

HTML Creative Design Guidelines

An effective design should do more than look nice. It should support the message and render correctly. When a design is properly executed, it really is worth a thousand words. Tight and compelling copy will “hook” users and lead them to the proper call to action. Simple and clean HTML will help maximize deliverability of the message.

HTML Design Requirements

- Use HTML software such as Dreamweaver, MS FrontPage, or Adobe GoLive to create the HTML. Do not use MS Word, MS Publisher, or other graphics/desktop publishing software. ImageReady or Fireworks can be used in some instances along with HTML software for designs if used properly.
- Do not use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), JavaScript, Submission Forms, Layers, or Rich Media (i.e. Flash movies, animation). These elements cause deliverability issues which can affect the campaign responses, hinder our deliverability for future campaigns, and do not render correctly in many email ISPs.
- Use basic HTML tags for the coding. If your HTML software uses CSS for formatting, adjust the preferences to apply formatting using basic HTML tags only. If *absolutely necessary*, inline style sheets are an acceptable substitute for CSS, but they may still be stripped by some ISPs and email readers.
- Whenever possible, minimize the use of graphics/images in the design to avoid these potential issues:
 1. **Many recipients have images/graphics disabled** in their email account on emails from unknown senders, so they won't see any information that is in the images/graphics. If they have formatted text in the HTML, the recipient can at least read the text part of the HTML if images/graphics are disabled. If the recipient is able to read the text and discover what the message is, they will be more likely to enable the images/graphics and act on the offer.
 2. The higher the ratio of image-to-text area in an HTML, the higher the SPAM score. We recommend no more than 30% of the design area be images or graphics, and the rest should be formatted text.
 3. The more images/graphics there are, the more time it takes for a recipient to download. Potential customers will be lost if they have to wait for images to download in order to read or act on the message.
 4. Any print that is part of the image/graphic can be fuzzy or blurry, making it difficult to read. This happens because graphics/images are optimized or compressed to reduce file size and maximize download speed.

- Avoid using “float” tags or pixel coordinates for positioning of objects in a design. Most ISPs will not correctly render the positioning of these objects using these tags. Use table rows and columns as an alternative for positioning of objects.
- Do not use comments in the HTML code of your email as they can potentially flag spam triggers.
- Provide a hyperlink to a related web site or at least an email address that the recipient can contact if there is not a web site available.
- Keep the width of the HTML message under 650 pixels to ensure the design is not cut off in preview panes for recipients and eliminate the need for scrolling horizontally to see the whole design.
- If doing a B2B email campaign, keep in mind that background images do not display for users of Outlook 2007. Background colors will render in Outlook 2007, so those can be used as an alternative. They can also be used together in the code so the background color will load if the background image does not.
- Keep the message size under 50KB for consumer emails, and under 75KB for business emails to optimize download time and deliverability.

HTML Design Recommendations

Focus design efforts on areas that can maximize responses and deliverability:

- Minimize graphics and images to logos, photos of products, or situational photos that support the message visually. Don't rely on graphics and images for the main contents of the message.
- Keep the length of the email short, concise, and about one page maximum in length. Newsletters may be longer, but the further details of a message should be left on a hyperlinked web page.
- Hyperlinks should be prominently displayed and used in multiple locations if the purpose is to drive customers to your web site and measure results by click-throughs.
- Place the most important info “above the fold”, meaning the top 2-4 inches of the design. Include a headline, call-to-action, and a small logo in this area to grab the attention of the reader right away. **Do not rely exclusively on images/graphics for this information** in case it is blocked and immediately discourages the recipient from acting on the offer.

- Use fonts that are universal on the Internet such as Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, or Times New Roman. Any other fonts will resort to a default font if the recipient doesn't have it installed on their computer.
- Clearly identify what the call to action is that you want the recipient to make to act on your offer.
- Use bullet points to identify key points in the message.
- Minimize the number of fonts, sizes, and colors used in the design for easy flow and professional look.
- Keep the subject line fewer than 49 characters. Any words after 49 characters may not be seen by some recipients because they could be cut off by their email ISP.
- Use ALT tags in the HTML code for each image used in the HTML design.
- When possible, avoid using white (#FFFFFF) text. Spammers sometimes use white text on white backgrounds to prevent visibility of some text, so Spam filters may flag usage of white text.
- Use a signature graphic, to make the e-mail appear more personal.
- Use headers, especially those featuring a brand or logo.
- Add a colored background behind a small but important part of the e-mail message to distinguish it.

Finally, remember that when it comes to copy you must take into account the federal CAN-SPAM Act and spam filters. SMA has created a solution that **may** help with the deliverability of the message. Although all offers are different and we cannot guarantee the deliverability of the message, our solution decreases the likelihood a message will be filtered out as spam. Please contact your sales rep if you would like further details.

SPAM Avoidance Guidelines

When sending an email message make sure the offer is relevant to the target audience!

Message Recommendations for Avoiding Spam Filters

Industry experts estimate between 10 and 20 percent of permissioned email messages do not arrive in the inbox as intended because the receiving ISP incorrectly identified the message as spam. This presents a problem for marketers because revenue is lost and campaign results are inaccurate.

Message Guidelines

You may wish to follow these guidelines when designing a message. Please remember that these are general rules and do not provide a 100% guarantee that a filter will not tag your message.

SPAM TO AVOID ALTERNATIVES TO SPAM

Do not repeat words	Be succinct; try to avoid 'spam' words.
Do not use all caps	Keep everything in lowercase or Title Case if possible.
Do not use !, \$, or 100% affordable	Keep punctuation to a minimum. Reasonably priced, reasonable, within your means, inexpensive
Bargain or best prices	Good deal, good buy
click here*	learn how, visit here
congratulations	Well done
debt	Owe, arrears, bills, deficit, due, liability
financing	Banking, expenditure, expenses, funding
free! for free?, for free!	No-cost, no-fee, complimentary, sample
guaranteed	Proven, certain, attested, affirmed, confirmed, insured
insurance	Coverage, assurance, warranty, safeguard
investment	Expenditure, expense, asset, grant
just released	New-improved
loan	Loan-plan, lending
low interest	Low risk
new car	New automobile
opportunity	Prospect opening, break, chance, occasion
paying too much	Over expenditure
permanent low interest	Definite low interest, preset
pre-approved	Pre-accepted, authorized, confirmed, credited
refinancing	Funding, outlay
special invitation	Proposal
unbelievable	Astounding, amazing, wonderful, awesome

Subject Line

When creating your subject line, **avoid** using the following words or characters:

• ! or multiple !!!!	• free upgrade	• free gift	• consolidate debt
• \$ or multiple \$\$\$	• Free or FREE	• free offer or offer	• Win a
• adv.	• mortgage rate	• Urgent	• save \$
• apply now	• New Customers	• One time	• please read
• ALL CAPS	• Prize	• Order Now	

Message Body

When creating the text of your message, **avoid** using the following words or phrases:

• ALL CAPS WORDS OR SENTENCES	• free information	• clickhere (no space)
• ***** (e.g. as a separator in plain text messages)	• free membership	• consolidate bill
• 100% satisfaction	• free quote	• credit card debt
• 18 years or older	• future mailing	• custom quote
• 1-800... or 1-888...	• home financing	• dream vacation
• a tracking number (visible, not autodetect)	• interest rates	• earn \$
• act now	• limited time offer	• email marketing
• amazing stuff	• mail is never sent unsolicited	• financial freedom
• satisfaction guaranteed	• free consultation	• spam
• prize	• winner	• drawing
• celebrity	• sexy	• special offer
• click below (CLICK BELOW) in multiple HTML references and in various locations		
• click here (CLICK HERE) in multiple HTML references and in various locations		

Spam Analysis Service

We offer a solution that may help with the deliverability of the message. Although all offers are different and we cannot guarantee the deliverability of the message, our solution decreases the likelihood that the message will be filtered out as spam.

Our service analyzes the content of the message looking for key words and phrases. The spam analyzer gives a score that indicates likelihood that the message will be viewed as spam. Ask your sales rep for additional details.