Links in Email: How to Code Them, How to Phrase Them

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One of the most important metric driving the success of your email marketing or newsletter campaign is click-through rate. It doesn't take a great deal of intimate understanding to know that if you can't convince subscribers or readers to click from your email to your website or landing page, you can't monetize them. Since, in almost all cases, the end goal of your email marketing campaign will be increased revenue either through transactions or page impressions, driving traffic from the email to the webpage or landing page is absolutely essential. The use of links in email is the primary driver of traffic funneling from your email to your webpage.

Content and Calls to Action Matter!

We don't want you to read this section and think that links in email are the only thing that matters in terms of driving traffic from an email to a landing page. If that were the case, there wouldn't be any reason to send an email that included anything but links! The quality of your copy and its ability to excite and incentivize users to click certainly matters. So do the offers that you may promote in anÂ email marketingÂ piece. Finally, writing and using good calls-to-action both around and in the content of your links can make a significant difference between an average click-through rate and an outstanding click-through rate. All of the elements of your email template design and content work combine to improve your click-through rate. However, there are some tried and true elements to keep in mind!

Images and Links in Email

We discussed this previously when discussing the best practices forÂ embedding images in emailÂ , but as a general rule you do not want to use images as a way to indicate to readers that they should click something. Graphic buttons that say "buy now" or "click here" work great on web pages. However, since many email service providers do not automatically load images when an email loads, your readers may never see the "click here" or "buy now" or "join now" or "sign-up" button and may actually not know where to click.Â Make all of the images in your email links just in case they don't load and users click them. Also, and more importantly, make sure that your main links in email are always text links. If you must use an image link (for example, if your design department insists on it), be sure to have a text link directly beneath it.

Formatting Links in Email

It's incredibly important that your links in email both stand out from the text around them as well as appear in a way that users immediately recognize as links. The most "fool-proof" way to accomplish this is to use a traditional link-style. That, of course, means using a blue, underlined font. It's also a great idea if all of your links are bolded. If you can't use a blue underlined font, it's strongly suggested that you, at a minimum, use an underlined font. Web users are trained to understand that "underline means link" even if the color is not blue. Bolding your links will help them stand out.

If your design standards don't underline or bold links, it's strongly suggested that you make an exception within your links in email. Again, even more-so than on a web page, the funneling of users from your email to a website or landing page where you can monetize them is the ultimate key to success.

Finally, if your web style guide involves denoting links by changing their color or style when a user passes his or her mouse over the links, do not replicate that in your email.Â CSS use in an email

template, which would be required to create that effect, can breakdown in various email service providers.Â Additionally, you're then relying on users and readers to actively mouse over your email text in order to find links. You want the links to "pop" and be obvious immediately when a user scans your email so that he or she can transition from the email to the web page as quickly as possible.

What to Say in Your Links in Email

Your links in email should be your email call-to-action. Don't make links in email single words, and certainly don't make them too long. Nothing is harder on the eyes than three lines of bolded, underlined link text!Â In short, the best links are ones that tell users what they will be doing when they click them.Â "Buy Now." "Click Here." "Join for Free." A strong, brief, clear call to action is the best text for your link!

Where to Place Links in Email

There's really no set rule as to where to place links in email, but there are some basic trips and tricks that can increase click-through rate.

Don't put links within big blocks of text. Instead, use your text to lead up to the link and then separate the link with a paragraph break so that it stands out.

Don't put too much space between text and an associated link. You want users to understand that the link is related to the text.

Don't put links in headlines â€“ the conflicting styles may confuse users.

Make sure you have at least one, if not more, links in the top two inches of your email template. You want users who don't scroll below the preview pane to still have opportunities to click through to your webpage or landing page.

As noted above, make sure that all images are also links.

We'll also discuss below using permanent and static links in the header, footer or side column of your email.

Density of Links in Email

The question of how many links to put into your email template can be a tricky question. On the one hand, the raw numbers game says that you want as many links as possible. The more opportunities that you give readers to click-through to your website, the more likely they are to do it. However, if you load an email up with too many links, you risk triggering spam filters. Finally, if you put too many links into an email, you'll ultimately deteriorate the readability of the text in the email. That may not sound like a situation that could really harm you, but you may be surprised at how important text can be in selling your product or service.

A safe rule of thumb is no more than one link per every fifty words of text. However, there's no hard-and-fast rule here, either. Your best bet is to start with fewer links in your email templates and then continue to add links with each send until you reach a click-through rate that is your desired click-through rate.

Permanent and Static Links in Email

Many email templates are designed using permanent and static links in email header, footer, and side bar. These links may be navigational clones of your primary site to help create familiarity with users between the site and the email. They may be links toÂ social networkÂ elements that you want to persistently promote.

They may also be links to customer service or other pages on your website that provide information that users consistently search for. Designing your email template with these types of persistent links can dramatically improve your click-through rate. The information or pages that the links drive to are content or destination pages that you've identified as high user interest. In addition, these persistent or permanent links also increase the number ofÂ links in emailÂ , which, in turn, increases the number of opportunities that your readers have to click through. There's really no downside!

The same rules apply to persistent or static links as well. Don't trap them in images. This is true even if you are trying to clone your website's navigation within your email template and the navigation on the website uses images. Make a temporary presentation adjustment and design something "close" to your site's navigational structure that uses text instead of images.Â The only best practice noted above that does not necessarily apply to permanent or static links in your email template is in regards to formatting. While you still want your links to look like links, because these are not your primary links you may not want to bold them or make them "pop" too much.Â You do not want your static, persistent and navigational links to detract from the offers or information in the email, so it's perfectly fine to use a more subtle visual approach with them.

Links in Email and Spam

Too many links in email can trigger spam filters and alerts. We've already suggested that, if you're just starting your email marketing program, you begin with templates that have fewer links and then build your way up. Another technique for determining how many links you can have in your email without creating a spam problem is to do some testing pre-send. Create an email with as many links as you want and test send it to your seed or test addresses. If it goes into the spam or junk folder (and if you're sure that there wasn't anything else in the content of the email that would have created a spam problem), then remove half of the links and test it again. You may find that you're suddenly inbox-ready just by removing some links!

Links in the Text Version of Your Email

Obviously, it's not possible to put actual links in the text-only version of your email. Whether your text-only version is the singular version of your email or whether you're sending a multi-part message with both html and text components, it's worth it to take some time to clean up the urls in your text-only version.

Here are a handful of best practices:

Keep URLs Short and Memorable:Â From a text-only email, you'll be relying on people remembering, typing-in, or copying and pasting urls into a web browser to get to your webpage or landing page. Keep urls short and easy-to-remember to optimize visits to your webpage or landing page from your text-based email.

Space URLs Out From the Text:Â Because you can't use any type of formatting to make your urls stand out in a text-based email, make sure that there is a full paragraph break between the text above and the text below a url so that users can easily spot and find it.

Put Your URL at the Top and the Bottom of the Email:Â You'll want to make any urls from the email easy to find in the text-based version. Make sure there is one above the fold and one at the bottom of the email so that users can find the destination url quickly and easily at the beginning or the end.

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