



The A-Z of
Email Design

create. connect. convert.

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The A-Z of Email Design

Design is one of the most rewarding and fun aspects of email marketing. It tends to be the part of email marketing that arouses the most passionate opinions - and the most disagreements.

Generally the design comes down to a few factors, namely your company style guide, company 'personality' and the taste of the person doing the design.

However there are a number of essential design principles that you can follow to ensure your email design is both attractive and functional.

The following A-Z of Email Design has been written to help you navigate your way through the maze of email design.

The 4 elements of email design:

- Planning
- Content
- Design
- Completion, Testing and Send

1. Planning the Email

A. Email length

Once your topic has been decided, consider how long the email will be. If you have a lot of content to convey, consider using landing pages. Landing pages reduce the overall length of the email, and allow you to monitor click-through rates and understand which topics are of particular interest to your readers. This will help you when planning future campaigns.

B. Audience

Consider segmentation to ensure you reach the readers for whom the email is most relevant. For example, an email about a weekend sale in your city store is unlikely to be relevant to readers in another town. In many cases, your entire database is not appropriate.

C. Scheduling

Consider the following when planning your email:

- Do I have enough time to thoroughly prepare, construct and test the email?
- What is the most appropriate time to send my email to my specific audience?
- Does this message compliment other email or marketing campaigns?



2. Content

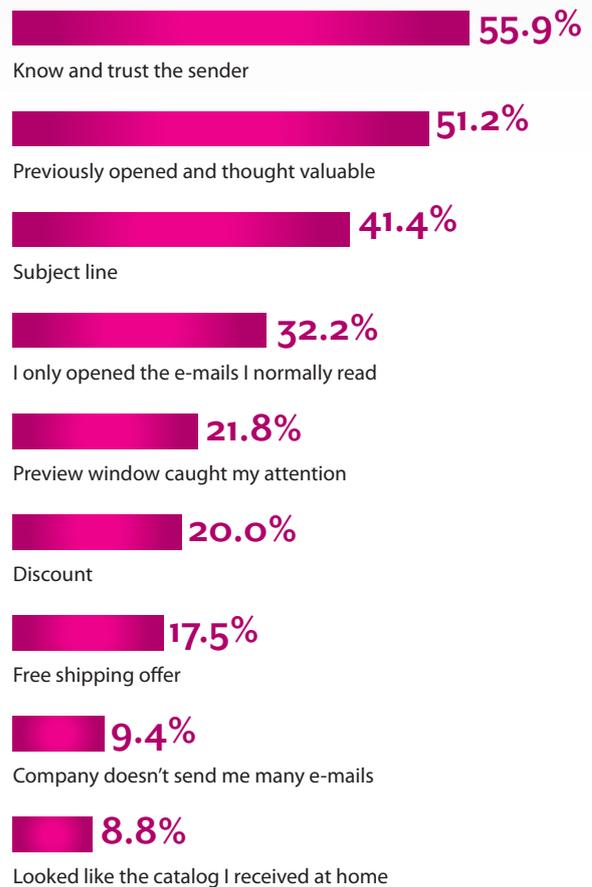
D. Content considerations

There are a number of things you must consider when deciding on your email content, including:

- What is the purpose of your email? If it is to inform, educate or promote, once you have decided the most important objective of your communications let it influence your editorial decisions.
- Do you have something relevant to say? It is crucial that you provide content that is relevant to your audience. Do not simply send an email for the sake of it – if you do it's more likely to be deleted than read.
- What do your subscribers care about? A great saying is “Don't sell to get, give to get” consider what value you can give to your audience.

Why Consumers Open Emails

According to data firm Return Path the following reasons are the most common when it comes to why emails are opened:



Return Path Third Annual Email Consumer Survey. Jan 2007

3. Design

The points below highlight the different elements you should consider when designing and constructing your email:

E. From name and address

Be **recognizable and consistent** by using a regular from address and from name to use for your emails; this will usually be your name and/or your organisation's name. This will ensure that these details become familiar to readers so they immediately identify the email relevance and ideally will add you to their address book.

F. Subject line

People aren't looking for reasons to open your emails. They're looking for reasons to delete them. That's why you need to write killer subject lines with your emails. A good start is to follow these tips:

- personalise when appropriate,
- be timely and relevant,
- state the benefit,
- use brand recognition if applicable and
- be as short and succinct as possible.

G. "Above the fold"

Make sure your main call to action is 'above the fold' most readers will use a preview pane when skimming their inbox; therefore the top 400 pixels of your email are the most crucial for capturing the audience's attention.

H. Header

It is tempting to make the header large and grand, however, avoid making them larger than 120 pixels high (approximately 2-3cm). If a recipient has images switched off in their email client, they won't see any text because there is a large white space where the image should be. Also a large header will stop limit the amount of content that appears above the fold.

I. View online

Use a "View online" link so that if someone is having trouble reading your email they can view a correctly laid out version online.

J. Branding

Ideally, you should place your company logo/branding in the top left hand corner of the email header. This will allow for easier company/brand recognition.

K. Top links

Provide easy links for readers to follow including key calls to action. In particular, these links should sit "above the fold" and serve as shortcuts for people who are skimming or returning to your email.



After you have defined the purpose of your email, put yourself in the shoes of the recipient and ask:

- Is the message and call to action clear?
- Is there a continuity of design from the email itself through to any landing pages/shopping cart/other links (e.g. PDF documents)?



3. Design

L. Personalisation

The email should be personalised and sent to a named addressee (e.g. Hi Billy, Hi Mr Jones) and where relevant, be written in engaging one to one dialogue. Personalisation can also be taken further by tailoring content to suit various audiences or demographics.

M. Navigation

If your email is long (more than 5-6 paragraphs), use an “In this Issue” navigation menu at the top of the email so that readers can skip to the parts that interest them most. Remember, you have only 3 seconds to grab someone’s attention.

N. Images

Tabloid newspapers are popular because they use graphics to complement a story – transfer this approach to your email for a similar effect. However, remember to use images that are relevant to your content. Also it is important to use Alt tags in case your images do not display correctly.

O. Links

Use “More” links to place snippets of info in the email and link through to more detailed landing pages. This will reduce the overall length of the email and allow you to track the reader’s interests.

Within the message, links should be shared between text & graphic. Where possible avoid using ‘click here’ but rather link the actual text you want to link, such as “visit our website”.

P. Social media links

You can also use social sharing links such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to promote your social media pages.

Q. Prioritisation

In journalistic convention there is a concept called the ‘inverted pyramid’ (imagine a triangle that points downwards) this convention states that the most important information should be placed at the top of an article and given the most attention. Emails are no different make sure that everything is ordered by importance.

R. Calls to action

Ensure you have a call to action that includes a link very close to the top of the email. This will enable readers to easily locate it even when viewing your email in the preview pane. Where appropriate, place different calls to action throughout the email so you can identify what is really grabbing your readers’ attention.

S. Scanning

To optimise your email for scanning remember that most people tend to scan an email in an ‘F’ shape so this is where your most important content and calls to actions should sit. You can also use headings, colour, fonts, links and buttons to make your email easier to scan.

T. Email footer

Ensure the footer of the email contains all the required information for spam compliance and best practice. The reader should clearly understand who sent the email, why they are subscribed to the list and how they can unsubscribe or change their subscription.

3. Design

Generic**Enterprises** J I [View this email online](#)

H News 120 pixels

K [Visit Our Website](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Send to a Friend](#) | [Register](#)

L Dear %%First Name%%

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Vestibulum ac augue. Nunc libero dolor, dignissim pharetra, convallis sit amet, suscipit non, felis. Curabitur lorem. Curabitur ultricies placerat mauris. Praesent interdum mollis ante. Suspendisse dapibus iaculis dolor. Curabitur eget nibh eu justo feugiat auctor. Fusce gravida. Donec ut lorem. In est quam, tristique quis, ullamcorper nec,
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M **In this issue**

[Article One](#) M
[Article Two](#)
[Article Three](#)

R REGISTER HERE >

G

N **Article One: Intro Text**


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O **Article Two: Intro Text**


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P **Article Three: Intro Text**


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[Read more >>](#)

T [Visit Our Website](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Send to Friend](#) | [Register](#) P

Level 1, Example Street, Suburb, State, 4000, AUSTRALIA

[f](#) [in](#) [t](#)

you are receiving this email because
[Unsubscribe](#)



4. Completion, Testing and Send

U. Styles – CSS

Although these are popular when designing web sites, it is preferable to design with in-line styles when designing emails to ensure display and consistency across all email clients. Remember that email clients read your HTML differently and CSS can result in your email not displaying as you intended.

V. Plain text version

Not all recipients will receive your email as a HTML email. It is important to fine tune the plain text version, bearing in mind the message needs to work without graphics, columns and tables. Ensure that you test both HTML and text versions of your email.

W. Relevance testing

Does the final email meet the objectives initially set out in the planning phase? If not, are the changes for the better, or does the content of the email need to be changed to ensure the email is still the right message for the audience? Following up with these simple steps can make all the difference.

X. Overall message

If possible, ask someone else to read the email, checking for grammar and link errors. It is easy to skim over these mistakes as the author, so a fresh set of eyes is advisable. Also if possible, run your email through a spam checking tool such as Spam Assassin to identify any issues that may resolve in your email being blocked by a recipients Spam filters.

Y. Email client testing

Your email may display differently in various email clients therefore it is important that you test to identify any issues that can be rectified before sending. To test your email set up a test database that includes Yahoo, Hotmail, Gmail, Outlook 07, Outlook Express and any other programs you have access to. Alternatively, many email service providers such as Vision6 have an in-built email testing feature, that will show you how your email will display in all major email clients.

Z. Define your QA procedures

Although it is extremely tempting to sacrifice quality to quickly finish and send your email, don't. It is highly recommended that you define an internal quality assurance process that you follow each time you send an email to ensure any mistakes are identified and rectified. Remember, once you send an email it cannot be retrieved.

Congratulations! You are finally ready to send a high quality piece of email marketing, deserved of representing your organisation and brand.



What's Next?

When using an e-messaging company to send your emails, you will have access to a variety of statistics and reporting. This will help you determine the success of your email and help you pinpoint which parts of the design were effective.

Then it is simply a matter of using this information to improve your future email messages.

About Vision6

Vision6 is an Australian owned and run company. We were founded in 2001 by friends and colleagues Evan Fortune and Mathew Myers.

Together they identified that marketing professionals needed an easier way to create, send and track email messages; and to integrate e-messaging into the marketing mix. As a result the duo formed Vision6.

From two guys in a tin-shed (well Mat's living room - close enough) we've grown to become a team of more than 30 developers and professionals.

Today, we are passionate about all things e-messaging. We empower thousands of businesses to achieve great marketing results. And we are always on the lookout for new ways to make our clients happy.

We also contribute to the marketing community by writing whitepapers, providing free training, producing the Email Marketing Metrics Report and organising Australia's only email marketing summit (EMSA).

Contact Vision6 for a FREE 30 DAY TRIAL

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