

cheetahmail

An Experian Company



EMAIL MARKETING **CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES** AND TECHNIQUES



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Recommendation Summary

Technical:

- Inboxes will accept email up to 100k
- Email creative should be no wider than 700 pixels
- Only inline stylesheets, or regular HTML should be used to format text
- Do not use JavaScript since most email clients will not accept it
- Forms are not recommended, but can be used if the mailing doesn't include AOL or Hotmail users. Even then, the form should be very basic and not employ JavaScript
- Creative can be coded using colspans, but CheetahMail recommends using a stacked table structure since it is more stable across all email clients
- Only Outlook can except a Flash email, so do not use it across all email clients

Creative:

- All featured creative, and content that has a high priority, should appear in MS Outlook's Preview Pane area. The average measurement for this area is 300 pixels
- Featured content should also appear "Above-the-Fold" when using a web-based email client like Gmail and Yahoo!. The average measurement for this area is 420 pixels in height
- Consider creating a second version of your email for Gmail users with a text ad or two on the right side of the creative. This will combat the automatically generated competitor ads that Gmail populates to the right of the email interface
- If there are ads in the email, run them down the left side of the email with the textual content to the right. Due to how the user's eye naturally travels around the page, this type of layout has been proven to maximize interaction rates
- Make sure that the featured content in your email exists in HTML text, not only images. With Gmail and other email clients that don't display images by default, the user won't be able to initially see any content that's in an image unless they opt to turn the images on



Introduction

The creative of your email is as important as the offer you present to your subscribers. A strong design will help ensure delivery, grab the user's attention and encourage him/her to act. In addition, integrating the email visually with the rest of your online and offline properties will reinforce your brand with the user, which will make them feel more comfortable clicking and interacting with it.

Email design principals are significantly different from those of web page or print design. Although all may have similar goals, email designers must take into account other factors such as email client and browser limitations, optimizing for the preview pane and call-to-action placement - just to name a few. Testing has shown that strictly adhering to these best practices doesn't guarantee to raise click through and open rates. It will only ensure your creative is compliant for ISP/email client delivery and browser rendering.



Formatting Recommendations

Technical:

JavaScript:

JavaScript is supported by all web browsers, but not all email clients. Since this is the case, it is recommended that JS is not used so that the email is universally accepted.

Forms:

Forms may be used in emails as long as they don't include JavaScript functionality and aren't mailed to AOL or Hotmail users since they don't support form functionality. CheetahMail can assist you with segmenting these email services.

Background Tags and Colors:

Background tags are stripped by some browsers and email clients, such as AOL and Netscape. If the creative calls for a background image, CheetahMail recommends nesting it in a table within the body stretched to 100%.

Define the background color default to white (`<BODY BGCOLOR=#FFFFFF>`). While most email clients have a white background default, others - such as WebTV- use grey or even black. For example, failure to use a white background may produce e.g. black text on a black background.

Troubleshooting the HTML:

Always check your code on both Netscape and IE, as well as on both the PC and MAC platforms. Make sure to close all HTML tags as leaving off `</td>`, `</tr>`, `</table>`, `</body>`, `</HTML>` tags are the root of most HTML email problems. These errors will cause email clients and browsers to read your email differently. What might look perfect in Internet Explorer may look vastly different on Netscape. As a rule of thumb, Netscape is stricter than IE.

Additionally, a missing section is usually due to a missing `</table>` tag. Incorrect alignment between sections is often due to a missing `<table>` or `<tr>` tag. CheetahMail recommends that a closed `</TD>` tag be brought up to the preceding line - not left on its own. Otherwise, it can add extra unwanted space.

Also, be aware of browser limitations and use universally supported HTML tags rather than tags that are Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator specific. Always include both height and width tags to specify image sizes as well as table cell dimensions.



Header Tags:

Avoid the use of any header tags (any tag above <body>), as web-based email systems, such as Hotmail and Yahoo!, replace all header tags with their own HTML code. This includes using header stylesheets also.

Avoid:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head>
<title></title>
</head>
<body bgcolor="#ffffff">
```

Instead Use:

```
<html>
<body bgcolor="#ffffff">
```

Rowspans and Colspans:

Avoid the use of rowspans when coding your HTML email. They will not be displayed correctly in several email clients, including: Lotus Notes, AOL, and Hotmail. Use colspans only, or nested tables instead.

ALT Tags:

Adding an ALT tag to your image tags will ensure that if, by chance, any images are broken when a subscriber receives your email, your subscriber will have an idea of what is missing. ALT tags also satisfy accessibility issues, conform to W3C HTML 4.01 specs, and allow the disabled to read and receive their emails.

ALT Tag Example:

```
<IMG SRC="http://imageserver/images/footnotes.gif" ALT="This image is of the footnotes for this page." border="0">
```

Creative:

Preview Pane Area:

Outlook's preview pane window is a commonly overlooked element in email designs. The designer only has, at the most, 300 pixels of height to present the email's main content and navigation to an Outlook user. In this case, since the user doesn't have to open the email to preview its content, this section should communicate the main message of the email quickly and efficiently.

TECHNICAL NOTE: When laying emails out using Photoshop and Illustrator, it's always useful to set guides at 300 and 420 pixels to map out where the preview pane and "Above-the-Fold" areas are.

Above-the-Fold Area:

The area that appears above the browser's bottom window bar is called the "Above-the-Fold" area. This is especially important for browser-based email clients such as Hotmail and Yahoo!. The "Above-the-Fold" section on a 17" monitor with a resolution of 800 x 600 is 420 pixels in height.

In most cases, these extra 120 pixels of space are used for content that supports the preview pane area design. It is important to note that this area should be visually engaging as well, since this is the first thing Hotmail and Yahoo! users will see when they open the email.

TECHNICAL NOTE: When laying out the "Above-the-Fold" section, the recommended guide is set at 420 pixels of vertical space.

Calls-to-Action (CTA):

CTA phrases like "Click here to..." or "Read more..." let the user know what they can click on and what content will be behind the link. CTAs aid users in making content and navigation decisions and generally guide them around the design. Break the phrases out visually using a heavier font weight or slightly different color. Generally, the more elements that are apparent to the user, the better off they'll be when visually scanning the page's content.

Email File Size and Physical Dimensions:

CheetahMail recommends that an HTML email's width does not exceed 700 pixels. This will leave ample room for elements like Hotmail and Outlook's navigation bars. Anything wider will push some of the email's content off the user's screen and force him/her to scroll horizontally to uncover it.

Emails should carry a file size of no more than 100k. In general, it takes 2 seconds to download 10k on a 56k modem (this is on the safe side). So a 30k email will be downloaded in 6 seconds and a 60k



email in 12 seconds. Of course, the smaller the file is, the quicker it will load, but anything under 100k will be received by the inbox without being filtered.

Stylesheets:

CheetahMail recommends using inline stylesheets to format text. You can also use regular HTML to control how text in the design looks.

Here's an example of an inline stylesheet:

```
<font style="font-family:verdana,arial,Helvetica; font-color=#000000; font-size=12pt">
```

Navigation:

It is very important to give the user complete control of how they view the email's content and interact with its navigation. For emails that have a lot of content, CheetahMail recommends using "same-page" navigation. This will allow users to jump right to the content they want to read and will not make them scroll down the email to uncover it.

In addition, provide some alternate navigation in the email for the user who doesn't find the content interesting. This navigation could be in the form of external links to a website or a Flash presentation. The more options the user has, the better.

Image Usage:

Never have important content appear only in an image. If that image fails to load, the main message of the email will be lost. This is important since more and more email clients, like Gmail, won't display images in an email unless the user takes action to do so.

Also, avoid spaces in your HTML code between an tag and </td> tag. Some browsers will read this space as an actual space in the overall layout which can lead to "cracked" graphics.

Your code should look like this:

```
</td>
```

not:

```
 </td>
```



Email Client Deliverability

CheetahMail conducted a test across major email clients to gain a definitive understanding of what constraints each were placing on the creative efforts of permission-based senders. We developed various emails based on different creative and coding techniques ranging from Flash, to stylesheets, then deployed them to these major email clients. Below is a detailed accounting of the results.

Gmail

- **Flash** does not work and cannot be loaded
We recommend you speak with your Account Manager prior to sending a mailing using Flash.
- **Background images** can be used as long as user clicks to view images
- Mailings using **colspans AND rowspans** rendered correctly EXCEPT in PC IE
- Mailings using ONLY **colspans** rendered correctly
- **Simple forms** like a poll, or ZIP code search submit their values correctly as long as there's a script on the main site that will parse the information, and no javascript is used
- **Javascript** doesn't work and should not be used
- Emails with a **file size of 100k** will make it to the inbox
- **Stylesheets** used in the header area of the HTML document WON'T work
- **Inline stylesheets** render correctly inside the body of the HTML document, but a style should be made for the links in the email so that they don't default to Gmail's link style
- **HTML entities** (& for &) work correctly in both their text and numerical forms
- HTML email designs can have a **700 pixel width**, and still be visible on a 17-inch monitor

Yahoo!:

- **Flash** does not work and cannot be loaded
We recommend you speak with your Account Manager prior to sending a mailing using Flash.
- Mailings using **colspans AND rowspans** rendered correctly EXCEPT in PC IE
- **Simple forms** like a poll, or ZIP code search submit their values correctly as long as there's a script on the main site that will parse the information, and no javascript is used
- **Javascript** doesn't work and should not be used
- Emails with a **file size of 100k** will make it to the inbox
- **Stylesheets** used in the header area of the HTML document WILL work
- **Inline stylesheets** render correctly inside the body of the HTML document, but a style should be made for the links in the email so that they don't default to Yahoo!'s link style
- **HTML entities** (& for &) work correctly in both their text and numerical forms
- HTML email designs can have a **700 pixel width**, and still be visible on a 17-inch monitor



Hotmail:

- **Flash** does not work and cannot be loaded
We recommend you speak with your Account Manager prior to sending a mailing using Flash
- **Background images** can be used as long as user clicks to view images
- Mailings using **colspans AND rowspans** rendered correctly EXCEPT in PC IE
- Mailings using ONLY **colspans** rendered correctly
- **Forms do not work and will not submit their results**
- **Javascript** doesn't work and should not be used
- Emails with a **file size of 100k** will make it to the inbox
- **Stylesheets** used in the header area of the HTML document won't work since Hotmail's stylesheet overwrites the entire head tag
- **Inline stylesheets** render correctly inside the body of the HTML document, but a style should be made for the links in the email so that they don't default to Hotmail's link style
- **HTML entities** (& for &) work correctly in both their text and numerical forms
- HTML email designs can have a **700 pixel width**, and still be visible on a 17-inch monitor

Lotus Notes:

- **Flash** does not work and cannot be loaded
We recommend you speak with your Account Manager prior to sending a mailing using Flash
- Using too many images or images that are too large can cause them to be misconfigured
- Lotus Notes does not support forms
- Lotus Notes strips out JavaScript (may vary by version)
- Lotus Notes strips out stylesheets (may vary by version)
- Mailings using **colspans AND rowspans do not** render correctly

AOL:

- **Flash** does not work and cannot be loaded
We recommend you speak with your Account Manager prior to sending a mailing using Flash
- **Background images** can be used as long as user clicks to view images, **except in MAC IE**
- Mailings using **colspans AND rowspans** render correctly
- Mailings using ONLY **colspans** will render correctly
- **Simple forms** like a poll, or ZIP code search submit their values correctly as long as there's a script on the main site that will parse the information, and no javascript is used
- **Javascript** doesn't work and should not be used
- Emails with a **file size of 100k** will make it to the inbox
- **Stylesheets** used in the header area of the HTML document won't work
- **Inline stylesheets** render correctly inside the body of the HTML document
- **HTML entities** (& for &) work correctly in both their text and numerical forms
- HTML email designs can have a **700 pixel width**, and still be visible on a 17-inch monitor **except on MAC IE and PC Netscape**

Outlook:

- **Flash will work**, but the user will need to activate their "Active X" controls in the options menu
- **Background images** can be used as long as user clicks to view images
- Mailings using **colspans AND rowspans** render correctly
- Mailings using **ONLY colspans** will render correctly
- **Javascript** doesn't work and should not be used
- **Simple forms** like a poll, or ZIP code search submit their values correctly as long as there's a script on the main site that will parse the information, and no javascript is used
- Emails with a **file size of 100k** will make it to the inbox
- **Stylesheets** used in the header area of the HTML document **work properly**
- **Inline stylesheets** render correctly inside the body of the HTML document
- **HTML entities** (& for &) work correctly in both their text and numerical forms
- HTML email designs can have a **700 pixel width**, and still be visible on a 17-inch monitor

Deliverability Summary:

- Flash only works in Outlook with the "Active X" feature turned on
- Emails can now have a width of 700 pixels and still be fully visible on a 17-inch monitor
- Javascript does not work and should not be used within an HTML email
- Email can have a maximum file size of 100k and still make it to the inbox
- Inline stylesheets work across all major ESPs
- HTML entities (& for &) work correctly in both their text and numerical forms
- Mailings using only colspans render correctly
- Simple forms like a poll, or ZIP code search submit their values correctly across all ESPs **except Hotmail and Lotus Notes**

Text Email Guidelines

Look & Feel:

With text emails, designers have very little control over the look and feel of the email. This includes even the most basic elements of style such as: font type, font color, bolding, italics, centering, etc.

There are a number of ways you can spruce up your text email, they include utilizing:

- Space
- Lines
- Special characters
- Capital letters

Width & Length of Text Emails:

The width of text emails should not exceed an optimal width of 70 characters. There are no restrictions to the length of text emails; however, the longer the email, the more likely any information towards the bottom will be ignored. The more important the message, the higher it should be placed in the email.

URLs:

Long URLs will often break in text emails. When URLs break, they may not work. It is always a good idea to keep the length of URLs moderate.

Importing Text Content from MS Word:

Importing text content from Microsoft Word can lead to a few minor problems all stemming from Microsoft Word's non-ASCII characters. While they may appear okay in Internet Explorer, Netscape users will see strange letters.

For example:	
MS Word & IE:	"Free" Money - Just Click Here...!
Netscape:	0Free0 Money 0 Just Click Here0!

Be especially careful with apostrophes, double quotes and dashes! With its default setup, MS Word will replace apostrophes and double quotes with special characters not supported by many email clients. Dashes, when surrounded by spaces, will be replaced by an "m-dash" which is a special character. Be extra careful with dashes/hyphens inside URLs. In some cases you can avoid the special character

problem by staying away from the INSERT SYMBOL tool, however there are exceptions. Below is a listing of commonly used non-ASCII characters:

- >Ellipsis: ...
- >M-Dash: -
- >Stylized Double Quotes: "
- >Stylized Single Quotes: '
- >Bullets: ?, ?, etc.

Always put hard returns after every line of your text copy. Failure to use hard returns may cause users to see extremely long lines. This also allows YOU to control formatting, rather than leaving it up to the recipients' email programs. Lines that do not exceed 70 characters will display correctly in virtually all text-mode email programs.

TECHNICAL NOTE: CheetahMail recommends using a text editor like notepad or wordpad when creating text for email.

Questions?

CheetahMail strives to keep our clients well informed, so if you have any questions on how to improve your creative, or would like to provide us with feedback, please contact your account manager or call us at (212) 809-0825. You can also email us at info@cheetahmail.com.