

The Marketer's Guide to Email Design

08 February 2010



Contents

- So HTML is all the same right? Wrong..... 3
- What is rendering? Sounds like building work..... 3
- How does Outlook render emails? 3
- What will Outlook not render? 3
- Testing Your Design 4**
 - Deliverability Checker..... 4
 - Inbox Preview 4
 - Use test accounts..... 4
- The Creative Design Checklist..... 5**
 - When using a designer for email design 5
 - Checklist..... 6
- Glossary of Jargon..... 7**

Introduction

The point of this guide is help marketers with no html experience to know what to look out for when working with email designers.

It explains some of the more technical terms a designer may use and comes with a handy checklist to provide your email designer that highlights the key differences between designing for web and designing for email.

So HTML is all the same right? Wrong

Designing and building an email is different to designing and building for a website or online banner. If one of your emails is not looking the same in the inbox as in the designed image you approved, you'll probably find that the designer is not aware of the difference between the two types of build.

If you already know your HTML stuff and are looking for a more in-depth guide to creating code for email, you can download 'Creative guidelines for emails' from the insights section at Pure360.com.

Rendering

What is rendering? Sounds like building work...

Rendering is simply the way images in emails are loaded. So whenever you read the word 'render' simply replace in your head with 'load'.

What we all want is a good looking email that will look the same in each reader's inbox, HTML created with the restrictions of email in mind will help ensure you emails look the way you intended when they arrive.

There are differences in rendering capabilities for webmail services such as Yahoo Mail, Gmail, and Windows Live Hotmail, in addition online email clients will render differently as they can be viewed through different browsers e.g. Internet Explorer, Firefox or Google Chrome.

How does Outlook render emails?

We've highlighted Outlook as it's one of the main email clients that people will receive your campaigns in, so if you get it right with them, you're halfway there.

Outlook 2003 will use whichever version of Internet Explorer is installed on the computer to render HTML, this has been a security risk in the past. As a reaction to the security risk, Outlook 2007 will use Microsoft Word 2007 to render the html. Subsequently Outlook 2007 is extremely limiting to which style attributes it will render.

What will Outlook not render?

Some of the more commonly used tags and styles which Outlook and many other inboxes will not render are; back-ground images, cell padding, cell spacing, margin, border, list bullet images or float.

Another really fussy inbox is that of Lotus Notes and there are many, many versions still in use all with different capabilities. Outlook 2010 is on the way and initially it looks to be even more restrictive, but we will not know the exact limitations until its release.

Testing Your Design

The only way to be truly sure of your design is to test it every which way you can. If you're using a template that you then just change the main body content in – put it through some rigorous testing and then you'll be sure that your next emails will be spot on.

There is nothing worse than basing five e-shots on a template that is wrong – your recipients will think you're pretty dumb to keep missing the same mistake.

A few tools you can use are:



Risk	Rule name	Description
low	URIBL_GREY	Contains an
low	HTML_IMAGE_RATIO_04	BODY_HTML

Spam and Format Checking

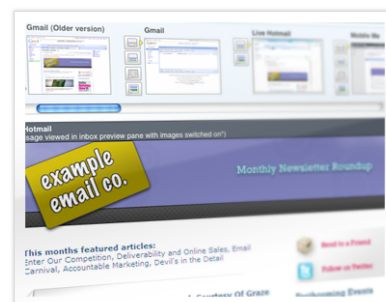
Any good ESP should give you tools to test your email for possible spam like content and html formatting that might cause rendering problems. PureResponse has a 'deliverability checker', which will highlight any issues with HTML coding or design.

How does the deliverability checker work?

A simple 'traffic light' status will alert you to issues within your email that could increase your chances of getting blocked or marked as spam.

Inbox Previews

Many ESPs will give you the chance to preview your message in multiple inboxes from inside your account. Some tools can also give you previews for different states including images blocked and images loaded.



Use test accounts

Send test emails to your test accounts in all the mail clients, to ensure they're looking as they should. Remember that the different email clients render emails in slightly different ways, so if you have information as to which clients they're using, even better – focus on those. *Tip – If you're using PureResponse, once you've used the test send tool do an actual send to a test list, so that you're experiencing the campaign exactly how your recipients would.*

The Creative Design Checklist

Whether you are using a designer or creating emails yourself in a WYSIWYG editor, the following is a comprehensive list that you can use to check your design. If you ensure the following you will produce a great email that renders correctly in each mail server.



When using a designer for email design

If you are using a designer, it is important you make it clear that you will need a creative designed specifically for email. Your designer should be following XHTML coding standards. XHTML standards are about closing every tag, only using lower case for tag and attribute names.

We've put together a creative design checklist, which you may want to send to your designer, so they are clear what exactly what is required from their design. Of course, your designer may specialise in email design and will know what is required.

Checklist

1. If your email design is simple, you could just use text interspersed with an image or two, but we'd generally recommend using tables to make the content more easy to read by controlling the width and arrange images in a more aesthetically pleasing way
2. Don't use CSS in the head of the file; it will often be removed by the email client. Tables should control layout, styles can still be applied in-line to each element.
3. Don't use background images unless the design will still look ok without them (very few inboxes will render background images, including Outlook 2007.)
4. Use web friendly fonts (Use only the most basic style attributes to designate font size, colour, and type and use them within basic HTML tags (avoid <div>tags).
5. Don't import from Microsoft Word, unless you are using an application that will remove the formatting on imported text from Microsoft Word.
6. Make sure images are hosted somewhere everyone can see them.
7. Don't embed video.
8. Ensure image files are saved as the correct size, rather than being large files that take a long time to download only to be artificially shrunk by the html.
9. Use alternative text to describe images, if images are blocked, the recipient can still understand the context. Also beneficial for the visually impaired using screen readers.
10. Text to image ratio should be 60:40. To achieve this balance, where possible convert images to text and use tables and inline styles. Also don't forget to add text - like privacy disclaimers, and legally required information such as *the legally required* company contact plus registration details, which will increase the text to image ratio.
11. If not structured properly, tables can easily break. It's useful to set the width of the table and use a row with transparent gifs in each cell that set the size of each column, to avoid cracks appearing in the layout.
12. Set table width to 600 pixels max. This makes it a more practical size to view, especially when seen in a preview pane.
13. Put image maps inside <body> tags. When using image maps, the <map> and <area> tags should be between the open and close <body> tags with the rest of the content. Otherwise he links will not work in certain Web e-mail clients that strip out everything apart from the contents of the <body> tag (such as Hotmail).

Tip - you can find more in depth detail on rendering capabilities of Outlook here:

<http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa338201.aspx>

Glossary of Jargon

Alternative Text: Often images are blocked by ISPs and they'll ask you if you want to view the images (as in those boxes with a red cross in them where an image should be). Alternative text is used to describe the images and in many cases it will link through to a relevant webpage related to the email or image. Alternative Image Text is also known as image tags.

Background Images: Is a graphic, generally hosted online, which is used to create texture to your design.

Cascading Styles Sheets (CSS): Is a way to style HTML, the style sheet (or CSS) is the presentation of the content.

HTML: (HyperText Markup Language) Is basically a series of tags which surround content and apply meaning to it. <html> is the opening tag which indicates everything between that and the </html> closing tag is HTML. The stuff between <body> and </body> is the main content.

Image Maps: This refers to when an image is overlaid with hyperlinks, so that different portions of the image, if clicked, link through to web pages.

Pixels: Short for Picture Element (px), a pixel is a single point in a graphic image. Monitors display pictures by dividing them into thousands of pixels.

Rendering: Rendering is simply the way email content appears when loaded.

WYSIWYG editors: (What You See Is What You Get) is the term used to describe a system where content is displayed in a visual (rather than code-based) way when editing HTML, often appearing in a similar form to Microsoft Word. Most decent email marketing software will have a WYSIWYG editor that allows marketers to view/edit the HTML of their email in a more friendly and familiar way.