

A quick guide to...

Increase Your Emails' Impact

In this guide...

We will shed some more light on effective planning of your email message sections, in accordance with industry's best practices.





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1. Preheader

If you regularly skim through your junk folder, you must have noticed some patterns when it comes to the structure of emails that land there. Let's face it – there's a horde of marketers that decide to take the risky route and, instead of writing well-formatted HTML messages, they simply insert a one gigantic image and link it to their landing page. This not only runs counter to HTML and email design best practices, but it also guarantees a junk folder "final stop" in most cases.

Yes, marketers, even a great domain reputation and a top-notch team optimizing <u>deliverability</u> round the clock will NOT help you if your HTML template violates spam rules.

That's why we've decided to draw up a 4-part series of posts that will shed some more light on effective planning of your email message sections, in accordance with industry's best practices.

1.1 Let's talk about preheaders

So let me start by introducing you to our first "preheaders" article with a case study. First, let's explain what is a "preheader" and why it's <u>so</u> important!

Imagine you're walking down the street looking in store windows, trying to decide whether to go in or not. You just walked by a chocolatier and it stopped you in your tracks! The gorgeous, mouth-watering, colorful truffles, crèmes, and jellies are already melting in your mouth.

The **preheader** is just like your storefront window – the email section subscribers see right after they open your email.

Now what you have to do is get them **salivating** with the preheader, then exceed their expectations with some juicy offers, great info, and cool graphics or video.

A picture's worth a 1000 words, so let's examine a screenshot of a typical HTML email found in a spam folder. Please note that we're dealing here with the "**images off**" version as most ISPs (such as Gmail, Yahoo or Hotmail) block images by default nowadays. The purpose of this is to make the spammer's life a little harder and prevent them from displaying offensive pictures and knowing whether the recipient opened the message..





Here's an example of what such a spam mail may look like:

Not really exciting, eh?

In a well-constructed email message, you should be able to **easily** recognize the following sections:

Preheader, header, main call to action and footer.

Newsletter	to me	show details Jul 9 (6 days ago)	♣ Reply	1
nages are not d splay images belo				
Double - A Foreign				
Reply → Forwa	HIQ.			

The marketer could surely do a better job of getting our attention right away. Think enticing window display or "impulse" candy section at the grocery check-out line!

One look should tell you the sender is not getting the best possible outcomes because the HTML content is kind of "mooshed" together rather than separated into sections, such as the next example.

Instead of following the best practices path, this designer has decided to base the entire message format around one huge graphic that doesn't give the recipient a clue about the topic or content before he chooses to unblock images.

If you saw this in your email, would you unblock images if you had NO idea whether it came from your neighborhood florist or a Canadian Pharmacy spammer?

The images lack a text description (no ALT attribute), so subscribers are unable to link the blocked image with any particular business or offer.





1.2 Use "ALT" Attribute To Describe Your Images

Senders should **always use ALT attribute** to describe an image with concise text, even if the graphic itself is blocked. This gives them some idea of what they're going to see once the image is unblocked.

Why are **ALT attributes** a "must" for senders today?

Simple: the number of email clients that block images by default these days is mind-numbing. And the fact that you're a legitimate and reputable business doesn't mean that 100% of your subscribers will instantly recognize your company name.

ALT attribute gives your subscribers that extra bit of information they need to feel confident about your message – and that increases responsiveness and engagement.





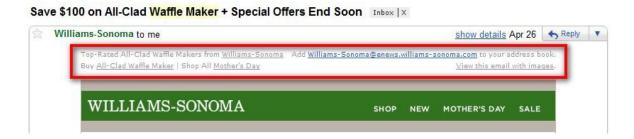


1.3 How to create a great pre-header?

OK, enough doom and gloom! Let's get to the point and focus on preheader design. Sometimes we spend so much time on the core marketing message, we totally skip the preheader part, yet doing so is like leaving your store window empty – deliberately reducing your open rate and click-throughs.

There are no golden rules regarding what preheaders should include but, based on our experience, you should consider the following points:

• Try using snippet text, which usually communicates a concise call to action like this:



- **Create a link** to generate the "lite" version of a <u>newsletter</u> for those folks who read their mail on Blackberrys, iPhones and other smartphones;
- Write a short note suggesting that recipients add the sender's address to their address books so that future messages can get past spam filters and into their inboxes;
- Additionally, you could insert an extra unsubscribe link to prevent some recipients
 from hitting the spam button. A "forward-to-a-friend" link in the preheader also
 seems to work well for many of our customers.

When you boil it all down, there are two major factors that influence the effectiveness of your preheaders:

- 1. Those that enhance the marketing message of your offer
- 2. Purely functional elements designed to improve deliverability and email reception.





1.4 Some examples of effective pre-headers

Example #1

"My only regret is that I didn't buy one sooner!" Get the bag she loves. Inbox |X



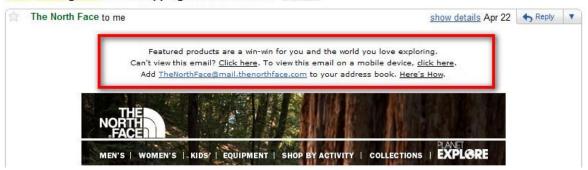
Example #2

The Nike Special Field Boot: A Nike Store.com Exclusive Inbox | X



Example #3

Save some green - Free Shipping on orders \$125+ Inbox | X







1.5 Still not convinced?

If you're still hesitant about adding a preheader in your messages, please consider the following:

- Many email clients block images by default. Preheaders allow you to "smuggle in" the marketing content, even if the rest of the HTML creative will be torn off the shiny call-to-action (CTA) images and buttons and all subscribers will be able to see are empty white frames!
- Again, snippet text is a cunning and effective way to show 1-2 sentences
 encouraging your recipients to open your message. Gmail and MS Outlook 2007
 render snippet text next to the subject line, so you can always use the extra
 characters to enhance your broadcast and give recipients another reason to open
 your newsletter;
- Last, but not least, you should summarize the content of the message in the
 preheader, so recipients can quickly and easily grasp your message without
 scrolling down a couple of times or, worse, deleting your email. In fact, this could be
 a real lifesaver in some cases!

Convinced yet? Just keep in mind the fact that preheaders have special requirements that need to be respected if you want to produce email sections that really deliver results. Here are somes examples of how to use preheader snippets effectively:

- Snippet text needs to be placed at the very beginning of your preheader. If you
 precede it with "Click this link to view the online version" or any other text, you will
 not be successful in rendering the call-to-action before the message is opened;
- Gmail will cut off the CTA snippet text displayed before opening the message after 100 characters. The email client in iPhone allows an additional 40 chars to this, making it 140 characters altogether, so keep these limits in mind when optimizing the snippet text for your next newsletter;
- The call-to-action in your preheader should complement the subject line, instead of simply summarizing it. Use it to motivate recipients to open the message. After all, without opens, there are no clicks and conversions!

To wrap it up, however successful you think your preheader might be, don't forget to **test it** for maximum effect. GetResponse split-testing can be a key to success here, so don't hesitate to make the most of it and pin down the right preheader to "nail" your email marketing success.





2. Header

Having discussed the email preheader in the last section, let's move on to the next part of increasing your email's impact: **the header**. How do you plan this section effectively? Where does it belong on your email layout map? What does "above-the-fold" mean? Can header design have an impact on click-thru rates and ROI?

2.1 The challenge ahead

Right, so you've planned out your **preheader** and made sure it contains a concise call-toaction and link to open the message in a new browser window, as we discussed in the preheader section.

Now you're facing the **real challenge**: how to design the "above-the-fold" in your sales message section in a way that will make subscribers click on the call-to-action and explore the whole message.

2.2 Email headers 101

Let me start with a short definition before proceeding to the nitty-gritty of header design.

The aforementioned "above-the-fold" is simply the 400-450 pixel high space that subscribers see right after they open the message. It's also the typical size of the "preview panes" in most popular email clients. Certainly, the size can vary depending on your subscribers' screen resolution.

<u>Studies show</u> that 1024×768 is still the most popular resolution these days, so fitting the header into the first 400-450 pixels is the best path to follow. You can also perform your own study and scrutinize which screen resolution is the most common among the subscribers on your list. This can be achieved by means of a survey or any web tracking system.

The key point here is to design it in a way that will engage the recipients quickly and make them interact with rest of the special offer content. Otherwise they might abandon the message, or worse, **mark it as spam**.

Unfortunately, the <u>industry stats</u> also show us that not every subscriber will scroll down your email. In fact, **51% of them will delete the message** within 2 seconds of opening it.

Therefore, email marketers should always begin their email template design from the top and work through to the bottom (not the other way around).





2.3 How to create an effective email header

Successful email creative, just like first pages of a book, should start off with a smart title, eye-catching cover and the name of the author, or party communicating with the recipient.

Due to the limited size of most preview panes, the sender needs to pack all 3 elements into the "above-the-fold" section to entice the recipient to engage further. With this in mind, here's what you should typically include in the template header:

- The name of the company, brand or person responsible for sending the offer. It is highly advisable to include the logo in this section to increase trust and the probability of being recognized by subscribers. Trust is the key to successful email communication!
- The purpose of the message: Provide explicit information in the header as to the
 intent of the email (whether it's transactional, event-related, a product campaign or a
 newsletter). It's helpful at this stage to re-evaluate the relevance of your email to
 make sure it's what your subscribers expect.
- A large, clear and enticing call-to-action: The CTA in the "above-the-fold" area is your big chance to create subscriber interest, encourage them to read the whole message and, eventually, convert them into paying customers.

The point here is to avoid vagueness and obscure slogans like "Great Sale", "New Products!", etc. Instead, pin down the exact benefits a recipient could gain upon further reading of the email: "15% OFF on all electronic devices!", "Buy one book, get the second one free!".

Keep in mind that most people these days are **flooded with offers** every day via email, snail mail, robo calls, social media, etc. Using an incentive (like a discount, bonus or gift) makes your email marketing campaigns more likely to stand out among all the noise and inbox clutter.





2.4 How some experienced marketers handle this

Example #1



Example #2



Example #3

New Arrivals at NFLShop.com + Great Father's Day Gifts, click here.







Example #4



None of these headers causes doubt or confusion as to why it's worthwhile to click on the call-to-action: "25% OFF on Car Speakers and Subs", "Accessories Sale, Ends Tuesday!", "New Arrivals Make Great Presents for Father's Day", etc.

The strongest selling point of your offer needs to be prominently displayed if you want to make a big impact on click-through and conversion rates.

2.5 The elements of an effective header

Now let's break the header into a few components, and consider how to make them as effective as possible:

Easily recognizable logo of your brand, website, product or company. Do not
forget to use alt-attribute to give subscribers a hint as to the image content, even if
it's blocked by their email client;

Maciej, try a free 100% natural LAVANILA sample duo for you and baby. > Mobile Version | Web Version







 Crystal clear and concise call-to-action which will communicate from the very start: "Here's the exact benefit you'll obtain once you scroll down / click on the CTA."

RALPH LAUREN



A navigation bar that lists the products offered on your website by category. You
can easily hyperlink each category to facilitate the subscriber browsing experience
and take them directly to the page they're interested in.

Last day to get free shipping on your entire order with \$35+ swim purchase. Details below. View this email on a mobile device, or web browser.

VICTORIA'S SECRET

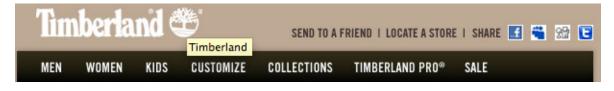
CATALOGUE QUICK ORDER | FORWARD TO A FRIEND

bras panties sleep + lounge clothing shoes swim beauty sale + specials gift cards PINK

In practice, make sure that if you are selling ebooks and recipients click on the "Getting-things-done" category within the email, they are taken straight to those offers.

Some marketers make the mistake of hyperlinking all of the segments to one landing page, which is usually the home page, making recipients browse further and often losing sales opportunities.

A "Share This" option with Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc. integrations. With so
many social media users out there, you can't afford to lose an opportunity to push
your latest offer or newsletter out of the inbox and across the Internet to gain more
exposure.







2.6 Wrapping it up

A well-designed header should be about clarity, transparency and order. Marketers ought to keep this in the back of their heads when trying to design headers with all the elements I'm suggesting.

Although the format should be orderly, the goal is a reasonable balance of text and images and overall proportion, so the content is both accessible and attention grabbing.

Remember, the content located below the top 420 pixels will not be visible to any subscribers unless they scroll down the email.

This is the default size of most email client preview panes (at 1024×768 resolution). To make sure recipients see exactly what you want them to see above-the-fold, I strongly recommend testing the HTML templates before the actual newsletter is sent. You can do this by sending an email to your Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail and AOL accounts, and analyzing how it looks. Then simply adjust to deliver the best header deisgn to all subscriber inboxes.

Last but not least, if you are sending monthly newsletters that do not contain any sales pitches or promo offers and coupons, it's a good idea to include the summary of the message content in the header. It will give your subscribers a hint as to what's included in this "issue" so they can decide whether they're interested to scroll further or not.

2.7 Does your header grab attention?

An effective header should be like a movie trailer.

It's an excerpt from the offer and sums up the most desirable, interesting and enticing passages of the message.

Make your subscribers want to read more and you'll increase your email marketing campaign ROI. Instead of highlighting 4 random products in the header, pack it with **the hottest**, **most exclusive** (or cheapest) offers. Once subscribers scroll down to check out the rest of the offer, you'll know the header's done its job!





3. Content

The design of a captivating <u>newsletter</u> is not easy, and has rules of its own, which I've already discussed a while ago here: (header and preheader). Now it's time to get to the point of each <u>HTML message</u>, e.g. the true email "meat" that includes: the main call-to-action (CTA), and the cornerstone content that generates high conversion.

3.1 Selling isn't done in emails

Before you get down to creating the content that is going to introduce your offer to your subscribers, remember that an email and a website are each designed to do different things. **An email message is NOT the destination for the subscriber**. You can't buy a purse or book a trip in an email client.

What then should be your main goal when you hit send on your email? The goal should be getting your audience to a **landing page**, which is the place the actual conversion occurs: your browser becomes a buyer, your reader becomes a subscriber, and so on.

That's why each of these tools has a unique role: The email's role is to get the click and the landing page's role is to get the sale.

I don't think you like scrolling through paragraph after paragraph of copy in an email — I know I don't. That's why your email content should be limited to a simple message, emphasizing unique selling points and corresponding with a highlighted <u>CTA</u>:

- Click here to find out more.
- Read about all the benefits of investing
- Get all 7 healthy dinner reports FREE! Click here!





3.2 Where are you sending people

These two elements together should work like a one-way traffic sign – it just has to point the subscriber to the destination, e.g. to the **landing page**.

Here's an example of a simple newsletter that gets your imagination going and makes you curious enough to point your cursor at the CTA instantly. (the version without images also makes its impression).

	l'tris message does not display	properly madification.
ACOSTE		
ROTECTION	IN	PROGRESS
rotection in Progress		
Lacoste is the first comp	any to support the "Save your L	guard endangered crocodile species, .ogo" campaign which allows private companie animal that represents their logo.
	> www.lacoste.com	v/saveyourlogo
	> www.lacosta.com	saveyourlogo

You received this email because you registered for Lacoste newsletter.

Make sure you receive it, add <u>contact@content e-lacoste ey</u> to your address book

If this message does not display properly. <u>read it online</u>



Lacoste launches its first operation to safeguard endangered crocodile species.

Lacoste is the first company to support the "Save your Logo" campaign which allows private companies to contribute to the preservation of the animal that represents their logo.

> www.lacoste.com/saveyourlogo





3.3 The magical 600 pixels

There is a marketing nightmare that's even worse than creating a newsletter that makes your user scan for 2 minutes:

It's a newsletter where you have to scroll way to the right to be able to finish reading a sentence. Making the subscriber scroll to click a CTA is like putting an item on a shelf that's so high you need to climb a ladder in order to reach it.

Fixing this problem is easy – don't cross the 600 pixel limit. This width is the most common for preview windows in email clients. It's also helpful to those who read your emails on a smartphone. 320 pixel width in iPhone, 480 in Droid, and 360 in Blackberry mean your newsletter will be readable to your mobile subscribers.

My own private tests have also shown that a newsletter wider than 650 pixels will get an unexpected surprise from from Gmail – being thrown in the spam folder.

3.4 Using a sledgehammer to crack a nut

Not so long ago, <u>email marketing</u> was seen by many as using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. There were no options to <u>target</u> or **personalize** the content so marketers addressed the same messages to all subscribers as a whole. They were blasting with a shotgun, when what they needed was a rifle.

Some still practice this today, which just sends their messages to the reader's junk or spam folder. In other words, their audience never gets the message!

With the tools you have at your disposal today, like **behavioral targeting** or **dynamic content**, you are much more likely to hit the target with your messages. Dynamic content allows advanced automatic personalization of content, counting down the time left to a given event, and even connects with the Central European Bank to convert currencies on the fly. Such messages win hands down with those whose personalization begins with "Hello, [[name]]."





3.5 Match up your colors and branding

To reduce the bounce rate on your **landing page** to a minimum, you should make sure the messages in your newsletters and the content the subscribers later see on the landing page are consistent. What I mean is:

- **Consistent branding**, your colors and marketing themes must match. Your message should be similar in both color and message.
- The right destination (e.g.: if you run an online perfume store and the main CTA in your newsletter is related to the promotion of an X perfume that's just about to end, make sure the subscriber gets a chance to buy the product right after they click the CTA button, and is not taken to the main page where they have to look for it.)
- Consistency of design within a newsletter the subject line/headline, CTA in the preheader, etc. The header and content should be integral parts of the message and complement one another. Don't confuse your subscriber as this will only lessen the effectiveness of the main CTA and the content.

3.6 Testing works. So do it

Did you know that Hotmail, Apple Mail, and MS Outlook 2007 don't render <u>alt-text</u>? Or maybe you missed the fact that Lotus Notes 6 and 7 don't support 8 and 24-bit .png images, which may cause your newsletter to appear blank just where you intended an ROI-generating call-to-action? Or did you notice MS Outlook blocked that background image responsible for the creative consistency of your newsletter AFTER you sent it to your entire base?

Designing effective HTML newsletters is a difficult task, and requires step-by-step formatting instructions. Effective coding in this case is nothing like the creation of a website, so the message has to be tested several times with the most popular email clients to be 100% sure it is displayed just the way you want it to be.





4. Footer

Your footer. It's easily the most neglected portion of your message. It is usually just where all the "boring" parts of your message go - the legal jargon, your contact info, and so on. But if your reader gets down that far, it means that they've read your entire message. So, congratulations. Though it might seem unlikely, your email footer can easily be ruined (just like the title,header, and any other section of an email).

What sets professional e-marketers apart from thieves and spammers is the complete transparency of their offer and contact details that allow your reader to identify the company you work for. So, a footer is pretty important.

4.1 What goes in the footer?

Let's start with what each law-abiding marketer should place in the footer of a commercial newsletter sent by e-mail.

Depending on your country's laws and regulations, you will probably have to place the company's name and address, tax registration number, etc. Western marketers take this information for granted, that yes, you do indeed need to put your real address and company information where people can actually find it.

A lot of the spammers don't work that way. Let's be grateful that we can be so transparent with our audience. It builds a massive amount of trust when you give someone a real name, an honest e-mail address, and accurate contact info.

4.2 Your unsubscribe link is legally needed

Probably the least popular item for all of us marketers is the fact that we must include an unsubscribe link in our footer.

It's really surprising that there are some who will complicate the unsubscribe process for their readers as much as they can. The subscribers may even have to click through several pages, log in to two or three websites, or send a request email before their address is removed from a list.

But let's face it – by making your customer jump through hoops, you shoot yourself in the foot. Not only will this make the subscriber hopping mad, it may also cause them to mark your message as spam – or send your messages straight to the junk folder. This may seriously harm your reputation as a sender, leading to problems with <u>deliverability</u>.

Your lesson from all this? Subscribers know exactly when they want to cancel a subscription and there's no place for vendor lock-in in email marketing.





4.3 Another word of caution

What's more, if you think the footer is a bucket you can throw all the unwanted elements and small print into, and hope your reader won't notice, check out these great footer examples for inspiration.

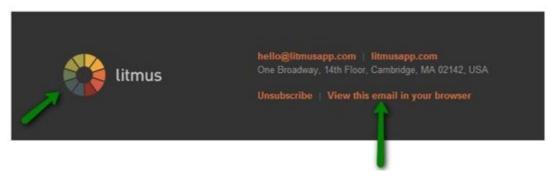
This background image is consistent in design with the rest of the HTML template.
 The footer is usually black or grey text on white background. But you can successfully enliven it with graphic elements, while keeping all the necessary info.



 Add links to social media. Why not give the reader another opportunity to share the newsletter with others? Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn... the choice is yours.



• Enhance the brand with a logo. If you have some free space left, you can try and make the subscribers' life easier by placing links to the newsletter online, or by using a "Forward to a friend" button. This can increase your newsletter sign-ups too.



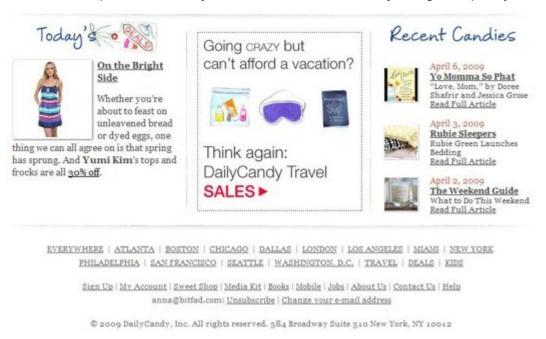




Making the footer a consistent element of the design makes navigation easier. If
you like reading about web design trends, you'll know the importance of a great
footer design. Use the footer to wrap up the lower section of the newsletter and aid in
better navigation.



 Add links to previous issues of the newsletter. If you have a web archive of your newsletter issues, it's a good idea to place links to previous issues in the footer.
 You'll help those that may have missed them or have just signed up on your list.



• Add links to terms of service, regulations, and new promotions. If law allows, try to gather all the legal conditions in one place and link to them, instead of overcrowding the footer with a mass of small print that confuses your audience.





When I think of the biggest flops people make when it comes to newsletter footers, I instantly think of the statement you probably know very well, and you may find in many newsletters. It usually goes like this:

"This newsletter was generated automatically. Don't reply to it, as your message will not be read or replied to."

It's only a dozen words or so, but the message is devastating to your readers. You could just as well say:

"Dear Subscriber, you're one of tens of thousands anonymous records in our database. We have no intention of replying to your emails, because we treat email marketing as a one-way communication channel that is no different than <u>advertising</u> on the radio or TV.

If you don't like it, please unsubscribe. We insist, though, you don't contact us about it, because no one will read your email anyway."

And what do you think about finishing your newsletter off with this kind of message? Not very effective, right? I trust you'll steer clear of this type of language.

Maciej Ossowski is an Email Solutions Specialist for GetResponse, focused on optimizing email deliverability, improving conversion rates, and increasing email marketing ROI for our customers.





5. Help and information

Start by clicking the **Support** link at the top of the page.





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