

EMERALG MARKETING FIELD GUIDE



A MailChimp Resource

Hello.

"What *is* email marketing?" Fair question. Unlike one-to-one messages, email marketing entails sending one message to many people—dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people. It's permission-based, which means your readers must opt in to your newsletter, and you need to explain to them why they're receiving it. Because personal email services like Gmail or Yahoo! limit the amount of people you can send to at one time, an email service provider like MailChimp is the best way to send email marketing. ESPs will manage your delivery infrastructure, help keep your messages out of [spam filters](#), and generally do a lot of not-fun-but-necessary work for you.

People use MailChimp to send all sorts of [fantastic email newsletters](#) to their customers, fans, friends, and followers, and we hope this guide will help you do the same.

Create an Email Marketing Plan

An "email marketing plan" might sound complicated, intimidating, and time-consuming to put together, but it's not as hard as you might think. In this section, we'll walk you through the most important steps, highlight real-life case studies, and give you everything you need to know to get started.

Define your audience

Before you start designing, writing, and sending campaigns, you should define your audience. Once you get a grasp on the people who will be reading your emails, it will be much easier to decide what to say to them.

If you already have subscribers on your list, their signup method can be used to help identify them. For example, if they subscribed during the checkout process through your online store, they're customers. A collection of subscribers that found you through your website or at a public event (like fairs, trade shows, etc.), would be classified as more of a general audience.

If you don't have subscribers yet, think about who is your target audience. How will you find these people, and what do you envision they'll want to read in your emails?

Perhaps you're an author or a blogger. In that case, your subscribers are going to be interested in your written content. If you're a retailer, subscribers will want to know about your new products or how they can better use what they've already purchased from you. If you're somewhere in between, your audience is likely made up of enthusiasts of your work or your brand.

Case Study: [Rooftop Comedy](#) lands somewhere in that third category. The San Francisco-based company sells comedy albums, produces festivals, and records stand-up acts all over the United States. With their ["Clip of the Week" emails](#),

they've found an entertaining, kind-of-sneaky way to delight their customers with the humorous brand they've come to know and love—while also reminding them that they've got stuff for sale.

Determine your content

Now that you know who you're talking to, it's time to think about what you're going to say to them. "What you say" is your content. Think about why this audience signed up for your emails in the first place, then focus on delivering that to them. It can be helpful to outline general content types that you might include in each email campaign. Later, as you're putting together your newsletter, you can refer to this outline to make sure you're staying on track.

For instance, [The Atlanta Rollergirls](#) keep a content list:

- Upcoming events
- Recaps/photos from past events
- Popular posts on Facebook, Twitter, blog
- News coverage
- Derby 101 (an in-depth look at rules/strategy)
- Player profiles

Each month, they choose 1-4 pieces of content from the list to [create a campaign](#).

Think about what content you're already creating that you might want to share with your subscribers. A popular tweet, a Facebook post, an article about your company—these are things your readers will likely find interesting. Also think about what content you'd like to create exclusively for this audience. Reward them for caring about what you do.

For example, [MonkeyWrench](#) is MailChimp's quarterly newsletter that showcases app updates, user case studies, and relevant email marketing news. We also include funny links, industry research, and more.

Tips for creating and gathering content

Your content is the most important part of your newsletters. These tips will help as you start to create and gather compelling content that will speak to your readers.

Treat your readers like VIPs.

People who subscribe to your email list are so into you that they've given you permission to their inboxes. Honor this privilege by letting them be the first to know about new products or sales. Give them access to special benefits as subscribers. Or go one step further, like clothing retailer [Billy Reid](#), who sends exclusive sales to its readers with the [highest member-activity ratings](#).

Keep it useful.

Think about which emails you open and which you delete right away. You don't open an email that doesn't benefit you in some way. Make sure your newsletters are giving your subscribers something they don't already have. "The reader comes first," content strategist and MailChimp user [Peter Cooper told us](#). "Without happy and loyal readers, you have a weak publication, whether it's a magazine, newspaper, or an email list. The majority of email newsletters are all about linking to a company's own projects, products and news. I think it's pretty rare that they delight their readers."

Show some personality.

No one wants to read a dry, boring newsletter that drones on and on and doesn't even say anything about zzzzz... So, inject some personality! Chances are, your voice, tone, and sense of humor are all important reasons why your customers signed up in the first place. Try to write the same way you'd speak to one of these customers. And who knows? Maybe your lighthearted, humorous emails will help you [raise a whole bunch of money](#).

Keep it short.

Most people are bombarded with emails every day. Keep yours to the point. If you'd like to share a large piece of content, feature one element—an excerpt or key quote—and link away to the rest. Make it easy for your readers to scan quickly, if they want or need to.

Get inspired.

Apps like [Pocket](#), [Evernote](#), and [Pinterest](#) are great for saving, organizing, and accessing content for later use in your campaigns. Check out our [inspiration board](#), too. It features hundreds of elegant, thoughtful email examples from MailChimp customers.

Determine your sending frequency and goals

Not all sending frequencies are created equal. Some users, like [Dave Pell](#) or [Quartz](#), send on a daily basis because that's a key part of their mission. Others, like [Longreads](#) or [Rooftop](#), send only on Fridays, offering a little e-gift for the weekend.

Ultimately, it's up to you to decide what works best for you and your subscribers. We recommend that you email at least once a month, but don't feel the need to commit to that immediately. Feel free to skip a month if you don't have anything truly useful to say. Remember, [content first](#). Be careful not to skip more than a couple months in a row, however, as some subscribers [may forget they opted in and report you for spam](#). Remember also to look ahead and plan accordingly for holidays or special events.

From there, decide what you'd like to get out of your email marketing. Are you looking to direct readers to your website? Help promote sales? Increase traffic at events? Set goals like these for your campaigns, then keep track of your progress over time.

Make a schedule

Not everyone is going to send on a regular schedule, but for a lot of senders, having a timeline is helpful. Timelines give writers, designers, and managers a deadline to work toward. If you have several people working on your team, consider MailChimp's [Multi-User Accounts feature](#) and other [collaboration tools](#).

Your email marketing schedule will depend on your industry, type of content, sending frequency, and so on. With that in mind, here is an example of how you might plan out your campaigns:

Day 1: Jot down content topics, art ideas, and other basics for your upcoming newsletter.

Day 2: Write out what you'd like to say about each topic, pull photos or art into a folder.

Day 3: Log in to MailChimp and create your campaign. Proofread for errors and grammar. Send a few test campaigns to make sure everything is just right.

Day 4: Send your campaign.

How HTML Email Works

Devising your email marketing plan is a great first step, but before you can actually start designing, coding, writing, and sending HTML emails, it's good to know how they work and what tools you'll need.

Multipart/Alternative MIME format

The most important thing to know about HTML email is that you can't just attach an HTML file and a bunch of images to a message, then click send. Most of the time, your recipient's email application will break all the paths to your image files by moving your images into temporary folders on the recipient's hard drive. You can't just paste all your code into your email application, either. Most email apps send messages in plain-text format by default, so the HTML won't render. Your recipients would just see all that raw source code, instead of the email you designed for them.

Instead, you need to send HTML email from your server in multipart-alternative MIME format. That means your mail transfer agent bundles your HTML code, plus a plain-text version of the message, together into one email. That way, if a recipient can't view your beautiful HTML email, the good ol' reliable plain-text version of your message is displayed. It's kind of a nerdy thing, which is why a lot of people mess it up when they try to send HTML email themselves. You either need to program a script to send email in multipart-alternative MIME format, or use an outside vendor—like MailChimp—to deliver email for you.

Delivering HTML email

Lots of email marketing newbies make the mistake of setting up forwarding lists, or CC'ing copies of a message to all of their customers. This causes all kinds of problems—especially when a recipient clicks “reply-all.” First of all, there’s no way to track analytics or personalize content for a big group like that. Plus, when recipients can see the entire list of recipients, the email may come off as unprofessional or impersonal. And exposing all of those email addresses can raise privacy concerns.

That’s why, when an email marketing service like MailChimp sends your campaign, we send your message to each recipient on your list, one at a time (but really, really fast). Unlike your work computer linked to your local ISP, which probably has a standard monthly bandwidth limit, email marketing vendors use dedicated mail servers capable of sending hundreds of thousands of emails every hour.

Email delivery considerations

Sending a mass email comes with a handful of delivery considerations. For instance, if you send from your own server, your ISP may throttle your outgoing emails or shut down your account if you send too much too fast or exceed your monthly bandwidth limit.

Email firewalls and ISPs that receive your campaigns typically don’t like receiving tons of emails from a single IP address at once. So if you only send occasional email campaigns from your IP, you may want to throttle your delivery or spread them across multiple IPs, to avoid accidental blocking. Email marketing services usually split your campaign into pieces and send it out over lots of different IP addresses to avoid this issue. If you send emails from your desktop email program, chances are you’re connecting through your local ISP. If you don’t have a dedicated IP address set up with your ISP, you’re probably sending emails from a dynamic IP address. ISPs and spam filters don’t like receiving lots of emails from a dynamic IP address, because it looks like a hijacked home computer. If you’re not using a vendor like MailChimp, you should always send from a dedicated IP address.

For more information on how HTML email works, visit MailChimp's [Email Design Reference](#).

Common Mistakes

There are a lot of common mistakes people make when creating HTML emails. From sending without permission to confusing transactional emails with email marketing, from purchasing email lists to writing like a used-car salesman, there are several things you should keep in mind while creating your campaigns. Our [Common Rookie Mistakes guide](#) is a great place to start. Give it a look before starting your first email marketing campaign.

Designing and Coding

Now that you have a solid understanding of how HTML emails work, we can get to the fun stuff: designing and coding your emails. Keep your design simple and straightforward; focus on your message, not your craftiness.

Focus on typography first. Type is the one thing that's consistently rendered across different email clients. Most email clients block images from first-time senders by default, so your subscribers will almost always see the text of your email before they see anything else. Your message should still be conveyed clearly and effectively without images.

Keep in mind that your email's layout should stay right around 600 pixels wide. Many email clients provide a preview window that's rather narrow, and this helps to ensure your entire design will be visible. Even with the limit of 600 pixels, there are plenty of ways for you to lay out your content to create a clean-looking design for viewing in standard email clients or on mobile devices.

To delve into the specifics of designing your email, visit MailChimp's [Email Design Reference](#).

Avoiding Spam Filters

Spam is unsolicited email sent to a list of people—and not only is it annoying, it's against the law. The [CAN-SPAM Act](#), which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2004, dictates that you can be fined \$11,000 for every offense. Multiply that by every person on your list, and you'll see how spam can get expensive in a hurry. If you send email marketing, you should read the CAN-SPAM Act and understand its rules.

But even legitimate email marketers sending to permission-based lists can sometimes get into spam-filter trouble. The only way to avoid this is to understand how spam filters work. MailChimp's [How to Avoid Spam Filters guide](#) explains the criteria involved in determining spam, and offers plenty of practical tips to help keep your emails out of the junk folder.

Testing Your Email Designs

Once you've designed and coded your first HTML email template, you may be tempted to write your content and start sending. But let's take it slow. First, make sure your template will work in as many different email clients as possible. Once you've found and fixed the inevitable bugs and typos, *then* it's time to send.

Test in different email clients and ISPs

All email clients are created differently and can render content in HTML email in different ways. Some clients will strip your *BODY* or *HEAD* tags, or all content below a certain line. Flash doesn't work with some, while others will block images by default. These inconsistencies make it very important to test your campaign in as many different scenarios as possible.

Send tests to friends and coworkers

It can be difficult for some users set up test computers or test in many different applications. By keeping your designs simple and sending test emails to a few friends or colleagues, you can be sure to catch broken images, typos, and other bugs.

Inbox Inspector

If you use MailChimp, the [Inbox Inspector](#) will automatically select the 10 most-used email clients from your subscriber list, then show you screenshots of your email as it will appear in each. It also gives you a spam analysis based on words and phrases that trigger filters. Inbox Inspector is free for all users with monthly paid accounts, and up to 25 inspections can be run each week at no cost. Forever Free and Pay As You Go plans can purchase a single Inbox Inspection for \$3.

Measuring Performance

You've designed, coded, written, tested, and sent your first email marketing campaign. Good work! Maybe now you're wondering if it was worth all the effort. How can you measure your performance? Figure out what's working and what could use some work? There's [data you should observe](#) and questions you should ask to make these decisions.

Clicks

How many people clicked links in your email? Which links did they click the most? Did they click on product links, or research links? Did you see a rise in purchases? How long after you sent the campaign do links keep getting clicked? Your click rate can help you determine the success of your campaign and reveal general trends in the behavior of your subscribers.

Unsubscribe rate

What's your unsubscribe rate after each campaign? Less than one percent is average for lists that are contacted regularly, and well-maintained. If you send very infrequently or if it's your very first send, your unsubscribe rate may be much higher. Check your rate after each campaign. If you see it spike after a particular campaign, consider whether it had anything to do with your content. Maybe you're sending too frequently, or maybe not enough.

Bounces

Watch your bounce rate after each campaign. MailChimp will break down your bounces into “hard” vs. “soft,” and clean your list accordingly. Soft bounces are emails that exist, but for some reason, they couldn’t be delivered. For instance, their server might have been too busy at the time of your delivery. Hard bounces are undeliverable—perhaps the email account doesn’t exist anymore, or there was a typo in the address. Hard bounces should be removed from your list immediately. [This article](#) can provide a few more details about bounces.

Website traffic

Check your website traffic logs after each email campaign. Does traffic pick up? Do orders increase? Was the spike in traffic immediate, or did it come gradually? How long does the new traffic last, and how long should you keep the graphics and pages that your email points to hosted live?

MailChimp integrates with Google Analytics to further illustrate how your emails affect website traffic and drive revenue. If you’d like to use Google Analytics with MailChimp, [this article](#) is a good place to start.

Our [Goal integration](#) is an optional campaign tracking feature available for paid MailChimp accounts that allows you to track subscriber activity from your email campaigns to your website. You can create segments of subscribers or trigger [automation workflows](#) based on Goal activity.

Signups since last campaign

After each campaign, do you get lots of new subscribers? That could mean your loyal readers are forwarding your emails to friends. Don’t see any list growth at all? Maybe you need to make your content more interesting or relevant to your

customers.

Resources and support

We hope this guide has helped you create a comprehensive email marketing plan for your business and given you a good handle on the tools you'll be using. If you have any questions about MailChimp, feel free to [contact our support team](#). Here are a few additional resources:

- Our [guides](#) and [research](#) sections are thorough, thoughtful looks at various angles of the email marketing industry.
- Our [Email Design Reference](#) page covers all the HTML email basics and some MailChimp-specific information to help you get started.
- Looking for some one-on-one help with your email marketing? Our [Experts Directory](#) can help connect you with third-party MailChimp pros.
- Our [inspiration board](#) features hundreds of elegant, smartly-crafted email newsletters. Go on, get inspired.
- We update the [MailChimp Blog](#) frequently with posts about engagement, integrations, customer case studies, industry data, and so much more.