Best Practice Email Playbook



triggerfish

digital growth partners

Purpose of this document

Research shows that a third of customers have visited a website or purchased a product or service, simply from viewing an email in their inbox. Email marketing is about giving your contacts valuable experiences that will keep them engaged with the your brand, and the products and services you offer.

Keeping a pulse on the most recent email marketing best practices will help you to:

1. Understand where you get the highest returns on your email investments
2. Continually optimise your email efforts and associated marketing program

If your emails are no longer having the effect you need them to – whether it's downloading content, registering for an event, getting in touch with a sales agent, or even just browsing the website – it might be time to re-evaluate email best practices to make sure you're making the most of your email communications.

While many organisations already have a suite of templates that are more than likely aligned with best practice email standards, many organisations do not. Your email template library should be designed in a way that;

- Ensures brand consistency
- Considers a multitude of screen sizes and device types
- Ensures email messages are reaching your customers when and how you intend them to.

If you're looking at refurbishing your template library or rebuilding a new one entirely - we encourage you to be creative, and push the boundaries with the themes and assets you have available to you. This eBook includes all the things you need to consider when building your email campaigns to give yourself and your team the best chance at making an impact with your emails.

Contents

2 **Purpose of this document**

4 **Email strategy**

6 **Language & Copywriting**

7 **Subject Line**
Personalisation in Subject Lines

8 **Preview Text**

9 **Content**

10 **CTAs**

11 **Email size**

12 **Layout**
The Inverted Pyramid

13 **Images**
Using GIFs in email
Using Video in email
Using alt text on images

16 **Frequency**

17 **Avoiding SPAM filters**

18 **Measuring Success**
Bounce Rate
Open Rate
Click through rate
Conversion Rate
Device Type
Unsubscribe rate
List growth rate

20 **Timing**
By audience
By device

21 **Wrap up**

Email strategy

Before kicking off the process of developing your email campaign, make sure you have a strategy. What are you trying to achieve in sending your email? Is the email part of a wider campaign, and how does it fit with the rest of your campaign activity?

Is your email a marketing, sales or operational email? Consider the templates you have to choose from, and plan your content based on your ultimate goal. It's helpful to set some KPIs around what you're trying to achieve so you can measure the success of the email against them, and optimise next time based on previous results.

You might need to consider creating a number of different templates for various emails types, including;

- Nurture
- Pre-Sales
- Welcome
- Notice
- Event
- In-Market
- Update
- Operational

Many marketers benefit from using a campaign calendar that shows;

- When emails are being sent? weekly, monthly, quarterly
- Email type: sales, marketing, event, newsletter, operational
- Email Purpose: branding, announcement, registrational, awareness (your CTA)
- Follow up activity: will you be communicating again when the desired action is not taken?
- Core message: The 1 single point you're trying to get across
- Audience: name of the list/database you are communicating with.



Use the chart on the next page to help visualise what messaging you are pushing to the market and when and will make sure you aren't over-utilising particular lists.

TIMING		PLANNING | PLANNING | PLANNING						CONTENT		
Month	**Send Date**	**Email Name**	**Owner / Stakeholder**	**Email Type**	**Target / Personas**	**Intended Outcome**	**Email List**	**Key Messages**	**Supporting Messages**	**CTA**
Description	*Delivery Date*		*Who is creating this email?*	*Promo, Newsletter etc*	*High level description of target audience*	*KPIs*	*Who is the email going to?*			*Including URL for landing page*
January										
Week 1										
Week 2										
Week 3										
Week 4										
February										
Week 1										
Week 2										
Week 3										
Week 4										
March										
Week 1										
Week 2										
Week 3										
Week 4										
April										
Week 1										
Week 2										
Week 3										
Week 4										
May										
Week 1										
Week 2										
Week 3										
Week 4										
June										
Week 1										
Week 2										
Week 3										
Week 4										

Download Chart

Language & Copywriting

Consider the audience for your email.

Before starting to construct the content for you email, consider both the audience and purpose for the communication. Language and tone of your email should be representative of the audience you are talking to. Consider the demographic of your audience, and in what tone they would best receive information.

These tips might help you get in the right frame of mind to write:

- Determine Brand Voice
- Write a conversation, not a sales brochure
- Break it up to form purpose-driven sections
- Be consistent in your language, tone and voice
- Test & edit – does the messaging fit the purpose
- Measure success – set your KPIs



Ensure the above considerations are balanced with the purpose of your email – whether it is a sales, marketing, operational or notice email type.

Subject Line

Subject lines are the first thing your recipient reads when receiving an email from you. Email subject lines are like news article headings, they need to convey the main point of your message and encourage the reader towards your ultimate goal, which should be your CTA.

Why? Because whether or not your email gets opened, your recipient will see your subject line. So, a subject line helps build your brand in your customer's inbox even if it's not actually opened. It creates a psychological association between your subject line and your brand and over time, it creates a cognitive association between the language you use, and the perception your customers have about you.

Be as specific as possible. One-word subjects such as "Hi," "Question," or "FYI" are not informative and don't give the reader an idea of how important your message is. If your message is time sensitive, you might want to include a date in your subject line, like "Your settlement is coming up next week", or "Registration closes tomorrow."

Personalisation in Subject Lines

Using personalisation in subject lines can increase open rates by 50% and higher click-to-open rates, too. BUT, make sure your data is clean before using personalisation tags – you don't want to be referring to someone by their last name, if their contact record is incorrect with their first and surname fields mixed up.

The best way to know the success of your email subject lines is to test them using A/B testing, and continually optimise. Here are some tips for and best practices when writing catchy subject lines;

- Keep it simple – don't use too many action words
- Personalise where you can by using personalisation tokens
- Use urgency or timely action-oriented subjects
- Surprise recipient with a fact or statement
- Pose a question
- Segment your list and target recipients
- Put action verbs at the forefront
- Give people a reason to feel special



Need help crafting your subject lines? You can try using a platform like Phrasee to do it for you!

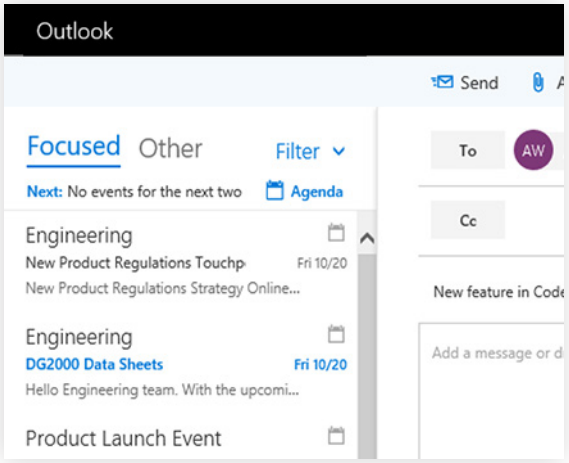
Preview Text

The preview text, which is sometimes referred to as *preheader* text, is the copy that sits below the subject line when the email appears in your inbox. This text is the second most important thing to utilise when trying to grab your recipient's attention after the subject line.

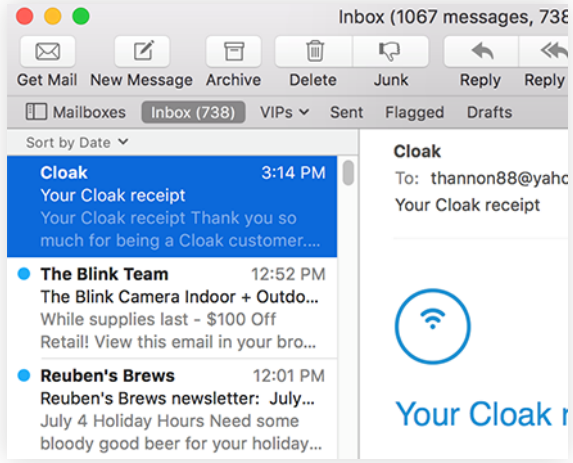
The preview text should combine a sense of urgency, together with an expectation of what your reader is going to see in your email.

- Keep the content concise and use plain language
- Include the main points of your email, address your CTA (if you haven't in the Subject line) or reiterate it here
- A/B test your preview text across campaigns and see which works best for open rates
- Make sure you're getting your message across in 40-50 characters to ensure your full message is displaying both on desktop and on mobile
- Don't repeat your subject line – people don't need to read the same thing twice
- Test the email subject link and preview text to see how it reads together

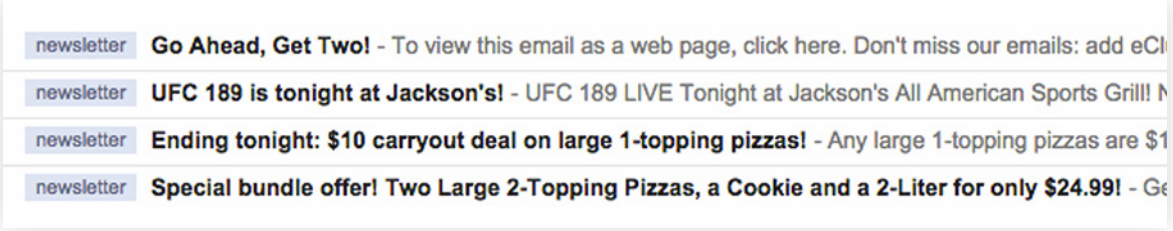
Outlook



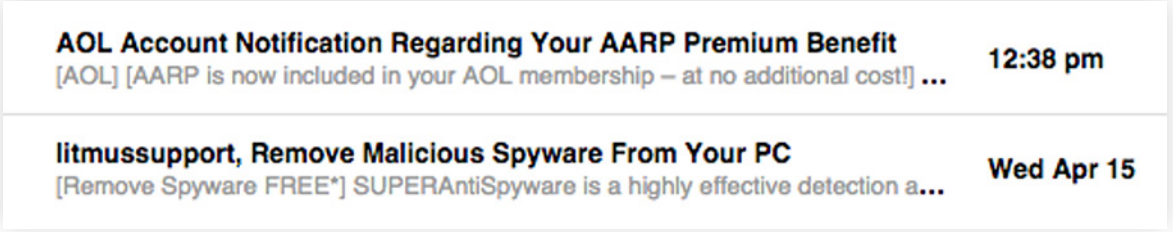
Apple Mail



Gmail



AOL



Content

While your recipient might be drawn to open your email through the from address, subject line and compelling preview text, the content in your email is the thing that drives business from the campaign itself. The content is the thing that will drive the conversion – which is what you ultimately want.

Here's how you can write compelling content:

- Keep it simple and strong: Keep messaging concise and to the point
- Make the email scannable: Add line breaks every 60 characters in your plain text emails to increase legibility, try using bullets to make your content more visible and separate copy with headings
- Align copy to subject line and preheaders, but don't be repetitive by using the exact same copy
- Know and write for your audience, always keep them front-of-mind
- Concentrate on a singular goal: don't clutter your email with so many actions that readers don't know what to do first (or at all)
- Body copy font size should be 14 pixels
- Heading copy font size should be 22 pixels
- Try bolding parts of your body copy to capture attention. Pick only 1-2 words to bold and avoid overusing this feature.

CTAs

A call-to-action describes the part/s of the email that asks readers to take an action that fulfils the goal of your email, where there is one. Marketing or Sales emails will typically have a more urgent CTA, while operational emails might simply have a link to further information.

For promotional emails, the CTA should be persuasive and compel your recipients to perform your chosen conversion, this might include:

- Make an appointment
- Get in touch
- Visit Us
- Register your interest
- Click through to an associated landing page
- Register for an event

Marketers often clutter emails with so many calls to action that none succeed. Keep an email simple, make it clear what you want the recipients to do, and give them a compelling reason to do so.

- Use a strong command verb to start each CTA
  (E.g. Visit, Register, Download, Start, Compare, View)
- Give recipients a reason to click – what's in it for them?
- A sense of urgency always helps – add an incentive where it works
  (E.g. "Limited space available" followed by "Register Your Interest")
- Use contrasting colours so the CTA stands out
- Make sure they are leading to the appropriate campaign landing page or website page.

Email size

Some email platforms (such as Gmail) will clip the email after a certain size, which is usually determined by the number of KB.

Specifically, Gmail will clip emails that have message size larger than 102KB, which will hide all content after that point and show the **[Message clipped] view entire message link**.

The email message itself is the underlying code that makes up the entirety of your email – text, images, URLs HTML, and any tracking code that might exist in the email. Each character of the code is approximately 1-2 bytes, and the total value of every character makes up the size of your email.

Use the below tips to help decrease the size of your email and give it the best chance of being delivered, and read:

- Focus on a few key points or a specific call-to-action rather than multiple. Shorter emails not only avoid clipping, but also improve open rates
- Use "Read More" links to point to a website where your reader can get in-depth information – don't overload your emails with information where it's not necessary
- Remove unnecessary spaces or line breaks.

Layout

Marketers should always work very hard to develop email templates with layouts that aim to convert readers.

Layout includes how it should look, its length, fonts, colours, image use, and CTA placement

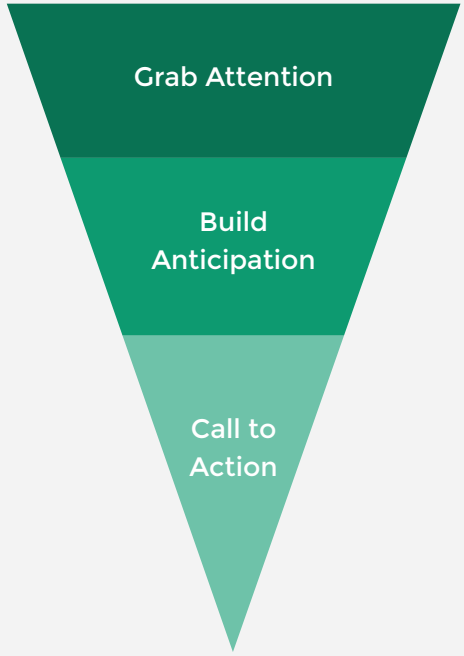
- Limit yourself to four or five modules (excluding footer/disclaimer and mandatory 'view online' sections) for better visual emphasis
- Don't use too many CTAs
  (See section on CTAs for tips)
- Where your copy is running long, consider limiting characters and hyperlinking '...Read More' copy that will lead to a relevant landing page
- Consider the hierarchy of information that you want to pay importance to. Ultimate CTA goes first!
- Use the right template for the purpose of your email.

The Inverted Pyramid

This model for email layout works particularly well for a campaign with a simple message and a single CTA, though if you can't avoid a long email, you can repeat this process down the length of your email (just make sure it's not TOO long!)

- Start with a succinct headline that highlights the key messages, or the value proposition of the email
- Follow up with supporting information and imagery to convince readers of the benefits of clicking through and converting
- Present your CTA to make it clear how you want them to act next.





Images

Research shows that the human brain processes visuals 60,000 times faster than text, making images a very powerful tool to use in your email.

Strong and beautiful imagery will helps encourage email readers or site visitors to engage with your content.



Using GIFs in email

Research has shown that the use of GIFs in emails can help increase the conversion rate by 103 percent, while also positively affecting open and click-through rates. Consider using GIFs to display projects or lifestyle images rather than using the video component for something different.

Where GIFs aren't supported, recipients will just see a static image so make sure that the leading image is appropriate for the email.

Remember to check your stats from previous sends to make sure you're sending the right email elements to the right audience; GIFs are not compatible with Outlook and Lotus, where only the first frame will be shown – so make sure you're picking the right elements for the most popular email client used by your recipient list.



Using Video in email

Because video can't be played in email, many organisations will use image components with a play button overlayed on the image. Videos should be embedded onto a landing page using the YouTube or Vimeo embed link, and the email should link through to the landing page, not link directly to the company YouTube channel.

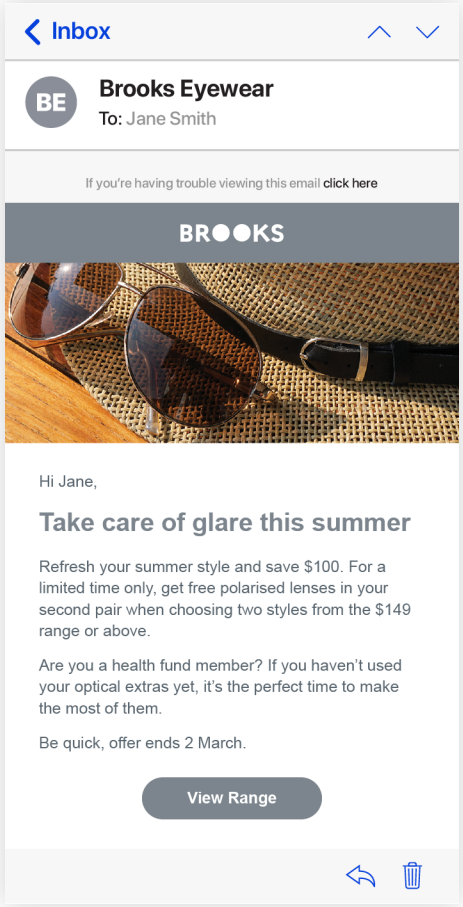
We should always be driving traffic to the website where we can, rather than external platforms.

Using alt text on images

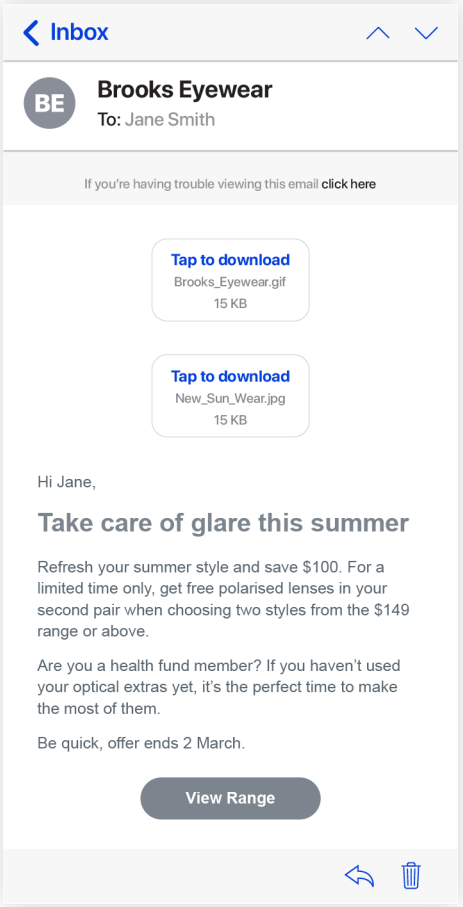
To help with image load times and to help protect from viruses, many email platforms will not automatically download images. Today, recipients also often have the option to turn off image loading – especially on mobile.

To help encourage recipients to take the extra step and download images, to get the full visual experience of your email, always include alt text for images (except items like divider lines). If you leave out alt text, your readers see a blank box.

Images downloaded in Apple Mail



Images not downloaded



Make your alt text compelling and descriptive of the image itself to entice the recipient to want to see the image and go out of their way to download it (and the rest in your email).

To the right outlines what recipients will see when alt text is being used versus not, as well as how you can use the text itself to be descriptive.

When images are downloaded:	 **Call Sales Manager**	 **Explore Properties**	 **Download Brochure**
How images might appear with no alt text:			
How images appear with generic text:	Right click to download	Right click to download	Right click to download
How images appear when using specific language to describe the image:	Call SalesManager	Explore Properties	Download Brochure

Frequency

How many emails is too many?

There is no hard and fast answer to what the perfect cadence for email sends is, so it's best to look at your data.

Some effects of over-mailing your subscribers can include:

- Increased unsubscribes or opt-outs
- Decreased engagement leading to lower conversion rates
- Flagging emails as SPAM, risking an IP ban by the internet service provider

The best way to know how many emails you should be sending your list is by looking at your data. If by sending four emails per month you're losing subscribers, try sending only two per month and measure their success.

Once you have found a cadence that suits the audience you're sending to, focus on optimising your emails themselves through compelling and lead generating content.

Avoiding SPAM filters

SPAM filters can be triggered for a number of reasons. Here are the main ones:

- The subject line contains a SPAM trigger word – see examples on the right
- Your email contains all capitals
- Your email has a lot of exclamation points
- You're using attachments
- Image to text ratio is high – don't use too many images
    - Emails less than 500 characters should contain a supporting image
    - Emails over 500 characters are not significantly impacted by image/text ratio restrictions
- Too many different fonts and/or styles
- Low historical open rates
- Email is unsolicited – recipient may mark as SPAM

Some SPAM trigger words include:

% off
$$$
100% free
100% satisfied
Acceptance
Accordingly
Act now
Affordable
Apply now
Avoid
Billion
Cash bonus
Chance
Cheap
Click here
Compare rates
Credit
Double your income
Earn $
Earn extra cash
Extra income
F r e e
Fast cash
Free
Free gift
Free info
Free installation
Free investment
Free leads
Free membership
Free offer
Free preview
Free trial
Get started now
Great offer
Guarantee
Help
Hidden
Hidden assets
Increase sales
Increase traffic
Increase your sales
Incredible deal
Info you requested
Lifetime
Limited time offer
Lose
Maintained
Make $
Medium
Miracle
Never
No gimmicks
No hidden coasts
No investment
Now only
Obligation
One hundred percent
One time
Opportunity
Order now
Order today
Please read
Prices
Problem
Promise
Refinance
Reminder
Remove
Reverses
Sample
Satisfaction
Satisfaction guaranteed
Save $
Search engine listings
Serious cash
Solution
Special promotion
Stop
Success
Test
Thousands
Urgent
Visit our website
Web traffic

Measuring Success

As a marketer, regularly reviewing your email success should be part of your routine.

Taking the time to review the email marketing metrics chosen to measure the success of your campaigns before sending your next campaign will ensure that your message has the best chance at resonating with your audience. It's important to remember that success can be measured incrementally, so tracking your email marketing metrics on an ongoing basis is important

We advise that you measure the following metrics each time an email campaign is sent.



Bounce Rate

How to calculate: Returned emails ÷ Sent emails × 100

The bounce rate is the percentage of email addresses that returned an error after being sent. Errors can be either hard or soft bounces. Hard bounces include non-existent or invalid email addresses, so emails will never be delivered to that email address. Soft bounces may include a delivery address with a full inbox, or where there are server issues. If the issue is resolved, the email will be delivered.

Monitoring bounce rates is important for ensuring that your messages are reaching the people you want them to, as well as providing a good indicator of the cleanliness of your data. Where your hard bounce rate is high, you might want to look at those invalid emails and clean up your database.

Similarly, high bounce rates may be related to a specific email client. Hard bounce rates are also one of the key elements used by internet service providers (ISPs) to determine sender reputation: this is why you should always clean up your lists in a timely manner when such issues arise.



Open Rate

How to calculate: Emails opened ÷ Emails delivered × 100

Open rate is the number of emails opened compared to the total amount delivered. Open rates are affected most by the subject and preheader: carry out tests frequently and pay extreme attention when drafting interesting copy that arouses curiosity and urges recipients to open the message

Click through rate

How to calculate:
Emails opened ÷ Emails delivered × 100

This is the number of clicks on the links contained in an email message, divided by the number of emails delivered. The click-through rate is determined by the email's content – images, copy and especially calls-to-action.

Conversion Rate

How to calculate:
Number of users who have completed your goal ÷ Emails delivered × 100

Open rate is the number of emails opened compared to the total amount delivered. Open rates are affected most by the subject and preheader: carry out tests frequently and pay extreme attention when drafting interesting copy that arouses curiosity and urges recipients to open the message

List growth rate

How to calculate:
(Number of new subscribers) - (Number of unsubscribes + email/spam complaints) ÷ (Total number of email addresses on your list) × 100

This is the rate at which your email list is growing. Marketers should always be keeping tabs on your list growth and loss. You should be aiming to grow your list in order to extend your reach, expand your audience, and position the brand in the way you want across your different audiences.

Be aware that there is a natural decay of your email marketing list by about 22.5% every year on average. This means is important to pay attention to the ways in which you're generating more subscribers and growing your list to ensure it stays at a healthy size.

Device Type

Marketers should always be looking at the common devices or email clients used to open emails, in order to properly optimise the email for those common platforms. This will also inform when the best time to send your email is, based on whether your audience is sitting at a desktop (usually during work hours), or on their mobile (typically used at home on the commute).

Unsubscribe rate

How to calculate:
Unsubscribed users ÷ Emails sent) × 100

This is the number of clicks on the links contained in an email message, divided by the number of emails delivered. The click-through rate is determined by the email's content – images, copy and especially calls-to-action.

Timing

A number of different email providers suggest that Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are favourite days to send email campaigns, with MailChimp confirming that Tuesday and Thursday are the two most popular days to send email communications.

Research has shown:

6am – 10am:
Popular for promotional emails for events, restaurants, and consumer goods

10am – 3pm:
Most people are busy working and email open rates are down

3pm – 5pm:
Recipients open emails connected to property and financial services more than any other email type

5pm – 10pm:
Promotional or sales emails have more opens

While the above can serve as a general rule, understanding your demographics is arguably the most important thing when deciding when to send your emails.



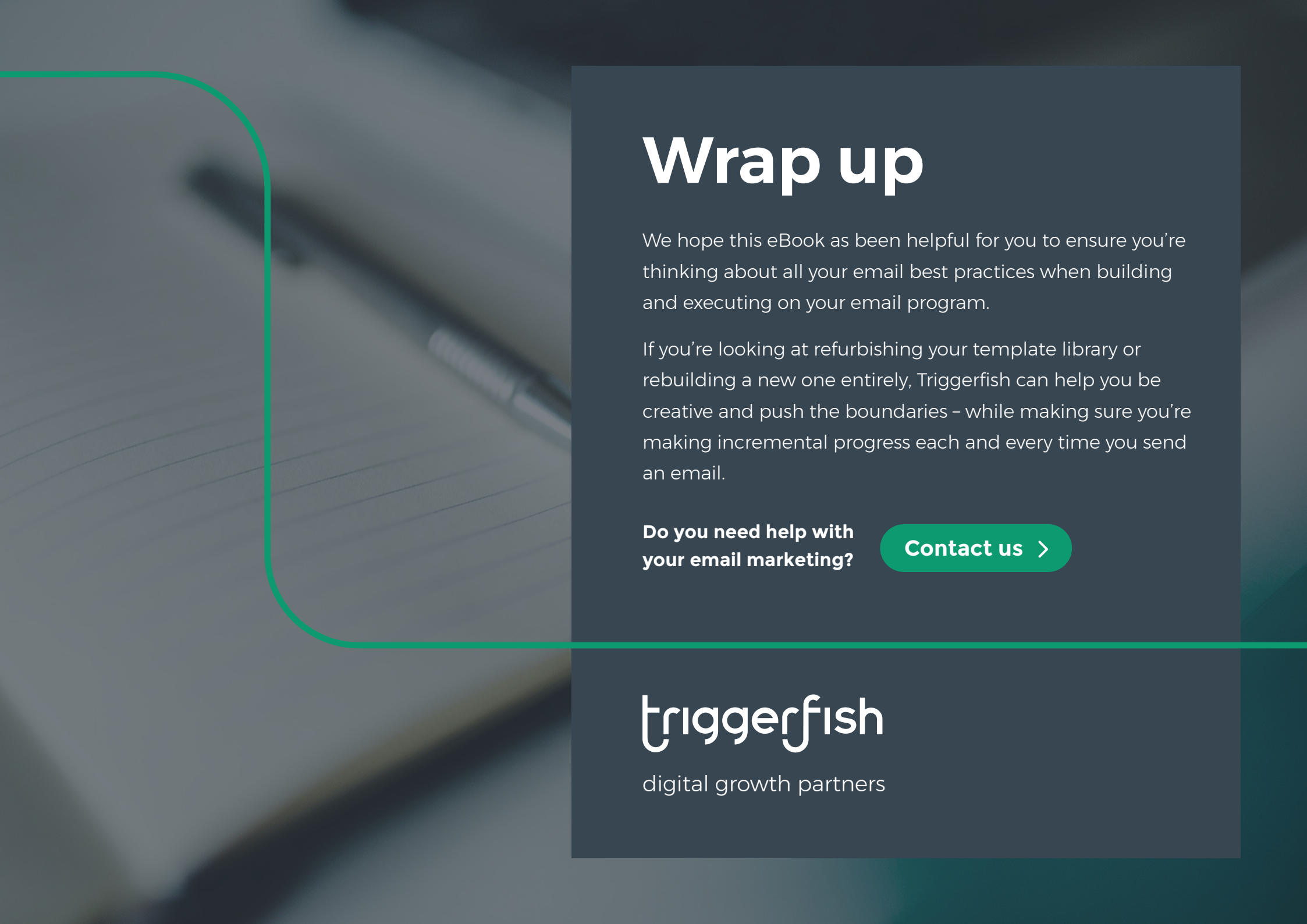
By audience

It's important to remember first your email's audience before deciding what might be the best time to send your email. When you know your audience, you can consider what their day might look like. Are they commuting to and from work and have the ability to check emails? If they're likely to have typical 9:00am-5:00pm work hours, sending before or after work could lead to higher open rates, with more time to browse through landing pages during commute. If you're targeting downsizers, the 10:00am – noon timeslot might be better.



By device

Consider using your device type metric when deciding a time to send your emails. If your list typically open on a mobile device, you could assume they're opening their emails before work, during lunch or after work rather than while they're at their computer during work hours.



Wrap up

We hope this eBook as been helpful for you to ensure you're thinking about all your email best practices when building and executing on your email program.

If you're looking at refurbishing your template library or rebuilding a new one entirely, Triggerfish can help you be creative and push the boundaries – while making sure you're making incremental progress each and every time you send an email.

Do you need help with your email marketing?

Contact us ›

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