Best Practices in Email Marketing

By:

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Prior to joining V12 Group, Amy held the position of Director of Strategic Marketing at American Law Institute – American Bar Association (ALI-ABA) from 2006 to 2012. Prior to that she was the Assistant Director of the American Law Network, the satellite and web cast network of ALI-ABA. Since beginning her career in legal services and education in 1991, Ms. Shapiro has held positions as the Director of Continuing Legal Education for the Center for Professional Education (CPE Inc.), where she developed and marketed seminars for both attorneys and CPA's, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Sales and Marketing Director of SMH Bar Review, and the Regional Sales Director for WEST BAR REVIEW, a division of West LegalEdcenter.

Ms. Shapiro is a member of the Association of Continuing Legal Education (ACLEA) and the Legal Marketing Association-Metro Philadelphia Chapter. She has held multiple positions within ACLEA including member of the ACLEA Executive Board as Director-At-Large. She has been a guest lecturer for ACLEA, Peach New Media and other professional organizations. She has lectured on a range of marketing topics including *Recent Trends in Technology in Continuing Education, Social Media Marketing and Communications and Email Marketing Planning*. Furthermore, Ms. Shapiro has acted as a consultant on social media marketing for the Institute for the Study of Business Markets at the Smeal College of Business Administration at Penn State University.

Ms. Shapiro holds degrees from the University of Pittsburgh and Widener University School of Law. Connect with Ms. Shapiro on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com) or [Twitter](https://twitter.com).
The following analysis attempts to quantify the impact of employing commonly discussed email best practices. In this case, the analysis specifically focuses on the following seven creative elements and their cumulative impact on performance (as defined by the open-to-delivered percentage).

- Special characters in the subject line – (ex. $, !, *, ~, ^, etc.)
- Subject length – is the subject line greater than 50 characters?
- Red/White text – is red or white text used?
- Image Size – is the total size of all images greater than 50kb?
- Background Color/ Images – are background colors or images employed?
- Alt tags – are image alt tags used?
- Text/Image – is there a good balance between text and image?

This analysis will not attempt to correlate creative design and delivery (defined as being sent and not receiving back a bounce code). Based on the actual data used for this analysis, the delivery averages were not materially different between email creatives with poor design versus those designed using best practices. Also, creative design does not necessarily impact delivery. Domain/Sender reputation and recipient engagement have a much deeper impact. This analysis will also not measure click through rates, as the measurement is much more subjective. The offer, call-to-action and link placement hold the majority of weight when determining how many clicks a campaign receives.

**Population and Sample Size** – The population for this analysis included all campaigns deployed from V12 Group’s deployment system based on 276 campaigns. Outliers were then removed. Campaigns that were knowingly impacted by finite ESP issues were also removed.

Out of the remaining population the **top fourteen** and **bottom fourteen** campaigns (as measured by open-to-delivered percentage) were used as the sample for this analysis.
Scoring the Creative

Each of the creative elements was scored within each of the sample campaigns. For each campaign, each element was given a 1 (fail best practices) or a 0 (pass best practices) using the following parameters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creative Element</th>
<th>0 = Pass</th>
<th>1 = Fail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special characters in the subject line (ex. $, l, *, ~, ^, etc...)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject length – is the subject line greater than 50 characters?</td>
<td>&lt;=50</td>
<td>&gt;50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red/White text – is red or white text used?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image Size – is the total size of all images greater than 50kb?</td>
<td>&lt;=50</td>
<td>&gt;50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background Color/ Images – are background colors or images employed?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alt tags – are image alt tags used?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text/Image – is there a good balance between text and image?</td>
<td>Not Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sum of the seven individual scores equals the total score for each campaign; a score of 3 or more means that the creative failed to be designed using best practices. Note: all elements are weighted equally.

The Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign Name</th>
<th>Delivered</th>
<th>Opened</th>
<th>Open %</th>
<th>Special Character</th>
<th>Subject Length</th>
<th>Red/White Text</th>
<th>Image Size</th>
<th>Background Color/Images</th>
<th>Alt Tags</th>
<th>Text to Image</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>3 or Greater = Fail 2 or Less = Pass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bottom 14 Performers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>60.412</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>18.477</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>84.307</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>105.143</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>0.39%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>40.026</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>7.957</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>21.243</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>0.48%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>47.430</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>175.944</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>73.860</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>0.55%</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>94.934</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>17.134</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>55.886</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>43.455</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top 14 Performers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>67.459</td>
<td>3,014</td>
<td>4.47%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>7.668</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>4.47%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>22.983</td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td>4.82%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>2.793</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>4.91%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>97.454</td>
<td>5,076</td>
<td>5.21%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>5.111</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>5.46%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>14.969</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>5.63%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>13.339</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>10.628</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>6.22%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>5.763</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>6.23%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>2.221</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>6.28%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>1.844</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>6.62%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>3.242</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>20.119</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>7.39%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis and Conclusion

Based on the results from the creative scoring exercise; 85.7% of the bottom performing campaigns failed whereas 42.9% of the top performing campaigns failed. This means that if the creative was not designed using best practices it had a nearly 100% greater chance of being a bottom performer. The analysis did show that certain campaigns did pass but performed poorly and vice versa. This can be due to many variables including: targeting, timing, brand awareness, subject line appeal, etc.

The goal of this analysis was to try to determine if creative design has an impact on open rates. Certain elements will determine if the email gets routed to the junk folder (resulting in lower open rates). Additionally, other elements will determine if the recipient opens based on what they see in the preview pane. Based on this analysis, failure to follow general best practices when designing an email substantially increases the risk of poor open rate performance.
V12 Group’s Best Practices Guidelines and recommendations were implemented to help clients create clean looking emails that can improve delivery and overall performance for *prospecting campaigns*. The strict guidelines are suggestions that can help legitimate email messages pass through spam and junk filters that might otherwise block acquisition emails. While some may be conservative in nature, there is room for some flexibility and testing is always the best option when determining what works best for each brand.

This document will cover the basic email guidelines as well as mobile design tips and also reviews the importance of landing pages.
This document outlines standard best practices that can enhance email communications, the Do’s and Don’ts for designing acquisition email, some guidelines for creative, copy, technical and mobile advice, as well as the important use of landing pages.

Designing successful email marketing campaigns is dependent upon having a clear understanding of marketing goals, whether they are for prospecting or CRM initiatives. This helps to determine “who” to target and with “what” offer. The following are some examples of campaign goal objectives:

- Acquiring new customers
- Converting prospects to first time buyers
- Growing current customer relationships with additional client offerings
- Retaining loyal customers or enhancing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty
- Reactivating lost or lapsed customers to current customers

Once the goals are clearly defined, the email marketing campaign can be designed to target a specific audience with personalized relevant messaging. It’s important to note that the email design guides for prospecting and acquisition are much more stringent to accommodate for spam filter issues. CRM based emails can be much more flexible with their design and subject line selections.

**Enhance Email Communication**

- Personalization addresses the recipients by name, and can include other personalized information (ie. demographic) about them which increases the likelihood of opening the email.
- Flexible Content Format ensures that the message gets to the recipient in the proper format that your client prefers. For example, send Text for a simple message or HTML to enhance the content.
- Format Sensing determines which of your client’s customers can receive the more graphically intensive HTML message format and then multipart messaging is sent with both text and html so the recipient can view in whichever format is readable.
- **URLs and Hyperlinks** used within the email content encourage the recipient to click-through to a website or landing page for more information on the offer. URLs are necessary for Click-Through Tracking reports that allow your clients to evaluate how effectively an email directs the recipient to various URLs within the content.
Copy Guidelines

Keep Copy Short And To The Point:

- Engage interest with short, easy-to-read, and relevant copy
- Use pre-header text. Pre-headers are 1-2 lines of HTML text at the very top of the email. They are ideal for hand held devices so repeat/ or highlight the offer making it the first thing a prospect reads before they even consider enabling images
- Using bullets is a good way to call attention to important details. But don’t use images as bullets in unordered lists (UL)
- Avoid Spam filter words and phrases

Subject Lines:

- The first point of contact is the subject line which also creates the initial impression about your business.
- The goal of the subject line is to reach an audience that is literally bombarded with email advertising and convince them to open your email. Be compelling and unique to set yourself apart from the competition.
- The subject line should be a maximum of 8 to 10 words to get immediate attention.
- The average email viewer can display 60 characters in the subject line before it is cut off. Recommend keeping subject lines under 50 characters or greater than 72 characters. Subject lines falling between 60-70 characters are considered the “dead zone” since some studies show that particular length can adversely affect open rates. Note: Marketers should use as much space as needed to communicate what the subject line needs to communicate. Don’t artificially keep it short just to meet some arbitrary maximum subject line length. Test it!
- We suggest refraining from the use of punctuation and other non-text characters since they can also affect spam filters (ie. !@#$%^&*()+=)

Headlines:

- Headlines should contain a COMPELLING offer and/or savings message
- Include brand name and/or logo in the headline to identify the sender
- Avoid large font sizes and spam trigger words and phrases

Body Copy:

- Restate the offer from the headline at the top of the body copy–make sure the offer is of relevancy to the recipient.
- Include 1-2 short paragraphs with details of the offer and a brief company description, when applicable.
- Convey benefits and features succinctly. Email messages should be brief and compelling outlining the unique selling points. Longer sell copy should be reserved for the landing page where the real sale happens.
Call to Action:

- Include a strong call to action that tells the recipient what you want them to do (i.e. sign up, join, buy, etc.) and place it above the fold (top 250 pixels).
- Use CTA’s within a graphic icon and within a blue [underlined url link](http://example.com).

Address:

The CAN SPAM Act requires that the physical mailing address of the advertiser be included in the footer of every email message. This helps to clearly identify the sender making it a legitimate advertisement. An unsubscribe link is also required in the footer so that recipients can opt out of future messages.

Privacy Policy:

The DMA Email Best Practices highly recommend including a link in the footer to the client’s web page describing their privacy policies.

**Design and Technical Guidelines**

Designing for an email is quite different than designing for a web browser. In fact, email reader standards are outdated in the sense that (a) they require designers to simplify their modern coding practices and (b) there really are no true standards that apply across the various email platforms. You can read more about email standards at [http://www.email-standards.org/](http://www.email-standards.org/).

The goal is to **ensure that emails render consistently** no matter what email client is used. Here are some basic best practices to follow when designing for email that will ensure your work displays as intended.

**Design for Quick Viewing:**

- Use basic HTML coding and keep it simple
- Create the HTML in an HTML editor in plain HTML. Do not use MS Word, layers, CSS, PageMaker or Dreamweaver.
- Keep offer information above the fold. The top 250 pixels (or area above the fold) are vital since it is prime real estate for the 3-5 seconds a prospect is focused on your email message so it needs to have useful, readable text not embedded within an image. Be mindful to incorporate your branding and benefit-driven offer text above the fold.
- Design as half-page rather than a full-page ad. Do not force the recipient to excessively scroll to read your email.
- Be considerate of screen resolutions and window sizes. Email readers often have added sidebars and navigations on both sides of where your email content is displayed, further decreasing the amount of space you have to play with. Be safe, set the width of your email design to be no more than 550-600 pixels maximum.
• You should not rely on your images to communicate your message. Avoid replacing too much text with images and make sure your email design still gets the point across even when images are not displayed. This also applies to use of background images. There is such an inconsistency between which browsers will actually display background images that it’s best to not rely on them.

Use of Graphics:
• Avoid the temptation to build your messages using only images. Loading up your email design with large images will slow down the download process on the reader’s end and may deter them from reading it all together. **Aim for 60 (text) to 40 (image) ratio on your campaigns.** The purpose of this strategy is to engage the reader with promotional text that entices them to enable images and view your entire email.
• Use bold graphics and design. Lifestyle graphics work best. Remember to optimize to smallest possible file size.
• CTA’s (Call-to-action) A “Learn more” or “Buy Now” CTA graphics should be placed in a location high up in the email to entice your reader to advance to the next step in the selling process, but use it in conjunction with HTML text that is visible when images are still disabled. It should also appear as a text based link.
• Unlike web design, email design must use absolute paths when referencing images.
• When using images, use ALT tags as component of <img> tag. This will ensure copy shows up in place of the image for those recipients who have their image reader turned “off” or the reader is set “off” as a default.
• Avoid rich media and forms. We do not recommend the use of forms, flash, animated GIFs, nested background colors, background images in DIV tags or TABLE cells.
• We do not recommend imbedded images.

Optimize Creative:
• The entire HTML and graphics should be **50-70kb in weight** (HTML 10kb or less and images 20kb each or less).
• Save graphics with large blocks of flat color or plain text as GIFs or JPGs.
• If the layout has one large graphic, slice it into smaller pieces and spread throughout email, BUT be sure to also include text. **Aim for 60 (text) to 40 (image) ratio on your campaigns.**
• Use a text-based link to a web version of your design at the top of your creative. (Add a link to a landing page where you are hosting the marketing message so an individual can view the marketing message in its entirety).
Design Format Tips:

- Do not use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) or JavaScript.
- Be mindful of punctuation and font colors! Excessive use of exclamation points (!) may be a spam trigger, as well as red text which should be avoided. Use email safe colors and fonts = *Arial, Book Antiqua/Palatino, Comic Sans, Courier New, *Georgia, *Helvetica, Lucida Console, Tahoma, *Times New Roman, Trebuchet MS, Verdana (* = Most Popular Fonts Used)
- Use a banner or logo at the top of your creative to attract attention and quickly promote your product. Ensure the banner/logo links to a landing page with your offer, not your company home page.
- Use of text based urls should be strategically placed throughout the email copy. Commonly, they appear underlined and in blue. We recommend 3 places to click through to a landing page that reinforces your offer/messaging.
- Test your design in a preview pane, full screen and with images turned on and off before you send it.
- Ask your subscriber to add your “From Address” to their address book at the bottom of the creative.

Mobile-Friendly Email Design Guidelines

Mobile access now accounts for 16 percent of how people read their email, according to Return Path. That might seem like a small percentage, BUT savvy marketers need to think about how their email marketing is and will be affected by this growing trend. So now, we’re not just worrying about overcoming spam filters, we also need to think about how email will be viewed, when will it be relevant, what action will they take and on what device?

The evolution of mobile email marketing can be overwhelming and daunting as we try to develop a design template that works across all platforms. Although there is no common template that fits all mobile browsers optimally, using common sense and best practice techniques, we can satisfy the needs of the large screen user and the mobile user in one single design. The best advice is to create emails that all mobile users can read and act on just as easily as desktop users.

Here are 10 tips to help you produce a better looking email creative that’s more accessible and will render for both desktop and mobile email clients:

Tip #1: Pixel Width

For average desktop computers, we recommend conventional emails to be set up with a fixed width between 550-600 pixels. Most marketing emails and newsletters are designed to that specification. However, mobile email readers are much smaller. The premium devices on the market are just under 500 pixels, but most common mobile email readers are in a range of 320 pixels.

Today the iPhone may be considered the gold standard for Smartphones which allows for a 300-pixel width when held vertically and
a 480-pixel width in landscape format. iPhones resize emails to fit their screens, BUT other Smartphones don’t, so it makes sense to design for lowest common denominator. The benefit is not only to ensure the recipient sees as much of your email as possible, but to limit the aggravation of scrolling side to side to read an email. Aim for 450-500 pixels if you want one template for both desktop and mobile users.

**Tip #2: Add a link for a mobile-friendly web version**

You can include a mobile friendly url link at the very top of an email, also known as the pre-header area. This would be a link to a hosted online text version of your email that is optimized for mobile users with limited text and images. This is considered the easy and safe default option, but it doesn’t provide a rich and compelling email creative for the user. It also requires additional clicks by the user which has been shown to hinder response rates. Also, many template driven email service providers may not offer options to host a mobile version. There are several providers, including V12 Group, that can accommodate mobile devices and keep ahead of the trend of changing mobile specifications.

**Tip #3: Effectively use the pre-header**

A pre-header is basic text that can be found at the very top of your email. There are 2 schools of thought regarding pre-headers and mobile devices, both of which should be tested. The first is that hand-held devices make the use of pre-headers a necessity since it’s prime real estate where you want to include key information and offer specific details that entice the consumer to read on. Some marketers use text phrases (ie. Click here if you cannot see images, or Add us to your safe senders list) However, since this is likely the first thing a prospect reads it makes sense to highlight your offer or promotion.

The second theory is to eliminate the pre-header altogether since it pushes the email creative down the screen and less of the email is visible. Our best advice and compromise is to keep pre-header text to one or two short lines so the email creative is visible while still highlighting your best offer copy.

**Tip #4: Use a single-column ladder design**

Sidebars and 2-column designs are the gold standard for desktop creative since you have 2 separate areas to put your best offer copy so that it appears at the top of the email preview pane where it’s more likely to be noticed. This is known as the “above-the-fold” area and commonly where your headline appears. However, a mobile device will likely shift the columns, text, images and create overlapping areas which is clearly a poor presentation. The single column design keeps it simple with no rendering issues to contend with, no columns being pushed into text, and images aligned as you intended.

Using a ladder system allows emails to scale down much more neatly. You want to avoid using tables or setting image size widths to ensure that the email is ‘elastic’ and adjusts to the size of
the mobile screen. You’ll also want to group multiple items, links, images on top of each other (like a ladder). You can then use background colors within the email itself to serve as dividers between the different sections. This stacking system allows for easy organization and alignment with limited rendering snafus. The end goal is to lead your reader down the email through the content.

**Tip #5: Padding for fingers in motion**

Point and click motions are fluid and precise when done on a computer mouse connected to a desktop or laptop, whereas mobile devices use touch screen technology and the human finger becomes a factor. Email designers need to anticipate how fingers will navigate the clickable areas of an email on a touch screen. This would mean buttons and icons need to get a little larger and the surrounding areas need to be more padded to accommodate for fingers in motion. Allow for 10 pixels (give or take) around or in-between any clickable area to leave space and make it easy for users to navigate and click to take action.

**Tip #6: Font sizes**

Another design tip for clumsy fingers is to use a minimum font size of 12 pt for body copy and keep headlines around 20 pt. Any larger and you risk your email landing in the junk folder for desktop users since some filters flag larger fonts used in email as spam. Keep in mind that the larger font means you’ll have to keep your content brief. You’ll most likely be able to fit 10-12 lines of text of a screen.

**Tip #7: Flush left**

Set all text to align to the left so it appears on the left side of the mobile device where it’s easiest to read. This will prevent text from getting pushed to the center or right of the phone forcing users to scroll in order to view and read the email.

**Tip #8: Images and alt tags**

Image to text ratio is another factor to contend with when dealing with spam filters so a 60/40 text to image ratio should be maintained for best results. Image sizes need to be considered because a mobile device will not load images as fast as a desktop or laptop. Try to keep the size of each of your images at 20k or less and the overall file size of the email should not exceed 50-70k. Do not use Flash or gif animations, they will not work and just add to the overall file size of an email. Keep it simple.

Header banners are the most common image to appear in an email and they run across the very top. They illustrate a brand, an offer or theme depending on the graphics used. Ensure that the banner is set to the same size as the pixel width of the email and it will appear at 100%. Set the height of the banner to control how it will render on the mobile screen. It should be no larger than 125 pixels high. Any deeper and the text portion of the email will be pushed farther down on the screen and may not even be visible.

Alt tags are snippets of text associated with an image and are commonly used in email so that before an image loads, the user has an idea of what the image is, what the offer might be, or the overall theme of the email. Keep it short.
Tip #9: Go back to the basics

This tip might seem a little basic but the core principles of email marketing 101 will still apply in order for your email to be effective, so they need repeating. No matter what the design, layout, or offer, always ensure your from line and subject line quickly communicate two critical points: **Branding** (who you are) and **Offer** (the value in your email) The straight-forward presence and recognition of both the sender and the email’s value drive open rates and responses—no matter what the viewing device.

Tip #10: Become mobile-friendly from A to Z

You can’t just stop at the email. The most effective campaigns have a supporting landing page that reinforces the offer from your email promotion. So you’ve spent all this time, effort and energy creating a mobile friendly email which means the landing page will need to be optimized as well. In fact, many marketers have a mobile-optimized version of their entire website. This is smart given the statistics we’re seeing on the mobile front and if you’re looking to see some serious conversion rates for your email programs.

Making it easy to click-through a well-designed mobile email that leads to an easy to navigate landing page can help improve ROI. Many of the tips above will apply to the landing page design, but you’ll be working from a larger width for a landing page. We suggest 640 pixels wide since it’s cleanly divided by 2 and a good canvas to develop a mobile friendly page that’s easy to navigate.

Importance of Landing Pages

Your email is the ‘teaser’ promotion that entices the consumer to click through to a landing page where more detailed ‘sell’ information is presented. The page will usually display content that is a logical extension of the email advertisement or click thru link. A landing page is also a great option for smaller clients who want to do email marketing but do not maintain a company website. There are two types of landing page, reference and transactional:

A reference landing page presents information that is relevant to the email. These can display text, images, various links to company website, etc.

A transactional landing page persuades a user to complete a transaction (such as filling out an order form), with the end goal of closing or converting a prospect into a customer. If information is to be captured, the page will usually capture some minimal amount of information (ie. an email address, name and telephone number) – and adds the prospect to a mailing list.

A landing page is a critical link in online communications and can go a long way to improve email campaign results and drive revenue. Revenue-conversion rates for free offers range from 5.67% to 11.31% and for ecommerce 5.67% to 7.63% (Marketing Sherpa). Some points to consider when developing an effective landing page:
• On average, 50% of responders who click through to a Landing Page leave the page. Make sure your page grabs attention quickly by restating the offer/call to action from the email.

• Do not direct responders to your home page. This approach does not carry through the offer/call to action from the email—losing credibility.

• Make sure your landing page has the same look and feel of the email HTML creative. This ensures there is no confusion and reinforces the brand.

• If your landing page is a form to be completed, do not ask too many questions. Five fields is recommended.

• Keep the copy on the landing page short and to the point, but use as much space as you need to convey your message and land the sale.

Need more?

You can access V12's Email Best Practices and more creative tips on our Resource Center

http://emailresourcecenter.net/blog/category/b-creative/bestpractices/

Some notes on proper HTML programming: