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OPTIMIZE
YOUR EMAIL
CAMPAIGN

Optimize Your Email Campaign

You want your email campaign to be the best it can be.

Whether you're just starting out or you've been dong email marketing for awhile, you are constantly looking for what brings the most results.

First, let's think about what can be improved:

How many subscribers are coming in?

The amount of time subscribers stay on your list

The open rates for your messages

How many people respond to your call to action?

A lot of times the answer to what works is "it depends." And it does. However, there are some tried and true email marketing tactics that you can start with.

We'll look at ways you can improve growth, retention, open rates and response rates based on strategies that work for most campaigns.

We also have examples, instructions and resources to help you apply these strategies to your campaign.

Boost Subscriber Growth

Building a list full of subscribers who are interested in your company means more interactions with your website and more sales.

You'll need to look at how you're asking subscribers to sign up, and make sure that you're using every chance you have to advertise your mailing list.

First, Make Sure Your Web Form Stands Out

The location of your web form will impact the number of submissions it gets. It's best to have your form be immediately visible upon landing on the page, and easily accessible.

You might also find that including it in your sidebar or header is an easier option, since this will put your form on every page of your website.

The Lost Canyons site is a good example of this:

No matter what page you're on, the option to sign up is always available in the sidebar.

Consider A Popover Type Form

One way to make your form stand out is to [add a popover](#) type form. It's best to supplement your inline form with a popover, rather than just having one or the other.

Take Michael McCarthy's investor relations site QualityStocks.

His home page has a good section dedicated to information about the mailing list, so it was decided a lightbox form would perform best on the "About Us" page, which gets a lot of visitors.

The "About Us" page contains important information about the company and what's offered, but their invitation to join the mailing list is not as prominent as it is on some of their other pages. The lightbox now allows that invitation to stick out on the page, bringing in more subscribers:
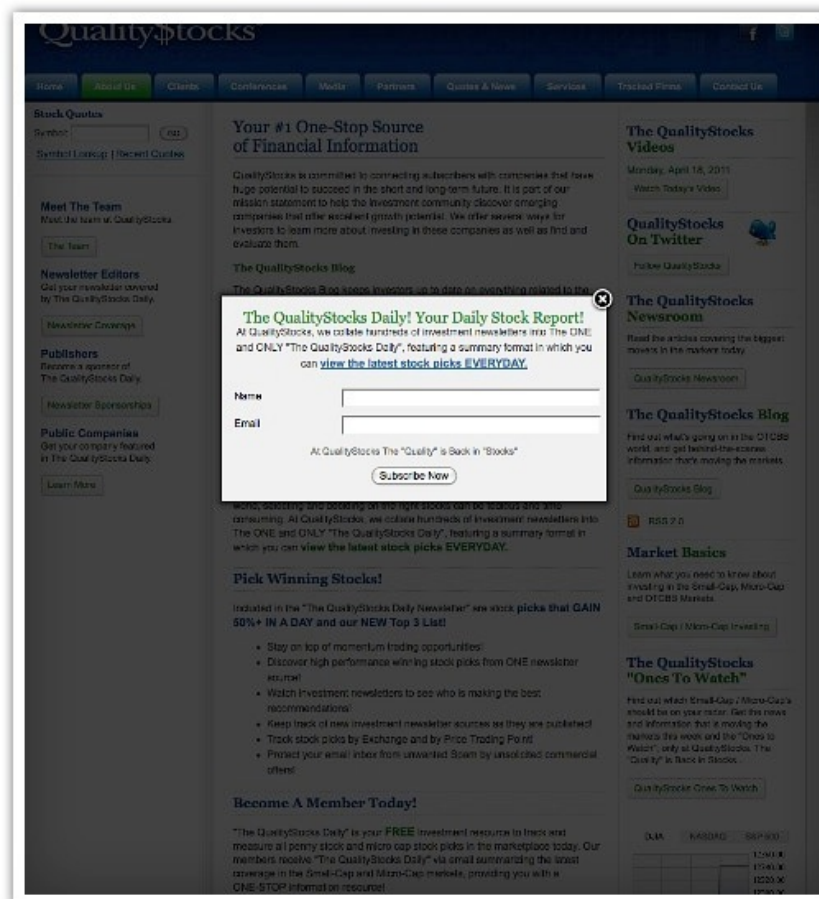
Adding the form on that page was a good move; it caused a 158% increase in subscriber growth compared to the previous month without the lightbox:
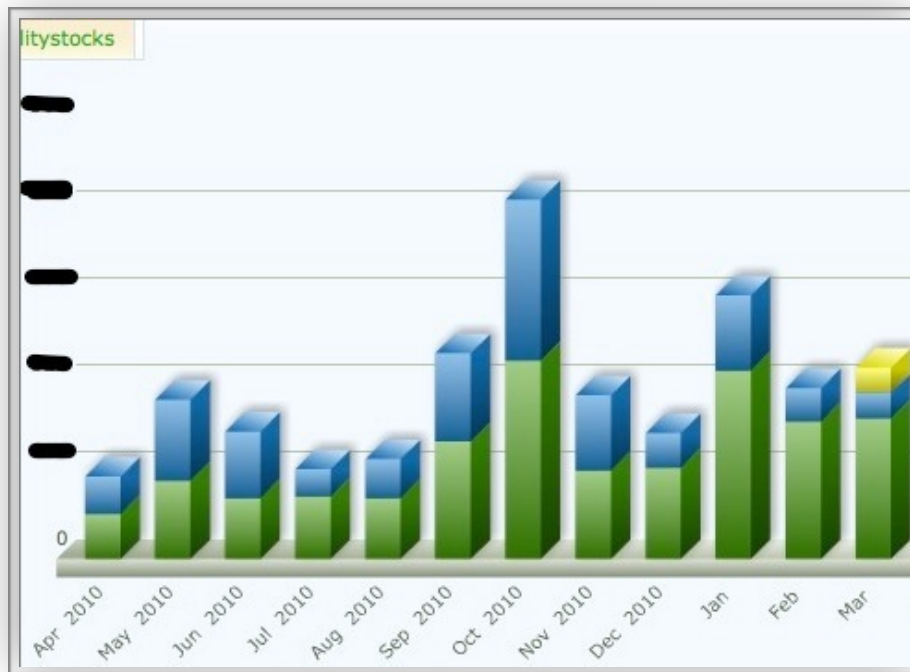
This monthly new subscribers chart shows the six months before and after when the lightbox form was introduced. There is a temporary drop in new subscribers during the holiday months before rapid growth resumes. In the six months since the lightbox form was added, Quality Stocks has seen a 99% increase in subscriber growth compared to the prior six months.

But he's not the only one!

AWeber user Leo Notenboom of Ask-Leo.com saw a 1000% increase in opt-ins after using a popover form.

Problogger.net ran a test and found a significant increase in sign up rates after adding a popover.

The proof is in the results; try it for yourself!

Utilize Positive Feedback

Before someone submits their personal information, they might want to see what others think of your company. People like to read reviews of products they're thinking of purchasing, and the same concept can apply to email subscribers.

You can include testimonials on your sign up page to influence the visitor's decision. Seeing what good things others have to say about you builds your credibility.

Not sure where to get testimonials? Try:

Your inbox
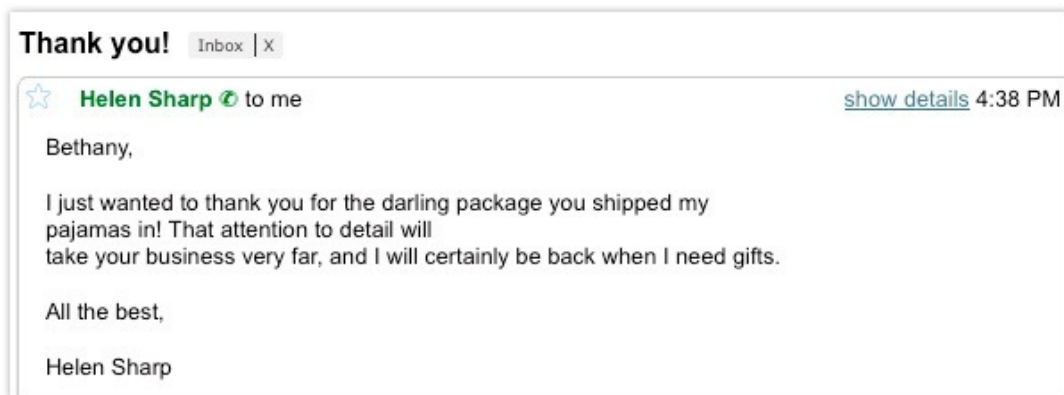
Chances are that your customers have had questions or comments about previous orders with your company. If you haven't deleted them, they're still frozen in time in your inbox.

Hunt through old messages and look for any positive feedback you can find. If you come across a nugget of praise, send a quick email back to the sender asking if they would mind if you used their comment in   your marketing materials. Since the feedback is good they shouldn't mind, but it's always best to ask.

Twitter
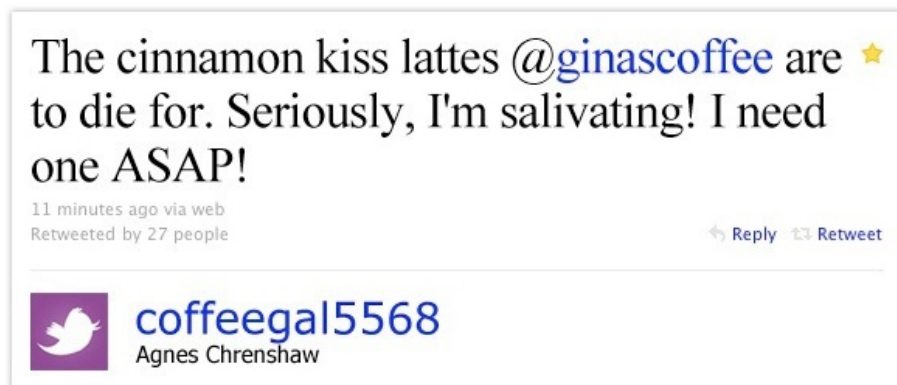
Next, head over to Twitter Search to find out if customers are tweeting about your brand. Search for your company name, your products and any other terms relevant to your business.

If the search produces results, send users a quick private message to ask if they mind if you use their tweets.

Facebook

If you have a Facebook fan page, take a look at what people are saying about your business. You might find the best testimonials without even having to ask for them.

Just make sure to send a quick Facebook message or email to the user to give them a heads up that you would like to use their testimonial.

Your blog

> **Brett Fayno Says:**
> April 5, 2010 at 4:39 pm | Reply
>
> Thanks for this great post about the Paleo diet. Your tips were easy to follow, and I've lost 2 pounds this week just by following your suggestions!

Have a blog? Read back over your older blog comments – there are bound to be testimonials you can use in your marketing materials.

Again, simply check with the person who so kindly gave you praise via email to make sure that it's ok for you to republish their comment.

Google Alerts

> **Web**   2 new results for **Lovable Paws**
>
> **Lovable Paws** loves my pet | All About Pets
> ... best place to groom my dog is **Lovable Paws** down on Main Street. They're clean, friendly, and very personable. I would definitely recommend **Lovable Paws** if you're ...
> blog.example.com/08/2010/lovable-pets-loves-my-pet/
>
> Fluffy's New Do! | Flickr - Photo Sharing!
> July 31, 2010 ... Check out Fluffy's new haircut! She's looking great thanks to our friends down at **Lovable Paws**!

This Google service lets you set up search terms that you'd like to monitor (such as your company name). It then notifies you when your search terms appear in new online content such as blog posts, news articles or web pages.

You can choose to be notified by email, through a web feed or on your iGoogle page. Scan your alerts periodically to see what the Web is saying about you.

Asking

If subscribers are content with your service, they should happily provide a few words of praise in return.

It's also a great way to find out where you can improve your service if they do have something negative to say.

- Use a survey service that allows you to redirect people to a page on your website after completing the survey. Once people start submitting, you can use goal tracking to see which of your subscribers fill it out.

- Or, simply include a line in your next email that instructs those interested to reply to your message with their testimonial – an easy and painless solution that takes all of 60 seconds to complete.

Happy with your sign up form? That's good, but there's more than just your form and website to optimize.

Archive Your Messages

You have the ability to publish your broadcast messages to an archive. This enables you to share those messages with more people. The archive will help give your campaign more exposure in two ways:

1. *It allows you to share with social media platforms*
2. *Your messages will appear in search engine results related to your content*

With more people viewing your messages, you want to make sure you're giving everyone a chance to sign up to receive your emails directly to their inbox. Including a form on your archive page will help with this.

Here's what an archive page looks like with a form on it:

This page is hosted by AWeber, so think of it as bonus advertising.

Don't Forget Social Media

Thanks to features like the AWeber Facebook app, you can include forms for people to sign up to your mailing lists on Facebook pages. This allows you to get your social media followers on your mailing list.

Here's what a Facebook form can look like:

Facebook has a lot of users, over 750 million, so a form on Facebook can bring big results.

For example, Chris Hopkins has an email campaign for his site Invested Central. The site provides information on the stock market and visitors can sign up for the free weekly newsletter. The site also has a Facebook page.

Realizing the potential for subscriber growth by offering an email sign up from for the Facebook crowd, he put up a form on a tab on their page.

After about 3 months with the Facebook form up, he saw monthly subscriber growth increase by 63%

You can also choose to have your broadcast messages published on Facebook and Twitter. This will provide those social media followers a link to a web-based version of your message. The more you share, the more potential subscribers see what you have to offer.

If blogging is more your thing, don't forget to include a web form in your blog posts or on your blog pages. Don't miss out on all the opportunities social media gives you to bring in more subscribers. Start getting in the habit of promoting your material across different platforms.

Keep Subscribers On Your List

If you have people unsubscribing from your list at about the same speed you're getting new ones, then your list isn't going to grow. Fortunately, there are things you can do to fix that.

It takes work to keep subscribers from leaving, but it's worth it.

Set Expectations

We've stressed the importance of setting subscriber expectations plenty of times before and there is a reason why- it works. When subscribers understand what's going on, they are less likely to unsubscribe or complain.

Here's how you can set expectations:

Start with your web form

The web form is where the sign up process begins, so you need to do a good job explaining what the potential subscriber will get for entering their information.

Check your form and make sure it lets subscribers know what they're signing up for. You want to detail what you'll be sending them and how often they can expect to receive messages from you.

Here's an example of a form that does that:

This company mentions that the newsletter is sent once a week and also shares other material a subscriber can respect to receive. To top it off, they've added a privacy policy at the end to ease any fears.

The confirmation message is sent immediately after the subscriber submits their information. You can customize the confirmation message so the subscriber knows what's going on, and what to do next.

If you're stuck on how you should customize this message, take a look at these examples:

Moving subscribers into a new list

If you have a list of subscribers you have already been in contact with, you will need to import them in your new list. The subscribers will need to confirm to remain on your list, so your confirmation message   could look something like Science North's:
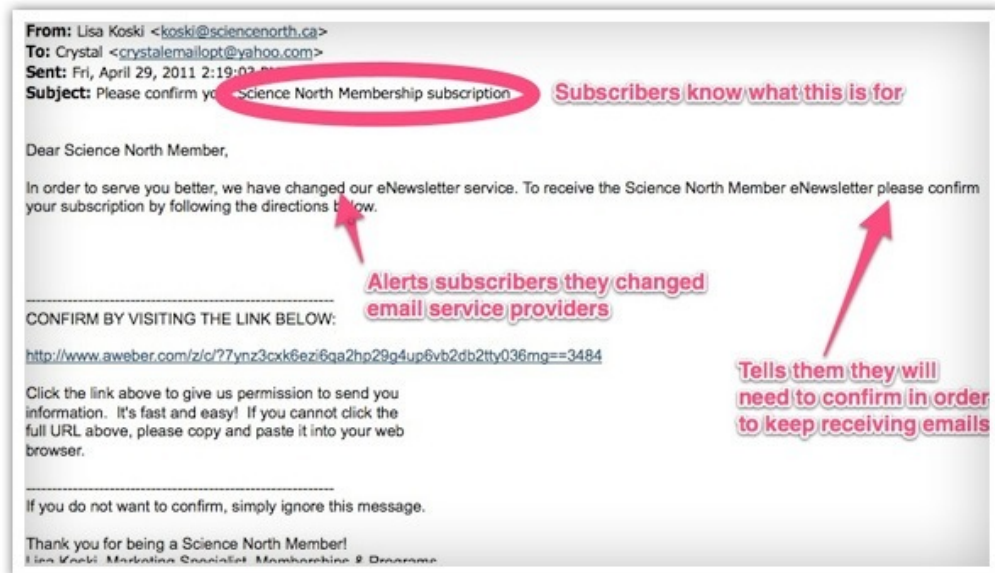
If you're adding a list, remember to be open with your subscribers. Explain why they are getting a confirmation message, especially if they were unaware a move was going to happen. Marketing   transparently will build subscribers' trust in you.

You should also emphasize that if they still want to be on your list, they will need to confirm. If they're still a subscriber, they're most likely still enjoying your emails. Make sure they realize they need to take action.

Asking subscribers from your web form

If subscribers are going to your site and filling out a form, your confirmation message could look something like The Bee Folks':
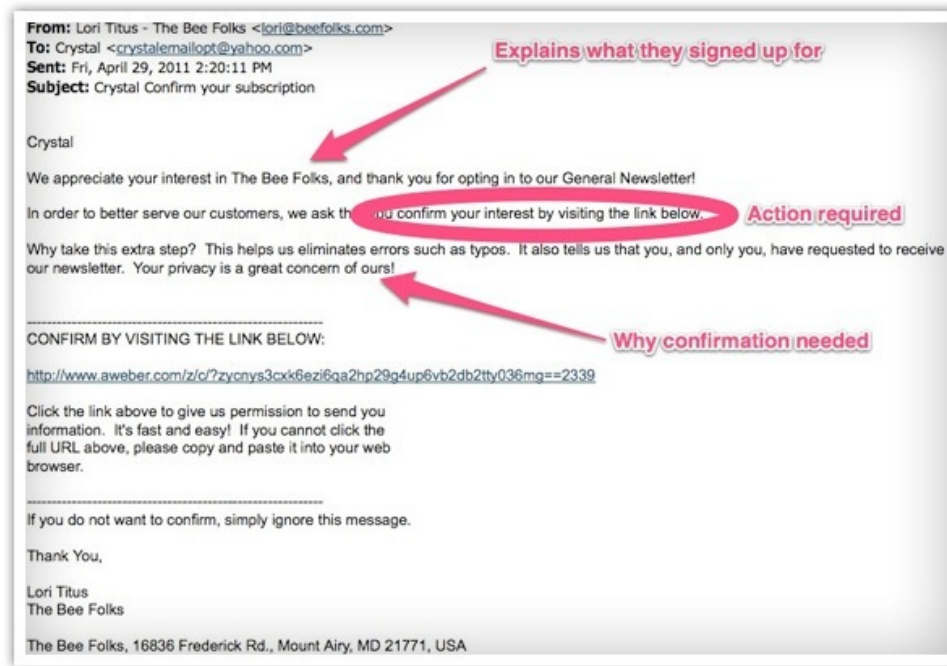
Remind them they requested this information, and make sure your from name matches what is on the site so the subscriber can easily recognize your message.

You also want to get their interest so they want to confirm. You can encourage them to confirm by reminding them of the incentive or content you promised them.

Welcome new subscribers

After subscribers have signed up and confirmed, it's time to welcome and remind them what they signed up for.

The welcome message should reiterate what they signed up for and what you'll be sending them.

Kevin and Janice Tuck run the site http://www.funmusicco.com, and they do a great job in explaining what to expect in their emails:

After you have set expectations you need to periodically assess your campaign to make sure you are following the guidelines you've set. For example, if you said you'd be sending twice a week, make sure that's what you're doing

As long as you stick to the expectations you set, you shouldn't have any subscribers leaving your list due to misunderstanding. However, there are still a couple other things you can do to increase retention.

Create Brand Loyalty To Keep Subscribers

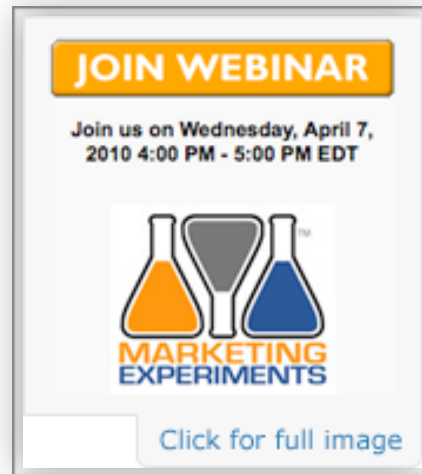When people begin to associate your brand with positive things, they'll stick to you.

Everything that comes in contact with your subscribers should have your brand represented. Subject lines can be branded by including your company name in them, and your messages can contain your logo.

There are many ways you can approach branding with your logo, so let's look at some examples.

First things first: the top left
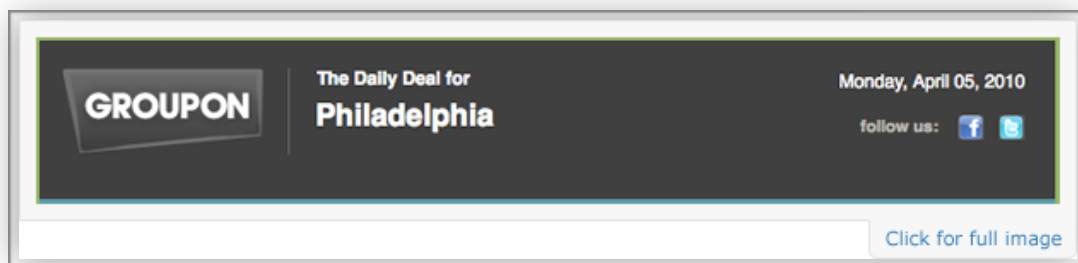
This common placement means the logo is the first thing readers encounter in a top-to-bottom, left-to-right world.

Here, Groupon's logo identifies the sender for readers who didn't pay attention to the "from" line – for example, those scanning through emails in a preview pane.

Even better, Groupon presents its logo alongside the email's main benefit.

Incorporated into the header

Memorial Hospital includes their logo in a subtle way. They used the color of the logo to influence the rest of the header's design. This keeps their design appealing and their branding consistent.

With the call to action

The Marketing Experiments logo follows the call to action in this email generated for an ME online clinic by Go2Webinar.

The logo's bright colors keep it highly visible against the low-key text. This logo doesn't need top placement to capture the eye.
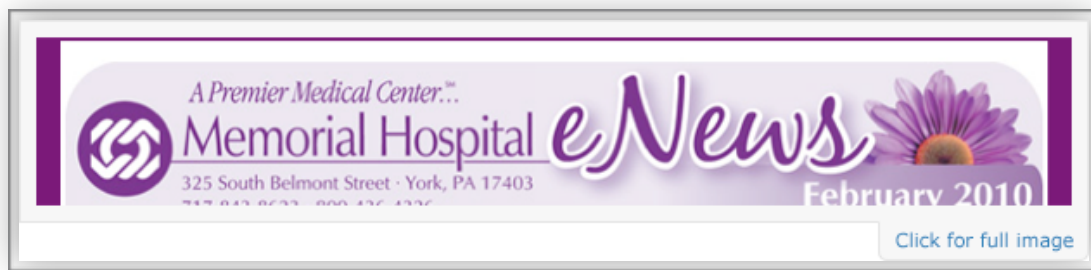
Throughout the design
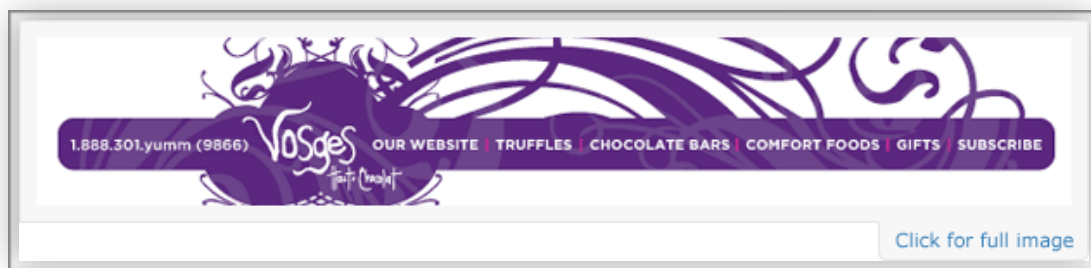
Vosges' logo borders the email at the top and bottom and extends into the rest of the design. For Vosges, the logo is part of the brand experience. Elegant and feminine, it denotes the luxury of gourmet chocolate.

This full-design overhaul goes further than simply inserting a logo. Think about ways you could incorporate elements of your logo into the rest of your creative with colors, fonts and other images.

Invoking your website
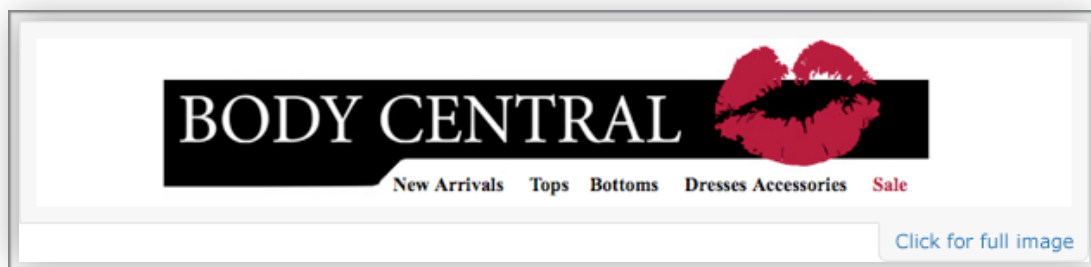
The goal of Body Central's email is to encourage shopping on the web site. Accordingly, the logo here is arranged as a full banner across the top just like the banner on the site pages.

Tip – No matter where you position your logo, make sure to include alt text in case images aren't displayed.

Pay Attention To Subscriber Behavior

If someone purchases something from you, they are more likely to purchase from you again.

Keeping this is mind, AWeber allows you to track who's opening messages and who's clicking on links. Setting up analytics will take this one step further. You'll be able to track sales, clicks through your site even if that URL wasn't specifically in your message and downloads.

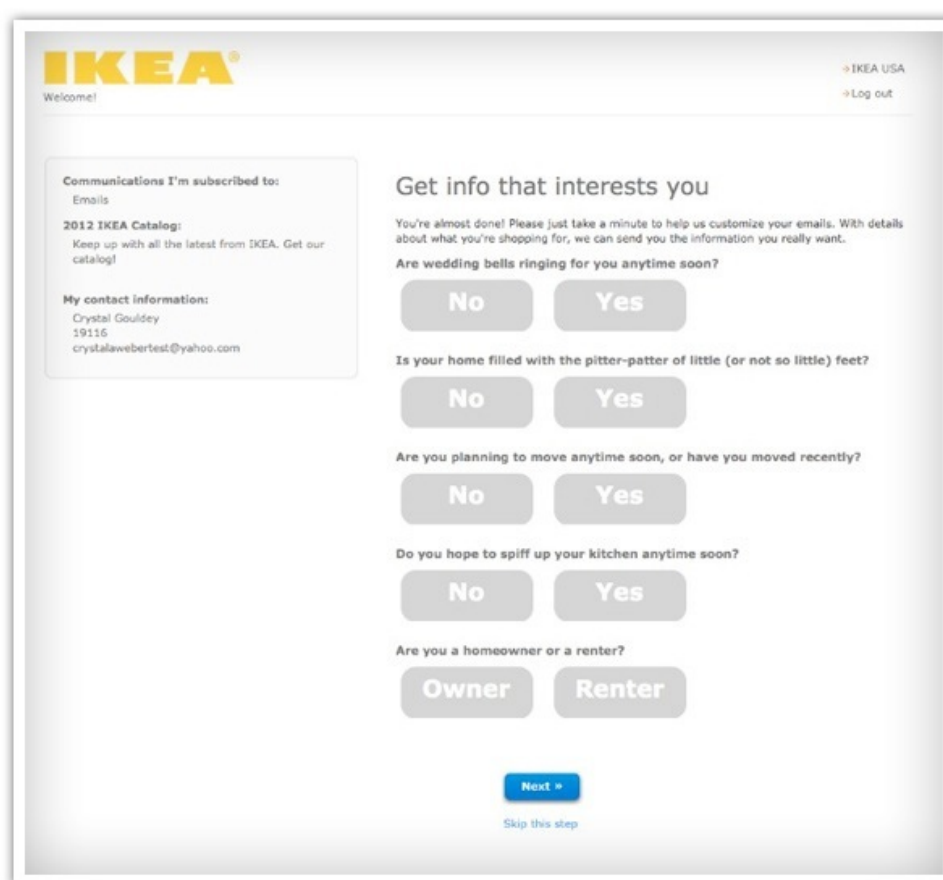Tracking subscriber activity allows you to use their information to send more personalized messages by sending to segments. Sending messages that are more personalized will help encourage subscribers to remain on your list.

In the MarketingSherpa 2011 Email Marketing Benchmark Report, 99% of email marketers surveyed responded that sending to segments based on behavior was somewhat effective to very effective.

You might also want to consider setting up subscriber preferences right at sign up.

IKEA is a good example of this:

Giving subscribers the option to enter more detailed information about who they are and what they're looking for will allow you to create messages relevant to what they need.

If you want to learn subscriber preferences right away, you can set up custom fields in your web form and use that information for segmenting, or even to place the subscriber in the appropriate list.

Your Messages Will Be Key

Implementing these tips will help keep subscribers, but your goal isn't just to have high subscriber numbers. You want your subscribers reading your messages as well.

If your messages are good, subscribers will stay on to keep receiving them and responding to what you're sending.

Get Your Messages Opened

Before your subscribers even read your message, you have to convince them to open it.

Part of this will have to do with setting those expectations we talked about and consistently delivering quality content. The other part will be how your message appears in the subscribers' inbox.

Find A Good Subject Line

Out of all the emails in your subscribers' inboxes, you need to make sure your email gets noticed. The subject line will need to get their attention and persuade them to look at the whole message- a big task for just one line.

Here are some ideas you can try out for your subject line:

Copyblogger also offers a great guide to writing headlines that can easily be applied to subject lines.

Once you have tried out different subject lines, you can try split testing different versions of them. This will give you a better idea of what your approach really is.

Utilize Snippets And Preview Panes

Your subject line gets their attention, but some email programs will let you take it a step further by displaying more of your email. Make sure your emails are benefiting from this.

Some email clients do this by displaying a snippet. An example of an email client that does this is Gmail, so you can set up a free account and test your messages there. If you look at the example above you'll see how some of the snippet text appears after the subject.

Other email clients will allow users to see a larger part of the email, otherwise known as a preview pane. You can utilize the power of snippets and preview panes by including compelling content at the top of your message.

To see how a preview pane can help, let's take a look at how Furniture Crate handles this:

Notice they have the sale notice right at the top, a great way to get subscribers to scroll down.

Southern Plate uses just an image, but it works well for their recipe emails:
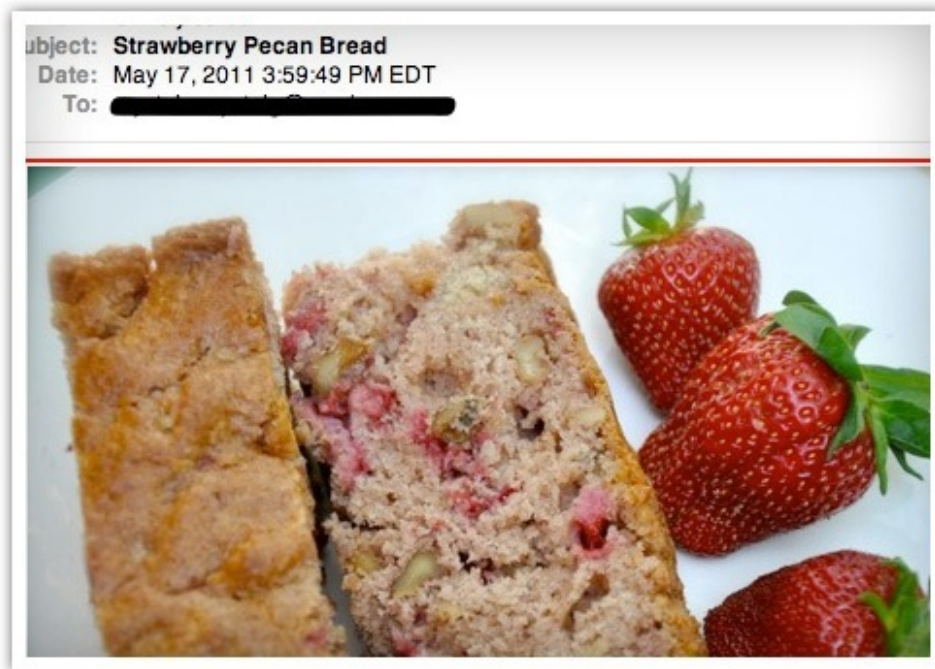
You just need to use whatever you think will convince your subscribers to keep reading.

Microsoft Outlook is one email client that uses preview panes, so check out your emails there or have a friend send you a screen shot of what they look like.

Design Messages for More Responses

Now that subscribers are opening your messages, you want them to take the next step: take action.

Make Your Messages Readable

To make sure everyone sees what you've created, you should include a link to a web-based version of your message.

How can you do that? You just need to archive it while you're on the message editing page. This will give you the direct link to that message:

You can then link to that web-based version in the pre-header of your message.

Focus Their Attention on Your Links

After working on getting subscribers to open and read your message, you don't want to drop the ball now. In order to get more clicks, you want subscribers' focus on your call to action.

Here are some things that might help:

Find Out Where Clicks Are Happening

Are people more likely to click links in your header or footer? The only way to find that out is to track where the clicks are coming from. Once you know where, you put your most important links there.

To find out which of the duplicate links perform best in your messages, you simply have to use "tags" to make the links slightly different without affecting their functionality. For example, adding "#message_body" would be a tag you can use.

Once the different links are clicked, you can easily view the totals for the different links in your message statistics, which can help when you're creating future messages and wondering where you should place really important links.

Take for example this email from Tea Collection, a clothing site for kids.
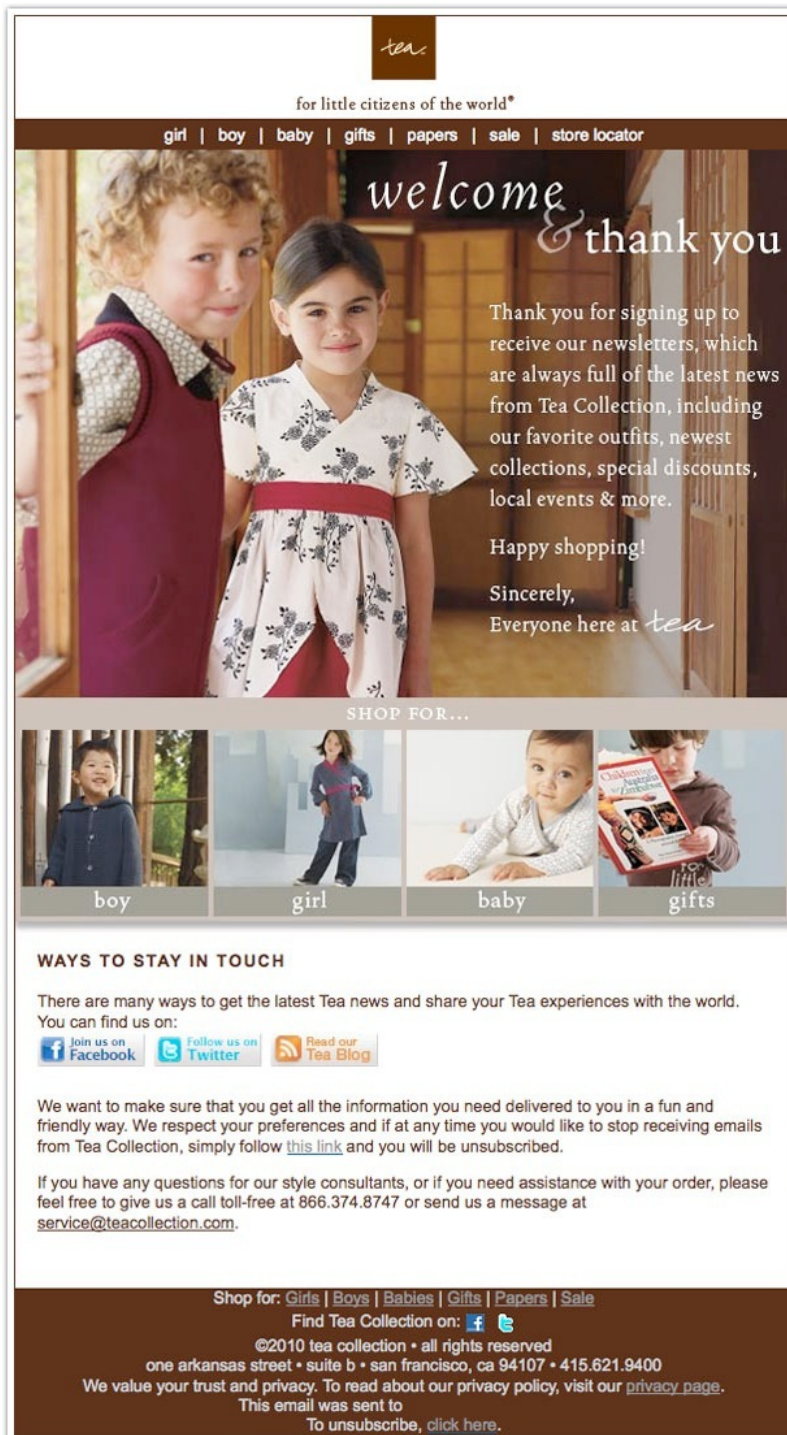
There are multiple navigation links in the header, body and footer of this message that lead back to the same product pages on Tea Collection's website.

If we were tracking which particular links performed best in this email, we would tag each of the links with a certain identifying code or phrase when adding them to the message.

In this case, adding **"#message_header,"** **"#message_body"** and **"#message_footer"** to the end of each corresponding link would indicate *where* in the message the link was clicked.

With your own emails, you can use any tracking codes that you want at the end of your links (as long as they start with #) but if you have any anchors, they can't match any other anchors that already exist on the page.

Consider This URL: http://aweber.com/blog/#footer

Notice that if you click that link, you automatically jump to the bottom of the page, which isn't ideal. If we were sending an email with a link back to our blog, we couldn't use "footer" as a tracking code.

On the other hand, "email_footer" *would* work there, because "email_footer" is not an anchor anywhere on that page. You can see this by going to http://aweber.com/blog/#email_footer – it doesn't jump you way down on the page.

Once you add tags to your URLs and send your message, you'll find a separate statistic for each of the links that point to the same page on the stats summary for that email.

By testing the placement of call to action links over a period of time, you'll not only be able to see which links cause a click-through frenzy with subscribers, but you'll also be able to test things like language and wording of offers.

Don't Bury The Call To Action

Make the link prominent among other text and images. You want eyes to be drawn to it, so give it plenty of room. At the very least, put a line of space between your link and surrounding text.

Try Using An Image

[One study](#) found that including an image brought a 52% lift in total click rate..

If you've been using just text links, try creating a button or linking up an image. [Snowboard Addiction](#) does that very well:
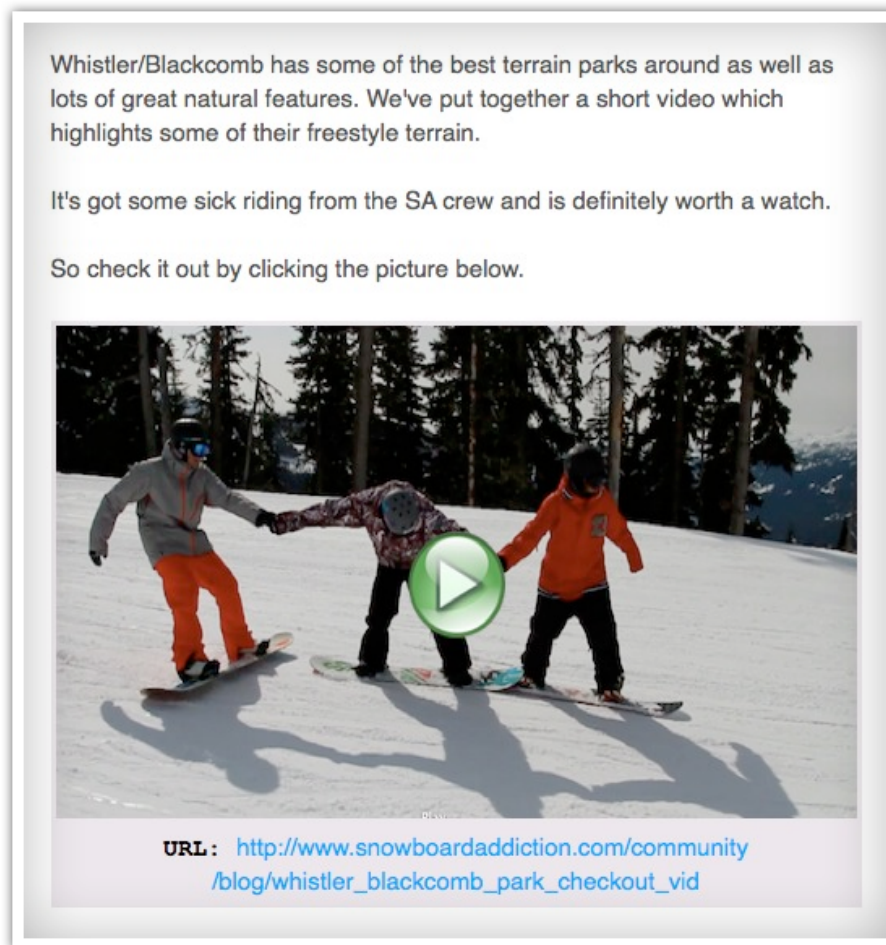
If the subscriber wants to see the video, they need to click on the screenshot to get there.

Note that while [images](#) and [videos](#) can be very effective, you should also include a text link in case the image is blocked.

Experiment With Wording

How you word your call to action can also affect your subscribers' decision to click or not.
Take these examples:

> Including "It's free!" [increased the conversion rate](#) by 28% for Soocial.

> "You should follow me on Twitter here" beat out "I'm on Twitter" [by 173%](#).

> What could this mean? Free is a positive and people respond to more powerful, clear and personal calls to action.

Want a Designer's Opinion?

One of our web designers, Bob Ricca, has some thoughts of what makes a well-designed email. Here's what he thinks about some of our customers:

Newsletter: Club Caitlin

Bob's take: "I really like the way this newsletter was done. The contrast between the reds and the greens really makes it fun and interesting and its all tied together nicely with the gray background.
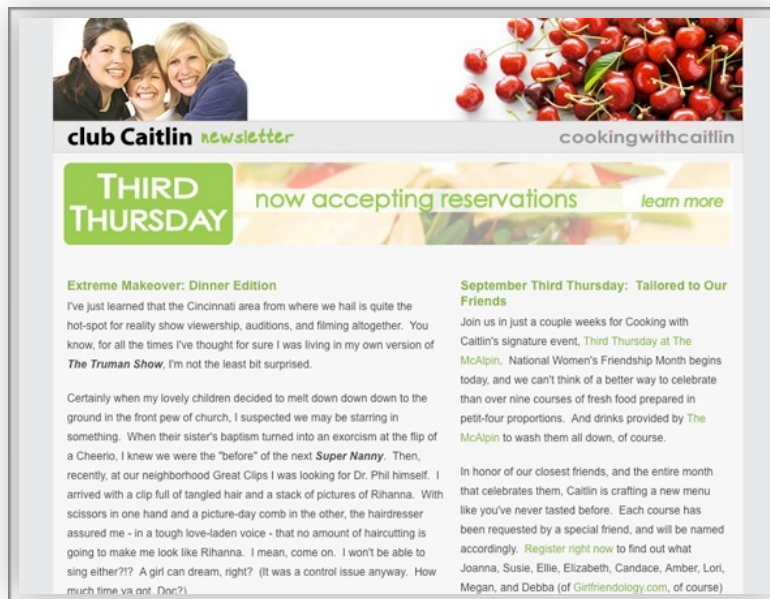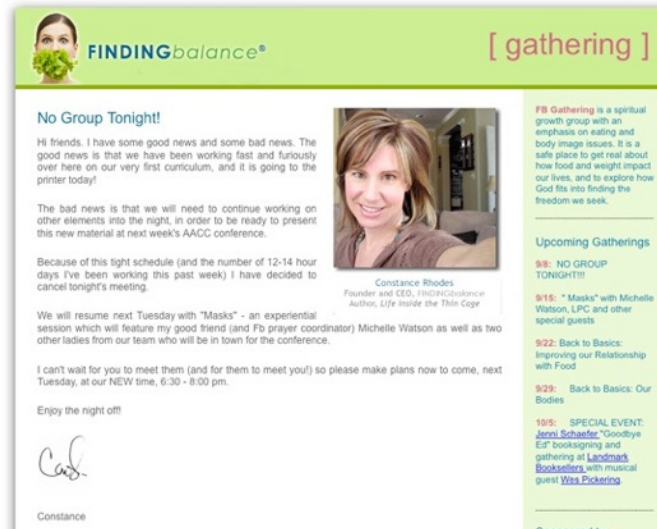

Whoever designed this email also spent time laying out the footer of the email (seen below)… something that can often be overlooked and neglected."
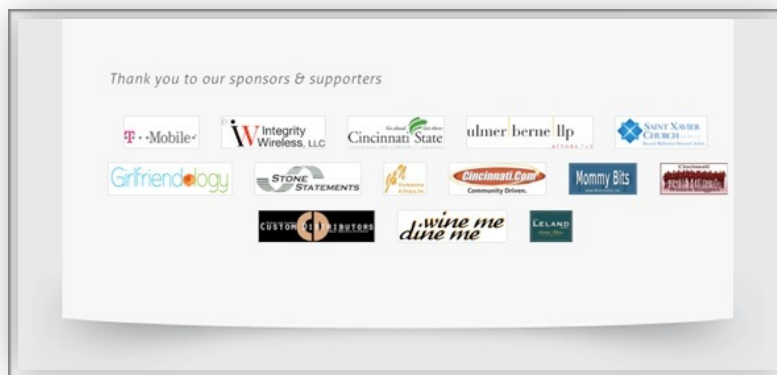
Click here to join Club Caitlin.

Newsletter: FB Gathering

Bob's take: "This newsletter design feels fresh. The pastel greens are very inviting and the imagery works well to balance out the newsletter."

[Click here](#) to sign up to receive FB newsletters.

Newsletter: Eye Spy Spain Magazine

Bob's take: "Not only do the colors work very well but check out the exceptional detail they put into the text header above where the newsletter starts. That sort of detail makes an email look very clean, crisp and extremely professional. Bravo!"
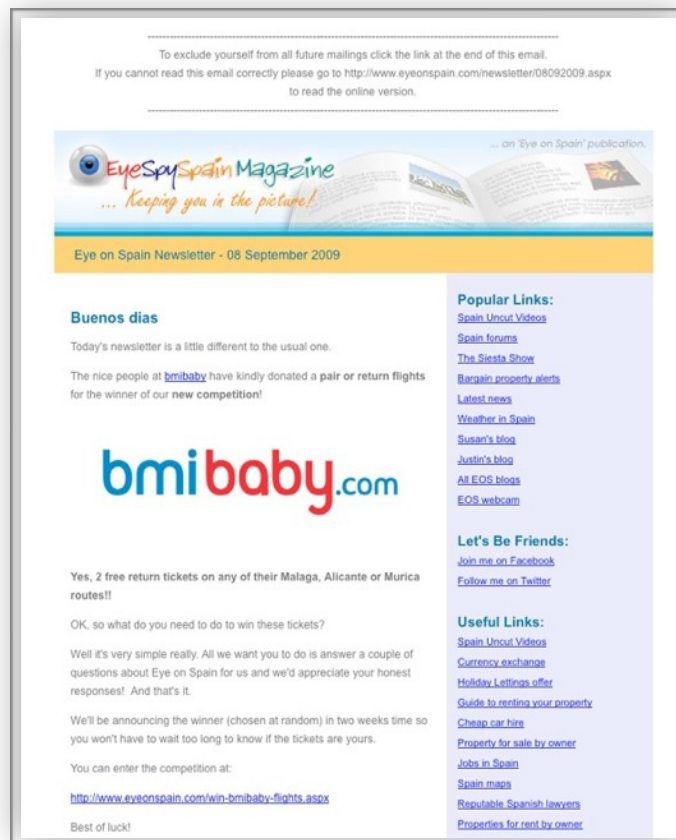
[Click here](#) to sign up for Eye Spy Spain Magazine.

About AWeber

AWeber is an easy-to-use email marketing tool that allows business owners and entrepreneurs to cultivate relationships with their customers. Since 1998, AWeber has been the email engine powering the growth of organizations around the world, including leading sites like Social Media Examiner and ProBlogger and industry influencers such as Peter Shankman and Ann Handley.

Today, more than 120,000 small- and midsize-businesses, entrepreneurs, agencies and nonprofits are making the most of AWeber's sophisticated segmentation and analytics capabilities, split testing applications, extensive template libraries and industry-leading deliverability and live support.

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