BE SEEN.
HOW TO
USE VISUALS

a guide by Maxmail

What's Inside

You've heard it. A picture speaks a thousand words. We live in a highly visual world and images are everywhere. According to Hubspot, 65% of respondents want to see images in their emails. A high 88% of readers want to read HTML emails rather than plain text. These are figures not to ignore.

If your emails are in need of some visual oomph, this guide will help you get there. Here we'll teach you how to add more visuals into your emails, render your images so they show correctly and most importantly, incorporate images only when they have a purpose.

Here you will learn:

- How to use images properly in overall design
- How to correctly format your email template
- Importance of testing before sending
- Avoiding SPAM filters

Have a question you'ld like to ask us? Speak to one of our support team or visit our online resource centre.

Now, let's get started.

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How To Use Images Properly

Balance text and image - the 30% rule

No more than 30% of the content in your email campaign should be images. Because not everyone turns on images, you want a majority of your email to be readable without images.

Mobile phone users impact your email viewing greatly. Studies suggest that 20% of consumers check their mail on text-only mobile phone applications so data usage is minimized. If your email is all images and no text, your email efforts are wasted.

Alt tags

This is the descriptive text that is tagged with your image URL. This text appears when the image doesn't load, and appears when you hover over the image. Having this text in your image is important because when a subscriber has images turned off they can still see the descriptive message in place of the image when it doesn't load.

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Alt text should be used in all images. That way your big "20% OFF" promotional image and other call to action images aren't lost in translation.

No trapped messages

Important information such as price, product title, value proposition and expiration date, must not be on your image but be in html text. This includes call to action buttons.

Don't rely on background images

Most email programs, by default don't allow images to load unless you prompt them to. Blocking images from loading prevents spammers tracking views by using embedded images in their emails.

If you have a background image that doesn't load, chances are your email will not be readable if the background color is very similar to the text color. The email will be worthless. If you are using a background image, make sure that the background color allows your text to be readable if your images do not load.

## Don't depend on your images loading

Emails based entirely of images allows for very creative layouts. It also makes your email worthless if for many reasons, your images don't load. Keep in mind that your subscribers will be viewing you email from a variety of email clients, applications and on mobile or behind a

company firewall or other content-filtering system that may block your images.

It would frustrate your subscribers to get an email with a heap of broken image links such as the example below.

Click Here

Click Here
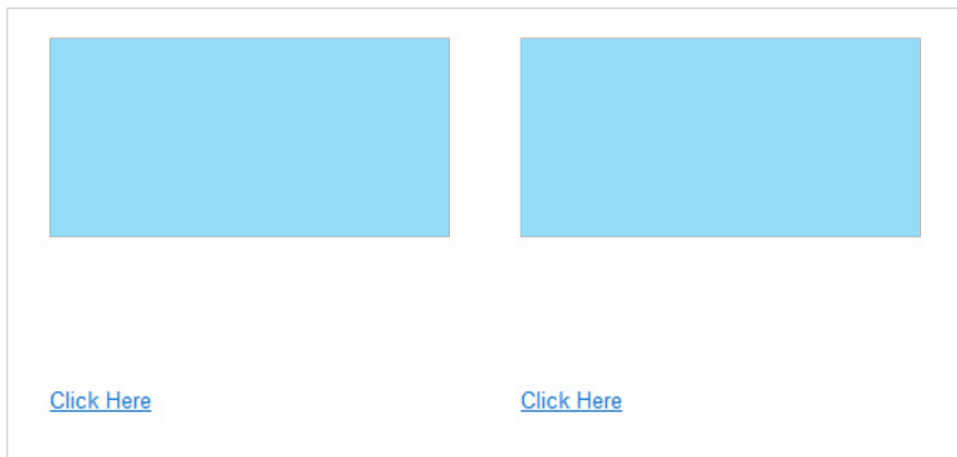
Buying or sourcing free images

Create original images as much as you can so images you use are unique to your brand.

For some businesses, it may be suitable to buy images for a royalty free from online image banks such as www.gettyimages.com or www.istockphoto.com. Here you can purchase photos, illustrations, video files, sound files and flash files. Make sure you know which files are yours exclusively to use and which aren't. You risk your competitors freely using the same images that you may have taken hours building a campaign around if the images are not exclusively yours.

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Online image files are subject to standard copyright laws. A **free** image is usually licensed under the **Creative Commons Licensing Agreement**. This agreement has requirements you must follow, such as giving credit to each picture you use.

Allow subscribers to view on web browser

Putting a handy "View on web browser" or "Email not displaying correctly? View Online" link that takes the subscriber to an actual webpage with your email content is an exellent solution to combat broken image links, firewalls and content-filtering systems.
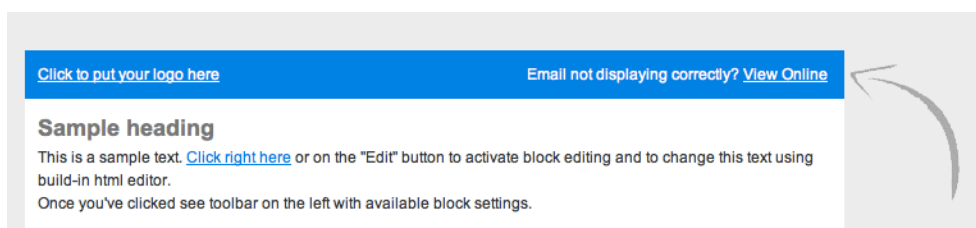
Animated GIFs

Recently, GIFs have made a comeback in email campaigns. This time they look clean and the animation is subtle yet makes an email really stand out. In the Threadless email below for April Fools, the words "24 hours only, nothing is on sale" tilts from side to side to emphasize a point.

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Test, Test, Test

If your images aren't displaying correctly, your email probably won't convert well. Set up accounts with all major email clients such as Gmail, Yahoo Mail, common desktop email clients such as Outlook and Apple Mail as well as mobile Android and iPhone mail apps.

Send out test emails to these accounts. Check your email for broken images before sending the final version to your list of subscribers. A service such as Litmus also does the work of testing your emails on various devices and clients to make sure everything is working the way it should.

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Formatting Your Email Template

Keep it narrow

Many people don't actually open their email but view it in the preview panel of their email client. This gives a very narrow space to work with if you don't want to make someone scroll to see your entire layout.

Keeping your design at 600px wide or less is a good rule of thumb, but even then some email clients are going to only display a narrow portion of your email. Make sure you have your important text on the left side of the email toward the top, ideally north of the 500px mark. That part of the email is sure to be seen and having a call to action there will entice the viewer to either scroll or open your message in a full window.

Keep it simple

Don't include your entire new catalog in an email. An enticing image of a sale item or a brief overview of updates is enough to get a click through. You want your image to pop out and grab your subcriber's attention before they scan over and click delete.

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If someone spends 10 seconds on your email, it should provoke a positive response. One way of many to ensure they click-through to your website is to keep your images simple with a call to action. Let them know that this image link is exclusive and relevant to them.

Consistent design

The branding in your email campaigns should be consistent with your website and all other promotional media. Consistency in an email does not mean an exact replica of your website but have similar features. Your logo, colors, font and corporate personality should be instantly recognizable.

Avoiding SPAM Filters

How would images trigger spam filters?

Spam filters look for large, embedded images. They will give embedded images a higher spam score. This is because spammers use images to hide inappropriate text content in their images. And the larger the image, the larger the concern. A large image size also adds to the weight or kilobyte of your email. This may make your email too big to deliver.

The best way to include an image in your email is through an ative url that is a reference to the image location on your server. This way prevents your email from being trapped by spam filters as it doesn't add to the 'weight' of your email. Here, your subscribers will need to turn on image viewing in their email clinet to view your images.

Avoid embedding rich media

Video or flash should not be embedded in your emails. These are sure to be blocked by spam filters because of their size. Subscribers wil most likely not take the time to view your videos while scanning through their emails either.

Provide a link to the video hosted on your website instead. This increases your click through rate and gives your subscribers who are interested a reason for clicking.

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Video and flash content is not supported by all email clients and may be blocked just the same as images.