The Art of The Email

Do's and Don'ts for Creating Successful Emails

WINDSOR CIRCLE

Introduction.

According to a recent survey of online retailers, email is the most common marketing tactic, with 94% of respondents utilizing it, and 53% allocating more than half of their budget to email campaigns.[1]

Why? Because email is effective, and if done correctly, does not have to be time-consuming. And email usage spreads far beyond the online retail industry. It's also projected that by 2018 the average person will receive 125 emails a day.[2] With this glut of messages, it's important to make sure your emails stand out in the inbox.

But what kind of emails should you be sending?

As you hopefully already know, sending the same message to all recipients is not an effective form of email marketing. This type of batch-and-blast emailing is old-fashioned and ineffective because the same message will likely not be relevant for your entire audience. Also, most email service providers offer tools that allow you to customize messages, which you should definitely be taking advantage of.

We're here to help you get started. In this eBook, we'll offer tips and tricks to make sure your emails are the best they can be. Read on to learn email marketing do's and don'ts that will help you reach your audience in a meaningful way.

[1] http://info.windsorcircle.com/2015-retention-marketing-survey-2015

[2] http://www.radicati.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Email-Statistics-Report-2015-2019-Executive-Summary.pdf

The Do's.

DO: Personalization.

Relevancy is important in email marketing. Using personalization can help make your emails more relevant for each recipient. How personal you get depends on how much you know about your email subscribers. The easiest type of personalization is to use the subscriber's name in the email message. If you have their name, you can add this to your message by including a merge tag in your email service software. Or if you know your subscriber's location you can send them geo-targeted messages based on this data. For instance, if you're a retailer having an in-store promotion, you could send an email to customers directing them to your closest location.

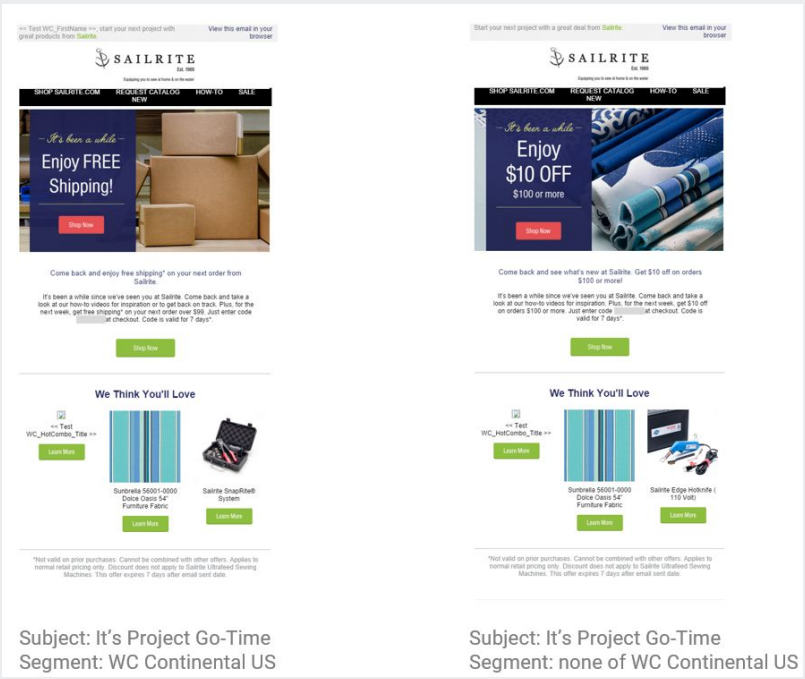
Windsor Circle client MyBinding tested geotargeting during with their holiday promotions last year, with messages that showcased their National Football League-branded products. Using zip code proximity, MyBinding segmented customers by the NFL team closest to them. These customers then received messages with team-specific merchandise and deals.

The Do's.

DO: Segmentation.

Segmentation is a great way to make sure you're getting the right message to different groups of your audience. Segmentation helps to build relationships with subscribers by leading to increased engagement with your email marketing. In fact, for segmented messages open rates are 13% higher and click rates increase 52% when compared to average engagement rates of non-segmented promotional emails.

Segmentation can also give you a better sense of what messaging is or is not working for your key segments. Take this evaluation one step further by creating benchmark open and click rates for each key segment. Once the benchmarks are in place, you can use this data to understand how altering segmented promotional email copy, subject lines, calls to action, etc. impacts subscriber engagement.



Subject: It's Project Go-Time
Segment: WC Continental US

Subject: It's Project Go-Time
Segment: none of WC Continental US

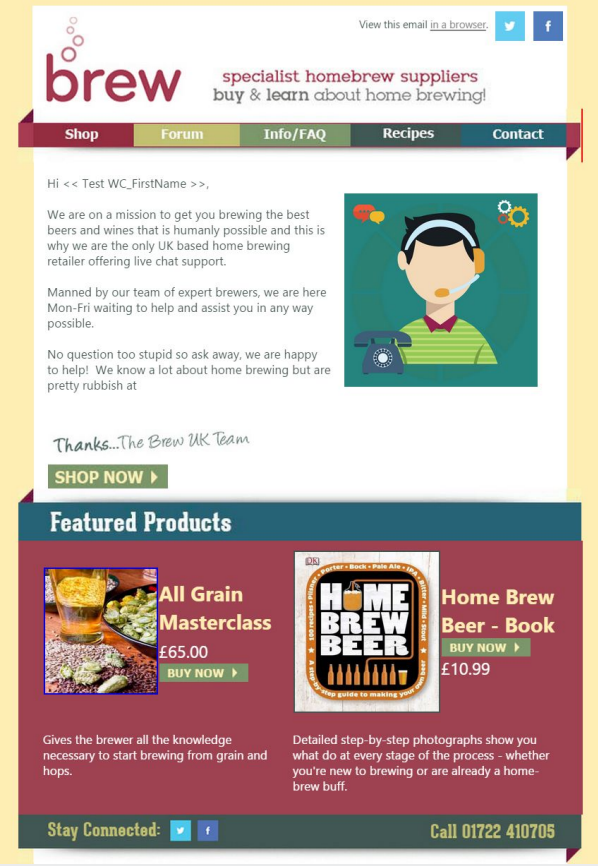
Another Windsor Circle client, Sailrite, uses geographic segmentation in their win-back messages, with separate campaigns for international and domestic customers. The messages are very similar, but the promotions are different. Because Sailrite can't offer free shipping internationally, they instead provide a deeper discount as an alternative for international customers.

The Do's.

DO: Automation.

Small organizations often forgo email marketing plans because they think they don't have the resources to enact and maintain them. Particularly, without a dedicated marketing staff, these groups may feel like they don't have the expertise or time to create a successful email campaign. However, automated emails don't have to be very time-consuming or complicated.

You can use lifecycle marketing to determine the typical journey of your email subscribers. Then, you can create automated messages for each of these points in the lifecycle that can be automatically triggered to subscribers when they reach that stage.



BrewUK's previous email marketing strategy consisted largely of batch and blast emails once or twice a week and little to no automation. With access to product, purchase, and customer data, BrewUK has set up over 40 automated emails to engage with customers at every stage of the lifecycle. Whether it's a "welcome" or a "thank you" message, automation ensures that each subscriber receives timely, relevant communications based on their behavior, which makes every customer feel special.

The Do's.

DO: Brevity & Simplicity.

When it comes to email, it's best to keep it short and sweet. One study found that the longer an email was, the less likely that recipients would engage with it. These emails saw a steady decline in opens when the length was above 125 words. To condense text count, try to utilize graphics that will get your point across without using words.

You should also be aware of your email copy, and try to avoid complicated or confusing language. The reading level of your emails has a significant impact on subscriber engagement. This same study found that emails with a third-grade reading level had the highest response rate. If you're unsure about the reading level of your messages, you can use online resources like ReadabilityScore.com to assess their reading level.

This "Happy Birthday" email from Artbeads.com is a great example of a short, but effective message. It clearly explains the purpose of the message using visuals and brief copy.These emails saw such a great conversion rate that they created purchase anniversary emails to duplicate the personalized, celebratory experience.

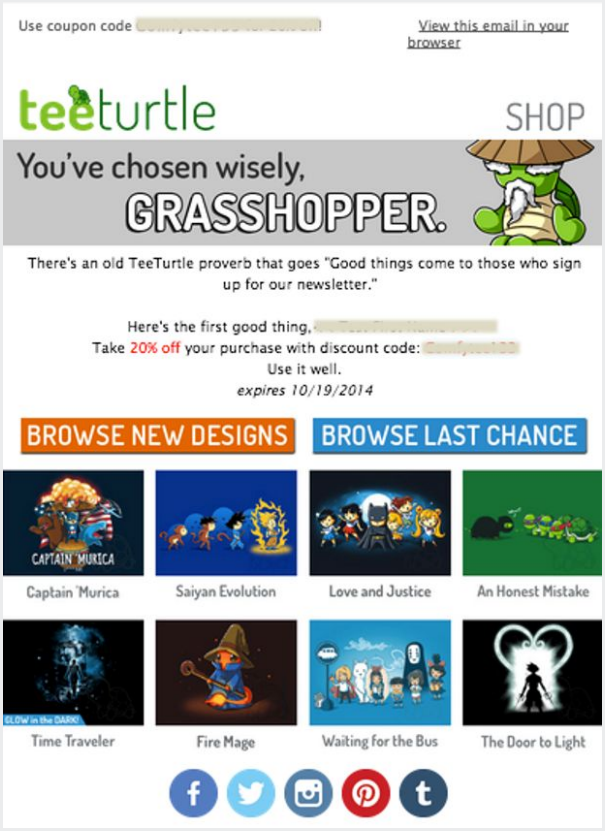
The Don’ts.

DON’T: Visually Unappealing Messages.

What your message looks like is just as important as its content. If possible, you should include images in your emails. In fact, a survey from HubSpot found that email recipients preferred messages that contained mostly images.

Text formatting is also very important. You can make your text more visually interesting by using different font colors, sizes, bold or italics to emphasize keywords. You can also use headlines to break up large blocks of text and briefly explain what each section is about.

But be sure to use a readable font. Sans serif fonts are often considered some of the most legible fonts for email templates. Avoid script or novelty fonts that may be difficult to read. What good is it to create an email if your recipients won’t be able to read it?

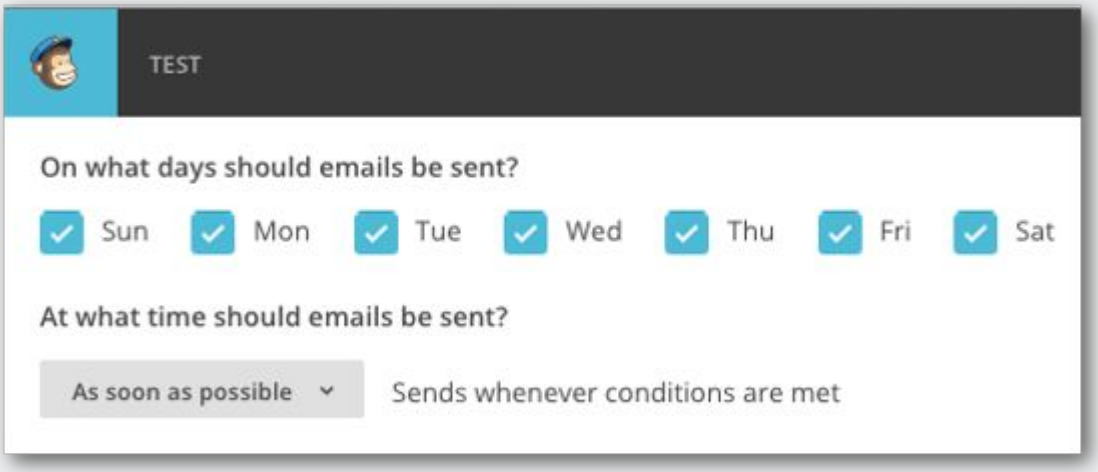


TeeTurtle makes a branded first impression in their welcome email by incorporating clever messaging and strong visuals, which make their emails striking, memorable and effective. The message includes a discount incentive with an expiration date, as well as a strong call-to-action "Browse Last Chance" to create a sense of urgency and to motivate a purchase quickly.

The Don’ts.

DON’T: Send Too Often.

Email frequency can have a negative impact on subscriber engagement. One study found that when marketers sent email more frequently their customers tended to engage less with each campaign. The results showed that the campaign click rate decreased as email frequency increased. This should be kept in mind when creating an email calendar. If you have a weekly newsletter as well as automated lifecycle marketing messages, make sure these emails are not being sent on the same day. In your email service provider, you can do this when scheduling your automated messages by simply unchecking the day that your weekly newsletter is sent. Below is an example of what this process looks like in MailChimp.



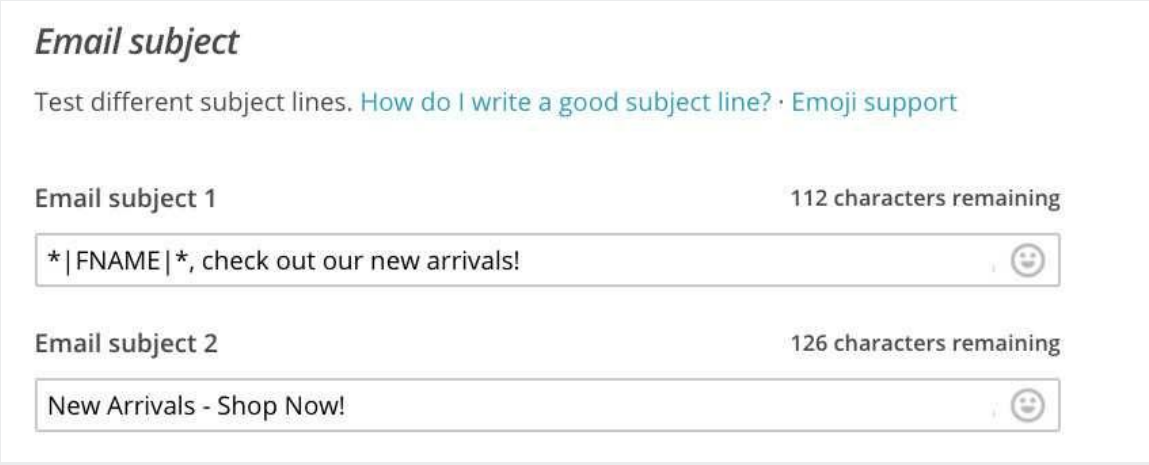
The Don’ts.

DON’T: Forget to Test.

You can use testing to find out which email elements resonate more with your audience. A/B testing lets you send slightly different messages to a test group of recipients to see which one garners a better response. You can test different subject lines, copy lengths, images, incentives and more. After the test, you can use this information to determine what your audience wants to hear and tailor your future email marketing efforts accordingly.

Another form of testing is to preview your message before it’s sent. With this function, you can see what your message will look like in multiple email clients or on various devices. A message that looks great on your desktop, may look completely different on a cell phone or tablet, so be sure messages are optimized for these devices as well.

The image below shows an A/B test of two different subject lines: one with first name personalization and one without.



The Don’ts.

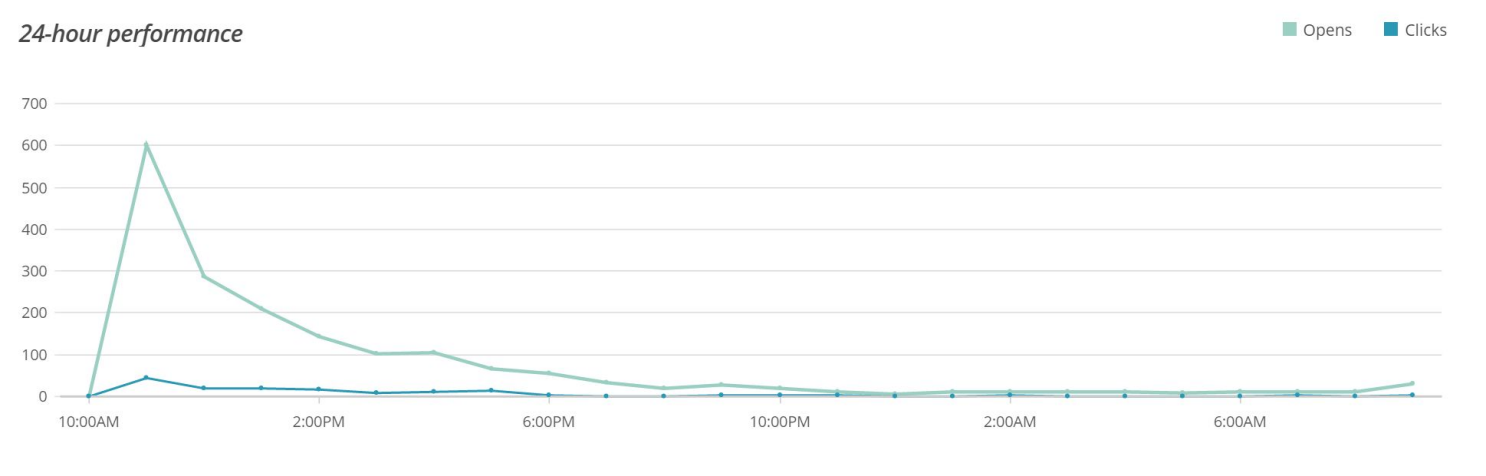
DON’T: Ignore Data.

You spend time perfecting your emails, making sure you have compelling copy, visuals and offers that will appeal to each of your recipients. However, all this work can go to waste if you deploy your email at 3 a.m. You’ve got the right message, but at exactly the wrong time.

How do you figure out the right timing for your message? In your email service provider, you can see peak times for opens and clicks for your messages. If there’s a pattern among the times subscribers are engaging with your messages most often, then you have an answer for the best time to send your emails.

You can also see what types of messages are most successful based on metrics like open and click rate. Try to determine what these messages have in common. Maybe it’s a similar offer, a catchy subject line, or first name personalization. From this data, you can figure out what works with your audience and give them more of what they want.

Below is an example of 24-hour campaign performance chart in MailChimp, which shows peak open and click times for the message.



Other Resources.

Your Inbox.

Look at what emails you've opened and why.

Examples.

Windsor Circle has a robust library of email examples, found here. We're always adding more to our blog, including holiday messages, cart recovery, browse abandonment, replenishment and more.

Art of the Subject Line eBook.

We developed an eBook to create compelling subject lines that ensure your emails are getting opened.

Spam Filter Guide.

This guide from our friends at MailChimp will help your emails avoid the dreaded spam folder.

Free Retention Analytics.

Sign up for a free trial of Windsor Circle's Retention Analytics Suite.