

2011 Email Design Guidelines

The very best of email marketing communication is true art. It is both appealing to the eye and effective in carrying out its intended message. However, even an email design novice can dramatically improve their chances of success by following the below considerations. Here is a current cumulative guideline on visual design as well as best-practices in html production for email.

Overall Design

- Keep email **width under 650 pixels**. We're designing for email clients such as Outlook with vertical preview pane layout options.
- Design **above the fold**. It's okay for an email to vertically scroll. It's not okay for a recipient to need to vertically scroll. Make sure your key elements are at the top (logo, call-to-action, navigation, primary subject matter, sharing functionality, etc.) and by top we mean, the **first 400 pixels**.
- **Keep it short**. Don't overload your email with content. Use it as a tool to drive recipients to your website or landing page. Most people prefer to read large amounts of text in a web browser as opposed to their inbox. Give them a taste and a "Read more here..." link.
- **Keep it simple**. Don't try and design a complex html masterpiece and expect everyone to see it the same way you do. The more difficult your email is to code, the less consistent display you will have across various email clients.
- **Goal-orientate your design**. This goes along with keeping the design simple. If your goal is to get recipients to sign up for a webinar, limit distractions in the design. Elements such as navigation, banner ads and social media connections may dilute the click-through activity you are trying to achieve.
- **Brand consistency**. If the goal of your email is to drive traffic to your website or landing page, there should be a resemblance between the two. Don't create a visual disconnect.
- **Hire a designer**. Not everyone is an artist. Pay a professional to create your template. The image of your business is at stake. If you can't afford to have a template designed, at least have a professional review your work and provide recommendations.



HTML Do's and Don'ts

- **Do code emails by hand.** Many “WYSIWYG” editors will typically add in a lot of extra code that email clients will tend to “cough on” and cause your email to display poorly. Dreamweaver is usually okay but not perfect. Always have a working knowledge of HTML so you can check your code for mistakes.
- **Don't use the “Save as Webpage” feature of Microsoft Word.** It adds extra code that will ruin an html layout.
- **Do design with tables.** Designing with tables is a dead artform in web design, but it still rules the email world. It's the only consistent way to have your design rendered correctly across multiple email clients. Use tables.
- **Do use inline CSS.** Avoid CSS shorthand.

An example of CSS shorthand: `<p style="font:12px Arial; color:#000"></p>`

An example the correct format: `<p style="font-size:12px; font-family:Arial; color:#000000"></p>`

CSS QUICK REFERENCE

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) are an extremely useful tool when building html emails, but there are many properties that have inconsistent results across various email clients. Below is a list of some basic CSS properties and how they generally perform. For a more detailed analysis, please contact a Blue Sky Factory representative.

GOOD PERFORMER

- font, font-family, font-size, font-weight, font-style
- text-align, line-height, text-decoration, text-indent
- color, background-color
- border
- height, width

INCONSISTENT PERFORMER

- background, background-image, background-position
- margin, padding
- :hover, :visited, :active
- clear
- display
- float

AVOID IF POSSIBLE

- text-overflow, text-shadow
- position, z-index
- list-style-image
- opacity
- border-image, border-radius
- box-shadow
- top, right, bottom, left

Below are a few examples of how to write proper inline CSS:

```
<p style="color:#FF0000">red text</p>
<a href="#" style="color:#FF0000; text-decoration:none" target="blank">website</a>
<td style="border:1px solid #000000; color:#FF0000">Table cell contents</td>
```

- **Don't use Javascript or other dynamic scripts.** Even if a SPAM filter happens to let your email through untouched, most email clients will not allow these scripts to function.
- **Don't embed external or internal CSS classes or IDs.** There are exceptions to this rule, but for the most part, if it starts with `<style>`, it will have mixed results across multiple email clients.

- **Do use this Hotmail glitch fix.** If you're centering an email on a solid colored background, you'll need to use this embedded style in your html. This is one of those "exceptions" mentioned previously.

.ReadMsgBody {width: 100%}

.ExternalClass {width: 100%}

- **Don't embed Flash or any other type of video.** By default, the ability to view these rich media platforms in email is turned off in most email clients. The best practice is to provide a link to view your rich media on a web page. Hint: make the video player an image with a play button. Link that image to the web page where your video is hosted.
- **Don't create complex colspans and rowspans.** It might work great the first time you send the template. It can also make content revisions a nightmare for the next edition. Use them sparingly and never together on the same table unless you know that content will remain consistent in future editions.
- **Don't attach body attributes.** Some email clients will ignore these. So if you want to make a body background green, use a 100% width table and nest your content into it.
- **Do ask questions.** Blue Sky Factory has an in-house team of support technicians and html developers. We battle this stuff all day and would be happy to share our knowledge with you.

Working with Images

- **Background Images.** Avoid using them. Outlook 2007 & 2010 **WILL NOT** recognize them. If they are important to your layout, make sure you use a background color that the text is legible on.
- **72 dpi please.** Avoid inserting file sizes with print-ready resolutions.
- **Don't use images for important content** such as headlines, links, or calls-to-action. Or if you do, make sure there is an html backup. Chances are images may be turned off, making the key elements of your email useless.
- **Use absolute paths.** Host images on your website or let your email service provider host them for you. Then make sure your image paths are absolute and point to the full URL, like this:
<http://www.yourwebsite.com/yourimage.jpg>
- **Use alt text** for your images and make it say something compelling about the subject matter, like "see this motorcycle in action".
- **Use image widths & heights.** This way your design will maintain its basic structure when images are turned off.



(Working with Images continued)

- **Optimize.** Make sure your image file sizes are as small as you can get without losing their visual integrity. Large images should be cut up into smaller, more downloadable sizes. No one wants to wait 10 seconds to see a 300kb jpeg to load.
- **Image maps.** Avoid using them. Gmail **WILL NOT** recognize them.
- **Avoid using PNG format images.** Lotus Notes does not support this format.
- **Gmail & Hotmail glitch fix.** When using multiple images, use this inline CSS property to assure the absence of a white gap in between adjacent images. It should be applied to each image as follows:

```

```

Text Content

- **Include an even balance of images and text.** The email campaign that is sent as one large image tends to end up in a junk folder.
- **Avoid invisible text.** This is another trick spammers use and has become an instant flag for spam filters.

Best Practice Content

- **View this email in your web browser.** Always give your recipient this option. Often, even after every step is taken to ensure proper design, an email client will mangle an email. It happens. Make this a text link at the top of every email.
- **Preheader Text.** Include a brief description about your email content at the very top of each email. This text will often appear in text preview features in some email clients.
- **CAN-SPAM.** You must include an unsubscribe option in every email, as well as your company name and address. Follow the rules like we do. Often this option is automatically built into your email provider's application.
- **Forward to a friend.** Allows your recipients to share your email with select friends, family or colleagues.
- **Share With Your Network (SWYN).** Allows your recipients to share your email with their social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
- **Clear call-to-action.** A big flashy button works best, but keep it tasteful. Also have a text link back up call-to-action in case images are turned off.
- **Follow us.** Be sure to add a follow us section in your email. Add follow us buttons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or any other social media outlet you participate in.

- **Subscription Center.** Add a “subscribe” option to your emails. This will allow forward recipients to join your list, thus helping with list growth.
- **Website navigation.** Trying to drive traffic to your website? Include navigation to the webpages you most want visited on your website.
- **Table of Contents.** For scrolling newsletter-type emails, include a list of anchor links at the top of the email so that users can easily navigate throughout the email.
- **Subscriber Preferences.** Having options is always nice. If your email provider offers it, include a link to update subscriber preferences. Allow recipients to add or change an email address or select content best fit for their tastes.

Testing

- **Test your design.** One of the best aspects of email marketing is the ability to segment and test to find out what produces the best result. This an extremely efficient tool in regards to design. Many marketers will test multiple designs of the same content to target segments before sending to their entire list. Of course the segment with the most activity wins the contest.
- **Test to multiple email clients.** See how your design looks in Gmail, Outlook, Hotmail and Yahoo, then tweak it accordingly. If available, use a tool such as Inbox Preview to view rendering results across all email clients.
- **Try turning images off** to see what your email will look like without them. This will give you a reference for designing around this common occurrence.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact a representative at Blue Sky Factory.



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