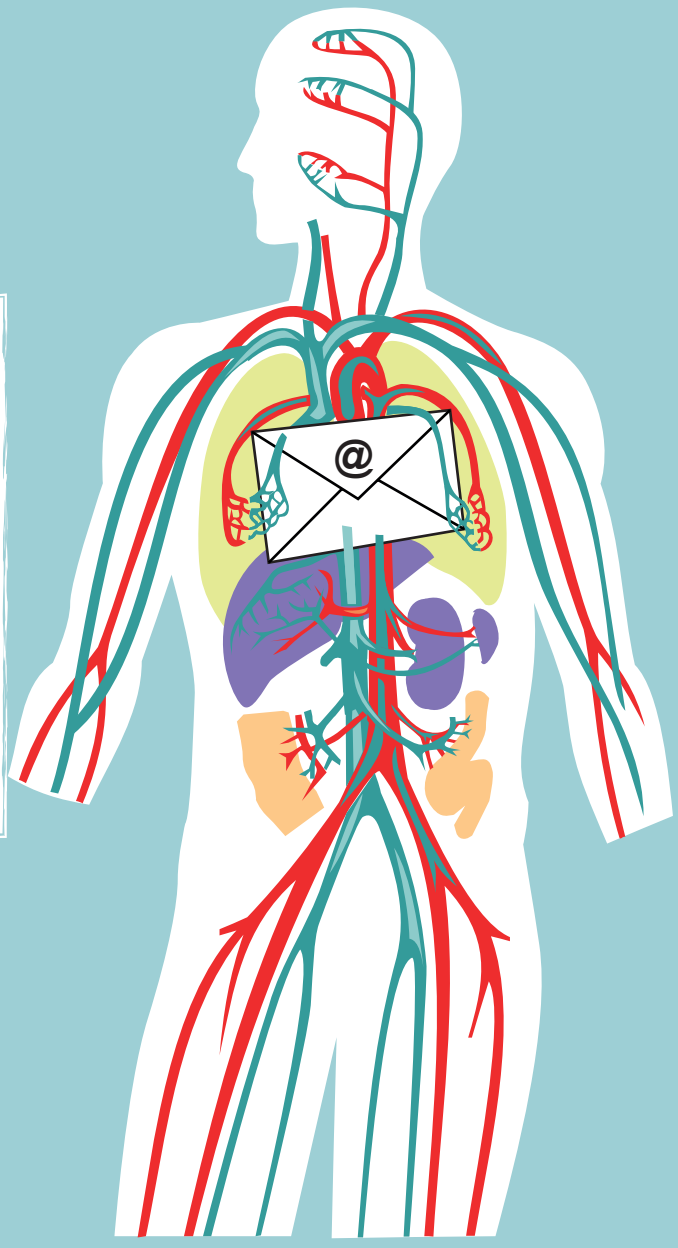
The Pure360 guide to the anatomy of an email



Often as you build an email it is hard to step back and think about what the recipients' opinion of your brand will be based on the communication…

This guide will help you as it looks at different parts of the email anatomy.

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Introduction

At Pure360 we work with lots of lovely brands of all shapes and sizes every day, we talk to other marketers, we talk to other ESPs, we talk to ISPs and we read everything we can about email marketing.

The experience of the recipient is the difference between an open and a spam hit. It will decide how the recipient prioritises your emails and how and when they take action. There is a high level of empathy required to get this right. Often, as you are building the email, it is hard to step back and think about what the recipients opinion of your brand will be based on the communication.

To help you understand this better, I have broken the email up and looked at each part of its anatomy.

I've described each part's importance and the impact it can have on the recipients' experience.



Subject lines

Subject lines get you the opens. There is lots of advice about subject lines and it is the most popular bit of an email to test, this is so you get to find out what works for you. Here are some key takeaways that will help you in your email marketing campaigns

- Length

  Keep it fairly short. Mainly to help with the many different interfaces your email could be viewed in. People also have very short attention spans so remember that if it's too long they won't bother reading it, and the chances are that means they won't bother opening your email

- Caps

  Don't do it all in caps, that's shouting. It gets you a spam warning in Spam Assassin. Some people don't like it when you capitalise the first letter of every word either because it can be viewed as bad English. It's not worth messing around so just write the sentence normally

- Brand name

  It is optional whether or not to put your brand name in the subject line. It'll be in the from field but some interfaces put the subject line on the left and the from name on the right, so if you do want to include your brand some people like to put it in there to make sure it gets seen first

- Accuracy

  Ask yourself 'Does the subject actually match the reason for the email?' Whilst saying 'Free iPad' will get the email opened - not offering a free iPad will get you junked shortly afterwards

- Relevance

  Is the subject line relevant to the recipient? Will they be motivated to open the email? - They should be otherwise you are fighting a losing battle from the off.

- Punch

  This is something that goes hand in hand with the length of the subject line. Punchy titles and subjects catch the attention and tend to get an action

- Novelty

  Novelty value is clearly not something you can add consistently to your emails because then they would never be novel! Every so often though it's good to think a little bit outside the box to make sure your recipients don't get into a de-prioritising pattern. When recipients see emails from you on a regular basis they will know exactly what your subject lines will say; they know it's relevant but they'll read it later. Something novel can get you back to the instant opener status

From name, preview pane appearance and pre-headers

From name

This is the bit in the inbox that shows your name or brand name (sometimes called "Friendly from"). Some people say a person's name gets a better open rate. If you are going to use a person's name then make sure your brand name is in the subject line. This is because the email may be seen as spam if it's from a person they don't know but seeing the brand in the subject line just alongside will reassure them of who you are

If you don't want to use a person's name in the from name, it's simple, just use your brand.
The email should come from the brand the recipient signed up to - if they asked for an email from a brand then send it from that brand. (see a relevance point below)

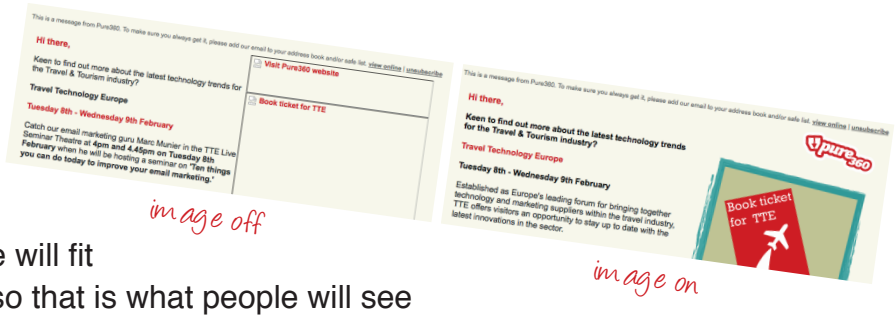
- Relevance

  Make sure the email comes from the brand they signed up to, not for example, the partner company. If people don't recognise it, they are less likely to open it

- Length

  This has far less space in an interface than the subject line, so keep it as short as you can whilst keeping it relevant and truthful

Preview pane appearance



Most B2B recipients view their emails in Outlook. This has a preview pane which is often used. The preview pane will fit about the top third of your email in it, so that is what people will see when they first open the email.

- Clarity with images off

  Outlook not only blocks images but it also substitutes its own alternative text with a blunt, and for some people, quite a scary message about security and having to right click etc. This is the reason for the browser view link in the pre-header; so people can click that link if the right click is too scary

You must make sure that people can see what your email is about whilst the images are blocked by Outlook. You can do this by either making the browser view a call to action or by keeping the images small in the top third

- Clarity with images on

  Once someone has loaded the images in the preview pane they still need to have easy access to a degree so they will do what you want them do and click through. If you have a giant image of your logo, they may have too much work to do and de-prioritise you, or just move on

Pre-headers

- Description

  Also known as 'Trust Earning Text', the description is the first line of the pre-header. This is also shown under or next to the subject line in many inboxes including iphone, Yahoo, Gmail, and some views in Outlook

  The idea of this is to elaborate on the subject line to add encouragement to load the images or view in the browser and read on.

- External View Link
  Really handy to have at the top, so people whose images are blocked initially can open the email in their browser if they can't be bothered to load the images

Put this same link at the top of the plain text version and make it a call to action. Recipients that can only see plain text are most likely to look for this link to see the html version in their browser.

- Safe Senders
  Ask people to add your from address to their safe sender list/address book. This helps deliverability and sometimes means that your images are auto-loaded next time

- Single Call to action
  If your email has only one call to action, it is not uncommon to put this at the top. This way people who are likely to convert immediately don't have to scroll or load the images

Banner and header

Banner

It's popular to have a bit of a banner near the top of an email, normally an image holding your logo.

- Size
  If your logo image is too big it will take over and whilst the images are blocked, recipients will not be able to see what your email is about when they first open it. Also image sizes trump table widths so if your image is wider than the table it will push the table wider

- Weight
  Every image has a certain amount of memory it takes up depending on its size and quality. For instance a 640px by 480px 1600dpi jpeg will be gigantic where a 45 x 30px 96dpi gif will be tiny

If your logo image is really big you may have changed the width and length in your Wysiwyg (What you see is what you get) but the image will still be the same weight. So when someone loads the images it will still take ages to load and you could lose their interest.

Most monitors only need images of 96dpi. So when you get your logo url from your designer make sure it is the size you need it in email, this way you haven't got to resize it.

- Relevance

  Ask yourself 'Is the banner relevant to the point of the email?' 'Is it just your logo or are you making the content personal to this email and even the recipient?'

- Position

  The banner does not have to be at the top, in the middle or take up the entire width of the page. People read from top left to bottom right, so you could have a smaller logo on the left and put your header text on the right, or the other way round. Why not test it to find out which way looks best?

Header



The header is the popular larger text used to announce what the email is all about. This is not a required section and is often put in alongside the logo banner or merged into one image.

The header is often also known as the headline of the email, for example the main story in a newsletter or call to action in the message. This way it can introduce the email properly, elaborate on the subject line and preheader description line, or add another call to action with a bit more context than one in the preheader.

- Size
  If it's too big it'll be a bit too aggressive, if it's too small it won't have the desired effect.
  If you use an image it'll need to be loaded and if you use too large text it'll get a spam warning

- Appearance
  Ask yourself 'Does it stand out enough but still blend into the theme of the message?'
  Many emails have a consistent template where the logo and header is always the same but this doesn't always work, it depends on the tone and the content of that particular email

- Relevance
  Does it say what it needs to? Is it delivering that first main message to the recipient that you need it to? If not, you might not need it at all and you can plough straight into the content

Content and footer

Content

This is the main bit of the email where your words and links are. Obviously the content varies greatly depending on the reason you are sending the email, e.g. it could be a newsletter or a single call to action like an event invite etc.

Here are some general things you should bear in mind to make sure the recipient experience is good.

- Appearance
  Ask yourself 'Does it look pretty, is it on brand, is it readable?' Don't fall into the trap of making it so pretty that no one can read it. And don't try and say too much.
  You should have a bag load of room on your website, so put the blurb there and use the email to get the click.

- Relevance

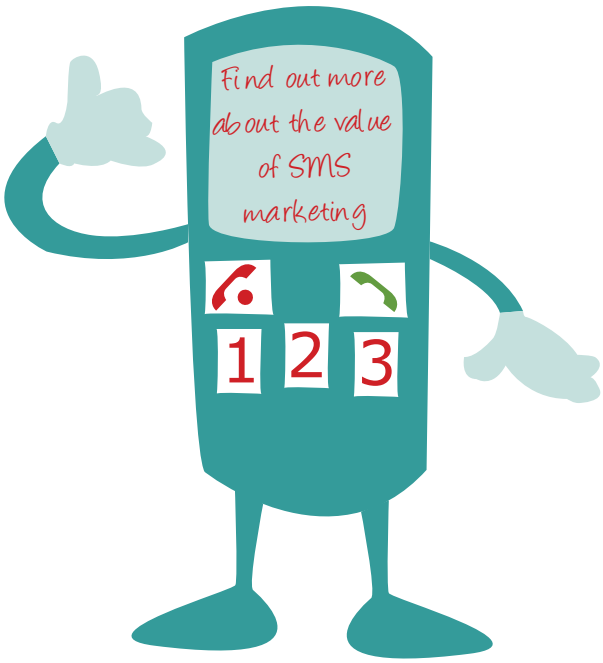
  Will someone quickly be able to decide if they are intrigued and click through? If they have to concentrate too hard they'll get bored and move on. Does the content connect to the reason they opened the email? Is it on track with the subject line, the from name and anything else they might have seen on their route to the content?

- Call to action

  A newsletter will have multiple call to actions so in this case make sure the read on bit for every article is easy to find. Make your images clickable too as some people just like to click images. If you have one main call to action, go for a button over a text link - buttons are more successful. You don't have to use an image either, you can use a little table with a border, a back-ground colour with some text in the middle, the table looks like a button but renders without having to load the images

- Mobile

  More and more people are reading emails on their smart phones. Most smart phones will normally load the images automatically. Obviously smart phones have tiny screens compared to computer monitors and all smart phones have auto zoom to fit in the text column or focussed image to the width of the screen. If your column is very wide, the text will be tiny and the reader will have to zoom in and scroll left and right. So, try and keep the text column widths consistent, around 300px and don't make the fonts too small



Footer - legal stuff

As of 2006, as well as the opt-out link, company information must be included on all electronic communications. You must include the full registered name, number and office address of your company, as well as country of registration, on all email marketing.

This is to ensure full accountability of the email in the same way as marketers must do for direct postal mail.

- Reg details

  Normal stuff just stick the registration details at the bottom of the email, not too big and not too small. For more information on this you can check out my '**Email Marketing and the law**' blog

- Optout link

  The optout link has to be obvious and not cryptic and not an image button. Essentially if someone wants to optout they will, if you make it hard for them they'll only hit the spam button and that's 100 times worse

- Preference Centre

  If you have a preference centre - well done!

  Make sure people can still optout easily once they get there and don't ask them to login in order to be able to optout. If your preferences are stored within a login site, you will need to have an unsubscribe link and a preference centre link in the email. If you do, put the unsubscribe link to the right of the preference centre link.



Testing & Rendering

This is about how the email appears to the eye in the inbox. Every inbox is slightly different and they are all changing all the time, so it is vital that you test to make sure it looks the same everywhere.

The key to testing is to have a list of your own addresses to send test deliveries to. Normally this will be your work address to test for Outlook and some inline inboxes. Include Google as well even if you are a B2B sender because Google Apps allows businesses to use Google for their work email.

Your message creation process should allow you to send untracked test emails to as many addresses as you like to test the rendering but before you send the email to your main list, send a full delivery to your test list, check the inbox placement and click every link to make sure they all work.

B2B Rendering: Outlook

If you are B2B sender Outlook is the one you should pay most attention to. So test, test, test into every version of Outlook you can get your hands on and utilise Inbox preview tools like Pure360's inbox preview (which uses Litmus).

Common rendering issue include: background images, borders, and bullet lists. Outlook is fairly picky about these.

B2C Rendering: Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail, AOL

If you send B2C messages, these are the big four. Historically Hotmail has been the pickiest. So normally if you can get it to right in Hotmail it will be good in the rest, but still make sure you test.

Image to text ratio OK

The most common spam warning in emails is the image to text ratio. Spam filters learned to read and look for key word combinations including 'Viagra' and 'Financial help' etc, so spammers put their text into images and in response filters require at least a 60% text to 40% image coverage. No images should touch each other and you need at least 3 images.

A good way to get more text in the email is use of the preheader and elaboration in the footer: bulk up the registration details, you can also include a privacy statement and text links to other parts of the site like contact us etc.

Phishing and Spam Warnings

Phishing

Phishing is easy to do without you even realising. Initially the protection was there to stop spammers using a bank's URL and making it link to a spoof phishing site e.g.www.natwest.com as the text but the underlying link could go to www.we-will-rob-you.com

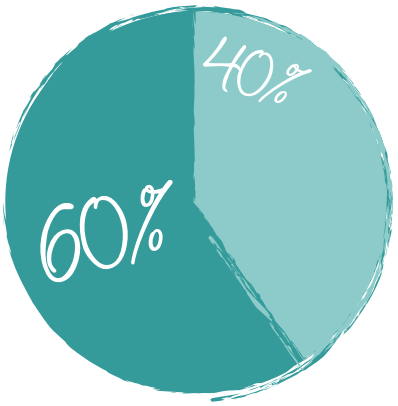
Subsequently inboxes will look for any link which has a URL for its visible text and check that the destination of the link is the same domain. Any tracked link, in an email or most online ads, actually go link to the tracking site, like the ESP who logs the click and seamlessly redirects to the intended destination.

This means that if you put a full URL in your email and link it, even though you will be linking it to the same place as the text says, when the email goes out the link will have been swapped for a tracked link to count the click. And this is when you could get accused of phishing.

The key to avoiding it is to not have http:// or www. at the start of the text of a link
e.g. www.natwest.com should be natwest.com. It's that easy.

Spam Warnings

Common spam warnings include:



• Image to Text Ratio - 60% text 40% images

Filters will do the maths and calculate the total area of your image coverage and then count all of the text characters, assign them 12px each and compare the two.

• One image and some text

Filters don't like one image and then some text. You need at least 3 images and not all of them touching. So make sure you don't just add text underneath your big image content.

• Subject line all caps

Spammers shout so you can't.

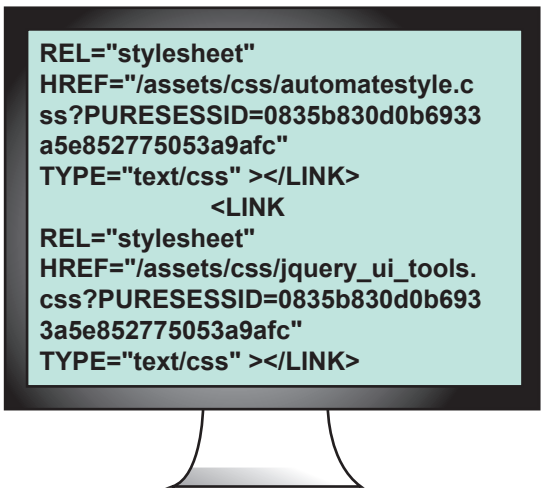
• Text the same colour as background

Some people try to hide text in the email to bulk up the text content whilst keeping it invisible, so they make the background white and the bulking text white too. Filters know this is a spammer trick so avoid it. Sometimes this can happen accidentally, depending on how your HTML person has coded the background colours in the email. So keep testing

• HTML and Plain text difference

As filters can read your text, they will also compare the copy in the html and plain text versions to an extent.
The filter will normally give up after about 400 characters.

The only time you are likely to see this is if you have a large image containing a lot of text which cannot be read by the filter. So getting the image text ratio right normally eradicates the problem.





Author of this guide, Andy Thorpe is one of the many talented and experienced people who make up the team at Pure360.

Pure360 is an email & SMS marketing provider who specialise in helping businesses get the best results from their campaigns. Pure360 work with over 1000 organisations including brands such as Rightmove, Virgin and innocent drinks. Our customers stay with us through choice, not contract, and they tell their friends about us – but never their competitors!

We'll work with you to improve your email marketing and SMS results.

You'll get the best from your campaigns without being tied into a long contract, because your success is our success. You'll get full training, support and regular free advice supported by email marketing and SMS software that's developed in-line with customer feedback.

Pure360 customers have access to the largest UK-based customer support team of all email marketing providers because our whole focus is on improving your results by working together.

Members of the DMA, we've recorded a 10% higher open rate for our customers than the DMA average, leading to higher clicks and conversions for your email marketing campaigns.

You can find the team working to improve our customers' email campaigns, down in Brighton, pop in or give us a call on 0844 586 0001 to discuss how we can help you get excellent results from your email & SMS campaigns. Or email us at contact@pure360.co.uk

We're also on Twitter (@pure360) or sign up for our newsletter online www.pure360emailmarketing.co.uk