

Best Practices for HTML Email Newsletters

Aside from the obvious issue of content for HTML email newsletters, there are considerations of technical implementation and layout approaches. This short review examines important 'best practices', layout and samples.

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Best Practices - The Technical Side

Landing Pages

In order to have a close tie between the newsletter content and the web site, it is important to have actions within the content (ie, links) lead to web content that reinforces the points being made. This can be done in the form of an intermediate landing page (or pages) within the web site that is (are) unique to the newsletter. This serves several purposes, not the least of which is to provide a direct measure of overall viewer click tracking. This can be enhanced with more sophisticated click tracking that can yield data at a specific user level. These pages should not generally be part of the public web site and can be removed from the web server after some reasonable period of time.

Outlook Junk Email Filter

Be careful with terms and characters used in promotional email campaigns. Microsoft's Outlook Junk E-mail Filter will send emails straight to the Delete Folder if it finds things such as these below taken directly from MS's filter 'readme' file:

Junk E-mail Filter

First 8 characters of From are digits
Subject contains "advertisement"
Body contains "money back "
Body contains "cards accepted"
Body contains "removal instructions"
Body contains "extra income"
Subject contains "!" AND Subject contains "\$"
Subject contains "!" AND Subject contains "free"
Body contains ",000" AND Body contains "!!" AND Body contains "\$"
Body contains "Dear friend"
Body contains "for free?"
Body contains "for free!"

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Body contains "Guarantee" AND (Body contains "satisfaction" OR Body contains "absolute")
Body contains "more info " AND Body contains "visit " AND Body contains "\$"
Body contains "SPECIAL PROMOTION"
Body contains "one-time mail"
Subject contains "\$\$"
Body contains "\$\$\$"
Body contains "order today"
Body contains "order now!"
Body contains "money-back guarantee"
Body contains "100% satisfied"
To contains "friend@"
To contains "public@"
To contains "success@"
From contains "sales@"
From contains "success."
From contains "success@"
From contains "mail@"
From contains "@public"
From contains "@savvy"
From contains "profits@"
From contains "hello@"
Body contains " mlm"
Body contains "@mlm"
Body contains "////////////////"
Body contains "check or money order"

Adult Content Filter

Subject contains " xxx"
Subject contains "over 18"
Subject contains "over 21"
Subject contains "adult s"
Subject contains "adults only"
Subject contains "be 18"
Subject contains "18+ "
Body contains "over 18"
Body contains "over 21"
Body contains "must be 18"
Body contains "adults only"
Body contains "adult web"
Body contains "must be 21"
Body contains "adult en"
Body contains "18+ "
Subject contains "erotic"
Subject contains "adult en"
Subject contains " sex"

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Body contains " xxx "
Body contains " xxx!"
Subject contains "free" AND Subject contains "adult"
Subject contains "free" AND Subject contains "sex"

Personalize eNewsletter Openings

In order to potentially engage the user, and hopefully transform them into a paying customer, personalization (name and /or email address) in the opening portions of the newsletter content can be very useful. The goal is to convince the reader that the content, product or service, is something that he/she really needs.

Counting Opens

Gauging the number of opens your email receives is achieved by embedding an image into your HTML message. The image isn't actually distributed in the message, but is rather referenced from within the message, as with all HTML documents. Each time someone opens that email, he loads up the HTML document and renders it in his email client. As the email is rendered, the recipient's email program must request a copy of that image from your server and attempt to load it in the message. Count the number of times that image is requested and -- voilà! -- an open rate. If you send a message to 10,000 recipients and log 5,000 requests for your embedded image, you can safely say you've got an (approximate) open rate of 50 percent. Strictly speaking, the open rate isn't the actual number of people who opened the email but the number who requested the embedded image. Placing the 'counting image' at the bottom of the message is preferred, as it will be the last fetched from the server and will at a minimum give a much truer representation of reader response to the message - even if the message was just loaded into the preview pane for more than a few seconds.

Click-Through Rates (CTR)

The next measure of performance, and one that will greatly influence the content, is to get a handle on click-through rates. The first refinement is the Landing Pages discussed above. Second, is to implement server applications that can measure detailed link by link performance identifying the newsletter, the content and the user. This data can be used to develop interest 'clusters', when combined with selection methods can permit very focused newsletters - and hopefully those that will have a greater yield. With this in mind, there are four data:

Total Message Count (TMC)
Open Count (OC)

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Landing Page Count (LPC)
User Action Count (UAC)

There are several important ratios that can be derived from this;

Population Interest Value (PIV) = OC/TMC
Content Interest Value (CIV) = LPC/OC
Action Interest Value (AIV) = UAC/LPC

In the instance of commerce systems, with appropriate server applications, it is also possible to derive actual sales values from the newsletter and in turn develop a measure of Return on Investment.

Subject Line

The message subject line should both build the brand and entice the user to open the message. Generic subject lines such as 'News from XXXXX' are to be avoided.

Email Message Size

Research shows that it is best to strive for HTML newsletters under 20k in TOTAL size (this is the HTML code). There is often a difference between creation size and total, or received size, based on the HTML editor. Certain HTML email clients and HTML composition/editing programs will "bloat the code", adding extraneous codes that can turn a 14k message into a 60k message without changing how the document appears on the screen. The size of your campaign content is dependent on a number of factors - the amount of copy, the number of images and the number of trackable links contained within your HTML campaign. In addition it is a good idea to keep the entire message from exceeding 100k when including all of the images that may be used.

Best Practices - Visual Appeal

There are 5 or so design approaches for email newsletters that have proven to be effective. Each of these is flexible and to the unpracticed eye may be hard to discern the difference. Below are a set of stylized templates and what can be attained with them.

Looking for more information?

We develop and deploy web sites and web services. If you are interested in more information about our shared and dedicated email newsletter management systems for your application please feel free to contact us.

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Title/Name or Logo	
Volume/Issue/Date	URL
First Promotional Item	Insert an image of your promotional item on the left and use the "Add text" text imitative to describe your item and provide a link to your store.
Second Promotional Item	Insert an image of your promotional item on the left and use the "Add text" text imitative to describe your item and provide a link to your store.
Third Promotional Item	Insert an image of your promotional item on the left and use the "Add text" text imitative to describe your item and provide a link to your store.
Fourth Promotional Item	Insert an image of your promotional item on the left and use the "Add text" text imitative to describe your item and provide a link to your store.
Fifth Promotional Item	Insert an image of your promotional item on the left and use the "Add text" text imitative to describe your item and provide a link to your store.
You are welcome to make a purchase anywhere right here. Use a strong call to action. Don't forget to link to your website and/or blog. Make it all very clear and informative.	

Template

Orange Template


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Call It Mine

Call It Mine

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Examples