

HTML Email Survival Guide: Technical and Design Best Practices

[Email marketing](#) is one of the most powerful and effective forms of marketing today. It is quick to deploy, offers immediate and highly-measurable results, enables advanced segmentation and personalization, and delivers a high return on investment.

However, achieving maximum results from your HTML email requires experience and expertise. Simple mistakes in the implementation of HTML emails can seriously affect delivery or usability and cripple your ROI.

To help marketers optimize results from their email marketing efforts, Lyris has created this complete guide to creating effective HTML email. These technical and design best practices give marketers the ability to improve their own email marketing campaigns. This guide is best shared amongst email marketers and the HTML coding staff that supports your email development efforts.

In this guide we will cover:

- HTML coding do's and don'ts
- Validate HTML content and avoid using scripts
- Using forms in HTML emails
- Font and font size
- Color
- Background colors
- Font colors
- Buttons, charts & other supporting images
- Style sheets
- Keep HTML emails to 500-650 pixels in width
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- RSS feed functionality
- "Push to talk" functionality
- Forward-to-a-friend functionality
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- Essential content

HTML Coding

HTML coding for emails is much trickier than for Websites. With Websites, most designers/programmers code for a finite number of the most commonly-used browsers, such as Internet Explorer, Firefox and Mozilla. Email, on the other hand, can be delivered and displayed on many more (dozens) of clients – making it harder to find commonality. In the office/work environment, Outlook (all versions) commands about 75% market share, with Lotus Notes roughly between 5% and 10%. With consumers, AOL, Yahoo, Gmail and Hotmail/MSN comprise about two-thirds of most email lists.









Good HTML creates branded, usable and attractive email messages that have better conversion rates than plain text emails. But when HTML goes bad, your messages will be unreadable, will not function correctly and can trigger email blocks or filters.

With this in mind, the following are a few general HTML coding “do’s” and “don’ts” for email.

HTML Coding Do’s

- ✓ Code HTML emails as a single Web page with the basic <HTML>, <HEAD>, <TITLE>, and <BODY> tags.
- ✓ Make sure all tags have supporting closing tags. The most common HTML errors come from not having a closing tag or having open <TD> or <TR> tags in the HTML. While your HTML might render properly in a browser, these errors can cause problems with many email clients.
- ✓ Test your HTML code. Make sure your code conforms to [World Wide Web Consortium](http://www.w3.org/) (W3C) HTML standards
- ✓ Code emails by hand where possible, as WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editors typically add extra code that creates havoc with certain email clients. If you must use an editor, use Dreamweaver or Homesite, which do not add extra code to the design process.
- ✓ Use only the ASCII character set. More advanced word-processing software often inserts odd characters, such as the trailing dot characters or smart quotes (curly instead of straight), which can hamper display or create delivery problems in some email software.
- ✓ HTML email code should be self-contained.
- ✓ If you use CSS, include the <STYLE> element in your HTML file between the <BODY> tags. Do not link to an external style sheet, as this code is often stripped out by email clients, creating display problems.
- ✓ Use HTML tables for the design layout.
- ✓ Keep emails at a fixed width of between 500-650 pixels wide.
- ✓ Animated GIF files are acceptable, but use them sparingly.
- ✓ Use of images maps is acceptable.
- ✓ When sending a multi-part message, remember to create the text version. Most email clients send HTML as a multi-part alternative by default. Failing to include the text part of the message can cause some filters to treat your email as spam.

HTML Coding Don'ts

-  Avoid using CSS for positioning. The support is very limited and will, more than likely, result in a broken layout for most of your recipients.
-  Avoid nested tables if possible. Some email clients, especially Lotus Notes and Netscape Messenger, might not render them correctly.
-  Do not use JavaScript. Some email clients do not support JavaScript, and others view it as a security risk.
-  Do not use canvas background images. Most email clients do not display canvas background images. Background images for individual table cells are generally acceptable but might not appear in some clients such as Lotus Notes.
-  Do not apply attributes to the <BODY> tag. Attributes placed in the <BODY> tag are often flagged by spam filters and increase the likelihood of your message getting bulked or blocked.
-  Do not embed images in an email. Some ISPs will filter emails with embedded images. Also, the file size can get quite large with multiple embedded images, which also might cause the email to be blocked.
-  Do not use EMBED tags.
-  Avoid embedding forms, such as surveys, into emails. Some email clients such as Hotmail might not pass the data through to the collection point. Instead, link to a Web form through which the recipient can complete the survey.

Validate HTML Content and Avoid Using Scripts

The vast majority of HTML emails do not comply with [World Wide Web Consortium](http://www.w3.org/) (W3C) HTML standards. This can cause rendering and delivery issues, particularly at AOL, MSN and Hotmail. AOL, for example, has a filter that is an HTML validator, which scans incoming messages for HTML syntax and formatting errors. If it detects invalid HTML, it will reject the message. If you use HTML in your messages, make sure your code is error-free and follows W3C HTML standards.

It's also recommended that you establish procedures for proofing email campaigns. Your proofing checklist should include HTML validation. Popular HTML-editing software such as Homesite or Macromedia Dreamweaver already offer effective validation tools and will highlight any errors as you create your message. For a complete reference spec of HTML formatting, visit the [World Wide Web Consortium](http://www.w3.org/) documentation pages. Also, you can use the HTML validator in your email application or a third-party validator such as W3C Markup Validation Service.

Also, avoid scripting. Scripting languages, which can be imbedded within HTML, are often used to add dynamic functionality to a Web page. However, security risks due to script vulnerabilities in email browsers have increased over the years. The result is most scripts, such as JavaScript and VBScript, get stripped out of messages. Some email systems reject messages outright if they detect scripting. For greatest compatibility, avoid using scripts in messages. Instead, drive your readers to your Website, where dynamic components are easily rendered.

Using Forms in HTML Emails

We generally discourage the use of forms in email to prevent delivery or usability problems. However, at times you might still need to use a form in an email instead of directing readers to your Website. Consider these factors before you use a form in your next email message:

Those recipients of your email who use Hotmail will not be able to use the form because:

- Hotmail displays the form but strips all values from your <FORM> tag and removes the name values of all form elements, rendering the form useless.
- Hotmail recipients can complete the form, but nothing will happen when they hit the submit button so they will not know it has not been received

Some email clients do not support forms that use “POST” method, which allows form data to appear within the message body. Instead you will need to replace it with the “GET” method, which will write all form content to the query string of the page to which the form is posted.

For example: <form method="get" action="http://.....>

Most email clients that provide a preview pane don't allow you to tab between form elements. This means that when a recipient completes the first field in your form and clicks the TAB key, the focus is automatically shifted to another part of the software. This hinders usability and can confuse your recipient.

Font and Font Size

In general, only universally-supported fonts such as Arial and Times New Roman should be used in email messages. Arial is a font that was specifically designed for onscreen readability. Studies indicate that Web users prefer Arial, Verdana and Tahoma to others when viewing Web pages and email.

If you include fonts that are not loaded on your recipients' machines, their email clients will substitute different fonts, which can affect your design. When using a special font (such as the unique font for a company logo), place it within an image.

Fonts can be specified in pixels, points or HTML font size value. Use a point size no smaller than 10 pixels, 10 point, or size “2”.

Color

In everything from images to fonts, colors play an important role in the email design process but can also create problems. For example, don't choose a font color such as a muted gray on a gray background that makes your headlines and calls-to-action difficult to read. And don't run the risk of hiding valuable information in your emails by blending the content into the background.

Men and women react differently to colors, but several polls on color preferences by gender and age yield interesting results:

	Favorite colors	Least favorite colors
Females	Blue, Purple, Green (all “cool” colors)	Orange, Brown, Gray (“warm” & “neutral” colors)
Males	Blue, Green, Black (two “cool” & one “neutral” color)	Brown, Orange, Purple (“neutral”, “warm” & “mixed” colors)
All genders	Preferences for green decrease with age; Preferences for purple increase with age	Dislike of orange increases with age

For more information on color preferences and perceptions, check out these resources:

- <http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/color/a/symbolism.htm>
- http://desktoppub.about.com/od/howcolorworks/l/aa_colorsee.htm

Background Colors

Use a white or very light-colored background with a dark to medium font color to make it easy for recipients to read your email message. Also, if you use background colors in sidebar boxes contain them within tables and avoid using a body background color, because Web-based clients remove the body tag and typically place its attributes within a table. Email clients such as Microsoft Outlook might retain the specified background color when replying to or forwarding the email, but other clients use their colors, making message text difficult to read in some instances.

Font Colors

Beware of using white as a font color. While it is tempting to use a dark background and white font to make the text stand out, many spam filters identify the use of white (#FFFFFF) in a font tag as a possible spam trigger. Spammers often use a white font on white backgrounds to hide information from recipients. Use your color wheel to find contrasting colors that can accentuate your message and readability.

Buttons, Charts & Other Supporting Images

Buttons, charts, and other supporting images should use the colors of your design elements to pull the reader’s eye to the images. Make sure the text color used on your images stands out and is readable. Most importantly, make sure the recipient understands the action. See the examples below:

SHOP NOW >>

BUY NOW >>

FREE SHIPPING >>

Style Sheets

Many Web designers use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to simplify the coding process and ensure a consistent style throughout a Website. Use of CSS in HTML emails can be problematic, however, as many email clients will not render style sheets correctly. Here is a handy reference on whether an email client renders certain types of style sheets correctly.

CSS and Email Clients					
	Hotmail	Yahoo	Gmail	Outlook	AOL
Linked style sheet	No Stripped	No	No	Yes	Yes
Embedded style (inline) between head tags	No Stripped	No	No Stripped	Yes	Yes
Embedded style (inline) between body tags	No Stripped	No	No Stripped	Yes	Yes
Testing environment: Windows XP, Internet Explorer 6.0					

When designing your email, keep in mind that popular email clients render CSS differently

Avoid using CSS if possible; but if you must use them, choose the embedded styles also known as 'inline'. Embed the style within the two body tags and not within the header because some email clients will truncate or strip out the header.

So, add the style within the body tags, like this:

```
<body>
<style type="text/css"> <!-- td maintext {} --> </style>
</body>
```

Keep HTML Emails to 500-650 Pixels in Width

Most HTML emails are 500 to 650 pixels wide. Early email clients were developed before HTML and were not designed to render wide Webpage-like emails.

More recently, the message windows of popular Web-based email services such as Yahoo Mail, Hotmail and Gmail will typically present 500-650 pixels, although this will vary according to users' screen resolution settings.

HTML messages wider than this range require the recipient to scroll horizontally in order to view the whole email. Forcing a user to scroll horizontally might be acceptable on your Website, but you should avoid it in email.

Windows Service Pack 2: Impact on Email

Microsoft's Service Pack 2 (SP2) for Windows XP includes several changes in the way Outlook Express processes email – and you should be aware of these changes so you can design and code your message effectively.

First, SP2 enables users to display email messages as either plain text or HTML. Selecting plain text mode forces Outlook Express to display the text part of a multi-part message, rather than the HTML part that had been the default.

Additionally the service pack alters the way messages display external HTML content. With SP2 installed, external HTML content, such as images or links to external CSS style sheets, does not automatically download. Outlook Express now includes a modification to the user interface allowing the user to authorize the download of all external HTML content for a message.

These steps should help minimize the negative impact of these changes:

1. Create a suitable text version of your message to accommodate users who prefer it to HTML (or whose clients do not render the email in HTML).
2. Minimize or eliminate reliance on external CSS to specify message formatting. This will prevent severe disruption of message formatting and reduce the chance that your message will be mistaken for spam.
3. Specify the height and width of images used in HTML content. Without manually setting image dimensions, a Web or email browser will "stretch" the rest of the HTML content around the image after it has fully loaded. Now that image loading will not happen by default, the browser will not immediately have a reference point for correctly placing the content unless specified. Image sizes are specified in pixels and are set in the tag.

For example:

```
<IMG height="20" src="http://website.com/yourimage.gif" width="50">
```

The changes to email will apply only to Microsoft's Outlook Express, not Outlook, which means that the greatest impact from these changes will be experienced when sending email to consumers rather than to business subscribers.

Images

You can use as many images in an email message as you wish – the right number depends on the purpose, type and focus of the email. For instance, ecommerce emails often have more images than promotional emails.

Consider using graphic images and buttons to draw a reader's attention. These images can convey concepts in combination with your copy. Make sure your call-to-action is not only supported by an image but also by text. This way, if the images are turned off, the call-to-action is still clear.

Images for emails should be hosted on a Website and not embedded within the email to ensure proper rendering and to minimize the email's file size.

Important note:

Define the size and parameters (horizontal and vertical height in pixels) of each graphic in the tags.

For example:

```

```

Use Image Alt Tags

HTML “alt” tags display a text description of an image either when the image does not display or when a cursor rolls over a displayed image. Using alt tags in your HTML emails is important for three reasons:

Recipients using dial-up or other slow connections might not see images for several seconds. Displaying alt tag text can convey what is to come.

Many email clients (Outlook and Outlook Express) and email services (AOL, Yahoo and Gmail) disable images by default or display a warning message or command to download the images.

Gmail uses what it calls “snippets,” which display the first few text words it sees in an email, following the subject line. Gmail will also display the text from alt tags, so it is important to use this to your advantage - as an addendum to your subject line, for example.

A sample alt tag looks like this:



```
<IMG SRC="http://www.emaillabs.com/image/01.gif" alt="Free shipping click here" BORDER=0>
```


Tips on using alt tags

Newsletters:

For logos, headers, section titles and other uses of images, describe the logo and image, but consider adding a brief teaser that explains that section of the email. If your email is a newsletter, an example of an alt tag that serves as both a teaser and a text version of the image might be: “Optimization -- Strategies for improving email marketing performance”.

Ecommerce Email:

Include short but complete descriptions of product photos or offers such as “50% off”.

Charts and Graphs:

Include enough text to explain the value and contents of the chart or graph, such as “Chart: Open Rates from A/B Split Test”.

Gmail Snippets/Preview Text:

Use an appropriate image in your header to display key teaser info. For ecommerce emails, the information might expand on special offers mentioned in the subject line, reinforce Free Shipping or promote additional products. For newsletters, consider mentioning additional articles beyond what is in the subject line, or expand on the existing topic.

While this sounds like a lot of work, at most it probably adds 5 to 10 minutes to your email production. Most importantly though, marketers who don't use alt tags appropriately risk lower open and click-through rates because recipients might decide not to display images or act further.

Creating a Web Version of Your Email Newsletter

Although the vast majority of email clients and email Web interfaces (e.g., Yahoo, Hotmail) render HTML correctly, your recipients could be using an older version of Lotus Notes or AOL, which might not render your images properly. Giving readers a link to a Web version or offering a text option ensures recipients see the message as you intended.

Three tips:

1. Include a “View Web version of this message” link at the top of your email. Also, include a link to the Web version in the footer or admin area of your email message. The link can automatically direct to a Web-hosted version (your email software should be able to automatically generate this link for you) or to a link to your Website where you've posted the message (perhaps along with back issues for newsletters). One Lyris client reports that approximately 4% of recipients click on the Web version link. This is a significant number if you have a large list.
2. Include “Format Preference (HTML or Text)” on your opt-in form. Also, include a note worded like this: “Choose text if you use Eudora Light, Eudora Pro 3 and below, Lotus Notes versions below R5 or AOL 5.0 and under”.
3. Include a link to a Profile Update page allowing recipients to change their preferred format from HTML to text at any time in the future.

Preview Panes and Blocked Images

Two advances in email clients are combining to deliver a double whammy to email marketers: 1) the horizontal/vertical preview panes which allow a reader to view just a narrow strip or square of an email message without actually opening it, and 2) a blocked-images feature that prevents images from downloading unless the reader requests them. Around 75% of people who use preview panes prefer the horizontal version, while the remaining 25% prefer the vertical version. You can cover both pane configurations by placing the most important information in the top left corner.

{Inside Lyris HQ} Email Preheaders Work, So Make Them Work For You

Lyris [inside-lyris-hq@lyrishq.com]

Click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures in this message.

Sent: Tue 3/24/2009 4:49 AM

To:

Email Marketing: Email Preheaders Work, So Make Them Work For You
Integrated Marketing: Does Arm's-Length Integration Frustrate You?
Search Marketing: Improve Site SEO With Four Quick Wins
Ask Lyris: Will the word "free" cause my email to automatically go into the junk folder?

Inside LYRIS HQ™ Newsletter March 2009
Your Source for Online-Marketing Best Practices Mobile Version | Web Version

Email Marketing

Email Preheaders Work, So Make Them Work For You
By Anita M. Taylor

Right-click here to download pictures....

Email pundits are oohing and aahing about the power of "preheaders" or "snippet text" to boost opens and click-throughs. But a casual trip through my inbox revealed that very few companies are using them, even though they're relatively simple to implement. Is it because you've never heard of them, don't know why they matter or don't know how easy it is to get them right?

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Previous Email-Marketing Article:
[Four Guaranteed Ways to Trash Your Reputation](#)

[Forward to a Friend](#)

Right-click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of this picture from the Internet.

Integrated Marketing

Does Arm's-Length Integration Frustrate You?
By Sean Ryan

Right-click here to download pictures. To help

Look on any marketing vendor's Web site, and they crow about how integrated they are. But what they call integration, I call "arm's length integration": completely separate applications that use application programming interface (API) calls to exchange finite

Attend Webinar: Email Testing & Measurement

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Struggling to improve ROI? Use testing and measurement to generate better results from each email campaign.

Date: Thursday, April 16
 Time: 1 pm ET/ 10 am PT
 Duration: 1 hour

[REGISTER FOR WEBINAR >>](#)

Right-click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of this picture from the Internet.

Lyris HQ combines email marketing, deliverability tools, content creation, Web analytics, search marketing and mobile marketing into one integrated, hosted solution.

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The [Inside Lyris HQ Newsletter](#) in the Outlook preview pane: although the images are blocked, recipients can preview the email's contents from the teaser text and a concise subject line.

Individually, each of these features can throw off your open rate and prevent users from seeing your most critical information. In tandem, it means your email performance may be reduced significantly if you don't redesign your emails to deliver key information as quickly as possible. In fact, you should assume that you have only 2 to 4 inches of space to tell your story and persuade viewers to open your email instead of just previewing it.

Although this has implications for both business and consumer email marketers and publishers, the problem is especially acute for B2B emailers, because a significant portion of their readers are likely using Outlook and Lotus Notes -- the two email clients that combine preview panes and blocked images.

Some email industry observers have even attributed drops in open rates to widespread use of blocked images, because an "open" is generally counted when a small, clear image within an email message is called from a Web server. If the image is being blocked, the "open" is not counted.

While most Web-based email clients don't use preview panes, Yahoo Mail has a relatively new Web client that behaves more like a desktop client with a preview pane and default image-blocking. Yahoo Mail and other Web email clients also use image blocking as a default setting.

Note: If you are not testing your emails in multiple clients already, the Inbox Snapshot in Lyris HQ shows you exactly how your message will render in various email clients, before you send it to your full audience.

Take these steps to make your email more preview-pane/disabled-image friendly:

1. Redesign the top of your email template so that key content shows in the preview pane even if images are disabled or blocked. Content-oriented newsletters should include headlines or "In This Issue" teasers. Newsletters with banner/image-based ads should switch to text ads and content teasers. Ecommerce and other promotional-type emails should summarize or highlight the key proposition, offer or products right up top. See how we've approached this with the design of the [Inside Lyris HQ Newsletter](#).
2. Study your click-tracking reports to understand where readers are clicking most often. Use this information to determine the best placement of images and links.
3. Ask to be added to your subscribers' address book. Images are displayed by default if you're in the address book for all AOL and Hotmail recipients as well as anyone using Outlook or Outlook Express. Always send from the same address, since that is the address the recipient will add to the address book.
4. Move less critical administrative information to an Admin Center at the end of the email or newsletter, especially if it draws few clicks. But consider keeping or including text links to key actions below your "In This Issue" or teaser text. At Lyris, we saw a fairly high number of newsletter subscribers clicking the "View Web Version" link. So, we kept that and added "Update Profile" and a few other key actions. However, we moved the "Add this address ..." copy to the Admin Center. We recommend that this "Add this address ..." information should be included in the opt-in messaging on your Website, in the confirmation emails and perhaps in the first email they receive. Thereafter, however, this copy is simply taking up prime preview pane real estate.
5. Your From and Subject lines become much more important in this new reality. Sixty percent of readers told us they consult subject lines to decide whether they'll scan the message in the preview pane or just delete it without a glance.

6. In this new preview-pane format, the From and Subject lines become the top two points of a triangle, with the third point being the top of your newsletter or email. All three have to work together to snag a reader's eye.
7. Remember that email clients vary in how they show From and Subject lines in the Inbox. You should keep both to no more than 50 characters each.
8. Use both text and HTML in advertisements, logos and branding messages rather than live images linked to your Website, such as JPEGs or GIFs. You'll still be able to deliver key information even to readers whose email clients block images
9. Use alt tags that describe an image's content or action.
10. Review your HTML coding to make sure it complies with W3C standards.
11. Review how well your format complies with the quirks and nonstandard rendering of Lotus Notes. Depending on your B2B readership, your Lotus Notes subscriber base might range from a low of 5% to as high as 15%.
12. Eliminate skyscraper or vertically rectangular ads that go deeper than the pixel equivalent of 3 or 4 inches.

Whether your email subscribers are B2B or B2C, use of the preview pane will only increase. You should act now to redesign your emails for a world of blocked images and small preview panes

Number of Hyperlinks

The main job of your email is to motivate recipients to click through to your Website. Hyperlinks in an ecommerce email, for example, should not be like in-store retail salespeople -- there when you want to be left alone, but nowhere to be found when you need help and are ready to buy.

Be sure to place text, image and navigation links throughout your email so that a customer can't go anywhere without tripping over a link. Make sure that all images, especially your logo, are clickable links. Consumers are trained to click on images and expect them work.

In fact, it's been proven time and again that increasing the number of hyperlinks in an email message leads to increased open and click-through rates. Even if you are promoting a single product, you should still have multiple links throughout the email, including your logo, navigation links at the top and bottom of your message and the call-to-action. The key is to make the links relevant to the message and the recipient.

Emails with 25 or more links have an open rate 12% higher than those containing fewer than 25 links, and a click-through rate that was 29% higher than that for emails with fewer than 25 links. However, you should not merely list a bunch of links at the bottom of the email. Doing this could hurt delivery, as it is a common spam tactic.

Marketing

The more links there are, the greater the chance that one or more will resonate with recipients and motivate them to click through. And while 25 links might sound like a lot, navigation and administrative links in best-practices newsletters can easily reach 15-20 links by themselves.

Although these findings are compelling, it is essential that you conduct a/b split tests across key variables to determine what works best for your customers and subscribers.

Phishing and HTML Links

Many email clients are being updated to detect phishing attempts. “Phishing” is the industry nickname for the effort to collect sensitive personal and financial information by sending forged emails that look as if they come from an authorized agency, such as a bank, financial service, ecommerce provider or government agency.

Both Mozilla Thunderbird and AOL 9.0 feature phishing scam detection that will affect how your email is treated. To determine whether an email could be a phishing scam, the client looks for a link in your HTML campaign where the display text is a URL. If the displayed link is different from the actual URL, the client alerts the user.

Most email service providers encode your URLs for tracking, and change the URL within the <HREF> tag.

```
<a href="http://www.yoursite.com">http://www.yoursite.com</a>
```

The change might look like this:

```
<a href="http://ESP.com/c.html?rtr=on&s=3d2,l8xr,pt,37e5,6bav">http://www.yoursite.com</a>
```

To avoid having your emails erroneously tagged as phishing attempts, don't use a URL as the display text for a link in any HTML emails. Instead, use a word or phrase which describes the link itself.

```
<a href="http://www.yoursite.com">Visit us here</a>
```

Length

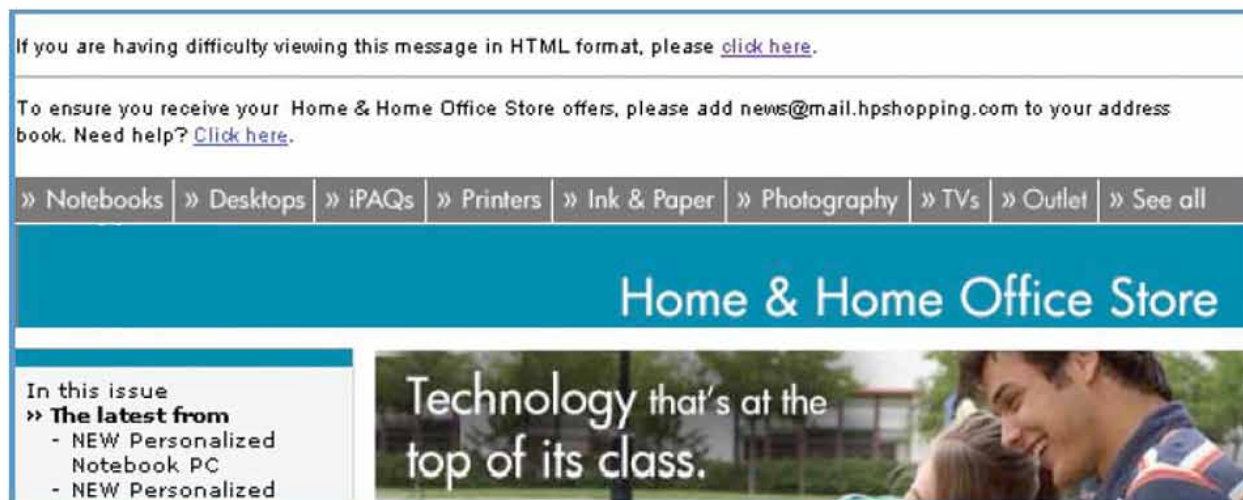
The optimal length for emails can vary dramatically based on your objectives, audience demographics, the type of content, frequency, the competitive environment and other factors. For example, subscribers receiving a monthly newsletter would expect it to be much longer than a daily or weekly one. A grand opening or seminar invitation is typically going to be very short, whereas a B2B newsletter discussing strategic and thought-provoking topics can easily run the print equivalent of 4-6 pages.

Message File Size

Don't be too concerned with message size. There is no data to support any negative effect on performance from messages above 50 KB, for example. Having said that, you should still try to keep message size to 40 to 50 KB, because some recipients might have size limits.

Navigation

Your email is basically an extension of your Website so, where appropriate, make the navigation of your email message consistent with your Website -- but also highlight key areas of your Website that are likely to get customers to take action. If you have Bargain Basement, Closeouts, Featured Products and other areas on your site -- use them in your email.



An example of good use of navigation in the email message header that mirrors the navigation on the Web site

Search

If you have a search capability on your Website, add it to your email. Your customers can type in their search phrase, hit submit, and it will take them to your Website's search-results page. You now have those people on your Website, where you have the potential to convert them to customers.

Email Format/Versions

While the core of your email program should use the HTML format, you must also produce separate versions of your email in plain text and potentially Rich Text Format (RTF) formats for subscribers whose email client cannot read HTML. Most email applications send HTML as a multipart MIME version (HTML and text pieces), where the message format shown is the version the recipient's email client is set to receive. Even if only 5% of your subscribers either cannot read HTML or prefer text, producing well-crafted text versions of your email can pay big dividends.

When producing the text version of your message, watch out for line length and justification. Insert a hard break after 65 characters on every line or as close to it as you can get without breaking up words. This will prevent email clients from breaking up your copy in inconvenient places. We also recommend left justifying all headlines to avoid spacing issues that can arise when attempting to center text. See the example below:

Headline Goes Here

As with HTML, you should use only the ASCII character set. More advanced word processing software often inserts “odd” characters, such as the trailing dot character or smart quotes, which can cause display problems in some email software. The following characters are safe to use in your plain-text emails:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

“ % & ‘ () * + , - . / : ; < = > ? _

RSS

Many email applications provide an RSS-feed function as an alternative format for delivery. Recipients who opt to change the format from email to RSS will receive any new email as an updated RSS feed. RSS users have immediate access to the new content and can view the same information and click through on the same links as the email audience. One key advantage to RSS is that entries are not subject to spam filters and have 100% delivery. Recipients who want to unsubscribe simply remove the feed from their reader.

“Push to Talk” Functionality

Consider adding a “Push-to-Talk” feature to your email if you sell products and services that benefit from personal contact. A “Push-to-Talk” feature enables a recipient to immediately schedule a callback from your call center.

Forward-to-a-Friend

The forward-to-a-friend functionality is a great way to increase your subscriber list. Lyris recommends providing a link in the email to a form hosted on your site, rather than including the form elements directly in the email itself, as discussed earlier in the section on form elements. Another approach is to provide a link to your subscription practices with language like this:

“Received this email from a friend? If you would like to subscribe, click here.”

This allows recipients to forward messages directly, rather than by using a form hosted on your site. Many consumers fear that by using the form hosted method, their friends’ addresses will be automatically subscribed. By including this option, you can increase the chance that a recipient who received the message from a friend will join your list.

Rich Media/Flash

The consensus on using rich media in emails is: Just don’t do it. Most email clients do not support Flash or other types of rich media. If JavaScript is needed to launch the rich media, it is often stripped out due to security concerns. If you must use animation, use an animated GIF, but watch the file size. If you’ve developed

a really cool rich media application you want to showcase, include a link to a Web-hosted version, which gives you more control and broader browser acceptance.

Essential Content

After you have gotten your design right, you must still verify that your message includes these items:

1. A working unsubscribe mechanism. You want to make it as easy as possible for your recipient to stop hearing from you. Not only is it a CAN-SPAM requirement, but a properly-designed and well-promoted unsubscribe process builds trust with recipients and reduces the likelihood they will report your message as spam.
2. Your company name and street address (no PO Box allowed) -- a requirement of the CAN-SPAM law.

Lyris recommends marketers combine this information with other best practices into a custom footer we call the “Email Admin Center.” By combining the above information with a few other useful pieces of information, you can keep all of the housekeeping items bundled together into one neat package. While not all marketers put this information in a footer, most email recipients now expect to find this information at the end of the email. This location obviously makes people scroll to the end of their emails, but having a standard location across all emails is ultimately better for the entire industry.

The Email Admin Center should include these items:

1. A quick explanation of how you got the recipient’s email address (e.g., opted in on your site or a partner’s Website, purchased a product from you, etc.).
2. Your recipient’s email address.
3. Link to your privacy policy or email policy. You can also put your terms of service link here if appropriate.
4. A request to be added to the recipient’s address book to ensure delivery, which also helps to ensure images will be turned on/
5. Update-profile link where the recipient can change the format, frequency or email address.
6. Your feedback and contact information: phone number and email address/
7. Forward-to-a-friend link.
8. Subscription link to help people who received your email from a friend and wish to subscribe.

The screenshot shows a footer template titled "Email Admin Center". It includes several sections: an "Unsubscribe" link to stop mailings; a notice about the email address (pbocci@lyris.com) with a "Change Address" link; a request to add the email to the address book; contact information for Lyris, Inc. (5858 Horton Street, Suite 270, Emeryville, CA 94608, Tel: 888-GO-LYRIS); a "Privacy policy" link; and a copyright notice. On the right side, there are two interactive boxes: a "Subscribe" box with a "Sign up to receive this newsletter" link, and a "Rate This Newsletter" box with a scale from 1 (hate it) to 5 (love it).

Email Admin Center

[Unsubscribe](#) to stop all future mailings.

You are receiving this email at: pbocci@lyris.com. [Change Address](#)

Ensure delivery: Please add inside-lyris-hq@lyrishq.com to your email address book or safe-senders list.

[Lyris, Inc.](#)
5858 Horton Street, Suite 270
Emeryville, CA 94608
Tel: 888-GO-LYRIS (888-465-9747)

[Privacy policy](#): We do not share, rent or sell your information.

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Subscribe

[Sign up to receive this newsletter](#)

Rate This Newsletter

On scale of 1 (hate it) to 5 (love it)

[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#)

Marketing Resources

For more email marketing tips, articles and tools, visit www.lyris.com/resources.

About Lyris

Founded in 1994, Lyris Technologies provides easy-to-use, software and services for online marketing inclusive of email marketing. Lyris' solutions are available as hosted solutions or software and are used by more than 5,000 customers and agencies worldwide, from Fortune 500 corporations to fast growing startups.

Lyris HQ is a single online marketing platform for the integrated products today's digital marketer needs: email marketing, Web analytics, search marketing, mobile marketing and social media marketing.