



AN INTEGRITY  COMPANY

BEST PRACTICE

EMAIL



There's a lot to consider when writing business emails. This guide can help you understand best practices, avoid common pitfalls and create email marketing campaigns that better connect with prospects and clients.

GETTING STARTED: KNOW YOUR BRAND IDENTITY



- **Your Brand:** When someone thinks about your business, how does it make them feel? That's your brand. When you send emails to clients, prospects or businesses, you want to make sure your brand is clear.

This happens using specific words, a tone of voice, colors and images. Emails can help support your brand identity.





- **Subject Line:** This is the very first thing your recipient sees and the key to getting your email opened. Your first — and possibly only — chance to catch your recipients attention. Use the guidelines below to build your subject line.
 - » Keep it simple. Avoid CAPS and lots of punctuation.
 - » Keep it short. The ideal subject line is 41-50 characters.
 - » Use symbols and emojis, but only if appropriate to your brand identity.
 - » Personalization can help. You can use your recipient’s name, or customize the subject line based on user behaviors.
 - » Even if the email is not opened, you still get to create and enhance your brand impression.
 - » Subject lines are not just about opening the email — they should draw in recipients with a better chance of conversion.
 - » Run subject line tests on many factors: personalization, urgency, humor, emojis, length and more.
 - » Conversational tone can feel friendlier. This includes not capitalizing every word in your subject.
 - » Deliver the key hook in the first 30 characters.
- **Preview / Preheader Text:** This is a secondary subject line where you can expand on your subject contents and reinforce your message. Tips for preview text:
 - » Don’t restate the subject line.
 - » Include subtle call to action or the value proposition.
 - » Can be used to “finish” a subject line left hanging.



- **Don't purchase email or contact lists:** All email platform user agreements explicitly prohibit purchasing lists. With CCPA, GDPR and strict privacy rules in place, email marketers may only send marketing emails to those who have expressly and explicitly opted in to receive email communications. It's been shown that organically grown lists result in better performing emails — far better than purchased lists.

Violations of these rules can result in high SPAM reporting, IP blacklisting by ESPs and ultimately the sender being kicked off the sending email platform. CAN-SPAM legislation (see our overview on page 6 in this guide) also allows fines to be assessed for this type of marketing tactic.

For more information, see these official websites:

CCPA <https://oag.ca.gov/privacy/ccpa>

GDPR <https://gdpr-info.eu/>

CAN-SPAM

<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business>

NOTE: Vetted leads that have opted in to Integrity emails through LeadCENTER can be purchased and emailed.

- **Ensure the sending domains in the email platform have all appropriate SPF, DKIM and DMARC information:** These are all ways to authenticate mail servers. They prove that you are a legitimate sender, that your identity has not been compromised and that you're not sending emails on behalf of someone else. These anti-spam measures are becoming increasingly important and will one day be required by all mail services and servers.

Check your authentication yourself! First, send a sample email to a Gmail address. Then open the message, go to the option menu (3 dots) and select View Original. The top of the page should show if you are passing or failing authentication. You can also use Cmd-F or Ctrl-F to search for the words "pass" and "fail."

More resources:

SPF <https://support.google.com/a/answer/33786?hl=en>

DKIM <https://support.google.com/a/answer/174124?hl=en>

DMARC <https://support.google.com/a/answer/2466563?hl=en>

- **Use confirmed opt-ins rather than single opt-ins, whenever possible:** Confirmed opt-ins are when a confirmation message is sent to a subscriber to confirm that they want to receive your messages in their inbox. With the California Consumers Protection Act (CCPA) and other privacy regulations around the country, confirmed opt-ins are becoming more important and will help protect your company against incurring fines. And don't forget — every email must have a clear opt-out link.
- **Be clear who is emailing:** Make sure your sender name clearly identifies who (what company) is actually sending the communication.
- **Don't over-send:** A consistent, yet measured, email schedule will keep you top-of-mind with your audience, without overwhelming them. Email frequency has no hard-and-fast rules, but consider how often you like to receive content. Weekly might be plenty, unless you are leading the consumer on a nurturing journey with a planned series of content over several days or weeks. No matter what, give your subscribers unique and interesting content that's relevant and helpful.
- **Keep your list clean:** Regularly update your mailing lists. Promptly remove any hard bounced or blocked emails, and purge emails of those who don't engage with you.

CAN-SPAM

This law requires that you follow certain rules for any email sent for commercial purposes. Violations can be costly, but the guidelines are straightforward.

CAN-SPAM compliance requirements:

- Don't use false or misleading header information.
- Don't use deceptive subject lines.
- Identify the message as an ad.
- Tell recipients where you're located with a valid physical postal address.
- Tell recipients how to opt out of receiving messages from you.
- If you have members or subscribers, remember they can opt out of marketing emails.
- Honor opt-out requests within 10 business days.
- Monitor what others are doing on your behalf, such as marketing companies you may hire.

For details, see the official CAN-SPAM guidance here:

<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business>



- **Email Content:** Even after your recipient opens the email, keeping their attention can take some strategy. Here are some general tips for the content of your email:
 - » Be mindful of why are you sending the email and what you want the reader to do with this information. In other words, what is the call to action (CTA)? Do you want them to sign up for a webinar, join a mailing list, learn more information from a landing page link provided? Whatever it is, keep the messaging clear, concise and simple.
 - » Show the CTA early. If you want your recipient to click a link, show an actionable CTA before your reader needs to scroll. You can repeat the link later, but don't hold it until the end.
 - » Use this space to show your brand. Choose the kind of voice that represents your business and speak with that tone. A person is reading your message — make sure they feel that a person wrote the message, too!
- **Testing:** Your email content is the perfect place to test ideas and see how your recipients respond. Here are just a few different approaches you can test:
 - » Try a short survey. Asking recipients to fill out a survey about their interests or even trivia can be a fun way to engage.
 - » The very first line is a test. Experiment with different tones in the first sentence or the greeting. “Hey, Charlie!” lands differently than “Dear Charlie,” does.
 - » Experiment with message length, but always lean toward short and easy to skim. See how four sentences compares to two or even one!
 - » Change the wording on your CTA to see if any phrases work better: “find out more!” vs. “get started now!” and so on.





Accessibility should always be a top priority in your email marketing efforts, but it's especially important for senior audiences.

- **Use appropriate ALT text:** ALT text, or alternative text, is a brief, backup description of an image that displays when the recipient has images blocked or turned off by default.

If your image serves a functional purpose with no live text to support it, then minimal ALT text should be included. But, in instances where images simply support the live text and add no functional value (such as decorative bullets, ornamentals, etc.), empty ALT tags should be programmed.


- **Use 15- or 16-pixel text in body of emails:** 15-pixel text is the minimum recommendation for readability, and CMS requires nothing smaller than 16-pixel text for Medicare communications.
- **HTML technical setup:** Maintain a logical structure to the HTML, declare the content type and language (e.g., EN for English) and include "role" on table elements. These items will help screen readers correctly read the content of the email in logical order, with appropriate context and in the correct language.
- **Use appropriate color contrast:** Color is key to readability. This is especially true for older audiences, people with color blindness or those with other visual impairments. Tone-on-tone content (e.g., dark blue text against a light blue background) should be avoided whenever possible. Generally, the more contrast there is between the text and the background, the easier it will be for all audiences to read.
- **Use the aria-label attribute (Accessible Rich Internet Applications labels):** Aria labels add extra descriptive information to HTML elements to enhance the experience for people using screen readers. Aria labels are very powerful and can help screen readers more accurately read content in a way that is consumable and makes sense to the user.
- **Use left-align (flush-left) copy:** Justified and centered content can be very difficult for recipients with dyslexia to read. Centered text should be limited to no more than two lines, and is generally only used for headers or subheads, not body paragraphs.
- **Use bulletproof buttons:** Bulletproof buttons are HTML buttons that will display regardless of whether images are turned on or not. Image-based buttons should be avoided.



Elegant design looks great and can increase overall engagement with your email. Here are a few guidelines to consider:

600 px

Trouble viewing this? [Read this email online.](#)









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ESPAÑOL (SPANISH): ATENCIÓN: Si usted habla español, se encuentran disponibles servicios gratuitos de asistencia de idiomas. Visite nuestro sitio web en www.AetnaMedicare.com o llame al número de teléfono que se indica en este material.

- Keep email widths in the 600- to 700-pixel range.
- Use a “mobile first” design strategy, reviewing the email as it would be viewed on a mobile device. Generally, one-column layouts are the best option.
- Try to stick to two typefaces, if possible.
- Keep important content and CTAs above the fold, or in one screen (especially important for mobile).
- Use appropriate white space.
- Avoid unnecessary imagery.
- Give readers every opportunity to click through to a landing page. Make headlines, images, buttons and phone numbers clickable.
- Make sure the reader knows who is communicating with them by including your logo and/or company name near the top of the email.
- Video tip: Link to video content with a thumbnail rather than embedding. Remember a video link could distract from a different CTA — make sure the video is the CTA.
- Using Email for Success
- Emails are an effective way to build your brand, reach people interested in what you offer, and serve your community.
- Leverage the strategies in this guide as you grow your business and build lasting client relationships.