

Email Best Practices



Mitch Daniels School of Business

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The background is a light beige color with a complex network of thin, dark beige lines. These lines intersect at various points, creating a grid-like structure. At these intersection points and along the lines, there are small geometric shapes: solid dark beige circles, open dark beige circles, and small dark beige squares. Some circles are concentric, and some squares are arranged in vertical columns. The overall effect is a subtle, technical, or architectural pattern.

CONTENT

Copy

SUBJECT LINE:

Personalize when applicable. Keep them short and to the point (try to keep around 40 characters – most email clients won't show more than 43 characters of a subject line in mobile view), 7 words/41 characters is optimal. Think carefully about the use of emojis, test, make sure it is relevant and don't overdo it. Avoid all caps. A/B test to figure out what works with different audiences.

PREHEADER:

Always include a preheader. Tie it into the subject line, but don't repeat what was in the subject line.

CTAS:

Be clear and tell people what you want them to do.

Copy

CONTENT:

Make sure it is easy to read and digest and not too dense, someone should be able to skim and get point of the message. There needs to be a hierarchy of information, keep the most important thing(s) at the top, don't make people read too far in to understand what they are meant to know/do. Personalize and use dynamic content where possible.

A/B TESTING:

Not just for subject lines and preheader, think about testing content areas within the email as well.

SPAM TRIGGER WORDS:

Resources for spam trigger words to keep in mind and avoid too much use of.

<https://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/30684/the-ultimate-list-of-email-spam-trigger-words.aspx>

<https://www.mequoda.com/articles/audience-development/subject-line-spam-trigger-words/>

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DESIGN & LAYOUT

Font & Sizing

Heading 1

Font: Arial
Color: #000000
Sizing: 28px
Line Height:
Font Weight: Bold
Font Style: Normal

Heading 2

Font: Arial
Color: #000000
Sizing: 22px
Line Height:
Font Weight: Bold
Font Style: Normal

Heading 3

Font: Arial
Color: #8E6F3E
Sizing: 20px
Line Height:
Font Weight: Bold
Font Style: Normal

Body

Font: Arial
Color: #000000
Sizing: 16px
Line Height:
Font Weight: Normal
Font Style: Normal

Links

Font: Arial
Color: #8E6F3E
Sizing: 16px
Line Height:
Font Weight: Normal
Font Style: Underline

Images

FILES:

.png preferred, can use .jpeg, .gifs are possible (the larger the file size, the longer to load – good rule of thumb is under 200kb – also keep in mind that not all email clients support gifs).

SIZES:

Email max width should be 600px. For images you want to span the width of the email they need to be sized down to 600px in width (avoid sizing down in SFMC, this can cause issues with rendering).

BUTTONS:

Try to avoid using images as buttons (even though they render differently across email views). This relates to accessibility for email and the need to use live text as much as possible. See the section on accessibility for more information.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Avoid image only emails (see the section on accessibility). Use images when they provide value to the email.

Colors



Black

HEX Code: #000000



White

HEX Code: #FFFFFF



Gold

HEX Code: #8E6F3E

Templates

ABOVE THE FOLD

This is the top part of the email that is visible without having to scroll. This is considered the top 350px of an email - keep this in mind with content and CTAs, you don't want the users to have to scroll too long to get them to do what you want them to do. Message clipping can also occur with emails that are too long.

ALIGNMENT

Keep the alignment consistent throughout the email. Ex. Left aligned vs. Centered. Try to keep text left aligned for accessibility reasons.

OPTIMIZE

Optimize emails for mobile rendering. Make sure the email looks good in all rendering views (using rendering services such as Litmus).

A/B TESTING

Consider A/B testing different template layouts.

SECTION SPACING

Make sure there is enough space to distinguish between sections, and keep it consistent throughout the email. 30-40px is a good place to start.

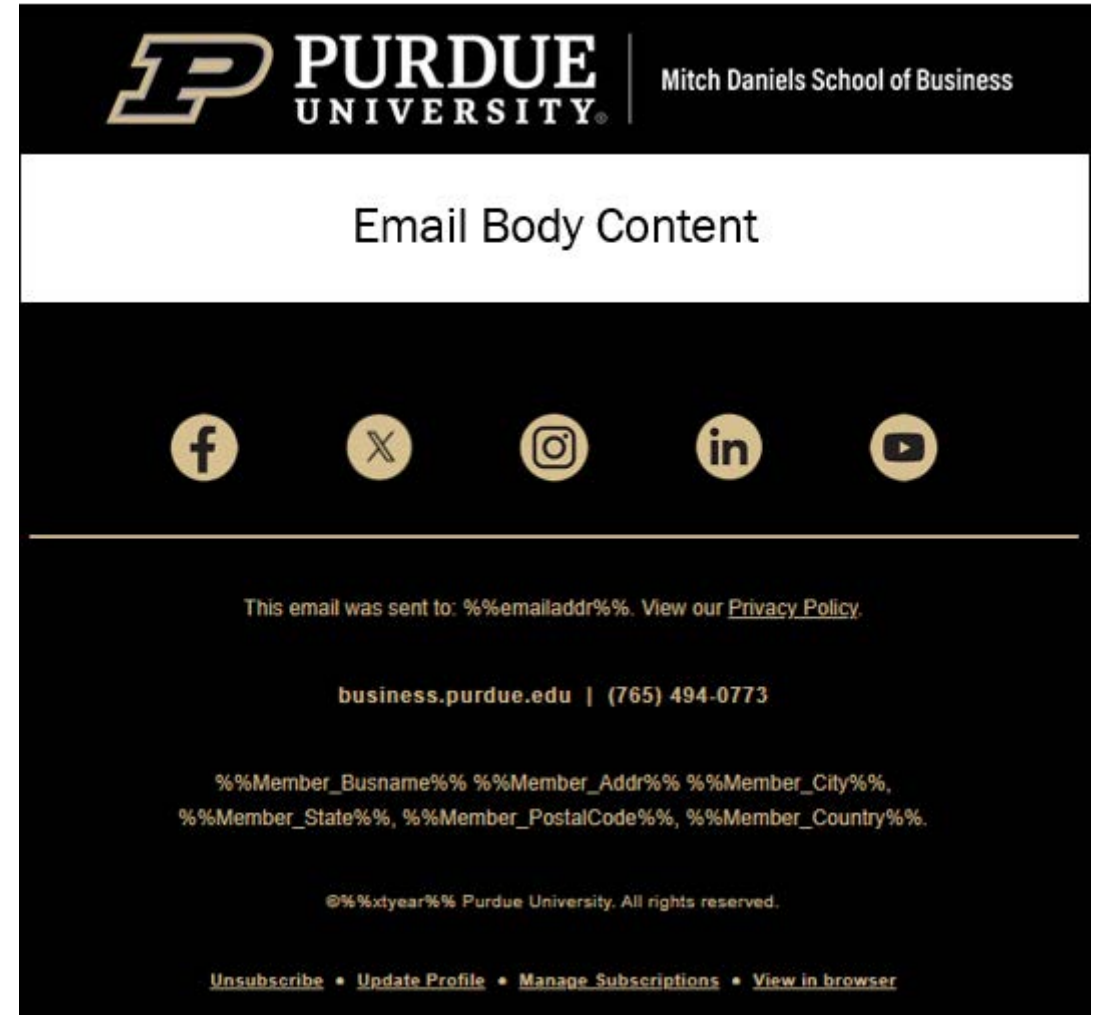
Templates

HEADER

Required by CAN-SPAM to not use false or misleading header information. Make it clear who the email is from.

FOOTER

Required by CAN-SPAM to include the company's physical address, and a link to unsubscribe. If the email is transactional, no unsubscribe link is necessary.

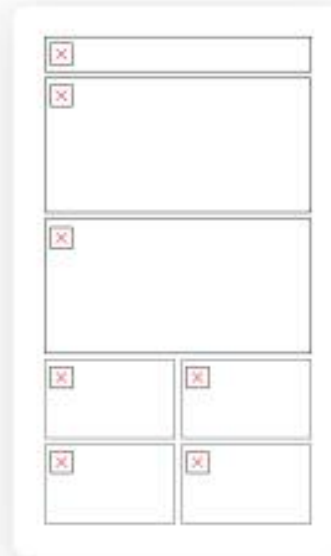


Templates

NO 'IMAGE ONLY' TEMPLATES

Avoid 'Image Only' emails. These do not render well when images are not rendered in the email view, and is not best practice for accessibility. Use live text when possible, as well as alt text and background color for images to distinguish them if not rendered.

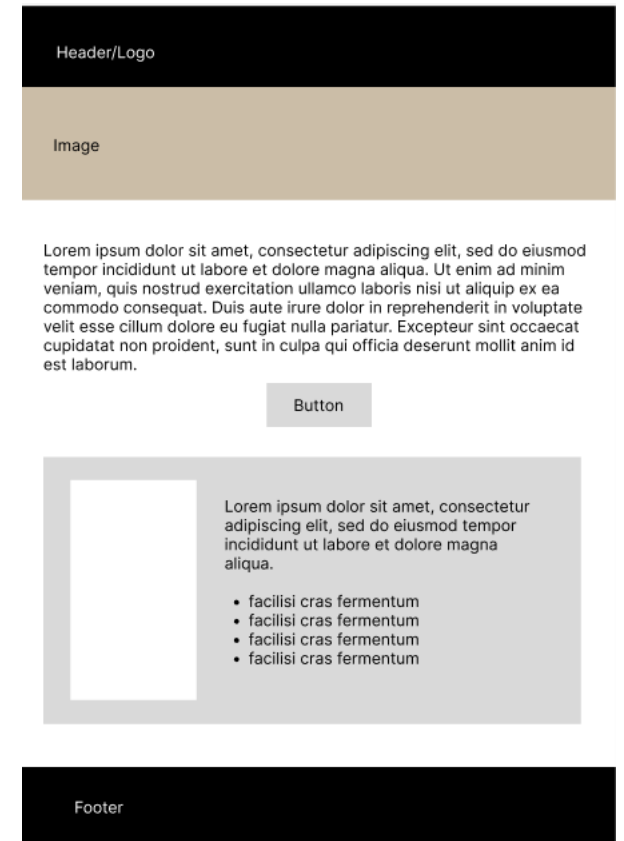
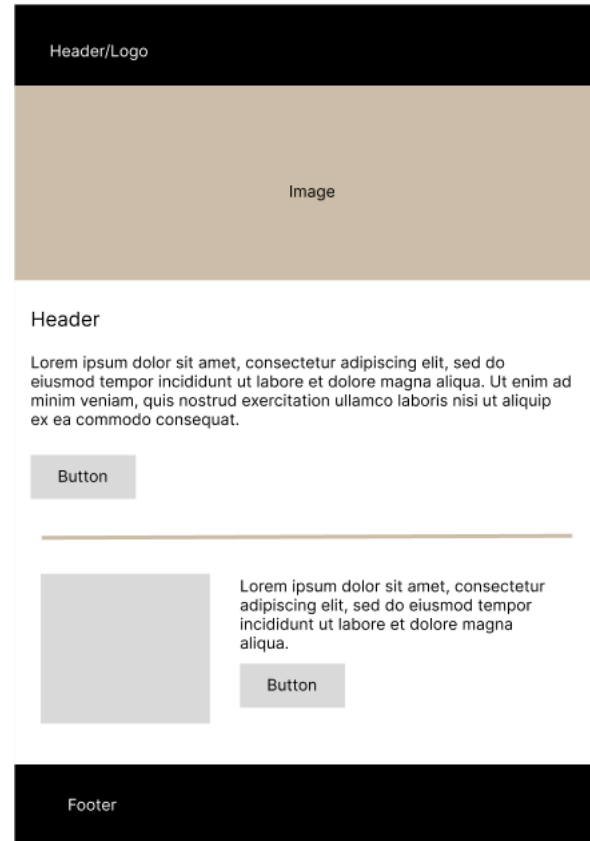
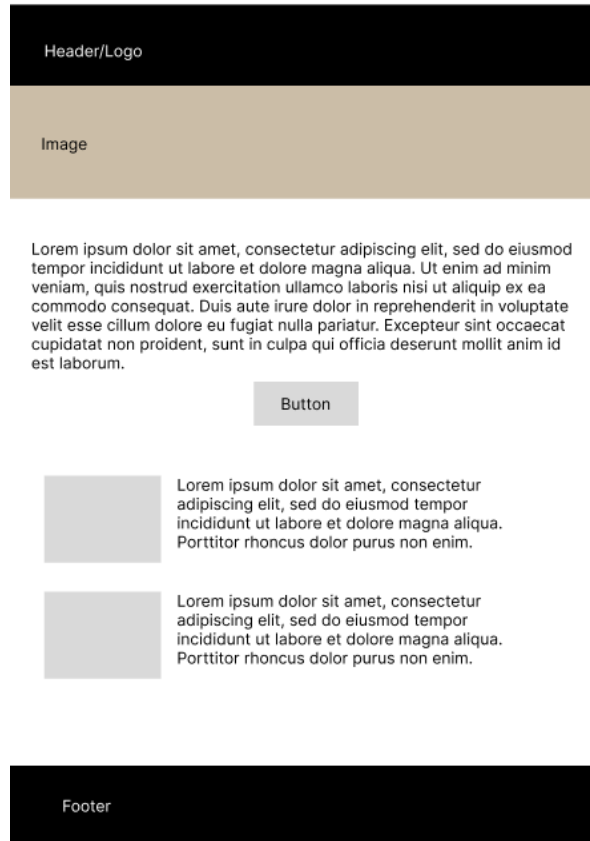
✗ Image-based email



✓ Text-based email



Templates - Examples



The background is a light beige color with a complex network of thin, dark beige lines. These lines intersect at various points, creating a grid-like structure. Scattered throughout the background are several small geometric shapes: solid dark beige circles, open dark beige circles, and small dark beige squares. Some of these shapes are connected to the lines, while others are isolated. The overall aesthetic is minimalist and architectural.

ACCESSIBILITY

What Is Email Accessibility?

ac·ces·si·bil·i·ty

/əkˌsesəˈbilədē/

The easiest way to define accessibility is the quality of being easily used or understood. In the context of email, we define accessibility as:

When an email's content is available to—and its functionality can be operated by—anyone, regardless of ability.

Optimizing email for accessibility doesn't just mean making your emails accessible to people with disabilities – it improves the email experience for everyone.

Why Does Accessibility Matter?

INCLUSIVITY

Disabilities impact a large share of the world's population that might make using and interacting with email difficult. For example:

- Visual Impairments/Blindness
- Color Blindness
- Dyslexia

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

More people than ever are using assistive technologies to listen to and reply to emails with voice assistant enabled devices (screen readers).

- Screen reader software translates the interface and content seen on screen into audio.
- Screen reader software is not exclusive to people with disabilities – ex. Amazon Alexa, Siri and Google Assistant.

Accessibility Features For Email

EMAIL ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS:

- For text color contrast aim to have a ratio of at least 4.5:1. Can use this [Contrast Checker](#) to verify.
- Make sure all images have alt text applied as well as a background color.
- Hover effects on images that have links.
- Hover effect and color contrast for hyperlinks in text.
- Left justify email copy with more than 2 sentences, and keep email justification consistent throughout the email.
- Optimize line spacing, especially for paragraphs. Keep this between 1.4-1.5px.
- Minimum font size of 14px, but consider having body text at 16px for better readability.
- Have copy written that is simple and easy to understand.
- Have email layouts that have strong hierarchical structure and are easily skimmable.
- Accessible HTML Tables, utilize role="presentation" to exclude screen readers from reading out the table structure and allow it to skip to the actual content.

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BENCHMARKS

Benchmark Resources

Direct Development has a report on The Email Marketing Benchmarks for Higher Education
Download and access the report here: <https://directdevelopment.com/resources/research-and-guides/the-email-marketing-benchmarks-report>

The report also includes valuable insights and takeaways on different types of emails within the higher education landscape.

Overall Benchmarks

The report highlights the following overall benchmarks:
30-38% open rate (varies by email type)
3-10% click rate (varies by email type)
0.3-1.1% unsubscribe rate

Email Categories

The report highlights benchmark stats for the following email categories:

- Communications flows (top, middle and bottom of funnel)
- Push to apply emails
- Post admit emails
- Email sequence in a journey (emails 1-6)
- Event emails
- Announcement/promotional emails
- Newsletters
- Post conversions emails

Along with the breakdown in benchmark stats by email category, the report also dives into content, design and CTA insights.

The background is a light beige color with a complex network of thin, dark beige lines. These lines intersect at various points, creating a grid-like structure with some diagonal and curved paths. Scattered throughout the background are small, solid dark beige circles and squares, as well as some hollow circles. A prominent feature is a large, solid black horizontal rectangle in the center, which contains the word "OTHER" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

OTHER

Segmentation & Testing

SEGMENTATION

Segment audiences to be more personalized and targeted – think about who the message is going to and why.

TESTING

Test sends and approvals where necessary – run live tests of emails to check rendering, copy, and design on desktop and mobile devices.

Create a testing checklist – what things need to be checked and by who before the send is good to go?

Run through Litmus for rendering checks.

If using dynamic content – test with Test Data Extensions to ensure it is pulling in information properly.

Known Rendering Issues

OUTLOOK

- Common Outlook rendering limitations to keep in mind:
 - Outlook desktop clients do not support animated GIFs.
 - Will not display rounded buttons (unless they are images – which we like to avoid doing).
 - Outlook doesn't support the hover pseudo-class. Hover effects will not work.

DARK MODE

- With dark mode rendering, we have limited abilities to control how this shows up in different device views.

TIP: Running emails through a rendering testing service such as Litmus or Email on Acid will allow you to see how the email renders across all devices and fix any issues before the send. *These are paid platforms.

Email Send Testing Checklist

- ☐ Copy Review/Approval
- ☐ Design Review/Approval
- ☐ Render checks through Litmus
- ☐ Test email sent – verify all links
- ☐ Email selected as Commercial or Transactional
- ☐ Send Profile and Delivery Profile selected appropriately
- ☐ Send Data Extension selected is correct
- ☐ Attach any Exclusion Data Extensions if necessary

Resources

EMAIL RELATED RESOURCES THAT MIGHT BE HELPFUL:

- [CAN-SPAM Act](#)
- [GDPR](#)
- [CCPA](#)
- [EAA](#)
- [Apple Mail Privacy Protection](#)
- [Litmus State of Email Report](#)
- [University Brand Guidelines](#)
- [The Ultimate Guide to Email Accessibility \(Litmus\)](#)
- [Rendering Emails Across Email Clients: Challenges & Workarounds](#)
- [MailedIt! Book](#)

Thank you

For any questions, please contact Kelsey Smith at smithkh@purdue.edu.



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