



20 HTML Email Tips

HTML design for email is a trickier prospect than HTML for the Web. Your message must display correctly across dozens of clients and platforms, each with its own quirks and rendering issues.

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

This list of 20 best practices addresses critical issues in coding and design in three key areas: format, functionality and usability. These issues affect rendering (how recipients view your message in their email clients) and deliverability (how likely your messages will be blocked or filtered as spam because of incorrect or suspect coding).

It's not a comprehensive manual of HTML and newsletter design (that's under development now). However, it pinpoints common problems HTML in email presents and offers alternatives and suggestions.

FORMAT

This section covers issues that affect how your message appears, including coding, images, message width and file size.

1. Code emails by hand if you can.

HTML design programs such as FrontPage are not ideal for designing HTML emails, because these "WYSIWYG" (What You See Is What You Get) editors typically add extra code that causes havoc with certain email clients. Have an HTML programmer code your email template by hand to keep it clean. Otherwise, use programs such as HomeSite and Dreamweaver and remove any unnecessary code, if any, by hand.

2. Avoid nested tables.

Some email clients, Lotus Notes and Netscape Messenger in particular, may not render them correctly.

3. Do not use canvas background images, which don't display in most email clients.

Background images for individual table cells are generally acceptable but may not appear in some clients such as Lotus Notes.

4. Host images on your Web site instead of embedding them in emails.

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Some ISPs filter emails with embedded images. Also, the file size can get quite large with multiple embedded images, and this might also get the message blocked. Host those images on your Web site instead and make sure all paths point to the full URL, e.g., <http://mysite.com/images>.

5. **Avoid 1x1 pixel spacer gifs (to force widths in your table data cells) as spammers use them and may flag your email as spam.**
6. **Avoid using Cascading Style Sheets.**

CSS on a Web site can simplify the coding process and ensure a consistent style, but in HTML email, they can cause incorrect rendering in some email clients or simply get stripped out or overwritten. If you must use CSS, choose the embedded styles also known as inline. Embed the style within the two body tags and not within the header.

7. Keep HTML Emails to 500 to 650 pixels wide.

HTML messages that are wider force the recipient to scroll horizontally in many email clients to see the whole message. Messages that are too wide are especially problematic when users give your email only a quick glance in a preview pane.

8. **Keep message file size under 100 KB.**

Although most desktop and Web-based email clients no longer balk at downloading large files, recipients still using dial-up connections might not have the patience to let a big file load, especially one 100KB or larger. Try to keep emails less than 50 KB if possible. But larger emails up to 100 KB generally won't cause filtering or loading problems.

USABILITY

The preview pane and blocking by default of images and links are two of the biggest challenges to HTML design.

9. **Validate HTML content.**

Invalid or broken HTML code can cause rendering as well as delivery issues. Several HTML design programs have built-in validators; you can also use this free utility. Additionally, tools such as Lyris' Email Advisor enable you to see how your emails render in more than 40 different email client environments.

10. **Avoid scripting if you can.**

Script vulnerabilities pose security risks. Messages with scripts might either get blocked by the email service or have the script stripped out by the email browser. Instead, move readers to your Web site, where you can use dynamic components more safely.

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11. Link to a Web version of your email message.

This benefits recipients whose email clients don't render your email properly, no matter how carefully you format it. Also, create a text version for those who don't want HTML. Put the "Web version" link near the top of the message for maximum visibility.

12. Use image alt tags.

These show one or two words describing an image or an action when the image doesn't display because of slow loading time or default image blocking.

13. **Redesign the top of your email template so that readers who see only 3 to 4 inches across, 1 to 2 inches deep and none of the images will see your key content.**

Otherwise, your message will have no visible function. Use HTML tags – colors, bold and backgrounds to make this area both functional and attractive – even without images.

14. **Use horizontal layout rather than vertical.**

This allows readers who scroll down in the preview pane to see more content in the pane. Eliminate story layouts and "skyscraper" ad formats that are more than the pixel equivalent of 4 inches deep.

15. **Incorporate both text and HTML into newsletters or offers and use alt tags, color and graphics instead of live images linked to your Web site.**

FUNCTIONALITY

This section covers crucial benefits HTML brings to email, such as search, navigation and links back to your Web site.

16. **Provide lots of active links to content at your Web site.**

Our studies have found adding more links – to special content or offers, related information, etc. – actually boosts your click and conversion rates. Don't forget navigation links, subscriber management in addition to multiple product or content links.

17. **Navigation through your email should reflect your Web site navigation – don't use different terms.**

Key shopping channels or functions on your Web site should have links from your email. But also design your main email navigation to reflect the key actions you want recipients to take from the email.



18. Add functionality such as Send-to-a friend...carefully.

Many email clients won't render forms correctly or pass the data from an email form to your Web site. We generally recommend using links to your Web site for send-to-friend forms, surveys, search boxes, etc. to ensure the greatest compatibility.

19. Add a subscriber-management section to each template.

Make it easy for your subscribers to change their email address, update their subscriptions or profiles, unsubscribe or contact your company right from their email.

20. Host rich-media functions such as inline audio, video or Flash on your Web site instead of embedding them in an email.

Instead, post a link that connects directly to these functions on your Web site. Many recipients won't have a compatible computer platform, email software or correct version they need to render those functions correctly.

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About Hotel Traffic Builders (HTB):

We are a full-service digital marketing agency dedicated to the boutique hotel & residential resort industry.

Our mission is very simple: *"To maximize sales success by providing our clients with exceptional internet marketing results"*.

Our clients consistently enjoy industry leading success because of our dedicated focus and experience. Our use of state-of-the art tools, best in class technology and wealth of industry experience enable us to provide full solution applications. We recognize that our clients are experts at running their hotels, and our role is to develop and maintain online marketing leadership for our client hotels.

We differentiate ourselves through:

Industry Expertise

We have a singular specialized focus on boutique hotel, resort and vacation home e-Marketing. Our sole goal is to be the best at what we do by ensuring maximum success for all of your e-marketing activities. Our 52 person design and development technology team delivers unparalleled quality and results. Our sole focus is resort marketing.

Individual Customized Creative Approach & Solutions

Every client has unique needs, opportunities and priorities, our e-Marketing plans are always custom built and based on in-depth research of your specific hotel.

Cutting Edge Technology

We use proprietary state of the art tools and applications that enable project efficiency, measurability and success of your e-marketing. We not only promise success, we document it in a 24/7 real-time secured private reporting platform that we create for every hotel client. Our clients never wonder about how hard their marketing dollars are working because they always know!

Return On Investment

The true measurement of our success is our proven ability to deliver reservation bookings. We grow booking results year over year, and we grow advance bookings, which result in higher occupancy levels and ADRs.

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Contact us at: www.HotelTrafficBuilders.com or call us **954-421-6399**

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