



EMAIL MARKETING BEST PRACTICES

Your guide to strategy, creative, and execution.

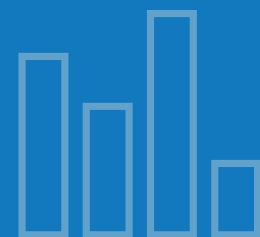
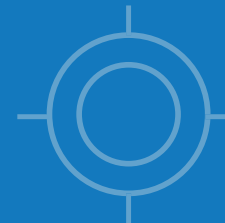


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Overview

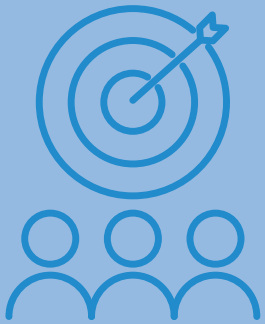
While brands have a variety of marketing channels from which to choose, email is one of the most effective methods for building relationships throughout the customer journey. With a 35:1 ROI¹ and more than 90% of internet users using email², this channel offers hard-to-beat efficiency and scale when managed skillfully. One reason email performs so well is its permission-based nature; subscribers invite brands into their inbox in exchange for value promised by the brand.

To help maximize the effectiveness of email programs, we have developed a collection of email best practices, which covers everything from strategic considerations to KPIs to creative and execution.

MORE THAN
90%
OF INTERNET USERS
UTILIZE EMAIL

EMAIL GENERATES A
35:1
ROI





**DETERMINING THE OVERALL GOAL
& REACHING THE AUDIENCE**



STRATEGY

There are a few key strategic components to consider when planning an overarching email program and any campaigns within it.

Objectives & Measurement

Determine business objectives, such as specific sales goals, increasing household penetration (HHP), driving trial of a particular product, increasing loyalty, and encouraging advocacy.

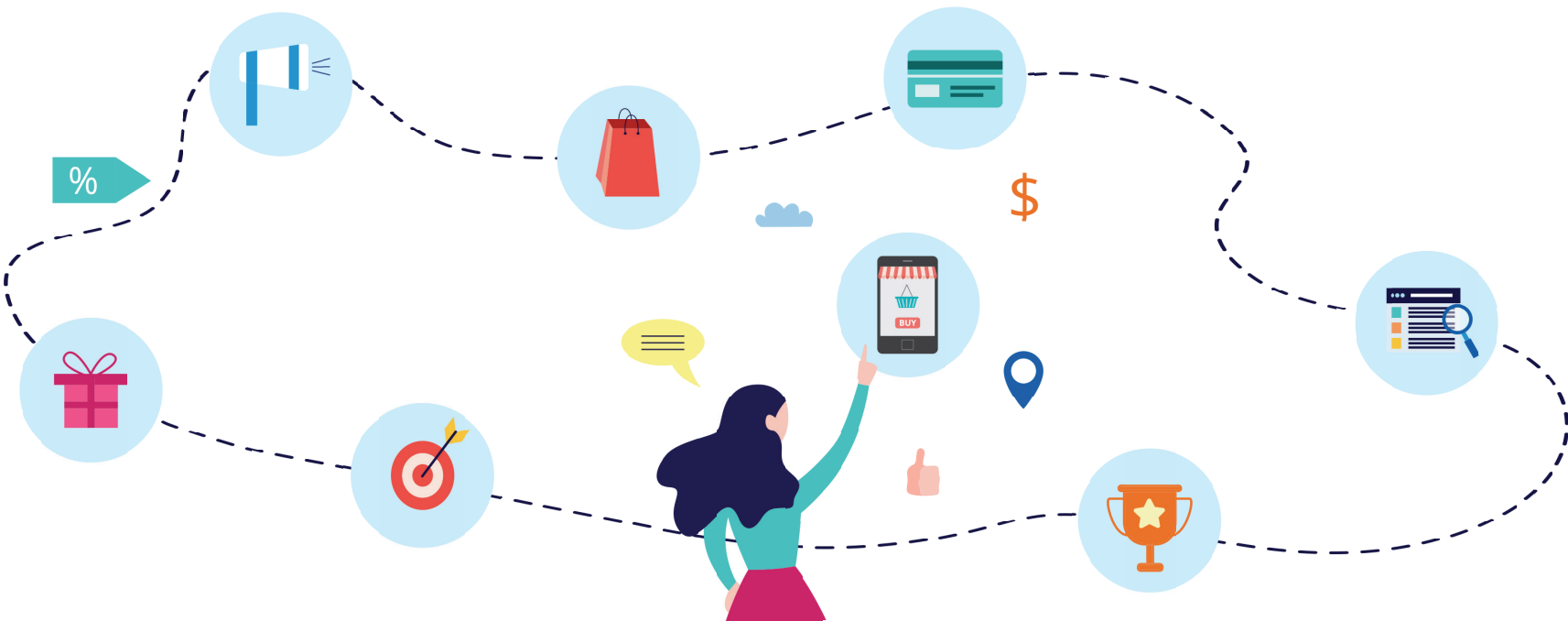
Consider how to measure success and set up appropriate tracking and attribution to ensure reporting on metrics that matter:

- To provide more insightful measurements, look for KPIs beyond opens and clicks, including coupon engagement, purchase, downloads, referrals, and pages visited from email.
- Know what metrics matter for each email. For example:
 - o New product announcements – Open rate
 - o Recipes – Click-to-open rate
 - o Coupons – Print and redemption rates

Create a Value Exchange

Decide on the value proposition of the email program and communicate it clearly to subscribers. Emails can provide value through offers, information, tools, resources, and more. Set clear expectations upfront and consider providing something exclusive that non-subscribers won't receive.





Support the Customer Journey

Understand how customers' needs evolve throughout their journey and be prepared to meet them. Email automation platforms make it easy to trigger certain messages based on available data, including profile information (e.g., birthdays) and subscriber behavior (e.g., sign up and abandon cart).

Segmentation & Versioning

- Versioning and dynamic content should be meaningful. Don't version just for the sake of it.
- Consider what data will allow for significant versioning or targeting and plan for how to collect and store it.
- Create a test plan with specific, measurable hypotheses and goals. It acts as a guide for purposeful testing that will improve the email program.



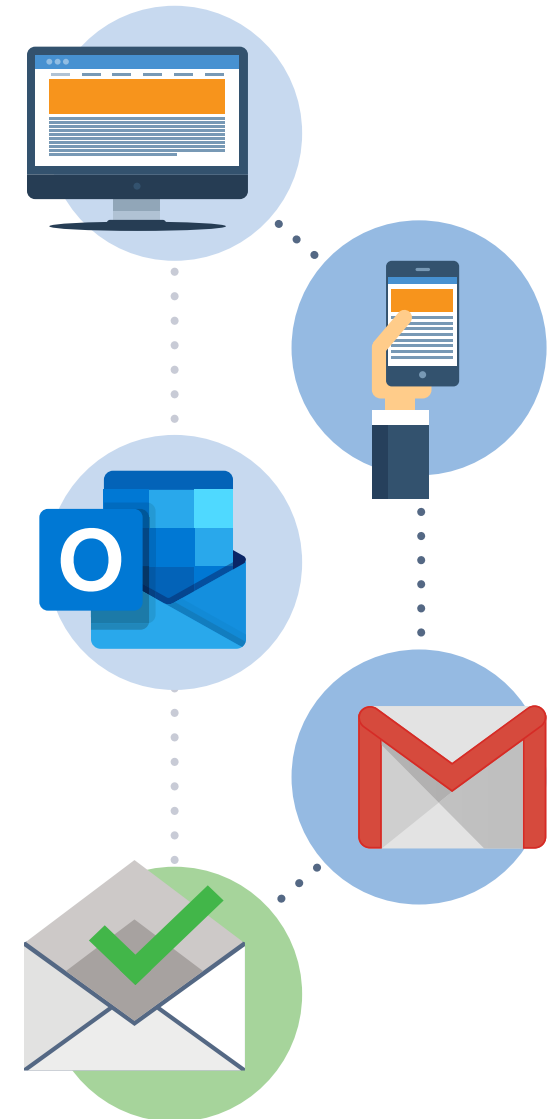
EMAIL MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Data

- When versioning or utilizing dynamic content, look at what audience data is available. It isn't possible to identify who should get what if the information doesn't exist in the database.
- Verify data can be indexed according to required reporting metrics. For example, ensure reports can be customized or use separate sends to see opens by source.

Display & Imagery

- If an audience already exists, look at reports on the brand's current and historical email client stats (desktop vs. mobile, Outlook vs. Gmail, etc.).
 - A brand sending primarily B2B emails whose audience is opening on a desktop in Outlook will not be able to have the same functionality as brands whose audience is mainly opening on an iPhone.
 - If a majority of the audience is opening in Gmail, limit how much content is in the email; Gmail will clip the message if it's too heavy.
- Consider a short plain-text version of the email for older wearables (like early Apple watches), which might not be able to view design or images.
- Make large images clickable.
- Keep total weight of downloaded images less than 2MB, ideally less than 500KB.





Deployment & Deliverability

- Follow an IP warming schedule when starting to deploy from a new IP.
- Keep total weight of HTML under 100KB to prevent clipping by Gmail and deliverability problems.
- View online and other redirect links should be branded. If not possible, use the default for the email software and confirm another business unit URL is not in place.
- Use a spam filter or other tools, such as Litmus, eDataSource, and Email on Acid, to inspect the message before sending a test and finalizing template(s).
- Ensure email authentication is passing all checks:
 - SPF
 - DKIM
 - DMARC

These checks help prevent emails from being marked as spam, or from being spoofed by spammers trying to use a brand's domain to send illegitimate emails.

- Implement a tool for monitoring feedback from major providers (Gmail postmaster and MS snds).
- Monitor deliverability and throttle as needed.





ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Content

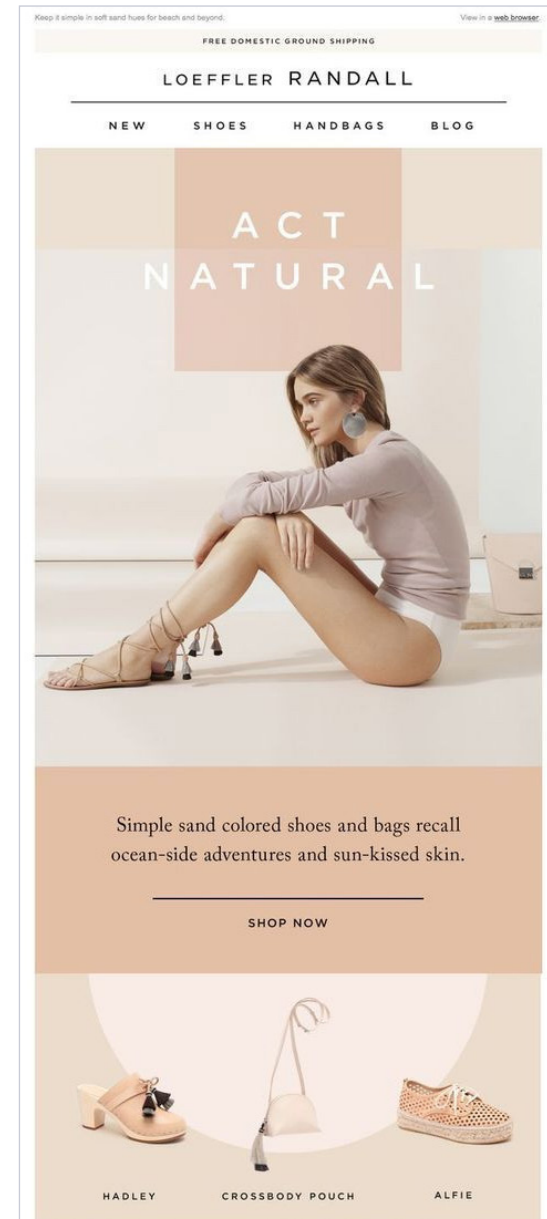
- Write an informative subject line. This string of text works as the first impression of the email and will determine if the email is relevant to the recipient.
- Email content needs to be assembled left-to-right and top-to-bottom.

Design

- As many people are sensitive to color, the background and text need to contrast enough to be readable.

Development

- Code concisely. Messy code often leads to longer load times and can have unexpected display results.
- Keep a consistent hierarchy by using `<h1>`, `<table>`, etc., so the information stays in the correct order.
- Describe images with alt text.
- Feature informative link text. Link text tells email recipients what the link will be once clicked — “read more” is not enough.





EMAIL CREATION



SUBJECT LINES & PREHEADERS

Overall Considerations

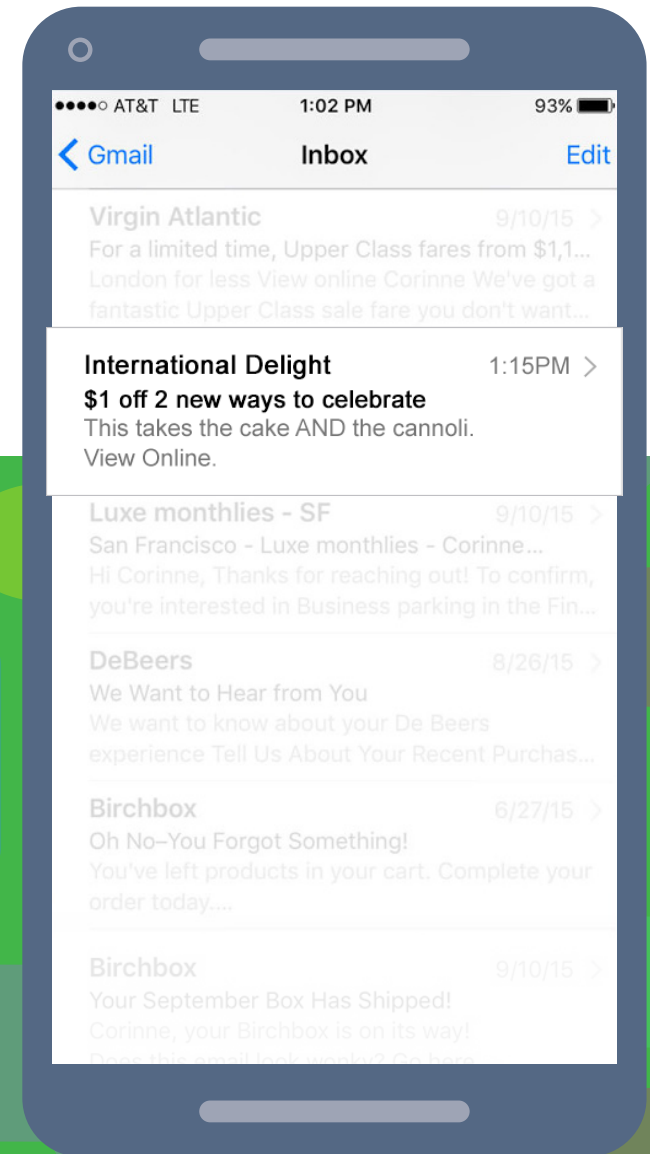
- Keep subject lines and preheaders to 35-50 characters each to prevent the end from being truncated in a recipient's inbox.
 - Note: Where they are truncated also depends on the recipient's screen size.
- Think about subject lines and preheaders as a pair. The two should flow together seamlessly and give the recipient a reason to open the email.
 - Note: Not all email clients and settings allow recipients to see the preheader, so don't depend on the preheader to pay off the subject line.
- Teaser/vague subject lines are a good way to get recipients interested in opening emails, but the email content must pay off what the subject line sets up.
- Emojis can increase engagement by drawing the recipient's eye to an email in a crowded inbox. A few notes to keep in mind:
 - Don't rely on emojis to make a point. Some browsers can't render certain ones, and recipients may be confused by a blank rectangle.
 - Overusing emojis can cause emails to land in the spam folder.
 - Emojis should relate to the email's message.





Specific Inclusions

- When the email offers a coupon, include it in the subject line. People love to save!
 - If the subject line is long, keep the coupon mention near the beginning.
- For new products, include “new” in the subject line. People also love being in the know about the latest and greatest products.
- Personalize subject lines with the recipient’s name for trigger emails, such as Reactivation, to help capture attention.





EMAIL CONTENT

Overall Considerations

- Know the audience and create email content that is relevant to them.
- Create a single story. Even if an email includes different topics, e.g., product, recipe, blog, coupon, it's still possible to weave a cohesive message.

Copy Guidelines

- Language should be consumer-centric, even when humble-bragging about positive brand initiatives. Think “you” not “we.”
- Focus on benefits to the recipient instead of features of the product.
- Calls-to-action (CTA) should:
 - o Be clear, concise, and actionable, e.g., Buy Now, Find Near You, Play Video.
 - o Reflect the webpage where the CTA links.



HORIZON ORGANIC

GROWING YEARS

ORGANIC WHOLE MILK

Nourish the Moment WITH HORIZON® ORGANIC GROWING YEARS™

Through all of your kids' little and big moments, we're here to cheer you on and deliver the nutrition they need with Growing Years organic whole milk.

WATCH THE VIDEO

THE SOUND IT OUT YEARS

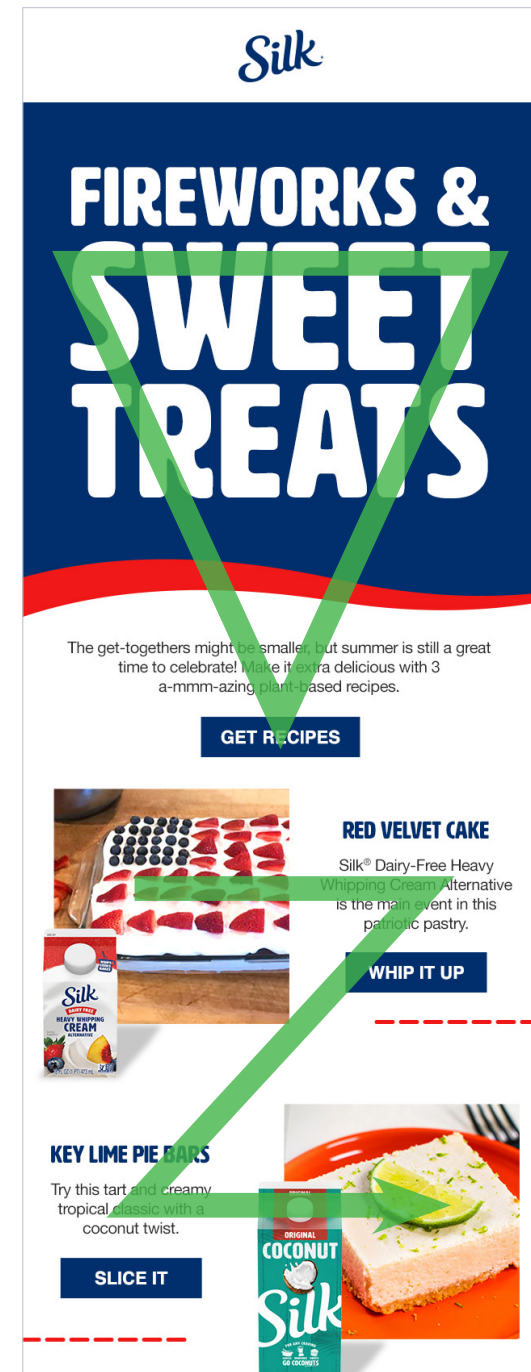
Every delicious glass of Growing Years whole milk has 50mg of DHA to help support brain and eye health.



EMAIL DESIGN



Overall Considerations

- Email hierarchies are usually laid out in one of two patterns.
 - Z pattern – Images on the left and copy on the right
 - Inverted pyramid: An image at the top followed by a headline, subcopy, and CTA, creating a funnel appearance that drives the recipient's eye to the CTA
- Not everything needs to be the same weight; items closer to the top or larger are often viewed as more important.
- White space is essential. It is easy on the eyes and encourages recipients to view more of the email content.
- Email clients do not display content consistently across the board. When designing interactive emails, it may be necessary to create segments with different content to ensure optimal user experience.
- Personalization is more than adding a first name. Choose portions of the email to be tailored to various audience segments, and design with them in mind.



Brand Fonts, Photography, & Artwork


- Typically, brand fonts are not live fonts. Thus, use brand fonts for headlines and choose a web safe font for subcopy.
- Designers need source files for any brand artwork that is desired to be included in the email, such as vector art in AI, EPS, and PDF formats. Before sending a PSD, confirm all linked artwork is included with the file.
- Any brand photography should have suitably high resolution and may be subject to cropping to fit within the space and format.



WE'RE BAKING UP A BETTER BISCUIT

NEW! We've reformulated our Pillsbury™ Golden Buttermilk Baked Biscuits to be lighter, fluffier and tastier than ever! See what's changed and get some menu inspiration with our [free biscuit recipe booklet](#).


[SEE WHAT'S NEW](#)



LTO TAKEOUT INSPIRATION

Offer this sweet and savory twist on classic Monte Cristo sandwiches as an LTO takeout item.

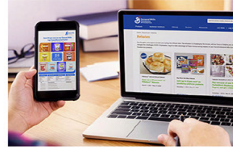
[GET RECIPE](#)



HOW TO CREATE GREAT LTOs

Follow our simple tips to create impactful limited-time offers that your customers can't refuse.

[SEE OUR TIPS](#)



OUR REBATES HAVE GONE DIGITAL!

Our new digital process makes it easier than ever to redeem and submit money-saving rebates, with faster processing and on-demand tracking.

[SEE HOW IT WORKS](#)

POPULAR LINKS

- [General Mills Supports Restaurants During COVID-19 with Donation to Restaurant Employee Relief Fund](#)
- [Tools and Tips You Can Leverage for Take-out and Delivery](#)
- [Easy Menu Items - Pillsbury™ Pie Dough Rounds and Sheets](#)

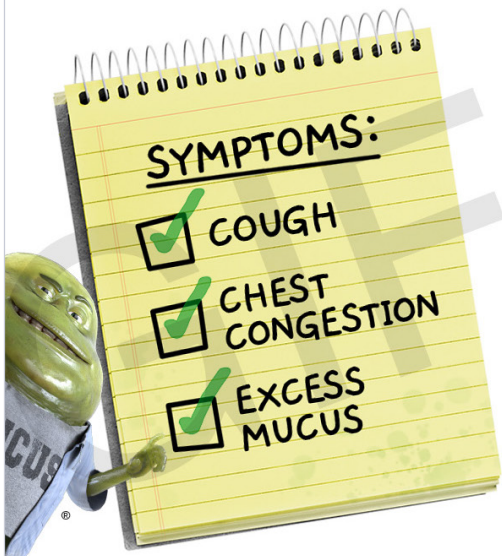

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Not the original recipient of this email? Like what you see? [Sign up here](#).
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GIFs

- GIFs should be simple. Use them to tell only a portion of the story and drive recipients through to the CTA.
- When GIFs are used in email, there are limitations to consider:
 - GIFs have a reduced color palette of only 256 colors, meaning photographic imagery and heavy gradients in imagery will look somewhat grainy.
 - GIF files should not exceed 2MB, which will most likely result in substantial amounts of optimization and frame editing compared to the original. Generally, a full video clip should not be condensed into a GIF because of the compromise in visual quality.
 - Dimensions for a GIF in the hero (first module) of an email should be a vertical orientation of 640px x 800px (or 1280px x 1600px for retina display).




SYMPTOMS:

- ☒ COUGH
- ☒ CHEST CONGESTION
- ☒ EXCESS MUCUS

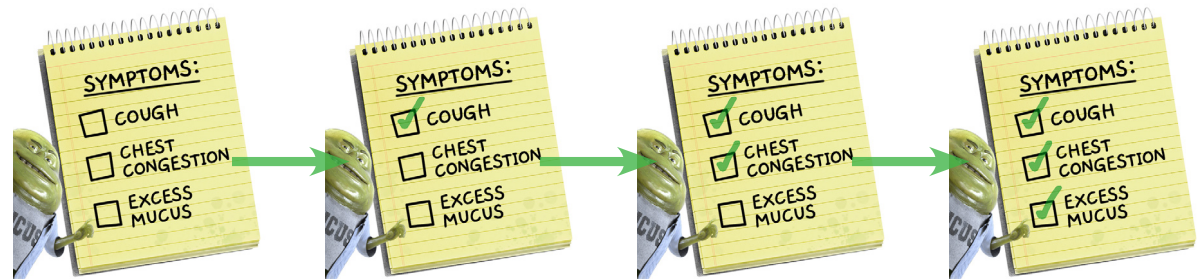

COUGHS AREN'T THAT SIMPLE

Do you have excess mucus, chest congestion or cough symptoms regularly, even without a cold or flu?

Those may be signs of something else going on.



1 IN 10 PEOPLE
say they have these chronic symptoms
but most haven't been diagnosed.*





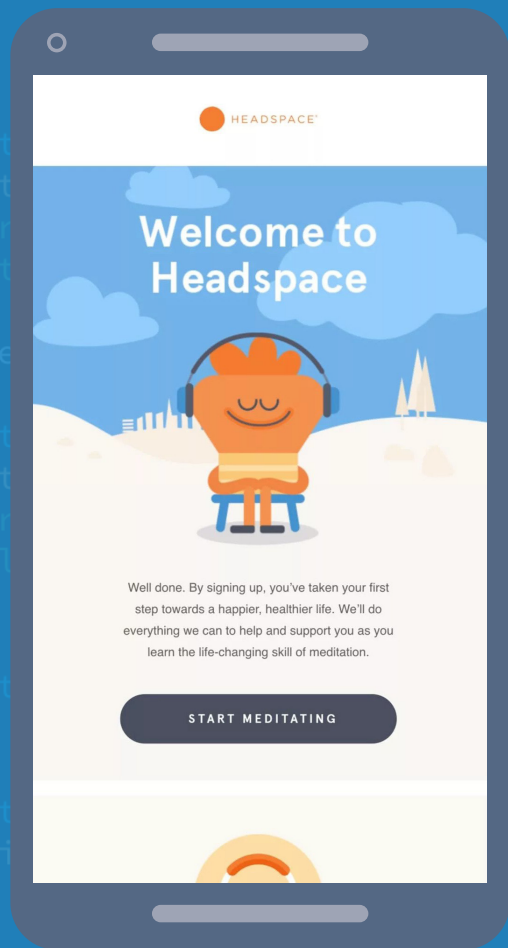
EMAIL DEVELOPMENT

Overall Considerations

- Email width should be 600px-650px wide.
- The text-to-image ratio should be 60/40 at a minimum, using as much live text as possible.
- Try to stay away from creating all-image emails because some email clients automatically block images from rendering.
- Alt text is essential, not only for recipients who have images turned off but also for accessibility readers. Make it clear and descriptive.
- Design and develop responsive emails that look good on mobile devices.
 - A combination of live text and stacked/full width images can achieve this.
 - Use image swapping to ensure the email displays correctly on both desktop and mobile.

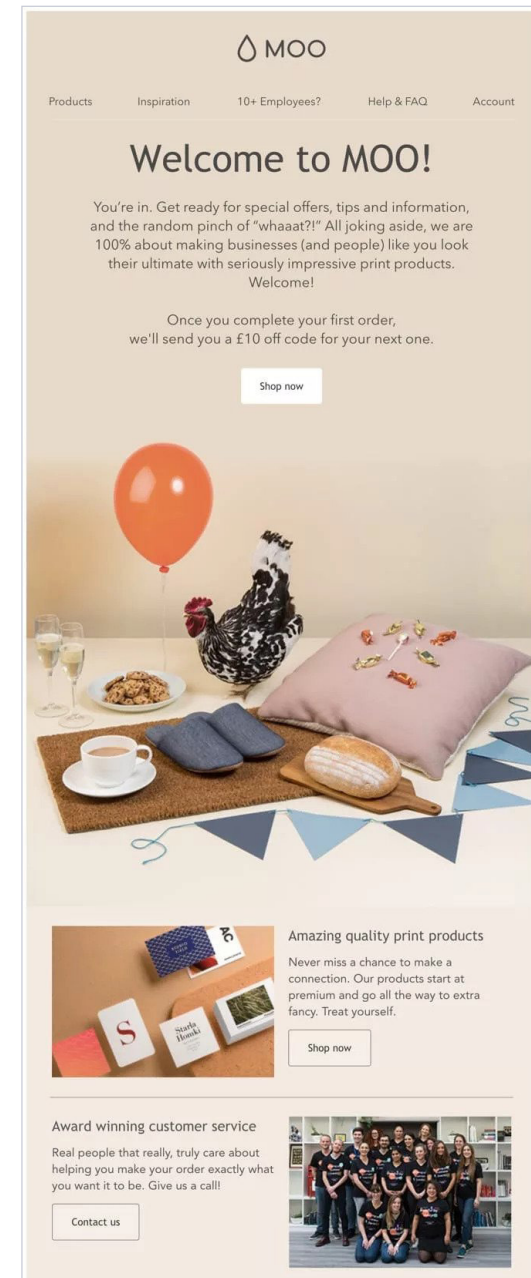
Fonts

- Brand fonts will render only in select email clients, such as Apple Mail and iPhone/iPad Mail app.
 - Use a web safe backup font, such as Arial, Verdana, Georgia, and Times New Roman.
- For headlines, a brand font can be used but needs to be an image to display in all email clients.



Display & Imagery

- Background images and gradients should be used sparingly.
 - Photo-like background images are not ideal. They do not respond well on mobile devices and cause many issues in email clients like Outlook.
 - If a background image is used, keep it simple or include it only in one section of the email.
 - Design a fallback image for email clients that don't support gradients and background images.
- Polls, interactive elements, and hover effects are cool to incorporate into emails but will only work in Apple Mail, Outlook for Mac, and iPhone/iPad Mail app.
 - Create static fallback images for email clients that do not support the functionality.
 - Keep mobile devices in mind when creating this type of content.
 - Ensure this type of message will be effective with an audience before designing and developing.
- Outlook does not support GIFs but will render the first frame.
 - Create a fallback image for Outlook clients if the first frame of the GIF is not the desired message.



Wrap-up

Following these best practices will help create a positive subscriber experience while driving strong return for brands.

Need help creating or managing your email marketing program? Response Media is a full-service customer acquisition and CRM agency with expertise in email strategy, creative, execution, and measurement. We help top brands intelligently grow through data-driven, personalized digital marketing at scale.



CONTACT

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contact@responsemedia.com



SOURCES

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2. eMarketer, *Email Marketing 2019*, 2019. https://content-na2.emarketer.com/email-marketing-2019#How_Are_Consumers_Using_Email

