

HTML Email Basics

This reference assumes you're a front-end web designer with an intermediate working knowledge of HTML and CSS. You're comfortable coding in and using HTML tables for structure, and working in coding standards that were state-of-the-art in 1999. Feel free to crank up a little TLC or Goo Goo Dolls to get into the spirit of things.

Best Practices: Design

There are a few things to keep in mind when designing HTML email campaigns.

Emails should be 600–800 pixels maximum width. This will make them behave better within the preview-pane size provided by many clients.

Design for simplicity. Use grid-based layers and avoid complicated elements that require HTML floats or positioning.

Assume images will be initially blocked by email clients, or that certain images—background images, for example—will completely fail to load.

Don't design an email that's essentially one large, sliced-up image. While these kinds of emails look pretty, they perform poorly.

Use basic, cross-platform fonts such as Arial, Verdana, Georgia, and Times New Roman.

Avoid elements that require Flash or JavaScript. If you need motion in an email, a .gif is your best bet.

Don't forget about the mobile experience! Is your email readable at arm's length on a small screen? Will the images slow its load time on a mobile device? Are your links easy to press with a thumb?