

Parts of an email message

An email message consists of the following general components:

Headers

The message headers contain information concerning the sender and recipients. The exact content of mail headers can vary depending on the email system that generated the message. Generally, headers contain the following information:

Subject. Subject is a description of the topic of the message and displays in most email systems that list email messages individually. A subject line could be something like "2010 company mission statement" or, if your spam filtering application is too lenient, "Lose weight fast!!! Ask me how."

Sender (From). This is the sender's Internet email address. It is usually presumed to be the same as the Reply-to address, unless a different one is provided.

Date and time received (On). The date and time the message was received.

Reply-to. This is the Internet email address that will become the recipient of your reply if you click the Reply button.

Recipient (To:). First/last name of email recipient, as configured by the sender.

Recipient email address. The Internet mail address of the recipient, or where the message was actually sent.

Attachments. Files that are attached to the message.

Body

The body of a message contains text that is the actual content, such as "Employees who are eligible for the new health care program should contact their supervisors by next Friday if they want to switch."

The message body also may include signatures or automatically generated text that is inserted by the sender's email system.

Components of an email

1. From label

We start with the “from” label. Everyone pays attention to where an email comes from, it’s the first thing a person sees when they scan their inbox. Since this is such an important piece of inbox real estate, you want to make sure that the from label matches your company name, or whoever your recipient signed up to hear from when they subscribed to your list. This helps easily identify an email’s source.

2. Subject line

When an email lands in your inbox, you decide whether or not you’re going to open it in a matter of seconds, right? One of the things you base your decision on is the subject line. Your subscribers do the same. This is why subject lines are so important. You could offer your customers the best deal or information in the world, but if you have a poorly written subject line, your customers won’t get far enough to take advantage of that great deal.

Beth Nagengast, who uses VerticalResponse to promote Cinquain Cellars, a winery in Paso Robles, California, says subject lines should be straightforward. “Tell your customer what’s in it for them,” she says. It’s good advice. Take a look at the subject line examples below.

Example of a subject line component of email campaign

The email from VerticalResponse tells customers the information they can expect to read about. The email from the electronics giant offers a deal. Both subject lines tell readers why they should open the email.

Tips to creating subject lines:

Keep it short. Stick to 40-50 characters.

Don’t overuse punctuation (i.e. !!!) or symbols.

Don’t use all caps.

Don’t repeat the from label.

For more tips, check out our Savvy Subject Line guide.

3. Pre-header

The pre-header is like a subject line's sidekick. It's the first line of text in your email. Some email programs, like Gmail or mobile phones, include the pre-header after the subject line so the reader can get a little more information before opening the email.

4. Content

The message that you create should provide value to your customer

5. Call to action

The point of every email is to get subscribers to take some kind of action. Whether you want them to make a purchase or take an online survey, a clear call to action makes it easy for the recipient to follow through.

When you're creating an email, ask yourself, "What do I want the recipient to do?" If the answer is to make a purchase, you could include a "Shop Now" button in the email. If you want customers to take a survey, you would include a link that takes the recipient directly to the questionnaire.

The main thing to remember when creating the call to action is that it should be clear. We're talking blatantly obvious. Take a look at this email.

Example of a call to action component of email campaign

The call to action is easy to identify. Recipients click on the "Shop now" button, which takes them directly to the online retail mecca in seconds.

One of the best ways to create a clear call to action is to use a clickable button. Check out our button creator to get a killer call to action button for your next email.

Tips to creating a strong call to action:

Keep it short: A call to action should be no more than five words; most are only two words. You want something that's simple and effective. No need for flowery language here.

Use active language: You want customers to act now, not two days from now. Use active words to get your customers moving. Phrases like “Purchase now” or “Try our new service today” are good examples.

Create a sense of urgency: Give customers a reason to act now. For instance, put a limited time frame on deals so customers won’t wait.

6. Images

There’s an old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words, and it especially holds true in email marketing. Using an image in an email is a great way to appeal to your customer’s visual nature. One of the easiest ways to incorporate images is to highlight your product or service. Take a look at the example below.

Example of using image component of email campaign

This email wouldn’t be nearly as effective without the pictures of the product. The images give customers an idea of what the new product looks like. It’s invaluable information for customers and gives them a reason to shop.

If you’re trying to market something that isn’t product-related, such as a service, you have to think outside the box. For instance, think about whom your product or service helps and try to use an image that relates. Take a look at the example below.

Example of using image component of email campaign

This online university uses a picture of a mom and a child in its email to encourage adults to come back to school. Notice how the image complements the text. That should be your goal.

7. Social media buttons

Don’t forget to include social media buttons in your email. You want your customers to engage with your brand as much as possible, so make it easy for them to check out your feeds. Take a look at the email below. Notice the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube options near the bottom.

Example of social media buttons component of email campaign

8. Unsubscribe option

You may not be aware of it, but there are laws regarding email marketing. The CAN-SPAM Act says your email must include a way for customers to opt out. You can go about this in a couple of ways. You can put the word “Unsubscribe” at the bottom of the email that is linked to an unsubscribe option so customers can click on it and remove their names from your list. Or your readers can hit reply and include Unsubscribe in the subject line. At VerticalResponse, we manage all your opt outs.