

THE MISTAKE MAKER'S GUIDE TO EMAIL MARKETING

15 Email Marketing Mistakes Your Business Can't Afford to Make



IN THIS PAPER

- 4 Email Campaign Planning Mistakes
- 6 Email Design Mistakes
- 8 Email Production Mistakes

INTRODUCTION

Email marketing. Ever remember thinking: “It’s just sending emails, how hard can it be?” Ha!

There’s a good chance that somewhere along the way, you changed your tune about effective email marketing ... because it is hard. Actually, let’s just say it’s more of a science than most of us give it credit for.

Drawing on years of experience, unique perspectives and combined knowledge, the experts here at RRD Marketing Solutions have come up with what we hope is a good primer for circumventing Murphy’s Law – whatever can go wrong, will go wrong – as it relates to your email marketing efforts.

As we see it, there are three major categories of email mistakes: campaign planning, design and production. Keep this guide within reach the next time you’re getting ready to press send on an email marketing campaign – no matter your list size.

EMAIL MARKETING CHECKLIST

Don't click send just yet! Walk through this email marketing checklist first. If you answered "Yes" to every question, then you are ready to drive brand advocacy and improve conversion with email that's highly personalized, consistent and timely.



5 EMAIL PLANNING QUESTIONS

- Did I pull a strong list?**
Avoid being labeled as a spammer by sending to well-maintained lists and subscribers interested in what you have to say ... or sell.
- Is my message targeted?**
The more relevant your message is to the recipient, the more likely they are to click through and ultimately convert.
- Did I measure the success of my last email campaign?**
Reviewing campaign statistics after each and every send is essential to determining what works and what doesn't work.
- Is this email on-brand?**
If the look, feel and messaging of your email doesn't line up with the same elements of a corresponding landing page, that's a big red flag to recipients.
- Is there a clear call to action?**
The goal of your email should be to get the reader to do something ... aka click for more information.



5 EMAIL DESIGN QUESTIONS

- Is the subject line enticing?**
One in three email recipients decide whether or not to open your email based on your subject line alone. Give it some thought.
- Is my call to action easy to find?**
If your call to action is a button or link, make sure it is prominent and that it looks like a button or a link.
- Is my email short and sweet?**
Use email as a way to start a conversation with your customer. Do that with an enticing, to-the-point message that leads them to your call to action.
- Do my graphics carry minimal text?**
If your user views emails with all graphics off, you've sent them a blank email. Talk about the most epic email fail.
- Did I consider the size of the email?**
More than half of all emails are now opened on a mobile device. Emails no wider than 600 pixels are a good start. Using responsive design is even better.



5 EMAIL PRODUCTION QUESTIONS

- Did I follow HTML email coding best practices?**
Poorly crafted HTML can shoot up your spam score, making it less likely that your email will reach your intended targets.
- Did I properly format a text-only version?**
Many subscribers prefer text-only versions for privacy reasons. Also worth noting, the absence of this version can up your spam score significantly in most spam filters.
- Is this email mobile friendly?**
How the email will scale down to fit the different screen resolutions is something that must be taken into account when coding your mobile email.
- Have I considered CAN-SPAM laws?**
To get your message to the people that want it the most, it's best to use a permission-based email send — think opt-out link.
- Did I go through the quality assurance process?**
Typos, grammatical errors, improperly targeted content and broken links erode your credibility and can jeopardize the success of your campaign.

HOW TO AVOID 15 OF THE WORST EMAIL MARKETING MISTAKES



EMAIL CAMPAIGN PLANNING MISTAKES

Sometimes good looks can only take you so far. A beautifully designed email will only produce beautiful results when a well-thought-out plan is in place. When you're not organized, strategic and proactive, mistakes happen.

The good news? We're here to help you avoid them.

Pulling Bad Email Lists

The last thing you need is to be labeled as a spammer. Your sender reputation is determined by many factors (e.g., volume, bounce rates, complaints, unknown users and much more). Reputation can follow both the IP address you are sending from and from your domain.

And don't forget the damage you do to your reputation among subscribers who do get your commercial emails and don't want them. They might peg you as a sender they don't want to do business with.

Not Targeting Your Message

Emails are meant to sell or persuade. This requires you knowing what will motivate the recipient to perform the action you want. From message to tone to design, an email campaign that doesn't satisfy their wants and address their questions will rarely succeed.

According to research performed by email marketer Mailigen, on average, email list segmentation increases click-through rates by 5%; emails truly relevant to the recipient drive 18 times more revenue than general broadcast emails.

Once you know why people are inclined to listen to your pitch as a whole, you want to start segmenting them into smaller groups and honing your message to their individual needs. The more relevant to their wants and needs they find the message, the more likely they are to click through and ultimately convert to a sale or action, sometimes dramatically.

REMEMBER:

If you buy lists (even from "reputable" list sellers) or poorly maintain your own list of subscribers, you run the risk of damaging your sender reputation. If that ever happens, the recovery process is expensive and time consuming.

Forgetting to Measure Your Effectiveness

When was the last time you pulled a report on your email campaign? And when will you do that again?

Reviewing campaign statistics every time you do a send is a must. This allows you to see what works and what doesn't work, warns you when things may be going wrong and gives you the statistics to gloat when you are doing things right.

Email campaign software can offer a whole host of statistics, all of which are important. These include:

- **Bounce Rates and Delivery Rates:** Find out how many of the emails you send reach the inbox. This can tell you about the health of your email reputation and your mailing list.
- **Open Rates:** Find out how many people open your emails when they reach the inbox. This can tell you about your reputation with subscribers and give you insight into your subject lines and preheader text.
- **Unsubscribes and Abuse Complaints:** Even if people signed up for your emails in the past, they may unsubscribe or worse, complain if your email doesn't match their needs.
- **Click-Through and Conversion Rates:** These will tell you how effective your messages and call to actions are.

Not Integrating Your Emails with Your Brand and Website

It can be a jarring user experience to have an email that looks different from your website when a subscriber clicks through. If the brand looks and feels different or the message on the landing page does not match the message of the email, the user will often stop the process right then and there.

Make sure your brand and identity is clear in the email; people don't respond well to emails that don't look reputable or look like they're from senders they don't know.

Hiding Your Call to Action

If you're going to the trouble of sending out an email, you want the audience to do something, feel something or know something. First, you have to be aware of what that is and make it clear to the user what it is you are asking them to do. Preferably, this is something you can measure like a click through.

Just providing information like your price list or current offerings isn't enough and certainly isn't measurable. Get the user to do something such as click for more information, buy something, fill out a survey, or somehow communicate their interest to you.



Emails from Midas are designed to work seamlessly with their website, extending the brand to any device.



EMAIL DESIGN MISTAKES

By design, we're not talking about how "pretty" or avant-garde your email is. That's between you and your graphic designers. Though, surprisingly enough, you may find that sometimes the prettiest and sexiest emails don't always convert as well as plain-Jane emails.

But there are structural design issues that always seem to hold true and failure to follow these rules can be damaging or fatal to the effectiveness of your emails.

Poor Subject Lines and Preheader Text

The handful of words you choose for your subject line and preheader text may be the most important words in your email. How's that for pressure?

People decide whether or not to open the email by the subject line and in some readers, the preheader text. If they don't open the email, it doesn't matter how snazzy your design and message is.

By testing, again and again, you need to determine what words and which presentations get the most opens. Do you personalize it or not, do you say "free gift" or "super opportunity" – depends on your product and your audience.

Overcomplicating Your Call To Action

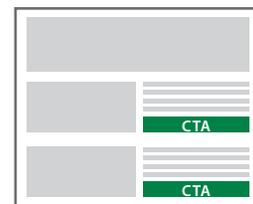
The design of your email should be such that the user can clearly see how to take the action you want. If it is a button or link, make sure it is prominent and that it looks like a button or a link. If they can't find your call to action (CTA), they won't be called to action.

That may sound obvious but many cool and avant-garde designs hide the standard underline and ugly blue link color for aesthetic reasons or make buttons that don't look like buttons to a standard subscriber.

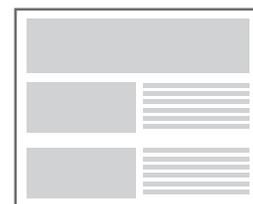
Another common mistake is including too many CTAs. Your email, like your web pages, should be more of a funnel than a whack-a-mole game. Don't expect them to hunt around your email if there are lots of little CTAs and it's unclear which CTA is the most important one.

FYI:

It's of utmost importance to strike a balance between your enticement to open against the words and phrases most likely to get you blocked by spam filters – or blocked by subscribers who think you are coming on too strong.



Clear CTA vs. unclear CTA



Too Much Text

How many emails do you get a day: 50, 100, 200? Are you going to read an email that looks like a WSJ article? Maybe if you are already really, really interested in the subject.

Emails are the first step in your conversation with your customer.

In most cases, the only real purpose of an email is to get the user to click a link for more information. Keep it short, sweet, enticing and to the point. Give the user enough information to get them say to “yes” by following your CTA. If they need more information, give it to them on your landing page.

Putting Too Much Text in Graphics

If your user views emails with all graphics off, you’ve sent them a blank email. No bueno. This violates generally-accepted accessibility standards, meaning that if your subscribers use a screen reader for need or convenience, you may have well just sent a blank email.

Did you know? All-graphic emails are more likely to be marked as spam by the spam filters.

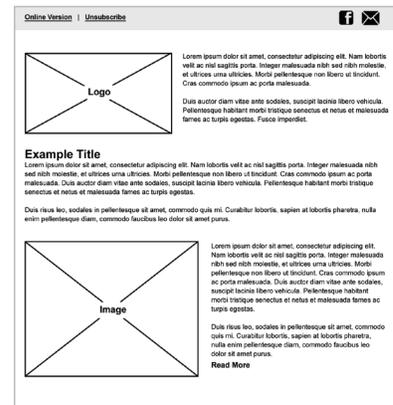
Not Considering Email Size

Web designers have settled upon 1024 pixels as the general minimum screen size for web pages, so many go ahead and design emails the same way. For a variety of reasons, this is a very bad idea.

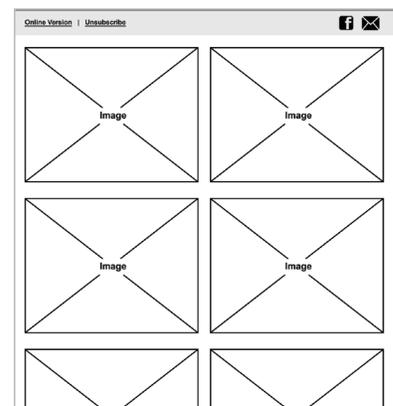
First, most people do not view web pages in full screen. Most people, even on their desktops, view email within a much narrower column. Things get even tighter when you consider more than half of all emails are now opened on a mobile device.

If you’ve designed your email at 900 pixels wide, they will either see the whole page with teeny-tiny fonts and pictures or they will see it 100% and have to scroll and scroll and scroll and scroll to try to read your message. They won’t do that ... delete is much easier.

Our recommendation: Keep your emails no wider than 600 pixels and no longer than it needs to be. If you really want the best experience for your subscriber, use responsive design, which adapts graphics, layout and font sizes to whatever size screen your subscribers are viewing it in.



Email with text vs. all-graphic email





EMAIL PRODUCTION MISTAKES

When developing HTML emails, it is very easy to try and get too fancy and complicated with your code. You have to remember your code has to work with more than 35 common email clients with varying support for modern HTML features. Things you rely on for websites – JavaScript, div tags, background graphics, CSS cascade, to name a few – don't necessarily work when coding your emails.

The goal of an email is to deliver a clear and concise message to every one of your subscribers. In order to ensure this, it is important to use some of the following coding best practices.

Not Following HTML Email Coding Best Practices

One of the most common problems we see are marketers who fail to learn and follow email coding best practices. Poorly crafted HTML will dramatically raise your spam score, making it less likely that your email will reach your intended targets.

To get you started, here are a handful of our suggested best practices:

- **Use Tables Instead of “div”:** Yes, this is the opposite of best practices for web pages but remember that many email readers, including some of the most popular ones, parse HTML as if it was 1998. To make life easy it is going to be best to use tables when creating your email. Most email clients do not support CSS positioning, floats and clears. Make sure you properly nest tables and close all open tags.
- **Don't Use External CSS:** You do not want to use external style sheets and you're going to want to keep all of your CSS inline. I personally try to avoid using any padding left and right, p tags, ordered list or breaks if at all possible.
- **Use Tables Instead of Lists:** Lists align in widely differing ways across email clients. Instead, use a nested table with rows to build out an ordered or unordered list.
- **Image Styling:** Always remember to style an image with no border and set display to block or you will get very strange results in many common email clients. It is a good idea to specify your image's pixel height and width but never try to specify a different size than the actual image size. Outlook and other readers will ignore your specs and show the image at its native size, often messing up your layout.

Failing to Properly Format a Text-Only Version

Many people view emails in text-only versions, either by choice or because they have to. While most, but not all, subscribers can view HTML emails, many prefer text-only versions for privacy reasons. You should also know that absence of a text version will up your spam score significantly in most spam filters.

When marketers fail to optimize their email for both versions, subscribers can see a broken design and an ineffective email. When setting up your text version, try the following:

- Keep the lines shorter so subscribers don't have to move their eyes so far across the page and back to read the email, making scanning faster and easier.
- Also make sure to add space between paragraphs and headlines to allow a nice and easy flow for the recipient.

Failing to Use Mobile-Friendly or Responsive Design

To ensure your emails look good on mobile devices, responsive designs are essential. When coding your mobile email, it is important to take into account how the email will scale down to fit the different screen resolutions. This can be accomplished by using media queries which tell the email client what criteria needs to be met before it uses the styles therein.

Ignoring CAN-SPAM Laws

In order to get your message to the people that want it the most, it is best to use a permission-based email send. To make sure that this happens, it is important to follow the CAN-SPAM laws by having an opt-out link. This allows people to state whether or not they really want to receive your emails.

Also including a legitimate physical address gives the email receipt confidence that the email they received is from a reputable source. Setting up accurate from lines gives the email a great first impression.

Bypassing the QA Process

Aside from credibility-eroding typos and broken links, probably the most important and biggest mistake marketers make coding emails is not testing your code through a quality assurance (QA) process. Things render differently in every email client and just because it looks okay in one client doesn't mean that it does in another.

FYI:

According to Litmus.com, by September 2016, 56% of all emails were opened with a mobile device. Compare that to a mere 8% back in 2011. Here's one more stat for good measure: TechCrunch notes of Gmail's 1 billion users, 75% of them check their accounts on their mobile devices.

THE EMAIL MARKETING STRUGGLE IS REAL

(It Doesn't Have to Be)

RRD Marketing Solutions knows email. With over 300 certifications across a variety of systems, our expertise is platform-agnostic. We work within client systems to optimize current technology through improved functionality and system integrations.

We maintain partnerships with several leaders in digital marketing including: Salesforce Marketing Cloud, Adobe Marketing Cloud, Oracle Marketing Cloud and Tableau.

We build digital marketing programs with messaging that speaks directly to customers and relates to the purchase path. Our experts can provide guidance, supplement client teams, or manage campaigns from start to finish.

Effective Marketing is Within Reach

If you found yourself making any (or all!) of these mistakes more times than you'd like to admit, it might be time to reach out for some support.

RRD Marketing Solutions has a proven framework for defining, enabling and deploying successful email marketing initiatives.

We help brands optimize engagement with their customers across all touchpoints—online, offline and onsite. Our group activates marketing resources in the most impactful way, through a combination of predictive insights, inspired content and meaningful interactions.

RRD Marketing Solutions empowers brands to execute marketing programs with maximum return and enables customers to experience brands in their own way.

Contributing Authors:

Patricia Babischkin, Account Supervisor
patricia.l.babischkin@rrd.com

Optimize Engagement.
Visit MS.RRD.com