

Creating Mockups for Email

The quick and dirty:

- Keep your margins 600 pixels wide or less
- Make sure the email makes sense to your recipient BEFORE your images download (i.e. keep images small. and never use an image in place of relevant text)
- Make sure you feature text (beyond just mastheads and images) within the first 300 vertical pixels of the email
- Every email must include an unsubscribe link in an obvious location (at the top of the message, bottom or both)
- Every email must include the physical address (not a P.O. Box) of the sender. Companies in the UK must also include their "Registered in England number"
- Avoid using dark backgrounds – they are generally more difficult to read

At Industry Mailout, we design our customers' email templates in two steps: first, we create a graphic mockup of the template. Then, once the design and layout are approved by the customer, we build their actual template. (Note: The "Text Only" version of the email template is generally an afterthought for clients. As a result, we often find it useful to wait until the HTML email is created before introducing the text version to our clients).

The mockup is designed to the "Best Case Scenario" where images load, CSS styles render uniformly, and web standards are correctly applied. Although this isn't the way the email will appear in every email client, we've developed our standards with the aim of avoiding as many rendering errors as possible.

Simply stated, designing for email is difficult; there are no universally-accepted standards that guarantee how email will display within clients. As a result, designers must consider a number of key factors when creating a message.

These factors include:

- Preview Panes
- Image Blocking
- Web Fonts
- Unsubscribe Link
- Privacy / Legislative Requirements.

Every type of email format has its own unique design requirements, best practices and inherent challenges. The most common types that we work with are Newsletters, Announcements, Invitations, and Promotions.

Preview Panes

According to 2005 statistics

(http://www.emailabs.com/news/emailabs_survey_preview_pane_and_image_blocking.html) 69% of business-to-business email users read their email within the "Preview Pane" of their email program. This feature is also becoming increasingly available through web mail services as well (i.e. Windows Live). There are two varieties of preview pane that designers must contend with: **vertical** and **horizontal**.

Vertical preview panes require that the width of an email be narrow -- 550 – 640 pixels is optimal. There are situations where greater widths could be accepted, (i.e. when recipients are tech-savvy business users.) However, this remains the exception rather than the rule.

Horizontal preview panes offer a minimal area of impact, which tends to challenge designers who are accustomed to web pages or printed communications.

In both of those formats, the masthead can be very large and the message (and/or call to action) is usually placed in the center of the page. If an email message has a large masthead and the content is placed in the middle of the page, the recipient is unlikely to take in anything beyond the initial branding image.

It is important to ensure that at least a portion of the message content appears within the first 300 vertical pixels of an email. If the mailout is a newsletter, you'll want to give the reader an "In this issue"-type index that gives them an indication of -- and navigation to -- the portion of the message that exists beyond the preview pane.

Image Blocking

It's tempting to design an email as a single graphic – a practice which ultimately gives designers complete creative control. Sadly, this approach just isn't practical for email formatting. Many (and possibly most) email programs initially block images in emails. As a result, many of your recipients will only see grayed out boxes or blank spaces where you place your images.

For the email designer, this requires that email copy be text-based, as opposed to being embedded within a graphic. This limits the choice of fonts available for your copy to typical web fonts. These fonts include: Times, Times New Roman, Georgia, Arial, Verdana, Helvetica, Trebuchet MS, Tahoma and Lucida Sans. However, in some extreme cases, email clients will override your fonts with their own.

Mailout elements that should not be images include

- Unsubscribe links
- Privacy Policy Links
- Article titles
- Body copy
- "If you are having trouble viewing this properly" text
- CAN-SPAM address (physical address) and/or Registered in England number

Unsubscribe / Privacy / Legislative Requirements

Unsubscribe - Unless your mailout is an internal mailing (i.e. does not leave your company walls), you'll need to include an unsubscribe link within the message. In many countries, this practice is actually the law. Anything less is an absolute no-no in cyberspace, and we require that all our customers follow suit.

Privacy Policy – A privacy policy is one of the easiest ways to put your reader at ease. If your organization has a posted privacy policy on their website, link to it from your mailouts.

Legislative Requirements – In addition to the unsubscribe link, the two major legislative requirements affecting email messages come from the U.S. and the U.K.

The United States requires you to put a physical address (NOT a P.O. Box) on your mailouts, while the United Kingdom requires "Registered in England" numbers from companies registered within the UK. Although your recipients may not be located in either of these countries, it's quite likely their email inbox is physically hosted there.

Rich Media (i.e. Flash, DHTML, JavaScript, etc.)

Realistically, your best option here is the "Sliding Doors" image rollover technique – and only for **some** email clients. Everything else simply won't really work, and will result in broken messages or blocked mailouts.