HTML CREATIVE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Simple and Clean HTML Design to Maximize Deliverability of the Message

Effective design does more than simply look nice. It should support the message in every way. Simple and clean HTML helps maximize deliverability, and it should render correctly in a recipient's email client (Outlook, Gmail, etc.). When a design is properly executed, it really is worth a thousand words. Along with compelling copy, good design can help lead readers to the call to action faster which means better marketing results for you.

HTML DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Use HTML software such as Dreamweaver, MS FrontPage, or Adobe GoLive. Do not use MS Word, MS Publisher, or other graphics/desktop publishing software. If used properly, Adobe ImageReady or Fireworks can be used for design in some instances along with HTML software.

✔ Do not use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), JavaScript, Submission Forms, Layers, or Rich Media (i.e. Flash movies, animation). These elements do not render correctly in many email ISPs, and they can cause deliverability issues, which will affect the campaign responses and hinder your deliverability for future campaigns.

✔ Use basic HTML tags for the coding. If your HTML software uses CSS for formatting, adjust the preferences to apply basic HTML formatting tags only. If necessary, inline style sheets are an acceptable substitute for CSS, but they may still be stripped by some ISPs and email clients.

Whenever possible, minimize the use of graphics/images in the design to avoid these potential issues:

⚠ Many recipients have images/graphics disabled in their email account for emails from unknown senders, so they won't see any information within the images/graphics. If you have included formatted text as well within your HTML design, the recipient can at least read the text part of the message even if images are disabled. And if the recipient is able to read some text, they will be more likely to accept/enable the images to view the complete layout and your whole message.

⚠ The higher the image-to-text ratio in an HTML email, the higher the SPAM score. We recommend no more than 30% of the design area be images or graphics.

⚠ The more images/graphics that are used, the more time it takes for it to download. Potential customers may click 'close' or 'delete' if they have to wait for images to load.

⚠ Any print that is part of the image/graphic may be fuzzy or blurry, making it difficult to read. This happens because graphics/images are sometimes optimized or compressed to reduce file size and maximize download speed.

⚠ Do not put comments in the HTML code of your email as they can potentially flag spam triggers.

✅ Provide a hyperlink to a related website or an email address that the recipient can contact if no website is available.

✅ Keep the width of the HTML message under 650 pixels to ensure the design is not cut off too much in preview panes.

✅ For B2B email campaigns especially, keep in mind that background images do not display for users of Outlook 2007. Background colors will render, so those can be used as an alternative. If you like, the email coding can load a background color if the background image does not.

✅ Keep the message size less than 50KB for consumer emails, and fewer than 75KB for business emails to optimize download time and deliverability.

HTML DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

✅ Focus design efforts on areas that can maximize deliverability and response rate.

✅ Minimize use of graphics and images to logos, photos of products, or situational photos that support the message visually. Do not rely on graphics and images for the main content.

✅ Keep the email short and concise, about one page maximum in length. Newsletters may be longer, but the full details of a message should probably be included on a web page hyperlinked from the email.

✅ Hyperlinks should be prominently displayed and used in multiple locations if you want to drive customers to your website and measure results by click-throughs.

✅ Place the most important info "above the fold," which is typically the top 2-4 inches of the design. Include a headline, call to action, and a small logo in this area to grab the attention of the reader right away. Do not rely exclusively on images/graphics for this information in case they are blocked.

✅ Use only universal fonts such as Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, or Times New Roman. Other fonts may not be installed on a recipient's computer and will be rendered with a default font and may not appear how you intend.

✅ Clearly identify your call to action—what do you want the recipient to do?

✅ Use bullet points to identify key messages.

✅ Minimize the number of fonts, sizes, and colors for easy visual flow and a professional look.

✅ Keep the subject line to fewer than 50 characters. Some ISPs cut off anything longer and may not be seen by some recipients.

✅ When possible, avoid using white text (#FFFFFF). Spammers sometimes use white text on white backgrounds to hide text, so spam filters may flag the use of white text.

✅ Use headers, especially those featuring a brand or logo.

✅ Add a colored background behind a small but important part of the email message to make it stand out.

InfoUSA's analysis service decreases the likelihood that the email will be filtered out as spam.

Ask our email experts for details by calling 888.297.0899.