

2016 STATE OF EMAIL DESIGN

How marketers go from inspiration to email design to landing page

Design gives structure, weight, and feeling to our messaging. As its own discipline, email design has unique limitations and considerations that marketers must master.

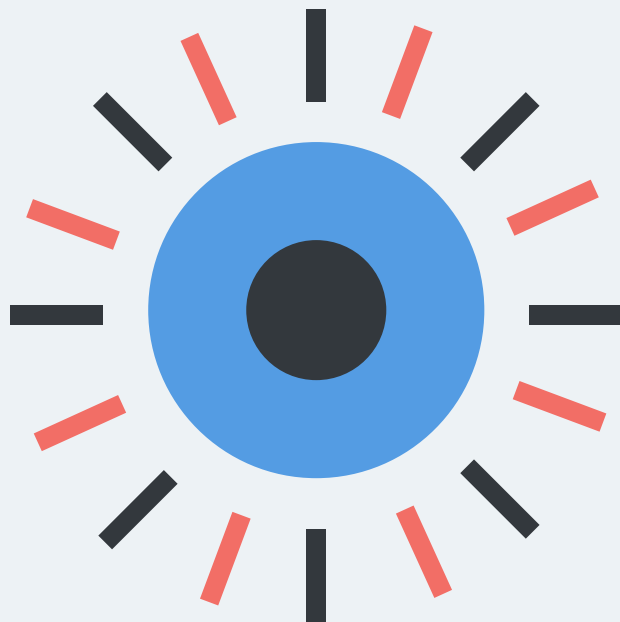
In the inaugural State of Email Design report, we take a detailed look at marketers’...

Search for email inspiration	3
Use of brand guidelines	7
Approach to email design	9
Use of various design elements	13
Use of one-off email designs	20
A/B testing targets	22
Email redesign schedules	24
Landing page responsibilities	26

Use the results to benchmark your own email designs and design processes, identify opportunities for improvement, and use this report as evidence to argue for the need to experiment with new email approaches, elements, and tactics.

All of this is made possible by the more than 900 marketers who took the time to take our Email Production Survey and share their insights with the industry—and the thousands of marketers who participated in the polls on the Litmus blog. Thanks! We couldn’t have done this without you.

Together, we can make email better! 😊



FINDING EMAIL INSPIRATION

Inspiration is often the first step in email design, and email marketers have a steady supply of it in their inboxes, with a quarter of marketers subscribing to 50 or more brands. Marketing luminaries Amazon and Apple top the list of brands email marketers watch most closely.

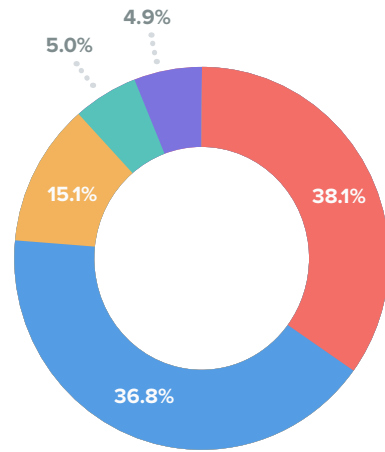
Beyond their inboxes, email marketers find inspiration on a variety of blogs and websites, as well as Pinterest, Twitter, Dribbble, and other social media sites. Really Good Emails and Campaign Monitor were cited as the best sources of email marketing inspiration.

Number of Brands Email Marketers Follow

How many brands' emails have you subscribed to, either for personal or professional reasons?

853 respondents

[Tweet this chart](#)



- Fewer than 20
- 20-49
- 50-99
- 100-199
- 200 or more

Despite all the talk about email overload, most consumers receive promotional emails from just a handful of favored brands.

Number of Brands You Receive Promotional Emails From

9% (21+)
5% (11-20)
15% (6-10)

Among more than 700 consumers

litmus **Fluent**

How to Create Memorable, Shareworthy Email Experiences

The vast majority of consumers say the promotional emails they receive are forgettable and not worth passing along to others, but there are several tactics marketers can use to stand out in the inbox and spur brand evangelism.

Despite all the talk about email overload, most consumers receive promotional emails from just a handful of favored brands.

Consumers who...

- male
- Receive promo emails from 20+ brands

and sharing emails at slightly higher average rates.

While 62% of marketers follow 20+ brands, only 9% of consumers receive promotional emails from more than 20 brands, according to our joint consumer research with Fluent. [Learn more consumer email habits](#)

Brands that Inspire Email Marketers

[Tweet this list](#)

Which brands do you think have the most inspiring email marketing programs?

1. Amazon
2. Apple
3. Campaign Monitor
4. MailChimp
5. HubSpot
6. ActionRocket
7. InVision
8. J.Crew
9. Uber
10. Bonobos
11. Patagonia
12. Airbnb
13. REI
14. Warby Parker
15. Starbucks
16. Email on Acid
17. Code School
18. Evernote
19. FitBit
20. Gap
21. ModCloth
22. Really Good Emails
23. Sephora
24. Asos
25. BarkBox

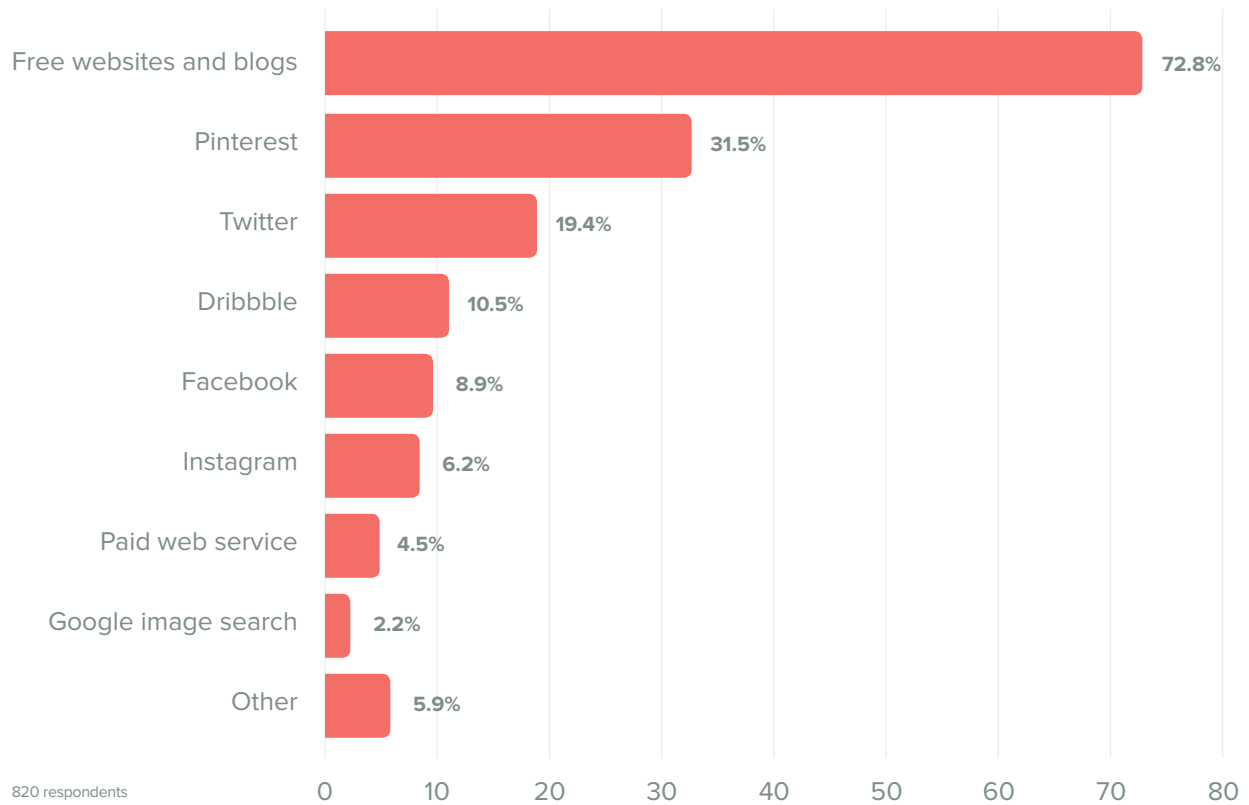


**Respondents said Litmus was more inspiring than Amazon, but we thought they were a little biased... delightfully biased.*

Sources of Email Inspiration

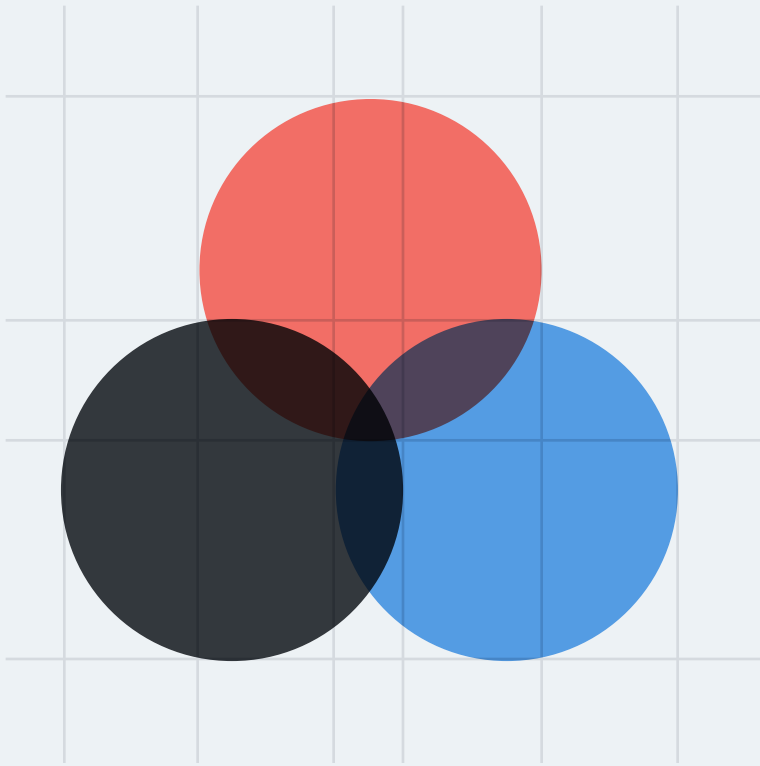
[Tweet this chart](#)

When looking for email inspiration, what channels do you turn to besides your inbox?



US email marketers were more likely to find inspiration on Pinterest and less likely to find it on Facebook than their non-US peers.





BRAND GUIDELINES

Every brand has guidelines that codify various design decisions so that their brand has a consistent look in print, on the web, and elsewhere. Brand guidelines typically include approved logo designs, indicate which font faces can be used and in what situations, establish a color palette, and more.

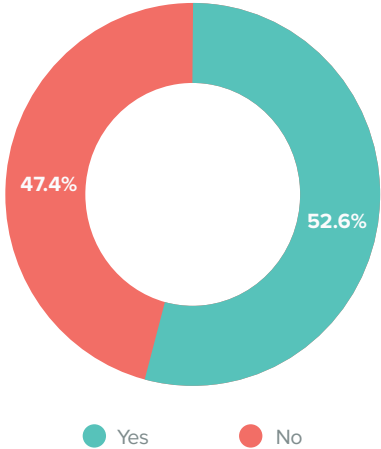
You should also have brand guidelines for your emails that recognize the limitations of the channel as well as the special elements only found in email. For example, the need to use HTML text and the limited support for fonts means that you'll need to have button designs and font selections for your emails that differ slightly from your usual graphic designs.

Brand Guidelines for Email

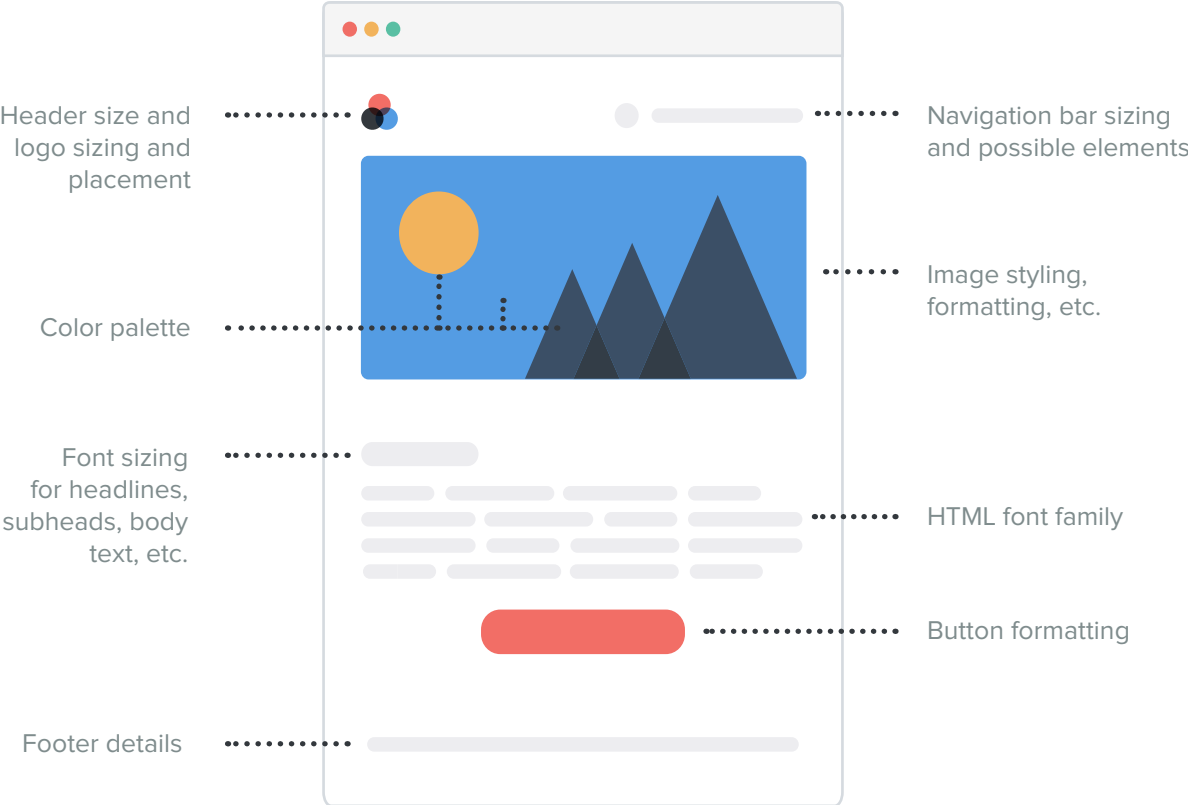
Does your company have design or brand guidelines specifically for email?

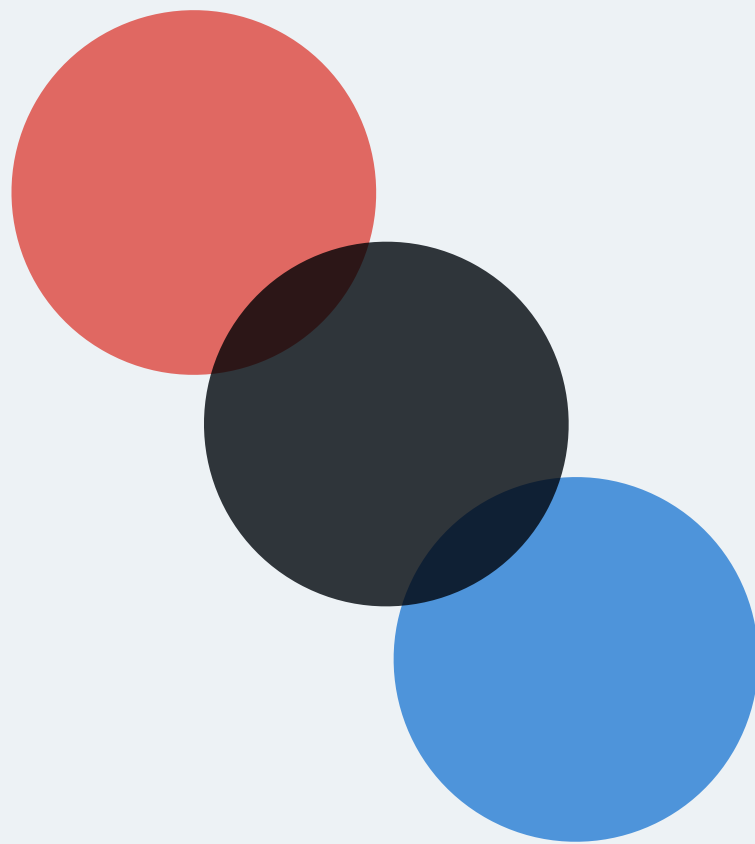
Source: Litmus poll of 1,235 visitors to its blog between Feb. 3 and Feb. 11, 2016

[Tweet this chart](#)



Possible items to include in your brand guidelines for emails:





DESIGN APPROACHES

Emails can be designed using a variety of approaches that range in complexity and favor certain environments over others. We grouped these approaches into three major buckets:

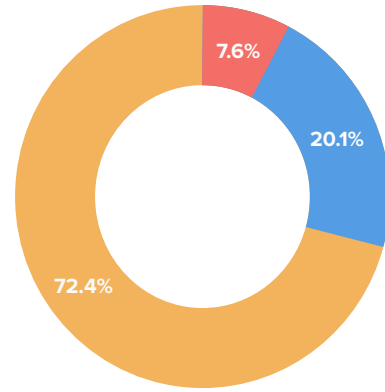
- (1) Desktop-centric design that favors large screens
- (2) Mobile-aware design that favors small screens
- (3) Responsive design that uses media queries and other advanced techniques to create emails optimized for both large and small screens

Based on the other results in our State of Email research series ([Production](#), [Salaries](#), [Agencies](#)), our survey respondents are significantly ahead of the curve in terms of embracing responsive design. That said, most of our respondents use responsive design to make only modest adjustments to their emails depending on whether they're viewed on large or small screens.

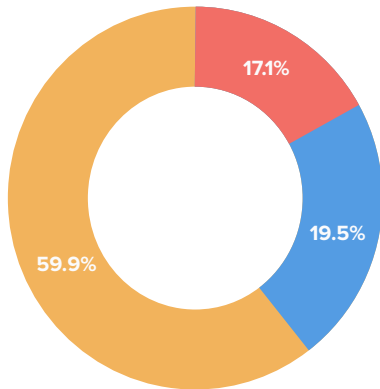
Design Used for Broadcast & Segmented Emails

Which type of email design approach do you typically use for your broadcast and segmented emails?

738 respondents



Desktop-Centric Mobile-Aware Responsive

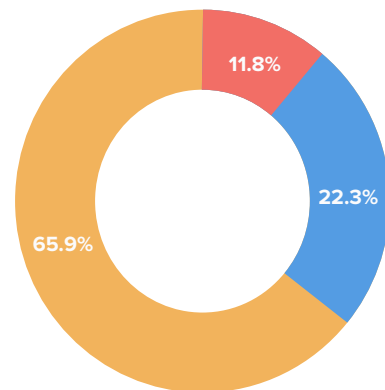


Desktop-Centric Mobile-Aware Responsive

Design Used for Transactional Emails

Which type of email design approach do you typically use for your transactional emails?

674 respondents



Desktop-Centric Mobile-Aware Responsive

Design Used for Triggered Emails

Which type of email design approach do you typically use for your triggered emails?

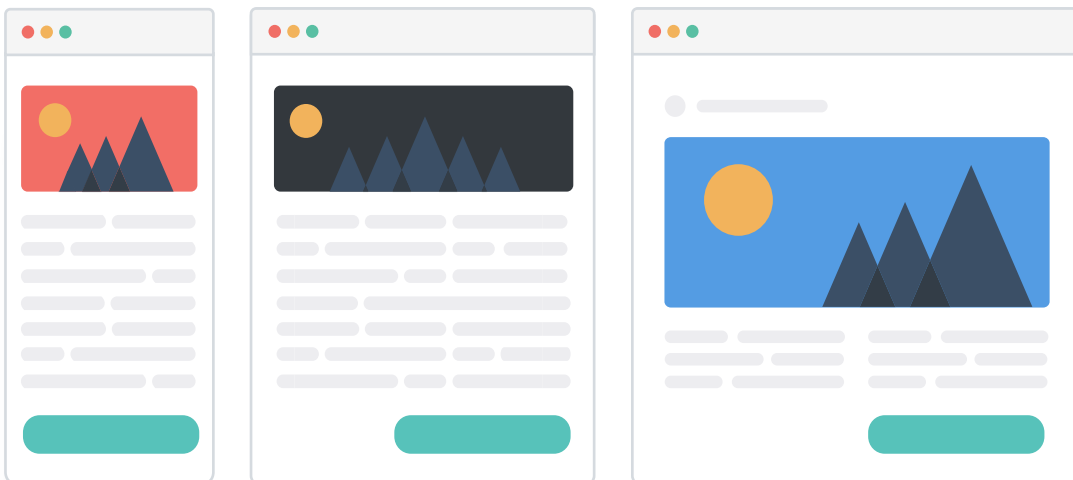
669 respondents

[Tweet these charts](#)

3 Major Email Design Approaches

Mobile-aware design: Deferential to smartphone and tablet viewing by using single-column layout, large text and images, and large and well-spaced buttons and links

Responsive design: Optimized for both desktop and smartphone viewing by using media queries and other techniques to adjust email content and layout to subscriber's screen size

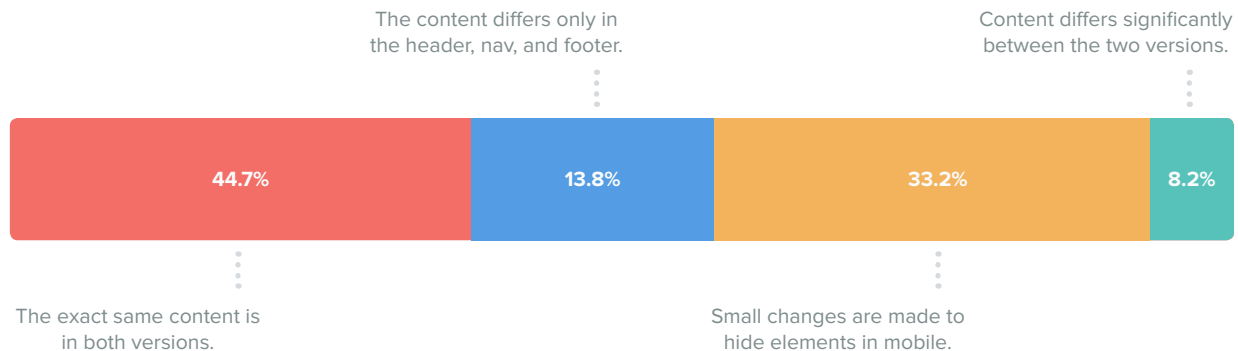


Desktop-centric design: Deferential to desktop viewing by using 2+ columns, small text and images, and tightly clustered buttons and links

Responsive Design Philosophy

Tweet this chart

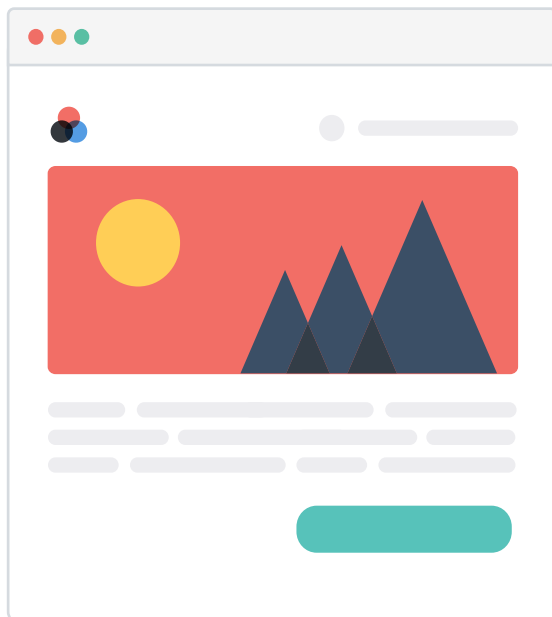
When using responsive email design at your company, to what degree does the content in the desktop and mobile versions need to match?



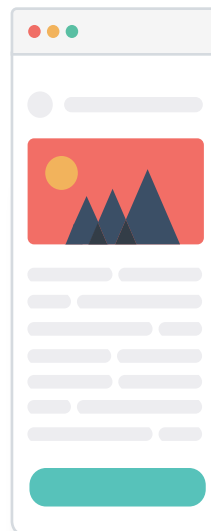
Source: Litmus poll of 1,104 visitors to its blog between Mar. 15 and Mar. 31, 2016

Using responsive design for the header and footer and then mobile-aware design for the rest of the email is a growing trend because of the production efficiencies. [Learn more about responsive-aware design](#)

Desktop



Mobile





DESIGN ELEMENTS

We looked at the design approaches that provide the framework of email messages. Now let's look at the design elements that sit inside that framework.

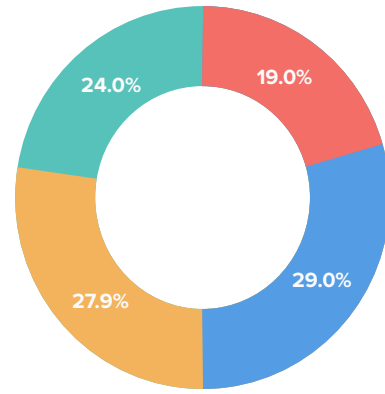
While use of dynamic content and ALT text was fairly strong, the usage of some design elements like retina-optimized images and animated GIFs were surprisingly low. These findings indicate that marketers have some easy opportunities to provide more engaging email experiences.

Use of Dynamic Content

What portion of the emails that your company sends include dynamic content or scripting to use data-driven personalization? (Note: We're not referring to first-name merges, but more advanced types of personalization.)

730 respondents

[Tweet this chart](#)



- All or most
- Some
- Few
- None

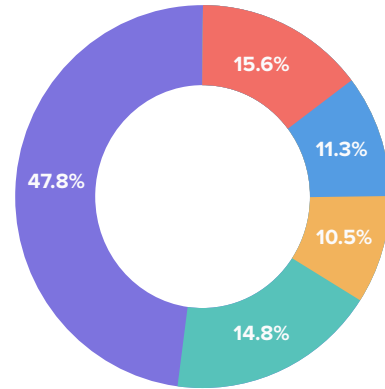


Our State of Email Salaries & Jobs report found that email marketers who use advanced design tactics like dynamic content make significantly more than those who don't. [Learn more about email salaries](#)

Use of Retina-Optimized Images

How frequently does your company use retina-optimized images in its marketing emails?

Source: Litmus poll of 1,223 visitors to its blog between May 23 and June 8, 2016



[Tweet this chart](#)

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Optimize your images for Retina and other high-DPI displays by creating images that are twice the intended size then setting the image's width and height attributes to the intended size. [Learn more about Retina images](#)

Non Retina



Retina

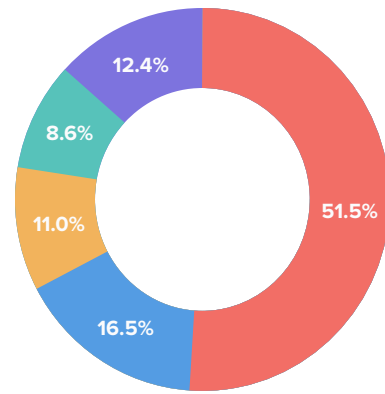


Use of ALT Text

How frequently does your company use ALT text for images in their marketing emails?

Source: Litmus poll of 1,133 visitors to its blog between Apr. 15 and Apr. 25, 2016

[Tweet this chart](#)



Always Often Sometimes
Rarely Never

You can also style ALT to change its font face, size, weight, and color to more closely mimic the graphical text in the image. [Learn more about styled ALT text](#)

Unstyled Alt Text

 Images are not displayed.
[Display images below - Always display images from hello@litmus.com](#)

Litmus

Styled Alt Text

 Images are not displayed.
[Display images below - Always display images from hello@litmus.com](#)

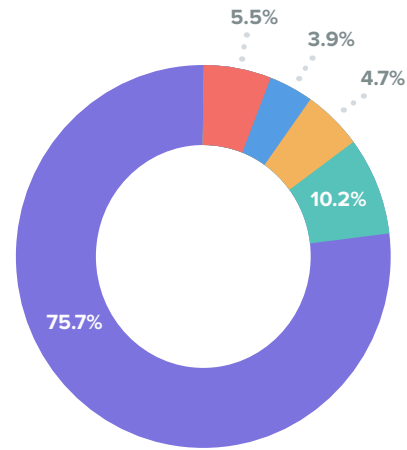
Litmus

Use of Images-Off Mosaics

How frequently does your company use pixel art or mosaics in its marketing emails to engage subscribers viewing its emails with images disabled?

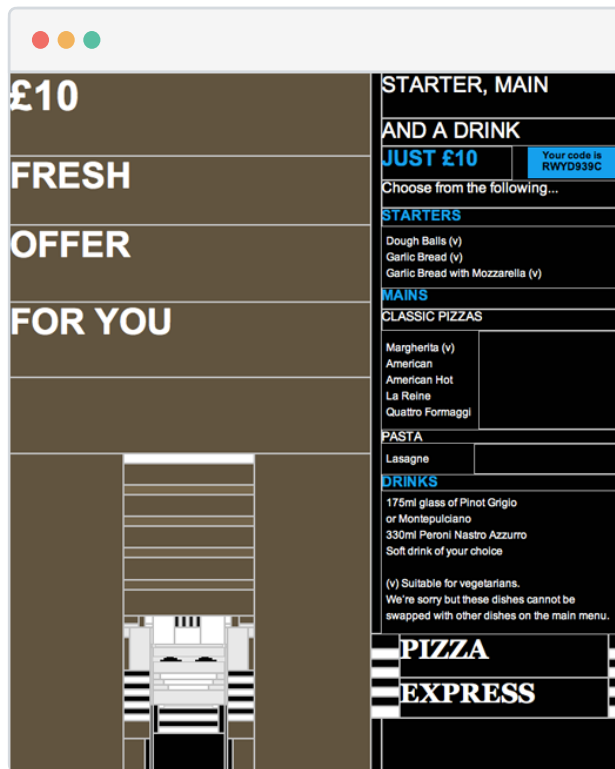
Source: Litmus poll of 1,069 visitors to its blog between May 2 and May 12, 2016

[Tweet this chart](#)



- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Best reserved for high-value campaigns and high-volume triggered emails, mosaics can provide unique experiences for subscribers who are blocking images. [Learn more techniques for images-off optimization](#)

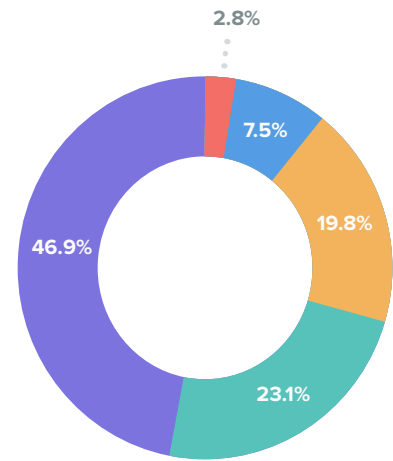







Use of Animated GIFs

How frequently does your company use animated GIFs in its marketing emails?

Source: Litmus poll of 1,087 visitors to its blog between Apr. 25 and May 2, 2016

 Tweet this chart



-  Always
-  Often
-  Sometimes
-  Rarely
-  Never

Although animated GIFs aren't supported in every email client (most notably Outlook), they are the most reliable and easiest way to add motion to emails. [Learn more about animated GIFs](#)

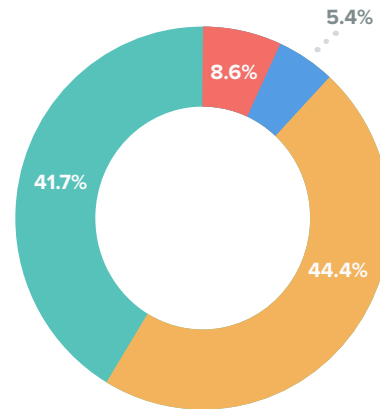


Use of Embedded Video

Have you ever used embedded or streaming video inside an email (e.g., using HTML5 video, Liveclicker, Movable Ink, etc.)?

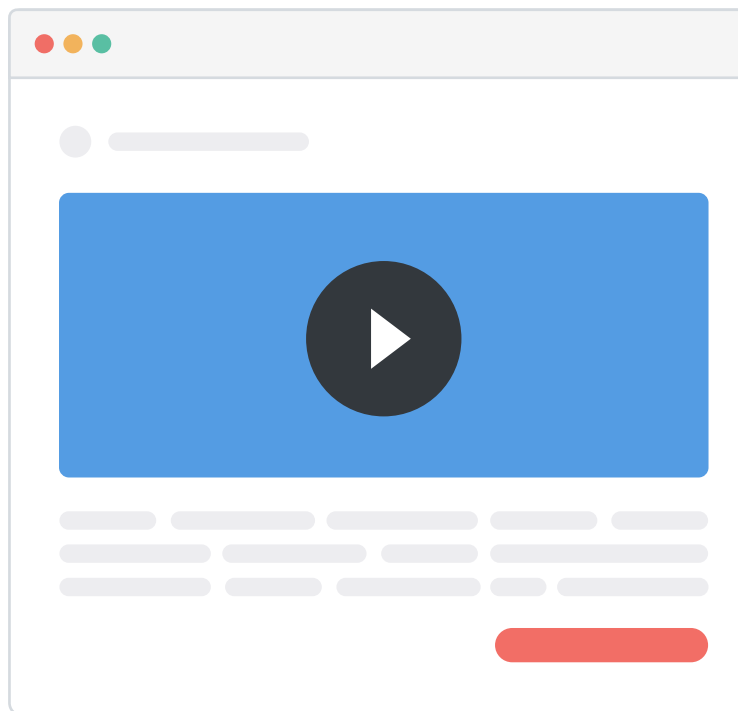
Source: Litmus poll of 1,622 visitors to its blog between Jan. 15 and Feb. 3, 2016

[Tweet this chart](#)



- Yes, and we plan on using it again soon.
- Yes, but we don't have any plans to use it again soon.
- No, but we plan on trying it soon.
- No, and we don't have any plans to try it anytime soon.

Consumers love video, but putting a playable video in an email is no easy feat because of poor support across email clients. [Learn more about video in email](#)





ONE-OFF EMAIL DESIGNS

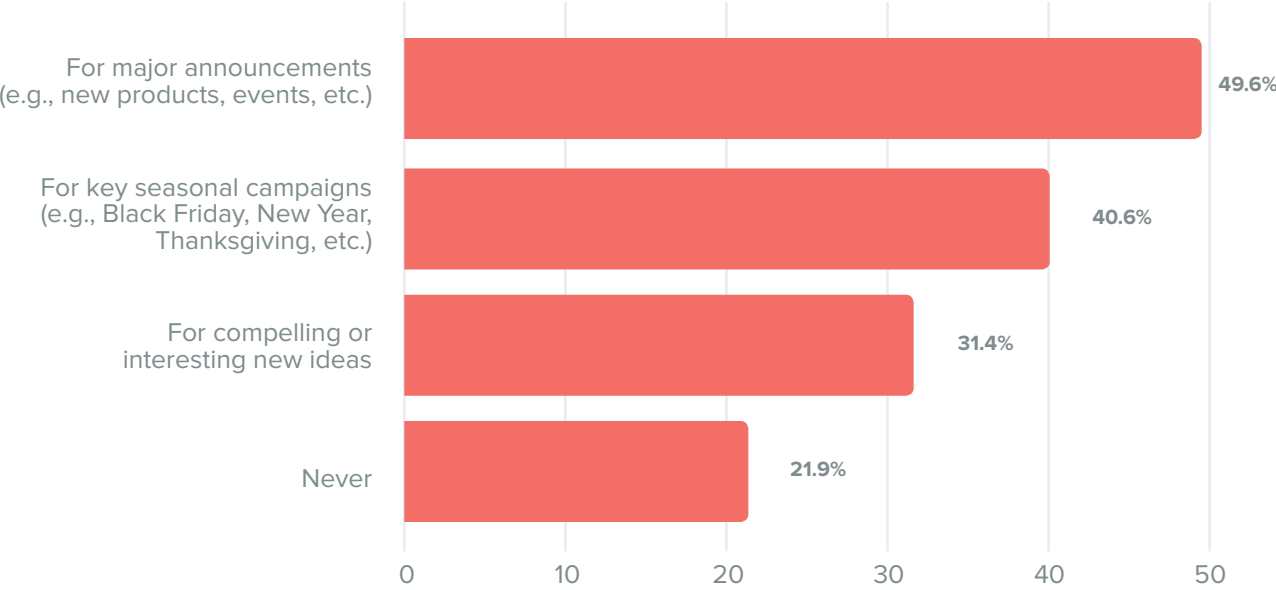
While sending emails that are consistent and look the same is brand-building, it can also be monotonous and boring. I say in my book, *Email Marketing Rules*: “Significantly changing your email design on a one-off basis every once in a while can deliver a ‘wake-up slap’ that gets your subscribers’ complete attention again.”

Marketers have largely embraced this approach, with fewer than a quarter of marketers never changing their email designs for special occasions like major announcements and key seasonal campaigns.

Use of One-Off Email Designs

[Tweet this chart](#)

Under what circumstances does your company use a unique one-time email design, rather than using one of your standard designs? (select all that apply)



Source: Litmus poll of 1,006 visitors to its blog between Mar. 8 and Mar. 15, 2016

2016 STATE OF EMAIL PRODUCTION
A comprehensive look at how marketers plan, build, approve & send emails

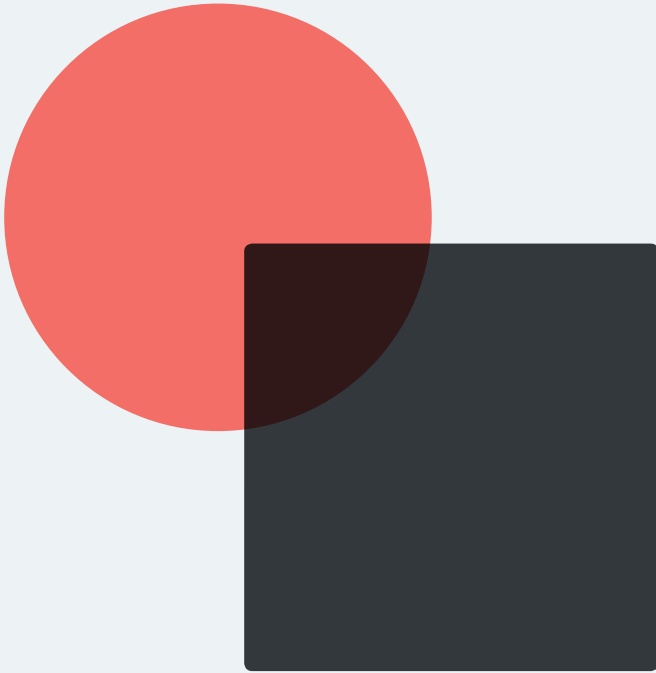
People on Team

How many people are on the email marketing team at your company? Include yourself and any of your co-workers who spend at least half their time on email marketing.

Documenting QA Issues

How does your company document quality assurance issues and collect feedback on email marketing and design?

Our State of Email Production report found that most marketers plan their email content out a month or less in advance during non-peak seasons and two months or less during peak seasons. [Learn more email production processes](#)



A/B TESTING

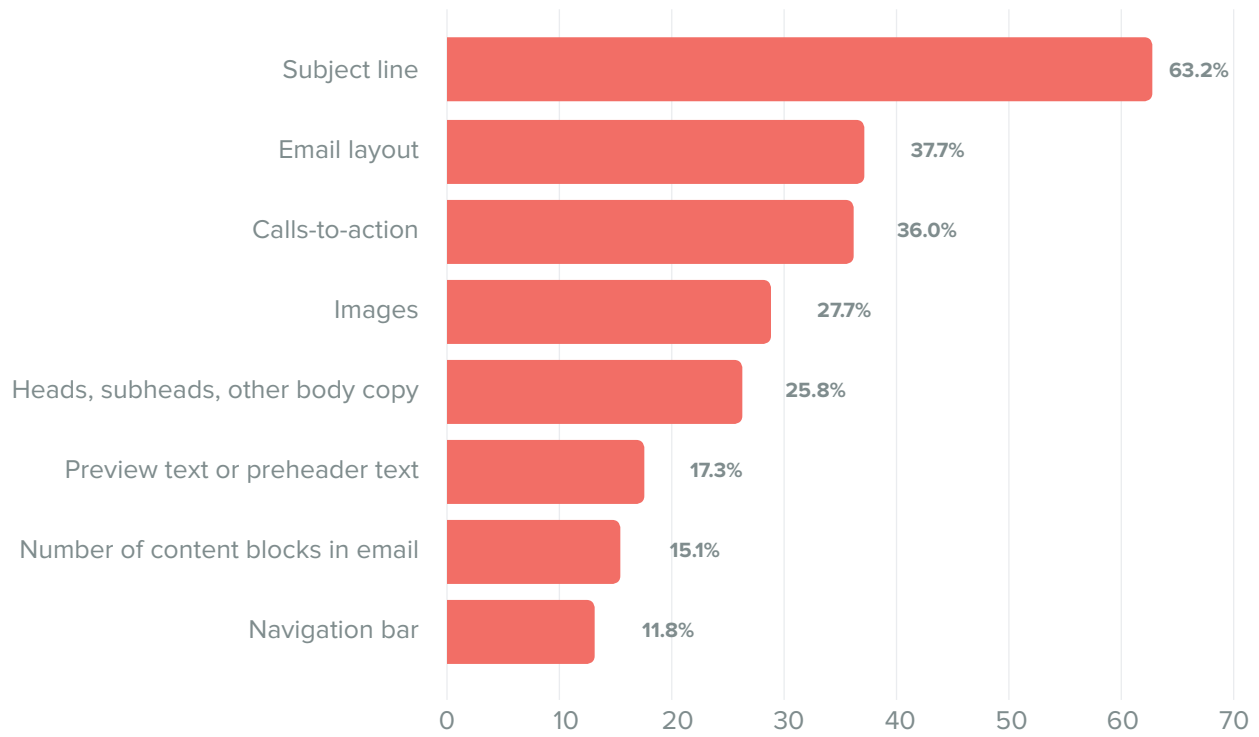
Whether doing 50/50 splits, 10/10/80 splits, or multivariate, A/B testing is an important part of not only optimizing your emails, but listening to and understanding your subscribers. While subscribers' responses to two different headlines, images, or calls-to-action are often the same, sometimes they're very different—and finding those big differences makes A/B testing worthwhile.

Thanks to improvements at email service providers, A/B testing is much easier than it's been in the past. However, only subject lines are being tested by the majority of marketers. That means there are still big opportunities for brands to increase clicks and conversions through testing.

A/B Testing Email Elements

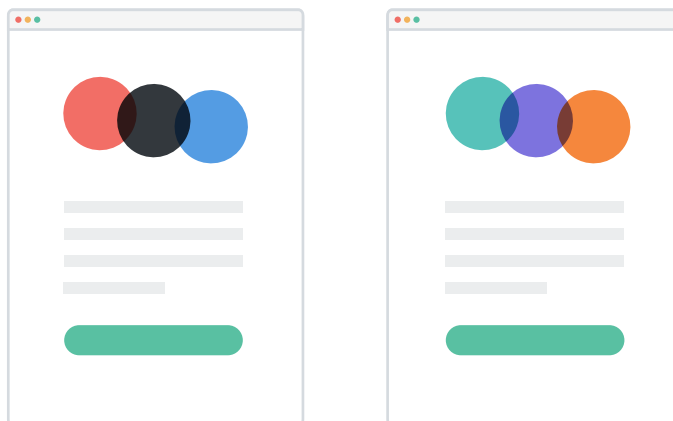
Tweet this chart

Which email elements does your company regularly A/B test? (select all that apply)



Source: Litmus poll of 817 visitors to its blog between Feb. 11 and Mar. 7, 2016

When A/B testing, it's important to judge winners based on bottom of the funnel activities like conversions and to ensure your results are statistically significant. [Learn more about A/B testing](#)





EMAIL REDESIGNS

Email templates can get stale. Perhaps you haven't been doing very much incremental A/B testing. Maybe your website or mobile app is being relaunched. All of those are occasions to seriously consider an email redesign. Most brands find a reason to do a major email redesign every year, and only a small percentage wait three years or more between major redesigns.

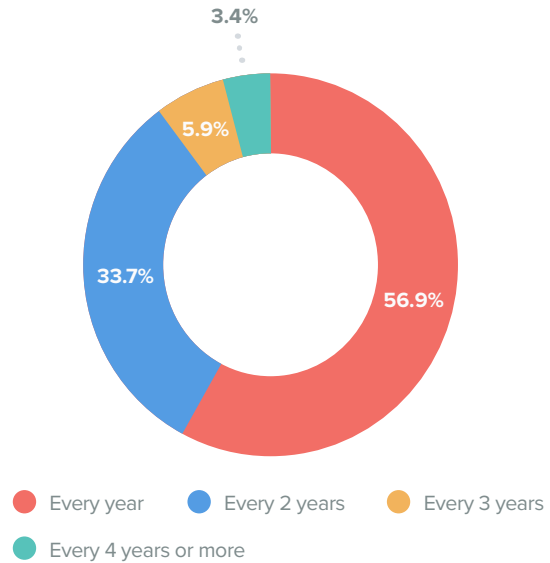
Triggered and transactional emails, which have an unfortunate reputation of being "set it and forget it" messages, tend to only get reviewed once a year or less frequently. Alarming, nearly a quarter of marketers go two years or more between reviews of these emails. They are missing out on lots of opportunities for optimization and also likely missing rendering issues and other problems that crop up over time.

Frequency of Major Email Redesigns

How often does your company typically do a major email redesign?

590 respondents

[Tweet this chart](#)



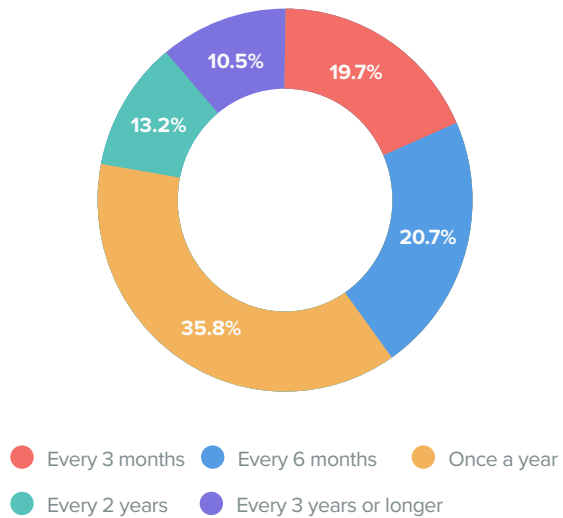
If not pegged to a rebranding or the redesign of your website or mobile app, then most major email redesigns tend to happen during off-peak seasons.

Review of Triggered & Transactional Emails

How often does your company review the design and messaging of triggered and transactional emails?

522 respondents

[Tweet this chart](#)



We recommend reviewing all triggered and transactional emails quarterly to maintain quality assurance and explore optimization opportunities. [Learn more about optimizing these emails](#)



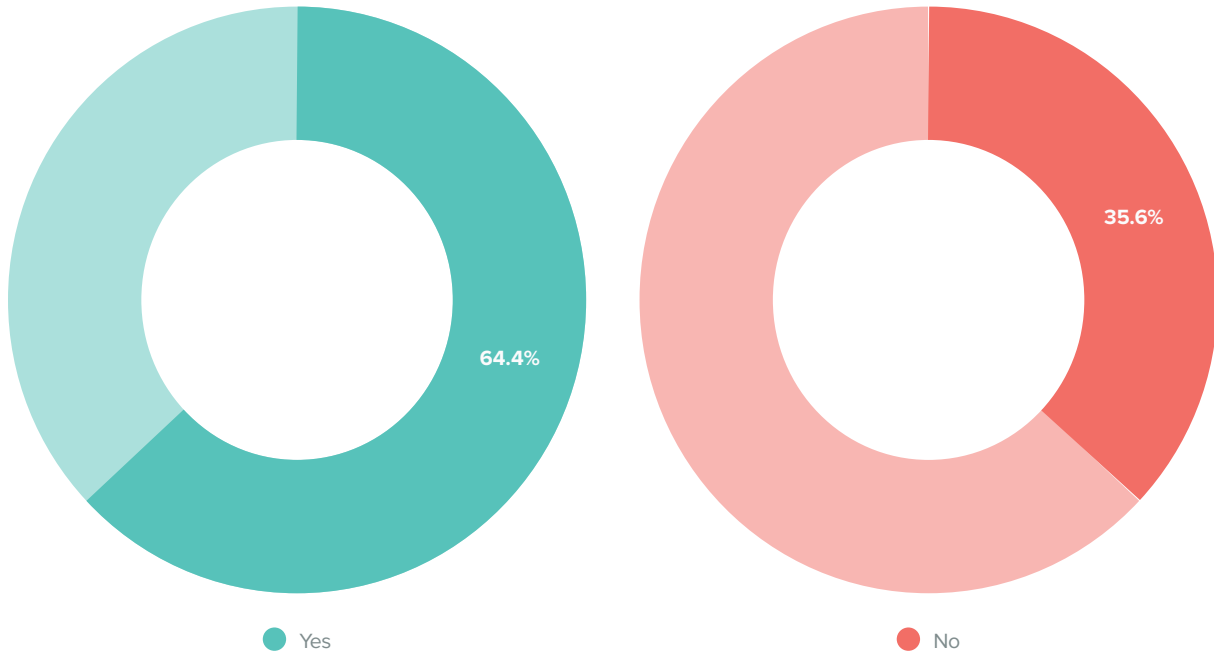
LANDING PAGES

Most email marketers are responsible for designating or creating the landing pages behind the calls-to-action used in the emails they create. That's a good thing, because email campaigns can succeed or fail on the landing page. As much as possible, email marketers should want control over the entirety of an email interaction—from open to conversion.

Landing Page Responsibilities

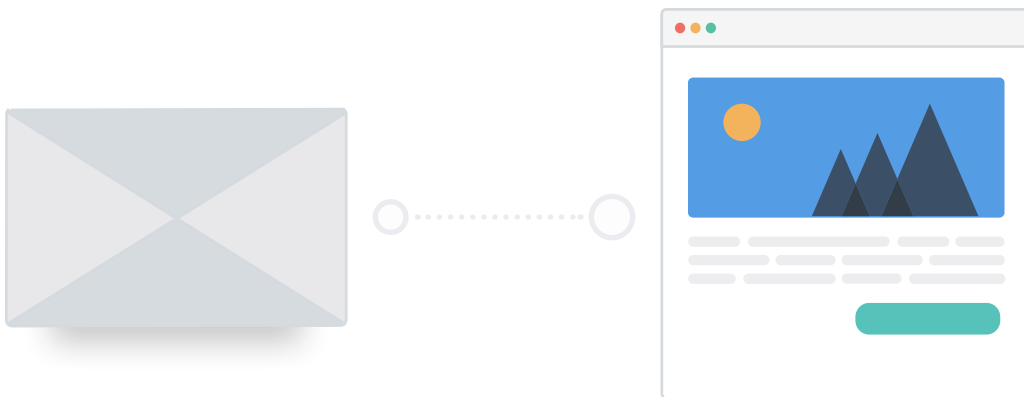
[Tweet this chart](#)

Is the email team at your company responsible for designating and creating landing pages for email campaigns?



Source: Litmus poll of 1,026 visitors to its blog between Mar. 31 and Apr. 15, 2016

Engagement and conversions are maximized when there's a smooth transition from email to landing page. [Learn more about landing page optimization](#)





START SENDING GREAT EMAIL

Build and foster relationships with your customers and prospects by creating emails that marry great messaging with great design. With an HTML editor designed solely for email, Instant Email Previews, comprehensive checklists, and Spam Filter Testing, Litmus helps you put your best email forward.

[Try Litmus free for 7 days](#)

[No credit card required.](#)

Methodology

Unless otherwise noted, all data is based on the responses of more than 900 professionals involved in email marketing who took Litmus' Email Production Survey between Aug. 27 and Nov. 24, 2015. All questions were optional, so the number of respondents is noted for each question throughout this report.

About Litmus

Litmus helps more than 250,000 marketers make email better. The web-based email creation, testing and analytics platform empowers marketers, designers and agencies to confidently deliver a superior subscriber experience. Litmus provides instant email previews and quality assurance tools across all major inbox providers, browsers, and devices, and features comprehensive analytics to help users quickly and easily build, test, troubleshoot and optimize every campaign.

Headquartered in Cambridge, Mass., with additional offices in London, Litmus has partnered with more than 250 major email service providers and agencies, including MailChimp, IBM Silverpop and BrightWave Marketing. For more information about Litmus and the latest email news and trends, visit www.litmus.com.



 [in](#)


About the Author

Chad White is the Research Director at Litmus and the author of *Email Marketing Rules* and thousands of posts and articles about email marketing. A former journalist at Condé Nast and Dow Jones & Co., he has spent more than a decade researching email trends and best practices at the Direct Marketing Association, Responsys, Salesforce.com, and in his current role.



 [in](#) 

About the Designer

Amir Hamdi is the Content Designer at Litmus with a passion for doodling, good movies, nice cameras, and fast cars.     

MORE RESEARCH FROM LITMUS



The Ultimate Guide to Optimizing + Troubleshooting Your Emails

In this report, we look at how to build a successful email marketing campaign—everything from defining the goals of your campaign and optimizing your design to troubleshooting the campaign and staying out of the spam folder. By the end, you'll have a blueprint for creating relevant, bulletproof email campaigns that get results.

Get your copy

10 Changes to Email Marketing Driven by SVOC

Cara Olson
Director of Direct Marketing and eCRM
DEG

With many brands spending the past two years for digital marketing optimizations, I predict that the next several years will see the emergence of the single view of the customer (SVOC) to bring all data points identified in customer-journey mapping. Here are 10 ways that email marketing will be created and experienced differently by 2020:

- 01 | Emails will be viewed more as messages, and the content will be part of the Internet of Things (IoT). Think of your appliances, when you start your car, walk in your house, etc.
- 02 | New metrics will emerge to report on this message. Think of metrics for watches and IoT. Think the "read" notification that can show after someone reads a text message.
- 03 | Fifteen percent or less of these messages will be opened. Instead of seeing metrics for desktop, tablet, and smartphone, reporting on potentially hundreds of IoT devices.



litmus

Email Marketing in 2020

20 Experts Share Their Visions of the Future of the Channel

Channel Power

Think the following channels will still exist in 10 years

Facebook - 67.6%	Cable TV - 67.4%
Snapchat - 57.1%	Postal Mail - 56.2%
Print Media - 51.5%	Landline Phone - 46.6%

Conducted online within the U.S. by Flout, Inc. on Nov. 4, 2015 among 1,225 American adults. Margin of error +/- 2.5%. Flout's proprietary ad serving technology was used to facilitate the data collection for this study.

Email Marketing in 2020

In this report, we take a look at what email marketing will be like in the year 2020—in terms of the subscriber experience, inbox functionality, deliverability, design and coding, technology provider landscape, and more. To provide the full picture, we surveyed marketers and consumers about the channel, and then asked 20 experts to share their vision of email's future.

Get your copy



2016 State of Email Report

In this report, we dive into major innovations from the past year, providing insights and action items for email marketing professionals. Plus, we take a look at market share stats across desktop, mobile, and webmail inboxes. By the end, you'll be positioned for email success throughout 2016.

Get your copy