

HTML Guidelines for Email Campaigns

When creating HTML files for use in email marketing, there are a few things that should be done differently from how web pages are created. Most of these involve working with HTML as if it was still 2004, which may look ugly from a development standard, but will create the most compatible code as far as emails go.

1. If you are not coding the HTML from scratch by using a text editor, it is best to use a standard HTML editor such as Adobe Dreamweaver or Microsoft Expression Web. These will generally create very clean code that is very compatible, even when using the graphical editing tools that they offer. If you are not making the creative using an HTML program, be very careful of what you use. Adobe Photoshop, InDesign and Microsoft Word are three programs that are used often for making HTML files, but all three are not meant for creating HTML at all. Oftentimes these programs create problems. If your designers do not know HTML and feel that they need to use a program like these, it is best to use Adobe Fireworks. Fireworks is intended to be an HTML creation tool that uses the same slicing features found in Photoshop and InDesign. It is very easy to use and creates the most compatible code.
2. Cascading Style Sheets are one of the greatest tools available in web design. However, CSS does not work well in emails. Some major email clients such as Gmail will actually strip CSS from the email when it hits the inbox, so any hard work you put into the styles for that email will have been for vein. The alternative to this is Inline Style Sheets. These are more compatible and offer better results for email clients. You will also want to be safe and not only use Inline style sheets, but use definition tags when available. For example:

```
<td style="width:600px;background-color:#00FFFF" width="600" bgcolor="#00FFFF">
```

Would be the best way to define a table cell, even though it is redundant.

3. Background images are not a good idea because Outlook 2007-2010 does not show them. Colors are fine, and we would suggest using them in place of images when possible. Also, set up the HTML to have the images as foreground images instead.
4. Div tags are a standard these days for website building, but they don't work in emails well. Tables are the best alternative to use, but try not to use colspaces and rowspaces. Instead just put more tables inside of the current table if you need to split up cells. The code looks ugly, but it works.
5. Try not to be too fancy in the creative. You want everything to look good, but try to make it look good in the simplest ways. For example, instead of doing Margins (margins usually work, but are known to mess up an email under certain conditions) use more tables. Tables work in emails very well, so if you put a centered 680 pixel wide table inside of a 700 pixel wide table to create a 10 pixel left and right margin, you will have no problem with that showing up. It's not the prettiest method, but it absolutely works.

If you can use these guidelines then your emails will have a much better chance of appearing correctly.

Data-Dynamix Production Team