Technical notes on newsletter mass mailing

2012

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Technical notes on writing a newsletter

Newsletters can be a powerful way of reaching your members and those interested in what you as an organisation are doing. However they can be tricky to get right technically. What will work for one person won't work for all. There are two technical aspects worth considering with email: Images and fonts.
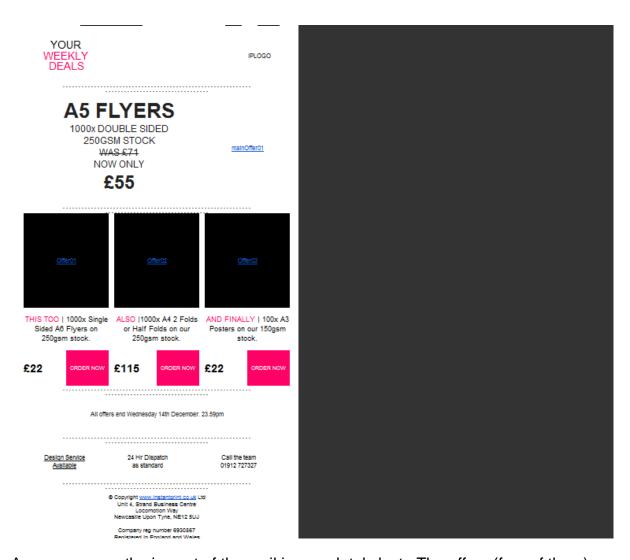
Images

Today there are lots and lots of email clients available for users. Some of them display images and some of them don't. It is possible for users to turn image display on but in practise many don't. The main clients on the web are:

Client	Default image display	Estimated market share
Yahoo	On	16%
Windows Live	Off	2%
Gmail	Off	5%
Hot mail	On	15%
Aol	On	0.9%

Desktop clients have a similar spread of image displaying:

Client	Default image display	Estimated market share
Outlook 2007	Off	40%
Outlook 2003	Off	
Apple Mail	On	8%
Thunderbird	Off	1%
Aol (desktop)	Off	0.35%

In short image based emails are often unlikely to be successful. The images won't be displayed on a large number on email clients. An example of such a mail sent to the author (using Gmail):

YOUR WEEKLY DEALS

IPLOGO

A5 FLYERS
1000x DOUBLE SIDED
250GSM STOCK
WAS £71
NOW ONLY

£55

mainOffer01

Offer01

Offer02

Offer03

THIS TOO | 1000x Single Sided A6 Flyers on 250gsm stock.

ALSO |1000x A4 2 Folds or Half Folds on our 250gsm stock.

AND FINALLY | 100x A3 Posters on our 150gsm stock.

£22   ORDER NOW   **£115**   ORDER NOW   **£22**   ORDER NOW

All offers end Wednesday 14th December. 23.59pm

Design Service Available

24 Hr Dispatch as standard

Call the team
01912 727327

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As you can see the impact of the mail is completely lost. The offers (four of them) are completely lost and the message fails to deliver. The mail should have looked like this:

This image looks great and could easily attract attention but without the images options switched on the message looks bare.

The company have tried to overcome these difficulties by writing the mail in a way that overcomes the difficulties. They have put the offer in text not images and have tried to make it easy for the user to see what is being offered.

The part that the company can't overcome is that over 60% of the ad area is an image and so it's not attractive to the reader. Generally they'll skip the mail.

Best practise for mailings remains to keep them image free or at least to reduce the dependence on images to get the point of the mailing across. The easy way to test

is to simply remove the images from the message and then see whether the message still comes across.

If you're still keen on using images then a solution that is used more and more is to create a webpage with all the graphics etc. and have a link in the email to that page. The page is "hidden" from normal website users but available by clicking the link.

Fonts

Fonts can make a mail look interesting and can help to set apart certain parts of the message. Unfortunately support for font types is very varied. Currently it is though that the following fonts are "safe" (that is will show on 99% of views):

- Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif
- 'Arial Black', Gadget, sans-serif
- 'Bookman Old Style', serif
- Comic Sans MS', cursive
- Courier, monospace
- 'Courier New', Courier, monospace
- Garamond, serif
- Georgia, serif
- Impact, Charcoal, sans-serif
- Lucida Console', Monaco, monospace
- Lucida Sans Unicode', 'Lucida Grande', sans-serif
- MS Sans Serif', Geneva, sans-serif
- MS Serif', 'New York', sans-serif
- Palatino Linotype', 'Book Antiqua', Palatino, serif
- Symbol, sans-serif
- Tahoma, Geneva, sans-serif
- Times New Roman', Times, serif
- Trebuchet MS', Helvetica, sans-serif
- Verdana, Geneva, sans-serif
- Webdings, sans-serif
- Wingdings, 'Zapf Dingbats', sans-serif;

These **normally** work as normal, bold, italic, underline and combinations of these type faces.

Using other fonts may or may not be successful so avoiding them seems to be a sensible approach. It's also worth noting that many email programs will only show black text (including bold, italic, underline etc.) so using colour will not always work.

At Websites4Christians we recommend using either Arial or Verdana in 12pt. These seem to work well across all formats and all mail clients. These fonts are clear readable and well liked.