THE 2018
EMAIL CONTENT & DESIGN GUIDE

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Movable **Ink**

WHAT'S INSIDE

For this eBook, BrightWave and Movable Ink, partners in email innovation and the all-important pursuit of email marketing ROI, have gathered eight of their best performing blogs on the topics of content and design. Inside, you'll find out how to tell better stories (even within the limited space we have in the inbox) and how to use design techniques and big data to power up email content with personalization, animation, and more.

FORWARD: Why Investing in Content is Vital to Email Marketing's Continued Success

The term 'Content is King' is clichéd for sure, but with the continued growth and investment in digital, content is more important than ever before. Think about your favorite marketing campaign and you can probably attest that great content built the brands we know and love today. The best content creates a tangible and compelling experience that moves people – even if they're not the primary target customers.

Content is the cornerstone of all marketing, but it also presents today's marketers with a catch-22. Digital provides great scale and reach, but content that speaks to customers one-to-one is difficult to scale. The more marketers invest in launching additional programs or channels, the worse the content problem becomes.

In the email channel, this paradox is rooted in the ways marketers traditionally tackled the objective of maximizing content's commercial impact (i.e. generating revenue).

Here are three existing strategies:

1. Send more campaigns

It's simple logic: more campaigns equal more revenue, right? The 'send more email' strategy made email the workhorse and highest driver of ROI in digital marketing for years. This approach has hit an inflection point. Yes, you can simply send more campaigns, but you need to produce and populate those campaigns with more content. And it can't just be more of any content; it needs to be better content. **Without better content, you'll burn out your customers and put program deliverability at risk**. Sending more emails requires a greater amount of compelling content.

2. Create more segmentation

Email content is too often more about volume than value. In an effort to shift this dynamic, many marketers are sending fewer emails to more finely targeted customer segments.

The approach has been about sorting content into the right buckets and getting the right buckets to the right audience. The problem is that people don't purchase just because you put the right product in front of them. Like more campaigns, more segmentation still requires a greater amount of compelling content.

3. Build more triggers & customer journeys

There's been a big push in the email industry toward building more triggered programs and customer journeys. Marketers aren't changing what they do with traditional campaigns per se but they are sending more individualized retargeting emails (e.g., cart abandonment, lifecycle emails). With one-to-one emails, marketers need to send a message tailored specifically to the recipient or will (a) risk training the customer to ignore the message or (b) need to always resort to promotions and discounts to get customers to act which jeopardizes the email program. Therefore, more triggers and segments requires – you guessed it – a greater amount of compelling content.

For every strategy, the answer always comes back to content. The above approaches have worked well (or well enough) but there's a compelling business case that says if you continue to invest resources in more campaigns, more segmentation and more triggers but fail to make a corresponding investment in content, you're going to eventually hit a wall.

So how can email marketers scale content for the digital era? If the continuous improvement of email marketing hinges on investing in content, what does that look like in practical terms?

Here are three areas to think about, invest in and leverage:

1. People

A few years back, everyone talked about the 'big data' problem. The recommended solution was to hire a data scientist who could build algorithms that enabled the company to use data to make important business decisions. Today scaling content is the problem for digital marketing and companies can consider hiring a content strategist – someone that looks at content from pre-production to post-production and maps it to business goals.

Every company can and should analyze how their internal team is organized and/or work more closely with their creative agency on content. Creative directors sit at the top of the marketing organization but should come downstream and get intimately involved with email content from start to finish.

2. Existing content

Investing in content doesn't always mean pouring money or human resources into a new solution. Sometimes it can simply be about leveraging and maximizing the content you already have, bridging content silos and becoming more aligned across channels. Email marketers generally report to digital marketing teams. Those teams take photos for product promotion across a multitude of channels, both digital and print. However, the email marketers don't necessarily have access to all of these assets. Especially for sectors like retail, think about how having access to all of those photos could change the way those products are effectively presented to individual customers when combined with other content and customer data.

3. Technology

Say you now have access to thousands of product images. How do you manage them all and make sure you get the right content in front of the right customer and present it in the best way for each individual? Technology can easily generate all of the variations and create the final combination of image, text, font, colors, etc. – all while staying on brand – in a way that's impossible for humans to do efficiently at scale.

For some, the fear of technology isn't just about the financial investment. They worry that technology will replace the creative director. Yet, in email marketing, automation is simply a way to optimize decisioning that machine logic can make much faster – freeing up creative directors to focus on creative decisions.

New devices and channels create almost endless possibilities for marketers to engage with customers today – and these things will only increase with time. Marketers can and should continue to make strategic investments in digital as things like wearables and IoT open up new opportunities to deliver content. Email will continue to be a tried and true channel for marketers due to its reach and unique role as a hub for all kinds of content. However, for email to continuously improve and drive even greater results, marketers must invest in content and the methods to make content more intelligent and effective.

Vivek Sharma,
Co-founder and CEO, Movable Ink

This forward originally appeared in Website Magazine.
You can find the article here.

In this eBook, we've compiled eight articles by email content experts that can help shed more light on the subject of content creation in a digital age.

Let's take a brief foray into neuroscience and look at some of the interesting things that happen in the human brain when we are told stories.

They include neural coupling, which is when the brain essentially turns the storyteller's experience into our own experience. A remarkable process called mirroring, where our brain activity begins to mimic that of the storyteller's, also occurs. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter that has been found to aid memory retention, is released. The cortex, the part of our brain associated with thought and action, is more active than it would be if we were just processing facts.

> "Numerous studies over the years have proven that our brains are far more engaged by storytelling than the cold, hard facts," writes Rachel Gillette in Fast Company. "Our brains are insanely greedy for stories. We spend about a third of our lives daydreaming – our minds are constantly looking for distraction – and the only time we stop flitting from daydream to daydream is when we have a good story in front of us.

That quote might start to explain why stories are such an incredibly powerful tool for email marketers to use to connect with customers.

Weaving stories into your email content

You don't have to be a fiction writer to be an effective storytelling email marketer.

"Storytelling is not inventing a story," advises i-SCOOP's J-P De Clerck. "In fact, the very reason why your business exists, why you have developed products and services and why you do what you do is filled with stories."

Worried that you aren't a natural storyteller? You can fix that. Aaron Beashel from Campaign Monitor offers a simple three-part formula for crafting compelling stories:

> " In the first part, your goal is to paint a picture of the reader's world as it was. In the second part, the goal is to show the drama that created a shift in the reader's world. In the third and final part, the goal is to show them how your product can be a resolution to the drama and how their world can be good once again. "

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5 story types to use in your emails

Marketing consultant Terry Dean suggests five types of stories for email marketers to use:

Case studies/testimonials

There are few stories more compelling to your potential customer than stories about – or from – your current customers. Let their experiences tell your story for you.

"Reason why" stories

If you are promoting a special offer, explain the story behind it. Why not share that the offer is designed to mark an anniversary, commemorate a holiday or move excess inventory? Use a story to explain to your customers why they are hearing from you.

JetBlue pegged this email to a "very special" anniversary that likely otherwise would have gone unnoticed by the recipient – the one-year anniversary of their email "relationship." It's a great example of "reason why" storytelling.

Origin stories

These are the stories behind your company or product that can serve to differentiate you from your competition. They can be about what inspired the founding of the company or about the gaps you see that you are trying to fill.

Vision stories

Share your aspirations. How is your company going to change your industry – or even the world? How are you going to provide better service? How do your products make people's lives better?

Rapport-building stories

Your stories don't always have to be directly related to your products. They can even be personal anecdotes. Sometimes telling a story outside the realm of your business can help humanize your brand and help build engagement.

One last word about storytelling

Storytelling is not a replacement for the other elements in your marketing toolkit; rather, it can serve as an adjunct for traditional email marketing techniques. You should share content and run special promotions just as you're expected to, but those usually appeal to the logic centers of the brain. It's stories that bypass the logic center and go directly into our emotions.

It happens to all of us from time to time. We want to get a new message out ASAP, but despite our intense brainstorming, the ideas simply aren't there. No worries! Chances are pretty good that the solution to that dilemma is right at your fingertips – in the content archive.

With a little imagination, there are many ways we can turn old content into something brand new.

10 ways to repurpose your content for your emails

1. Create roundups from previous blog posts

"You can create a theme and then pick the content that fits before you send the email," suggests Autumn Rivers at The Marketing Scope. "This way, your old blog posts have a new purpose, and you now have relevant content for the emails you send. For example, your theme might be content marketing, in which case you can look through your blog and choose five posts that would help someone who needs content marketing tips."

2. Develop and promote an eBook--sort of like this one!

"A great way to repurpose your content is to make it into an eBook," according to AltusHost. "All you have to do is recycle your content into one big, greatly designed, and coherent story. Chapter titles, chapter summaries and even chapter or paragraph illustrations can become a valuable asset in your email marketing strategy, if you, of course, link it back to that dedicated landing page where people can buy your eBook or download it for free."

3. Turn data from presentations or other sources into an infographic

"Infographics might take a little more effort to produce than a blog post, but they're one of the most powerful weapons in your content marketing arsenal," writes WordStream's Dan Shewan. "Infographics can be skimmed quickly, making them appealing to today's mildly ADD media consumer, and they can distill a great deal of complex information into an easily digestible format."

4. Develop a case study from your company's internal data

"If your company has any kind of internal data, consider turning it into a case study," suggests Eric Sachs of the Sachs Marketing Group. "Reach out to current and past clients to see how your products/services have helped them reach their goals. Or, run tests in your own website and save the data to use. Case studies can help you earn trust and credibility since they show your customers how you can help them, too."

5. Turn your webinar into a video tutorial, post it online and promote it by email

"You host a kickass webinar that gets tons of attendees," writes Megan Marrs on the WordStream blog. "It's a huge success! But of course, not everyone will make it to your webinar, and months later you'll have new site visitors and leads who don't even know what they missed out on. You can repurpose that webinar as a YouTube video, ensuring that your great content lives forever."

6. Make your most popular posts even more popular

"Your email subscribers may not know about your most popular articles and blog posts," writes Kate Kiefer-Lee at VentureBeat. "Show them what you have to offer." Here's an example of this idea in action right here on our blog – a look at our most popular posts from 2016.

7. Find a new way to approach old topics

"When you look through your old content, think of yourself as a beat reporter for your business," suggests Monica Montesa on the AWeber blog. "First, you want to look for content that received greater engagement than usual (higher click-throughs or open rates, increased traffic to a blog post, etc.). Then ask yourself if there's a way to take a fresh, new angle on that topic you've already written about."

8. Leverage your best-selling products

"If you sell products online, send periodic emails sharing your best sellers," writes Kate Kiefer-Lee. "You can use an image and product description you already have on your site. It's a great way to introduce your customers to items they might not think about while giving your best sellers a boost.

9. Create an email series

"When it comes to repurposing content, email series are a perfect channel," according to Hootsuite's Bill Widmer. "You can take an eBook or even a long blog post and split it into several parts which you send out to your email list over a few days or weeks."

10. Create a course from an eBook or blog posts

"Got an informative how-to ebook or a collection of related, instructional blog posts?" asks Megan Totka at Wishpond. "Break up your eBook (or organize your blog posts) into logical segments, and use an autoresponder to deliver each session to new subscribers at timed intervals, along with your marketing message and call-to-action at the end of each session."

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According to some research conducted by BrightWave in 2016, millennials prefer that brands they like communicate with them via email, point blank.

This extensive research, which had statistically significant results, polled over 1,500 people between the ages of 18 and 34, with the results weighted by gender and region. In the end, we found that this seemingly fickle demographic is pretty predictable when it comes to email content.

A few of the most notable statistic takeaways:

- Millennials prefer email over other channels: Email was the preferred method of contact with brands for millennials do business with or like, beating out social media, SMS, phone calls and others
- Millennials don't want to share emails: Only 8.7% say they'll share engaging content
- You're emailing them too much: 47.1% say they unsubscribe because they receive emails too often

The survey also found that millennials expect great, personalized content—and that they expect it to look great on every screen.

GET A CLOSER LOOK AT THE INFOGRAPHIC HERE.

Always be mobile-friendly

Designing for desktop only is a sure-fire way to land your email in the trash and irritate your audience. Making emails that function as well on mobile as they do on desktop should be a standard practice for your team because scalability matters—particularly to "hard-to-please" millennials.

We recognize two basic approaches when it comes to designing for mobile: mobile-friendly design and responsive design. What's the difference? Check the next page for a little guide.

What are you going to do about it?

It's not hard to see how these new email design standards can have a massive effect on content. In a way, these findings tell us that too much information can be a huge turn-off for millennial customers in particular. Since most mobile-friendly emails keep copy on the short side, you may find that the content you thought could be delivered in a single email is really a series or that the message you wanted to send to your whole email list really only applies to a small number of recipients.

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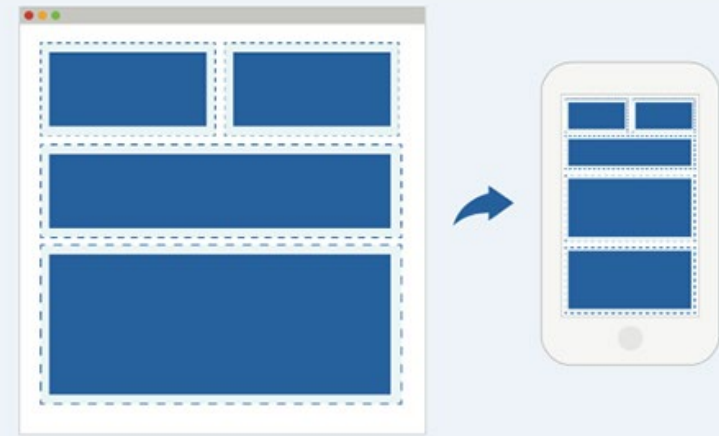
Responsive design

A responsive design uses a media query, a special set of CSS styles. Media queries detect the screen size of a device and then "turn on" different sets of rules based on that screen size. They require more planning and testing than standard emails and won't necessarily work in all email clients. However, the list of responsive-friendly clients is growing everyday.

Mobile-friendly/scalable design

A scalable design is readable and clickable no matter what environment it is being read in: mobile, tablet or desktop. There is only one version of the email and one layout, which is typically between 320 and 750 pixels wide.
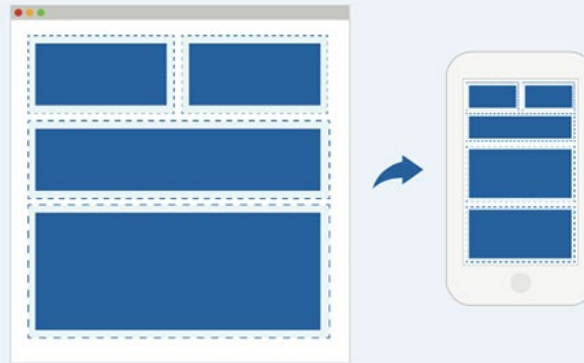
Mobile-friendly/scalable design elements that typically come into play include:

We Like Big Buttons and Can Not Lie

"U Can't Touch This" is one song we hope would never be associated with our emails. This means bumping up the size for more finger friendliness.

Short, Direct Copy

People are more inclined to read headlines and bullets than huge blocks of text – especially on a small screen.

A Clear CTA

The CTA button should be one of the easiest things to find and its text should entice even those who skipped over the body copy. For example: "See the Benefits" could be better than (God forbid) "Click Here."

Increased Font Sizes

Going right along with the need for short copy is a need legible fonts with 14 point being a standard minimum.

A One-Column Layout

With a phone's smaller screen width, no stacking will be needed. And keep in mind what you want at the top because the next element you need in your mobile email is...

A Content Hierarchy

If your email has a lot of info to impart, a carefully considered information hierarchy should be a top priority.

As mobile email opens continue to grow, the challenge of converting glances to skims, skims to reads, and reads to clicks is ever-challenging. Enter: Kinetic Design, a coding technique for creating high-impact interactive email content—right in the inbox.

For those looking for that x-factor to bring their email ideas up a level, look no further. These interactive elements focus on not only improved click-through rates, but pumping up overall engagement with a little surprise and delight—as well as upping the overall time spent reading the email.

To put interactive content to the test, we first tried some in-email interactivity on the annual BrightWave holiday card—and saw firsthand how it can skyrocket click-throughs and time spent on the page.
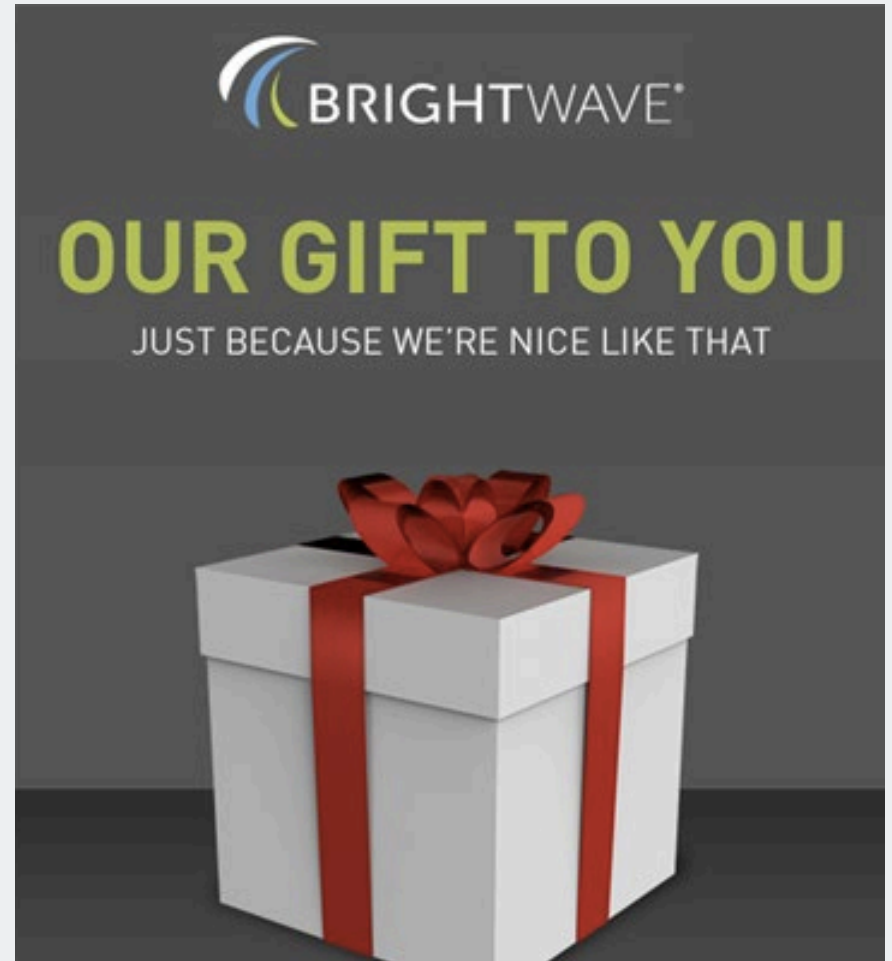
SEE THE INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS FOR YOURSELF.

The Tech Powering Kinetic

Kinetic email at its core is a coding technique via some creativity with HTML and CSS—HTML5 and CSS3 to be more specific. Hover over animations and carousels of hero images are tell-tail signs that kinetic design is being used.

A Quick Caveat

There is a catch. Every email client supports a different level of kinetic features. A kinetic effect like the one in our example ONLY works on fully kinetic-friendly email clients such as Gmail, Yahoo Mail, Gmail, Outlook.com, AOL, Outlook 2003, iPad, and a few Android clients. For many marketers these clients will represent a large portion of their audience, so we consider kinetic design worthwhile for improving engagement and click-through rates. Readers on other email clients could be served a static image instead of the subtle surprise of kinetic interactivity.

Kinetic Email Takeaways

- Coding tactics that allow an animation within an email for many of today's most popular email clients.
- Keep the animation subtle, a surprise-and-delight to a selected group with supporting devices. Viewers with non-supported devices should not miss out on anything important.
- Those that implement can expect great click through rates, and longer times engaging with an email.

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Another inbox innovation that, like kinetic design, can take your email content to the next level is animation.

Email nerds have been using animation to take their visuals to the next level of greatness for some time now. Typically, integrating any kind of animation involves GIFs. A lot of them. But with a little CSS finagling, a single image can infuse your email with panning, scrolling, looping effects–without the file size limitations and other strife of GIF-making.

If you're looking to quickly add animation and visual interest to your email, CSS @keyframes could be for you! CSS @keyframes can animate a beautiful background image with scrolling and/or panning effects. And the code that sets in all in (literal) motion is simpler than it sounds. It looks a little something like this:

A little coding nerdery: The "backgroundAnimation" defines the @keyframe, and is later added to the CSS "animation" property to add the effect. 0% sets the starting point for the animation, and 100% sets the ending point. The background image should be extra wide (our example below is 1849px) to create the scrolling effect.

```
@keyframes backgroundAnimation

{0% { background-position: 1000px 0; }

{100% { background-position: 0px 0; }
```

Putting This CSS
Scroll to Use

Each year, we try to showcase some of our favorite email innovations in a fun and festive way with our annual holiday card. After seeing great success with the interactive present email, we knew we had to roll with the scroll for the following year's holiday greeting. Take a look at our "sea-tastic" 2016 holiday card to see this CSS trick in action.

As the background image moves, a hand-created vector illustration of BrightWave's seafaring CEO Simms Jenkins gazes into the starry sky. By nesting a table inside the table containing the background image, the image of Simms remains static while twinkly ships, toasting BrightWavers and a Santa-hatted dolphin float by. Pretty neat, huh?
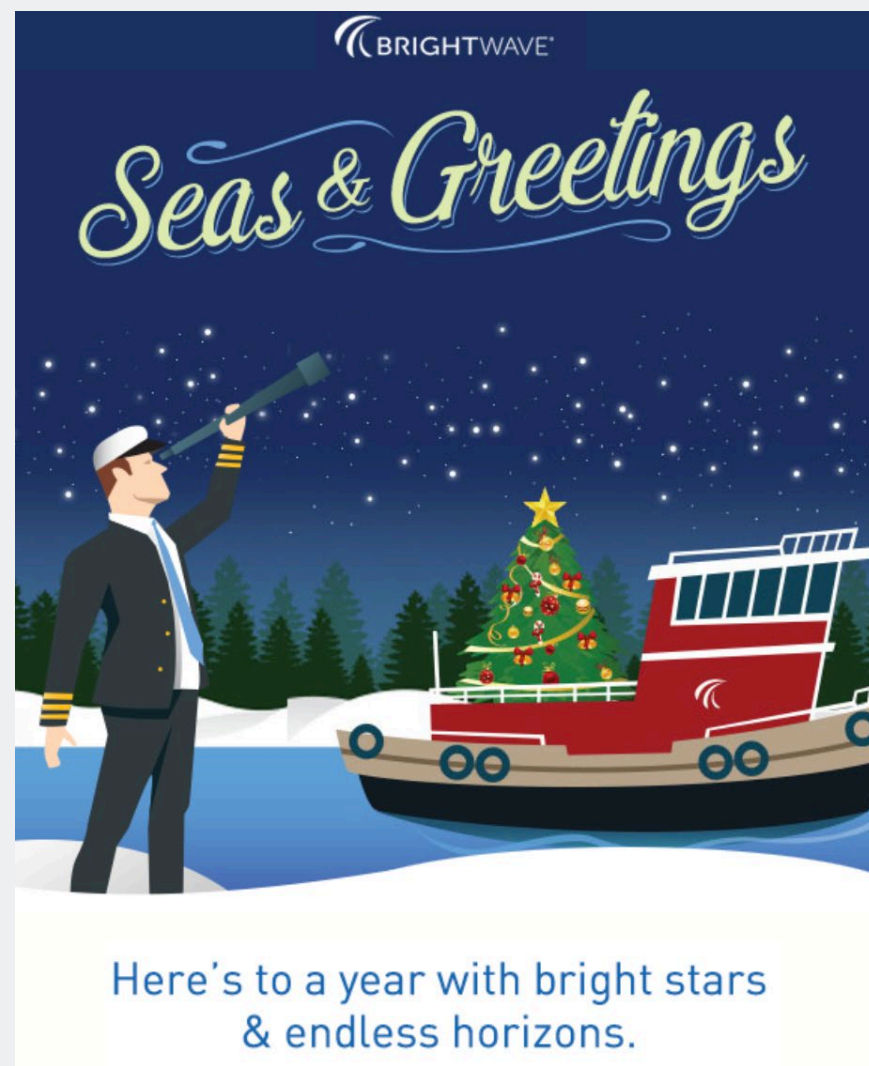
The Response

By saving you from massive GIF files, this image-enhancement technique lets you more easily create disruptive inbox experiences. In a space where most scrolling occurs in a strictly up-and-down fashion, horizontal movement provides an unexpected and memorable respite from those ups and downs. And being able to achieve the effect with a quick snippet of code certainly sounds like a win all-around. It's the kind of unexpected element consumers can get excited about when used smartly. Plus, the clients and partners who received our holiday card all responded super positively with more than a few asking how we pulled it off!

The Fallback Plan

Sadly, as with all things email, this will not work in all email clients. As a fallback, displaying the most important content in the initial "frame" of the background image will do the trick. Email clients that do not support CSS @keyframes will just not animate. Simple as that.
As you sail further along on your email content-making journey, animation through GIFs, CSS @keyframes and more could inspire lots of new ideas for organizing and highlighting different types of content.

Quick! What's the most important piece of content generated for any marketing email?

Yep, it's the subject line.

Subject line writing may sound easy enough—it's just a couple of words, after all. Yet much of your emails' success hinges on that first handful of syllables. They don't always have to be perfect. Still, they can quite literally make or break an open rate.

We always follow these five subject line commandments when writing them:

1. Don't clickbait.
Just don't. Articles like this may tell you how to get an open, but that open won't have a lot of meaning if you don't follow through on your subject line's claims. Besides that, since most people hate being sold to, your deliverability might even take a hit if your subject lines start to look too "spammy."

The subject line is there to set up your email content, not manipulate your open rate. When compelling content, clearly set expectations and on-brand tone all come together, you've struck subject line gold.

2. Be relevant.
This applies largely to the content itself but it can be just as important in a subject line. If you're following the "no clickbait" rule and have something interesting to share, relevancy should come naturally. If your emails are triggered by customer behavior and messaging is targeted to the individual subscriber, then a relevant subject line should be obvious. But even less targeted emails can be relevant. Try adding a little seasonal flair or the promise of some timely educational information.

Of course, a little personalization never hurts, either. Adding a first name, city name or a reference to a recent purchase can drive it all home with that "just for you" feeling.

3. Pay attention to preheader text.

Does this still need to be said? We'll say it anyway just in case... Most any brand doing email right makes sure to optimize their preheaders. A subject line with no built-in preheader can be underwhelming and, at worst, confusing. A good preheader, in turn, can make that meticulously worded subject line really sing. Use it to enhance your subject with extra details, tease some secondary content or build anticipation with mysterious diction.

4. Always be testing.

In reality, no two email audiences are exactly alike. Email is an unpredictable world, after all! Even if you're following every best practice you can find, what typically works for others may be a total disaster for you. The only way to

know exactly what will work on your particular audience is to test—then let the data be your guide on future subject line writing.

5. Don't be afraid to go against the grain.

Subject lines that are direct and relevant don't have to be boring! If your brand is fun and quirky, your subject lines should be too. Punctuation, character count, capitalization or a really impactful emoji can all be used to help you stand out in recipients' inboxes. Maybe not anything as cRAzY As THiS, but it never hurts to use capital letters for emphasis... or to throw them out altogether for a more exclusive "this is between us" tone.

With a little creativity, a little honesty and a few rounds of testing, there's no telling what your subject lines can do for your email program.

Personalized content—everyone is doing it. And everyone should be: 74% of marketers say that personalized content increases engagement and can generate up to six times the revenue per email.

Using email personalization is a great way to resonate with your subscribers. When you send your customers content that matters to them, you build trust, boost sales and increase your ROI. It makes sense that everyone is doing it these days.

But in an oversaturated inbox, how can you ensure that your emails go beyond {firstname-fix!}?

One word: data.

How data helps drive personalization

Data exists to help you make better informed decisions when it comes to your email marketing. By looking at the behavioral and demographic patterns of your customers, you unlock valuable insights that allow you to connect with them on a much more personal level.

And with so many ways to collect information on your customers (hint: it starts with your sign up form), there's a massive opportunity for email marketers to engage their customers with better targeted and relevant communications.

How to use data to personalize your email content

Send personalized content recommendations

Using data from past purchases to influence future decision-making is a great way to provide consistent value to your customers. Take this email from Netflix for example:
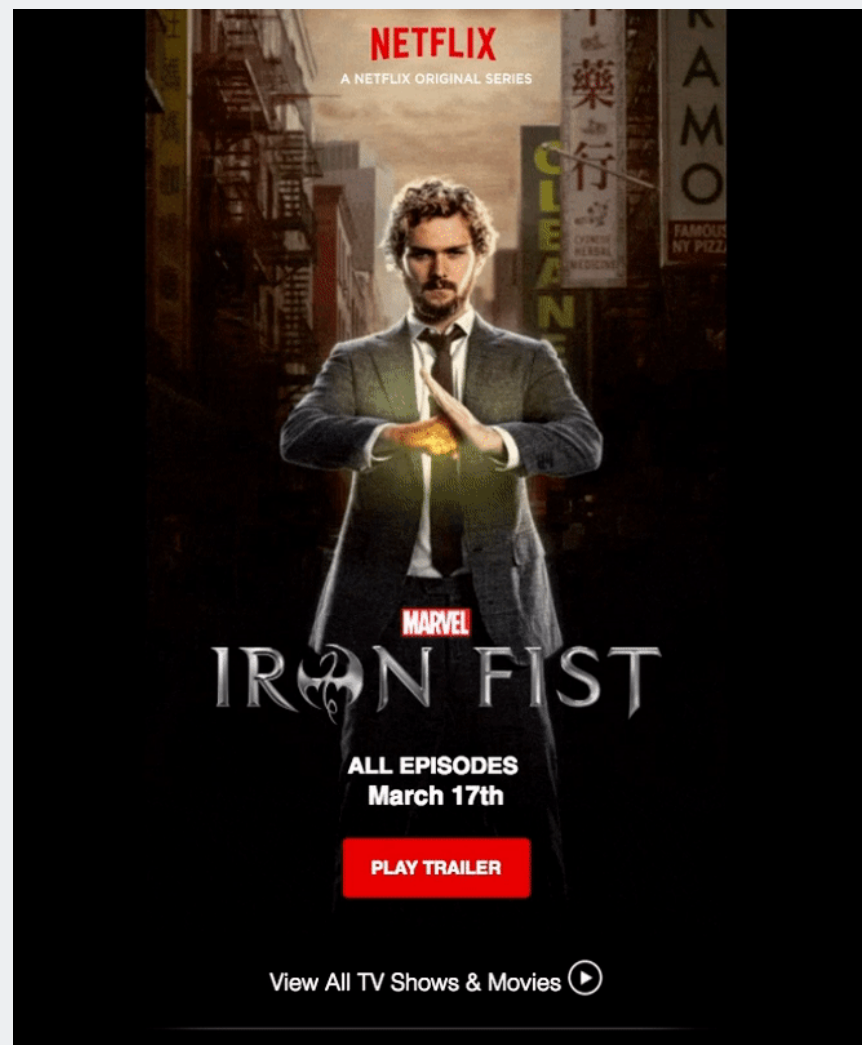
(Image via Really Good Emails)

By sending personalized content recommendations based on their browsing history, you can make smarter predictions about what they'll buy in the future—and entice them to keep paying for your products or service.
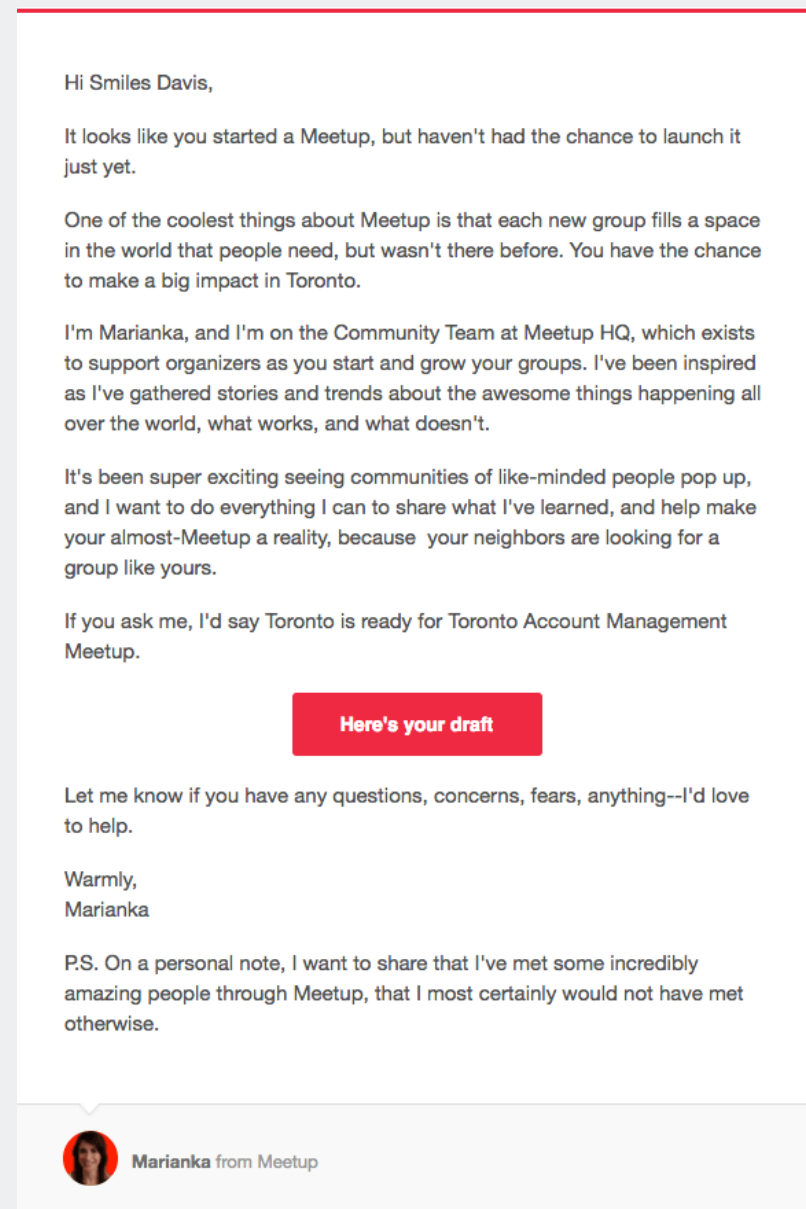
Don't think that you need a subscription-based business to take this approach. It works just as well for retail brands (take Amazon, for example), and can totally apply to digital marketing materials as well (think ebooks, courses or webinars).

Use automated emails to motivate activation

Nearly 60% of users who sign up for a free trial or service will use it once and never come back.

Activation is one of the most important steps in getting new customers to start seeing the value of your products. Personalizing the onboarding experience to reduce the amount of friction it takes to get set up can make a world of difference.

Let's take a look at this example from Meetup:

Hi Smiles Davis,

It looks like you started a Meetup, but haven't had the chance to launch it just yet.

One of the coolest things about Meetup is that each new group fills a space in the world that people need, but wasn't there before. You have the chance to make a big impact in Toronto.

I'm Marianka, and I'm on the Community Team at Meetup HQ, which exists to support organizers as you start and grow your groups. I've been inspired as I've gathered stories and trends about the awesome things happening all over the world, what works, and what doesn't.

It's been super exciting seeing communities of like-minded people pop up, and I want to do everything I can to share what I've learned, and help make your almost-Meetup a reality, because your neighbors are looking for a group like yours.

If you ask me, I'd say Toronto is ready for Toronto Account Management Meetup.

Here's your draft

Let me know if you have any questions, concerns, fears, anything--I'd love to help.

Warmly,
Marianka

P.S. On a personal note, I want to share that I've met some incredibly amazing people through Meetup, that I most certainly would not have met otherwise.

Marianka from Meetup

(Image via Really Good Emails)

The user clearly intended to utilize the service—they went through the steps to create an account and input their information, but never followed through. Maybe they got stuck somewhere in the process. Or perhaps there were too many steps and they planned to finish it "later."

Sending a personalized note can help motivate users to finish the setup process. Good support is key to improving activation and building trust with your new customers. This is a great opportunity to invite questions and conversation that can help improve your activation process.

Implementing a personalized lifecycle sequence, based on actions that your customers take, can be a huge step forward to improve your activation rate and increase ROI.

Step up your subject line game

Emails with personalized subject lines have 26% higher unique open rates than non-personalized emails.

But that doesn't mean you have to keep things on a first name basis—a great personalization tactic is to tailor your subject line to include other demographic information, like location or birthday. You can use this information to send relevant messaging, like location-specific offers, news or exclusive deals.

Your subject line isn't the place to go crazy on the personalization. A light touch helps to show your subscribers that you know them beyond their email address and could help improve your open rates.

Each of your customers is unique and interacts with your brand in many different ways. Great personalization starts with understanding who they are and what makes them tick. With behavioral marketing, you can start tracking your customer's interactions with your brand, from recently browsed items to products added to their shopping cart.

It's an easy trap to fall into – we're so busy creating content that we can lose sight of exactly why we are doing it.

Sure, it's rewarding to get clicks and follows, and to stretch our creative muscles, but ultimately the goal of all our effort is to, as the Content Marketing Institute puts it, "attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."

Is your content doing that? If not, read on for five tips that can help make it happen.

1. Focus on something bigger than yourself
"If you don't know the driving reasons behind your actions, you'll struggle to consistently work toward your goals," writes Daniel Marlin at Entrepreneur. "The same holds true for growing your following. People tend to shy away from brands and content they perceive to be

self-serving. If you want to stand out online, do some soul-searching and align yourself with ideals that your audience feels passionately about."

It's no accident that when you think of brands like Ben and Jerry's or TOMS, you immediately associate them with social activism – their brands (and the content that promotes them) are carefully crafted to do just that. They are less about the founders and more about what the founders believe in, and how they translate their beliefs into action. As a result, both brands have legions of loyal, like-minded followers. If you can consistently link your content to something you are passionate about, you may be on your way to becoming the next Ben Cohen, Jerry Greenfield or Blake Mycoskie, founder of TOMS.

2. Be a storyteller
"Fantastic writing and storytelling will put you ahead of the pack when it comes to your competition," writes Alex

York on the Sprout blog. "By telling better stories, you're able to engage, entice and spark conversation with your audience. Your content management strategy should absolutely focus on getting readers talking about your brand."

Use writers who can help your brand find and nurture its own voice, York suggests. "When your content has a unique voice that others in the industry will recognize, you know you have quality writers working for you."

3. Do your research

"The most effective content is never about your company, your products or yourself," writes Priyanka Desai at YourStory. "Instead, it starts with acknowledging a pain point and the best ways to solve it (including your solution). Putting your customers' needs above your own builds trust."

Without research, you risk wasting time and effort creating content that has no meaning to your readers, Desai suggests. "Research includes studying your competitors and understanding the market and your ideal customer's problems.

Create content your customers demand instead of writing about what you think the readers want. The worst kind of content marketing starts with companies focused on showing how great their product or service is, instead of filling a void or addressing a clearly defined pain point."

4. Build trust by using data

"In today's digital media environment, trust can be hard to come by," writes Dan Shewan on the WordStream blog. "With fact-checking and journalistic due diligence at all-time lows, it's easy to see why so many readers have become reluctant to accept 'facts' as the cold, hard truth. That's why it's so important to back up your assertions with data."

Shewan argues that using data should be as natural and commonplace as spell checking.

"If you make a point, include statistics and facts to back it up. Similarly, if you cite data to make a point, be sure to cite it appropriately and, if possible, include a link to the original source. After all, you wouldn't want somebody else using your data in their content without tipping their hat to your research, right?"

5. Always choose quality
"Growth from content marketing comes from quality, not quantity," says Neil Patel at Outgrow. "Each post should add value. You're better off publishing one absolutely amazing piece of content per month than publishing 30 mediocre posts. If you can publish more than one great post – fantastic! But always start with quality. Quality will always win."

Poor content not only won't help your brand, it can also damage it. Tony Delmercado, writing at ClearVoice, cites a survey in which 93 percent of respondents said high-quality content leads them to view the company producing it favorably — and 94 percent said poor content hurts their opinions of the brand producing it.

"If you want real engagement, your content needs to be stickier than trendy, easily generated listicles and repackaged blog posts," writes Delmercado. "Critical thinkers are drawn to substantial subject matters written with snappy, compelling language. Write about something important, and make sure it's well-researched."

About BrightWave

BrightWave is the leading email marketing agency. With over 15 years of experience managing the best email programs in the country, BrightWave elevates eCRM and cross-channel programs through industry-leading innovation, relationship orchestration and pioneering inbox experiences.

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Movable Ink is the leading provider of intelligent content, which enables marketers to personalize email content at the moment- of-open. Marketers use Movable Ink to provide consumers with engaging on-brand experiences to grow revenues with every customer interaction. Since 2010, consumers have engaged with over 400 billion intelligent content impressions from more than 450 leading brands, including Delta, eBay, Spotify, and The Wall Street Journal.

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