter of the preview window.
- Create emails that have a high text to image ratio.
- Ensure that the main promotion and call to actions are presented within the preview window.
- Optimise all images to be as small in file size as possible.
- Keep the HTML code as simple as possible.
- Where possible present copy in HTML text.
- Create a remote version of the email creative that can be viewed outside of the email environment. This should be linked to from the top of the original email.
- Compensate for any images that may be blocked, this includes background images.
- Make all links for interactive elements and images, complete URLs and friendly.
- Inline all stylesheet attributes.
- Create equivalent plain text version of email.

Don't

- Create emails with inadequate applications such as Microsoft© Word / FrontPage.
- Create large emails both in dimension and file size.
- Produce emails in HTML 4.0 successor code.
- Create an email that contains predominantly images or a single image.
- Present body copy with in images.
- Create clickable elements as images only.
- Use HTML forms.
- Use JavaScript or any other scripting languages.
- Use Adobe Flash animation or any other plug-in reliant file formats.
- Use External StyleSheet or StyleSheet blocks.
- Embed images within an email.
- Use keywords that may trigger spam filters.
- Use unfriendly URLs for linking images and interactive elements.
- Present plain text version in an adequate applications such as Microsoft© Word / FrontPage.

Email Guidelines - What to do

■ Validate

We require all email to be 100% HTML valid, you can check your email by using the following link
[<http://www.htmlvalidator.com/>]

■ HTML 4.0

The HTML mark-up that you should be using is 4.0. This is the most supported HTML platform for emails.

■ Width of the email creative

We recommend that your email should not exceed 620 pixels in width. If you have an email that stretches to 100% of the email window, make sure the minimum width supports 620 pixels.

■ Text rich email

By making your email rich in text, with images only as supporting elements, you'll allow the user to view the important parts of the email - even with email restrictions in place.

■ Preview window

Try to keep the primary 'call to action' within the top part of the email. This should include a summary of the promotion and a clickable area. This is so your promotion is accessible within the preview window (commonly displayed in Outlook).

■ Optimise HTML and images

By compressing your images as much as possible, allows the end user to view the complete email quicker. This also applies to your HTML with the added benefit of improving the email's deliverability.

■ Online Version

Always provide the user with an option to view your email outside of the email environment they are using. This allows the user to view your email in the way you intended.

■ Compensating the email

If your creative contains images and/or background images, ensure that there is a contrasting background colour to the text. This will avoid text becoming hidden or hard to read if the images are blocked.

■ Complete and friendly URLs

Ensure that all links within your email are complete URLs and are presented in a friendly manner.

■ Inline all stylesheet attributes

To ensure your email is presented in the way you intended, inline all your CSS attributes within the HTML tags

■ Text version

Provide a plain text version of your email to allow the end user to view your email if they do not wish to view HTML files. This should be presented in a standard compliant .txt file format.

Email Guidelines - What not to do

■ Inadequate applications

Avoid using applications such as Microsoft© Word / FrontPage, which are wholly inefficient and create problematic code. We recommend you 'hand code' the email to ensure the best output.

■ Large emails

Heavy or large emails impede deliverability. Emails should be short and to the point.

■ Beyond HTML 4.0

Although successor HTML mark-up is being used on the web, this unfortunately does not filter down to email mark-up which remains at HTML 4.0

■ Image emails

An email that is predominantly image based is not only highly likely to be blocked, but will also prevent the user from seeing your promotion if images are restricted. Clickable links associated with images will also be disabled.

■ HTML forms

Many email applications remove or render the HTML form unusable. We recommend that any form submission you require should be held on a website and linked to via the email.

■ JavaScript or other scripting languages

Due to the possibility of malicious content being served to the user, scripting languages should either be removed or alert the user with a warning message.

■ Adobe© Flash or any other plug-ins

This inherently has the limitation of the user requiring the correct plug-in to view your email. So your target audience is considerably reduced.

■ External StyleSheet or style blocks

Email applications commonly strip out any element outside of the HTML body tag (including the body tag). This means that external stylesheet links will be removed, as well as style blocks (if contained within the HTML head section).

■ Embed images within email

Emails have the option of embedding images, this can dramatically increase the file size of the email and should be avoided.

■ Keywords and Shouting.

Many email applications implement keyword filtering to remove emails that they deem not appropriate to the end user. Some common keywords are: offer, loan, discount, free, etc. Shouting is a term used to describe text that is presented in uppercase. This is not considered good practice and can be filtered against.

■ Unfriendly URLs

Links within your emails should use friendly urls, instead of IP based urls, as these are considered suspicious.

Email Guidelines - HTML outline

- Good - Make sure this is present.
- Caution - Be aware of restrictions
- Bad - Make sure this is not present

■ Mark-up

The structure of your mark-up should be based on HTML 4.0 as this is the most supported format of HTML emails. All HTML mark-up should be 100% valid, and this can be checked by using the following link [<http://www.htmlvalidator.com/>]. It is also important that no dependent elements should reside outside of the HTML body (including the body tag), as many email applications remove these areas.

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head>
<title>...</title>
</head>
<body>
...
</body>
</html>
```

■ StyleSheets

To ensure that your email is presented in the way you intended, make sure that your style definitions are inlined within the HTML tags.

This should prevent your styles being misinterpreted or removed.

A style block may only be used if presented within the HTML body.

There are however restrictions that have been put in place by some email applications to limit what can be assigned in your stylesheet declaration. Please use the following link for your reference

[http://www.campaignmonitor.com/blog/archives/2007/04/a_guide_to_css_support_in_email_2.html]

Block CSS

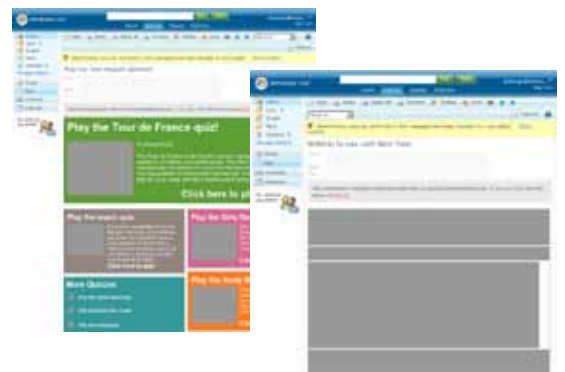
```
<style type="text/css">
youremail.td { font:12px Verdana,Geneva,Arial,Helvetica,sans-serif; }
</style>
```

Inline CSS

```
<td style="font:12px Verdana,Geneva,Arial,Helvetica,sans-serif;">
...
</td>
```

■ Images

As with images on websites, it is important to optimise your images as much as possible to improve not only the user experience, but also to reduce the bandwidth used to deliver your email. Image based emails (known as 'single image emails') are not permitted as the deliverability of such emails is very poor. We discourage embedding images as this is not highly supported and will dramatically increase the file size of the email.



■ Text

Making your email rich in text, increases the deliverability of your email, it also allows your user to view more of the email even under email application restrictions. When inserting text within your email, ensure that any extended characters are using named entities. If you have text that is overlaying a background image, be sure to add a high contrast background colour, to enable the text to be viewable if the background image is restricted.

Extended Characters

- £ = £
- & = &
- " = "

Email Guidelines - HTML outline

■ Links

Throughout your email all URLs should be presented complete (or absolute) and not relative. Also we recommend that links should not contain spaces, as this can cause links to stop functioning.

Absolute URL

http://www.yoursite.com/your_email/your_image.jpg

Relative URL

[../your_email/your_image.jpg](http://www.yoursite.com/your_email/your_image.jpg)

■ Forms

Inserting forms within your email to capture user information is not widely supported by email applications, we therefore suggest not applying forms within your email.



■ Scripts and plug-ins

JavaScript, VBScript, and/or any other scripting languages are not permitted to be used in emails as they have the potential to contain malicious content. We also advise not to use content that requires plug-ins (Adobe© Flash, VRML), as this limits the number of users who can access it and can make deliverability an issue.



■ Online option

Adding a link to an online version of your email is considered good practice, as it allows the user to view your email outside of the email application. This in turn means that your online email can have added features that would normally be restricted under email conditions.



■ Preview window

It is common practice to make your email layout such that the main promotion fits within the top part of the email ('above the fold'). The preview window is normally measured by the available space in Microsoft Outlook©, this can vary between user settings.



Email Guidelines - Plain text outline

■ Encoding

When creating a plain text email, ensure that the encoding method is set to ANSI. This should be presented in a plain .txt file. Avoid using text editors like Microsoft® Word that do not output native ANSI characters, as these commonly use extended characters outside of the character set which may be displayed correctly.

■ Word wrap

To ensure that the user is able to read your email correctly, we recommend word wrapping your copy at 67 characters. This should keep the layout of your plain text email consistent.

■ Links

Throughout your email all URLs should be presented complete (or absolute) and not relative. The URLs should also not be word wrapped as this may break the link. We recommend that links should not contain spaces, as this can also cause links to break.

■ Layout

If you wish to position text in your email, we recommend using spaces instead of tabs as these can be determined differently in various email applications.



<----- Maximum 67 characters wide ----->

Absolute URL

`http://www.yoursite.com/your_email/your_image.jpg`

Relative URL

`../your_email/your_image.jpg`

Your Email Title

Body Copy

> Indented copy

Email Guidelines - Useful links

If you require additional information regarding the process involved in emailing, please have a look at the links below.

Additional Information

- The Big Book of Email Marketing
<http://www.ipt-ltd.co.uk/the-big-book-of-email-marketing>
- Creative rate card
<http://www.ipt-ltd.co.uk/design-rate-card.pdf>
- Creative work flow
<http://www.ipt-ltd.co.uk/design-work-flow.pdf>
- Creative hosting
<http://www.ipt-ltd.co.uk/design-file-hosting.pdf>
- How does email pre-population work?
<http://www.ipt-ltd.co.uk/design-email-pre-population.pdf>

Tools of the trade

- HTML validation tool
<http://www.htmlvalidator.com/>
- StyleSheet usability guide
http://www.campaignmonitor.com/blog/archives/2007/04/a_guide_to_css_support_in_email_2.html
- Extended character list
http://www.webmonkey.com/reference/special_characters/
- Plain text editor tool
<http://www.textpad.com/>

Established Organisations

- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)
<http://www.w3.org/>
- Email standard community
<http://www.email-standards.org/>

