

The Simple Guide



To Email Marketing

By Dean Levitt of

Mad Mimi

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To
Email Marketing**

by Dean Levitt

Chief of Culture

[Mad Mimi Email Newsletters](#)

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Introduction

You don't need to be an HTML wizard to send HTML emails or a Photoshop guru to design something beautiful. You don't need to be tech savvy (I'll help with that part) and you don't need to be a "marketer."

In writing this, I have a single aim: To get you emailing effective HTML emails that will respect your readers and achieve your goal whether it's marketing, connecting or marketing while connecting.

Sending email is a fun and rewarding experience. You know how awesome it is when people comment on your Facebook posts or respond to a tweet? Well, email newsletters are better with a greater reach! Don't lose sight that this is all supposed to be something you enjoy and hopefully grow to love.

I'll be using our very own [Mad Mimi](#) interface as the vehicle but where you drive is totally up to you! With that in mind, each section will include the Philosophy and the Technical (though not necessarily in that order) and will translate to any service that suits you!

The title is "*The Simple Guide To Email Marketing*." That's a theme I'll be returning to frequently - "**Simple!**" Easy, uncomplicated, effortless and intelligible. Simple is important.

Simple is important because it makes your life easier and evades the usual time-wasting, hair-pulling frustration. Keeping things simple means it's easy for your readers too. Simple means do-able. **Simple means you'll enjoy your emailing, do it more often, and both you and your readers will benefit.**

When reading this, it's a good idea to let yourself be swept along. Build a promotion as we go!

If you ever have any feedback, spot any errors or want to share your thoughts on email marketing in general, reach out to me at simpleguide@madmimi.com.

Mad Mimi Email Newsletters

[Mad Mimi](#) is an email marketing application that makes it simple and enjoyable to create beautiful HTML email newsletters. It's an easy-to-use platform helps you create, send, and track your email campaigns, all from within the same intuitive interface.

In case you didn't know this, I'm one of Mad Mimi's owners. Even so, the ideas here are universal and if there's a program I think compliments building great emails, I'll recommend it.

Why Email?



I'm probably safe assuming that you already see some value in email marketing. I'll take the opportunity anyway to mention a few salient points about email and why marketing and email go together well.

Subjectively, email is the main system of interaction in my life. I use my phone to talk to people only for a small fraction of my communication. Email gets my attention as fast as text messaging (SMS). In most cases, I let any unknown callers go to voicemail yet **I view every email that pops up in my inbox.**

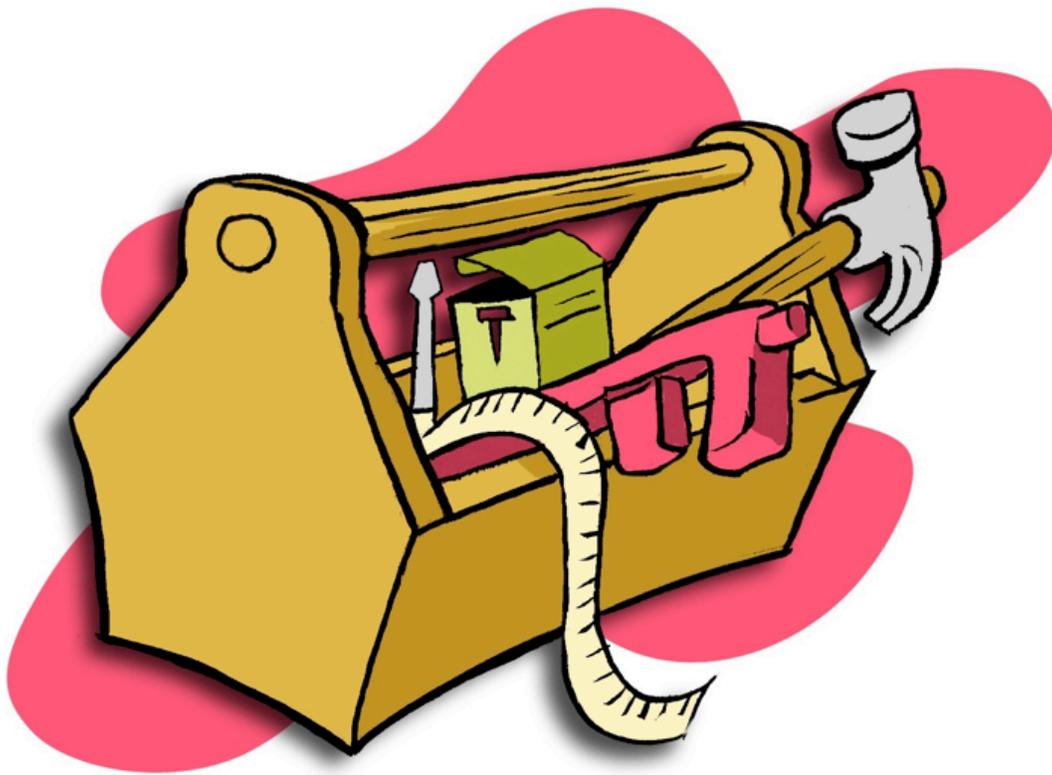
When I sign up for newsletters it's an easy way for me to stay in touch with businesses I like or even business I think I'll like. As a customer, I expect businesses to email me if there's anything I need to know whether it's a sale or a new product release. My favorite musicians don't call me about their Summer tour nor do the local restaurants text me their Spring menu - they email me. It's all about email. It's the standard!

More than one in five people worldwide use email. That's about 1.9 billion people. It's predicted to increase to 2.5 billion email users in the next 2 years. Yup, email's popular. The Radicati Group, who came up with that info, also reckon that the world sends about 294 billion emails daily.

Let's put it simply. Email is a vibrant and powerful way to connect with people.

Bringing it home, think about your own experiences. Do you even know anyone who doesn't have an email address? You probably receive a number of HTML emails each week (I sure do). You read them, get inspired by them and even look forward to the next one. Email is a part of our lives. A very big part.

Every Artist Needs The Right Set of Tools



Before we start creating an email, let's procrastinate just a little and look at some tools that'll help you get your emails looking gorgeous while still keeping your life easy.

On A Mac...

Evernote

This is a neat little screenshot tool. You can use it to resize and crop images. <https://evernote.com>

ColorSnapper

This color picker is easy to use and a great help in creating your color scheme (your "Theme"). <http://colorsnapper.com>

On A PC...

Just Color Picker

A simple and easy color picker for PC. <http://annystudio.com/software/colorpicker>

On Both...

Jing

Jing takes great screenshots and is super easy to use. <http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html>

Flickr

The Commons on Flickr is an awesome resource for grabbing images to use in your emails. <http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons>

Morguefile

Morguefile is another great spot for images you can use. Please just always double-check the fine print to make sure you can use the image for commercial use (if you're using it commercially). <http://www.morguefile.com>

Image Editing Program

There are tons of free and easy image editing programs both online and for your desktop. I like Aviary (<http://aviary.com>) and PicMonkey (<http://picmonkey.com>), Mad Mimi's Vicki likes Photoshop.com and our Rylan enjoys the desktop Photoshop experience.

I also recommend drafting your emails on a basic text editor. **If it reads well in plain text, it'll read well in the inbox!**

The Technical



It's worth getting to know these tools. They'll be your sidekicks. By familiarizing yourself with their basic uses, you'll avoid running into roadblocks along your composition journey. That means less stress.

At some point you may need to get an image sized so it renders beautifully and downloads fast for your readers. You'll need to know what a hex code is so you can match your website's lovely color scheme.

Facing this stuff now will give you far more confidence down the road and won't interrupt your compositional flow. Don't spend too much time exploring these tools, just get acquainted with them - you'll get to know them much better later.

The Philosophy



It's all about the company you keep! **Using simple but powerful tools is empowering. It will save you tons of time and result in a better email.**

Say It Loud!



What's first? Well, once you've completed this walk-through, what comes first will be up to you. I like to start with the content since that's really what your email is about. So let's talk content!

The Technical



Simply put, good writing matters. Don't distract your readers with typos or exhaust them with over exclamation. It's worth having a few friends proof read for you. This helps you avoid run-on sentences and poor grammar. If anything stands out in this regard, it's a distraction from your intended message. Seriously, proof read!

The Philosophy



Well, I'll try to keep it simple (there's that word again) when talking about content. Let's start with this basic idea:

You know your readers better than I do.

Everyone always says, "know your market." That's true for emailing too. What do you think they want to hear about? Remember, you want them to read and enjoy the emails you send and look forward to the next one. What, as it pertains to your business, will give your readers **something interesting** to read?

Do you like receiving emails that are nothing but a hard sell? I'm sure you don't! No one likes the pixellated equivalent of the junk mail that arrives in your post box every day.

Here's the **REAL** reason you're emailing:

You want to connect with your customers and fans. You want to provide value, keep them informed and give them a moment in their hectic day to enjoy the email you've sent.

You also want them to read your next one, to share it with friends and to stay loyal customers. Don't lose sight of that.

And how do you do that?

Well, by sitting down and asking yourself, "What do I, me, myself and my friends and customers want to read? What do I look forward to receiving in my inbox? What can I share that my customers might not know. If I were *my* customer, what would I find interesting?"

Buyer Personas

Let's take a quick digression and chat about buyer personas. That sounds terribly fancy and jargonish but it boils down to this: A buyer persona is a fictional example of your customer. Larger businesses, politicians and universities often rely on multiple buyer personas to dictate their websites and marketing tactics.

Ask yourself this: Who is my likely customer? What are they like? What do they do during the day?

Often, building the buyer persona relies on asking some customers to share their thoughts. Other times, you're relying on your own knowledge. Most likely, if you're a small business, your buyers are just like you.

Stop and build a character for your customer. Give him or her a name and a story. You may gain some insight into your own business and make some positive changes to your email marketing.

These could be personal stories about a product, the chef's inspiration behind a new dish or news about the industry you're in.

Say your business is to sell "small batch" roasted coffee beans. A weekly email that highlights various ways to prepare coffee, from cold press to stove-top percolators (my favorite!), would be perfect. Talk roasting techniques or why the chief coffee poobah created a blend of dark roasted Sumatran beans and medium roasted Arabica or... you get the point. As a very passionate coffee drinker, I'd find this fascinating and I'd be inspired to try out those techniques or new blends.

If you're **informing**, you're already being interesting. If you're interesting, **it won't feel like an advertisement.**

Say It Proud!



Let's discuss the layout of your email newsletter.

The Technical



When thinking basic format, I stick with what we humans are used to. I look at major blogs and publications. These usually have a main title, an article heading, maybe a teaser (I call this a subheading) and then some text. Oh, and an image too.

See? Pretty neat and easy to read, right?

While dual columns may seem attractive because well, you've seen emails with that format, I tend to steer clear of that layout. It's a "noisy" format that's distracting and **we like things that are easy to read. So keep it simple!**

Okay, I know what you're thinking: "but Dean, I just want to add some links along the side."

To that I say, don't put them there - place them up top. We're trained to look there. Visit every website you like and you'll find the vast majority have their navigation links up top and not down the side. Placing those "quick links" up top utilizes your email real estate to the best advantage.

The length of your email is worth exploring. I'm a fan of being concise and I like to scan an email quickly and "get it."

Now many of you will have a lot to say on a specific subject. It's OK. **Don't stress it. Do what feels right.** It's also worth taking a look at other options like hosting the real meat of a topic on your website or blog and linking to it from your email. If that's not possible, well, still try to keep it succinct. If your email needs 10 minutes of uninterrupted focus by your readers, it's probably too long.

The Philosophy



Similarly, if your email takes you all day to write, it's probably too long. Be wary of overcommitting yourself and creating chores. **Creating your email should be fun and easy.**

Think about it like a new resolution - like blogging or starting a workout routine. If you try to update your blog 10 times a day or by going from couch to running 10 miles in a couple of weeks, you'll burn yourself out.

In the email world, this applies doubly so. If you're tiring yourself out building intricate compositions that rival websites in terms of content and design, you're probably also wearing out your readers.

Start simple - you can always ramp it up. Single topic emails are easy to digest and easy to keep up with whether your goal is monthly, weekly or daily. Besides, it's much less disheartening to ramp up than down.

So, what is a topic? It's **relevant content** you want to share with your readers. It could be a sale or it could be a new product. It could be an anecdote on your blog (by the way, check out Mad Mimi's [RSS to Email](#) feature), something instructional, or it could be an event coming up. A topic could be a "behind the scenes" look at photoshoot or the inspiration behind a new jewelry item.

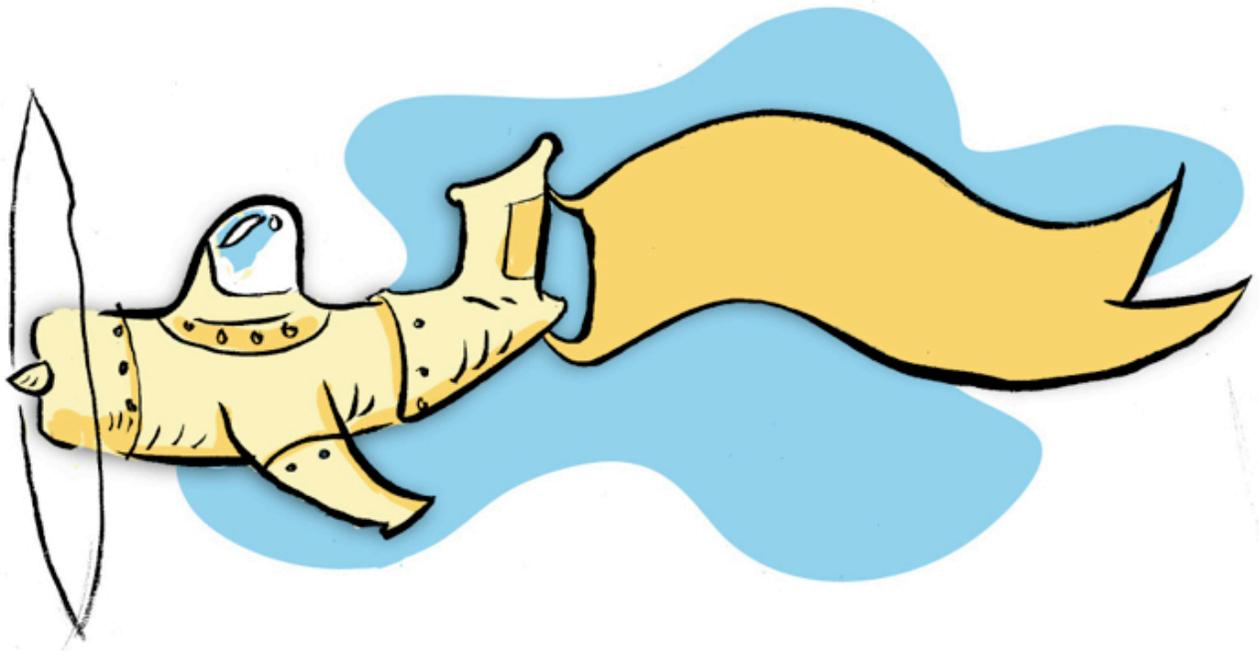
Topics I find interesting depend a lot on who the sender is (that's you!). If I'm receiving a commercial email about new products in an online store, I like to know a little about the product, why it's useful and sometimes, simply, what it does. Some newsletters that draw me in tend to be more focused on telling tales. I love knowing the story behind a song or a work of art. I like reading about what inspired a new menu item.

Don't feel that you need to write a lot to get your point across. If you think that a product image with a brief caption is all that's needed, you're probably right. Sometimes topics can be shared visually.

A topic is whatever your readers may want to hear about. Remember what I mentioned earlier - **you know your readers better than I do!**

OK, so take some time and draft some content. If you want to move on in a hurry, grab some lorem ipsum (y'know, that placeholder text) and read on!

Bannerize



The banner is a logo or an image that goes right up top of your email. Nearly every website you'll ever visit has something similar.

It's the first step to branding your email and since it's a first impression, it's pretty darn important.

The Technical



Here's where Aviary or Picmonkey (or Evernote or Jing) come in handy. Chances are you already have a logo that works on your website or, at the very least, on your desktop.

All you'd need to do is import that logo into one of the image editing applications mentioned and do any necessary cropping and resizing. Your goal is to make sure it'll look good in the **email's context**. That's a fancy way of saying that when you add it to your newsletter, it should look natural - not too snug against any borders, not blurry and not too small either.

Creating A Banner

If you don't have a logo don't fret! It's easy to create a banner for your email. Here's how:

- **Step 1.** Find an image! It could be (and often is) an image that defines you or relates to your business. Here's where Flickr or Morguefile become great resources!
- **Step 2.** Upload your image to your image editor. This is where you can crop it, edit it and add text like your company or business name. **Let yourself go and get creative** but remember - keep it simple. You can always refine your banner image over time.
- **Step 3.** Saving your image to the **right file size** is important. We'll discuss this in more detail later but here's a quick tip: in Mad Mimi, our banner image width is 590 pixels wide. If you save it at that width, you'll be just fine.

There are other options if you don't have a banner or logo at hand. Ask a friend! We all know someone who's artistically inclined. A home-cooked meal in return for a banner image is an easy trade.

And don't forget the [Mad Mimi](#) team! If you ever are stuck, reach out to us and we'll help you get a banner image that stylishly rocks your email newsletter.

The Philosophy



Well, there's not much to this philosophically. In keeping with our theme, simple is king! You don't need to go overboard with some elaborate design - your company name is usually enough. **Keep it simple and you'll naturally keep it stylish.** Some of the most beautiful and effective email banners I've seen are just pictures. An effective banner for brick and mortar stores is a photograph of your shop itself with the name captured in the frame.

A Beautiful Moment

One example that comes to mind is [Picada Y Vino](#), a Brooklyn wine shop, that uses a different gorgeous image of a vineyard in each email. Each week's newsletter seems to impart a beautiful, yet relevant atmosphere.

Like 0 Tweet Pin +1

Saturday December 8th, 5pm-7pm
Old World for the New Year

As we count down to the end of 2012, join us for a festive tasting of three Old World gems, perfect to help usher in the New Year.

Erste & Neue Mueller Thurgau - As smooth and clean as a mountain stream, this sub-alpine white is excellent example of an Italian Mueller Thurgau (a hybrid grape combining the flavors of the noble Riesling with the brightly acidic Sylvaner) from a 100-year old co-operative in the German-speaking Alto Adige region, just south of Austria. *From terraced vineyards that are situated around Lake Kaltern and on the plateau at the foot of the Mendel Mountain, the co-op's members produce

The point is, have a banner image! It's your brand. Even if it's simply your business name in big block letters, that's fine. It's easy to change later.

Here are some of my favorites:





folk radio uk

at the cutting edge of folk music from the British Isles & beyond



Innocent Indulgence

IMPRESSED

by nature



taskrabbit

THE WOOL SHED

Designer, My Designer



Before we really dig into your overall design, plug in some content! Whether you took my recommendation earlier and drafted some of your own or you preferred to stick with placeholder text, just add something in there.

If you're using Mad Mimi (and I hope you are), make sure to include the following:

Section Title, Heading, Subheading, some text and a link or two. Whether you really need all this for the finished email is not important - from a technical viewpoint it's helpful to see all your design options first before throwing out what's not necessary.

What we're about to tackle is what, in Mad Mimi, we call your "**theme.**" There are plenty ready-made themes out there for you to use as a launch pad, but I'm a fan of creating my own. This is where we pick your colors for the email, set the fonts and font sizes and really add the link between your website design and your email newsletter.

At the very least, **here's where you get your email looking really gorgeous!**

Let's begin with The Philosophy.

The Philosophy



The theme is one of those things that feels less important than it really is. Don't neglect it!

A stylish, well-thought-out color scheme ties everything together and plays a huge role in subtly emphasizing important links.

If the style doesn't fit well, it can create, at best, a slight level of discomfort for your readers and at worst, it can make your content feel as out of place as high-heeled shoes on a football player.

Your theme colors can often set the vibe - calming with subdued grays and blues to party time with neon on black. Fonts matter too. Your readers will notice the difference between Helvetica and Comic Sans. More subtly, there's a definite difference in mood between Georgia and Optima. While it might not be as obvious as a jarring color scheme, using mismatched (or oddly sized) fonts is like wearing pink socks with a tuxedo.

As with everything we've discussed, when in doubt, keep it simple. **Aim to keep everything uniform and easy to read with visible links and you won't go wrong.** To keep the tuxedo metaphor going, you first need a nicely fitting suit before you can pull off the tartan bow-tie.

To Mix Or To Match

A common question is whether to use multiple fonts in a newsletter design or to pick just one and stick with it. I like to mix two fonts though many designers go up to three. The key here is to create a gentle contrast so I like to use a serif font (Times New Roman and Georgia) for my section titles and headings while sticking to a sans-serif (Arial, Helvetica, Verdana) for the actual body of the email.

This technique is visually stimulating while subtly creating a distinction between sections.

The Technical



Let's start with your website - you can grab a ton of ideas, inspiration and guidance from your website. Use your website's background color as your background color. Draw the colors from your site for your subject lines, headings, backgrounds, text colors and links. Same goes for fonts, font sizes, etc.

Another very important source of inspiration is your Banner image. It's going to be obvious and up front so make sure your theme **blends** with it.

Here's where your color picker comes in handy. The color picker will give you the exact color, usually in the form of a hexadecimal color code code. The "Hex" code is a 6 character code made up of numbers and letters. So if you hover the color picker over a color in your banner, you'll get the "hex" code. Then plug that in to Mad Mimi and voila!

What Is A Hexadecimal Color Code?

The Hexadecimal Color Code is an easy way to specify colors on the web. It looks complicated, but you won't ever need to memorize the values. While a color picker tool will give you the color codes you need, it's helpful to understand what those numbers and letters all mean.

Your screen shows only three colors: red, green and blue. These three colors (often shorted to the moniker 'RGB') combine to create all the other colors you normally see. The hexadecimal color code is simply a way to define the amounts of red, green and blue that make up the colors and hues you want. Examples of colors written as a hex code look like this: #FF0000 (red) and #61399D (purple).

So, here are my very breakable rules of thumb for creating a great theme in a couple minutes:

1. Find your boldest color

It could be a bright red, a dark blue or a green that just stands out. It's usually an eye-catching color in your banner or on your website. Use this for your Section Titles and your links. It's a great way to tie in your color scheme without over saturating the eye of your readers.

2. Keep it readable

Keep the inner background color behind your text white or something light. Dark text on white background is very easy to read and we humans like that!

3. Set a neutral outer background

Make your outer background a light gray or something similar. This allows your content to be the focus and helps make it pop. Having bright colors in your outer background area draws the eye away from what matters.

4. Use a strong dark border

This clearly highlights the space the eye should be focused on and can help make your content "float" above the outer areas.

5. Experiment with heading colors

You can use other colors or simple blacks and grays for your headings and subheadings. You can't go wrong with simple here. I do tend to make my headings a dark charcoal and the subheading a medium (but readably dark) gray. These colors work with nearly every theme.

6. Keep it common

Paragraph text should be a very dark shade of gray. Our eyes aren't used to reading bright colors so don't rock the boat until you've tested it out on everyone you know first. Many designers say that off-black is the most readable font color and I suggest using color codes #222222 or #444444

And there you have it. Your first theme. Now you can tweak it and make it yours but **when it comes to readability, simple can't be outdone!**

Images



So you've got a banner, entered some content and now it's time to discuss images. While your images can really add some color and magic to your emails, there's seldom any reason to hire a designer to build intricate flyers. Almost everything you ever need can be found on your website, Flickr, stock photo sites, Google images or your camera.

It's important not to overuse images. When in doubt, leave them out. If it feels forced then it doesn't belong.

The Philosophy



If your image doesn't compliment your content then you're doing it wrong! So, how do you really pick the right images? Well, it depends. I personally find one image compliments one topic although if you're discussing something visual like a fashion line, you're going to want to include more images.

Alternately, trying to match an image to every idea you include in the content can become tiresome for both you and your readers. The best thing to do is **step back and evaluate**.

Send an example of the email to yourself and take a look; does it cry out for an image *just there*? Does it read smoothly and easily already but needs a splash of color to draw the eye down? Go with your gut.

Images, in most cases, are something you can't under-do but it's very easy to overdo. Just be restrained and tasteful (whatever that means to you) and you won't go far wrong.

There are common exceptions to this though - online stores with a sale on should include thumbnails of their cool new products. Clothing companies should highlight their swimwear line. I love seeing pictures from the latest events or from the band's last show. It's fun and visually tactile and definitely very engaging.

Again, step back, see your email with the images added in and ask yourself: **Do the images compliment and add to my email or do they distract?** You'll know the right thing to do.

The Technical



There are several things to keep in mind when it comes to images. Some are a bit tricky, but we'll go over the technical issues you're likely to face. I reckon **size is the most important!**

Size really refers to two things - the visual size (height and width) and the file size. In most cases, if you follow my advice about the visual size, your file size will take care of itself but it's worth knowing about all the same. Let's jump in!

Visual size

Visual size refers to the height and width of an image. **I tend to only focus on width**; height usually isn't that much of an issue here and if everything is adjusted proportionally you should be fine. Oh and don't worry about adjusting things proportionally - most image editing programs keep things proportional for you automatically.

Inboxes are often on the slim side so your images need to conform to their specifications. On average, you want to stay between 580 pixels wide and 650 pixels wide. Mad Mimi keeps your images at 590px (pixels) - a safe cross platform width.

OK, so here's why image width matters:

If your image width is very big (say 1500 pixels wide), it'll need to be squashed into a small space to fit. This can cause issues for many browsers who may simply not load the image. Also, big widths mean big file sizes and big file sizes mean it can take a long time to download for your readers.

If your width is too small, you're stretching it out to fit into the allotted space and this results in blurriness, pixellation and well, it's just kinda ugly.

Open up an image in the image editor of your choice and you'll be able to view the size in pixels. You can also adjust the image in all cases. Adjust the width to 590 pixels and the height will follow. If your image will be displayed at 590 pixels wide, then make sure you're accurate resizing it. Undercutting the size results in blurriness.

Even though Mad Mimi and other email service providers will allow you to adjust your image sizes, it's worth guessing your final image width and sizing appropriately before you upload the image. It's not vital but it's a great way to be sure your file size and visual size are right for you.

File size

File size is in kilobytes (KB) or megabytes (MB). You really never ever want to send an image of 1MB or larger in an HTML email and most images you use won't be. But, when you consider things like your readers' connection speeds and how fast you want your images to load when they view the email, it highlights how much **size can have an impact on the impression you make.**

In my opinion, the ideal image size is under 150KB. That's kinda small so it's not always achievable, but for most images within the body of your email, it's reasonable for them to be even under 100KB. For a small image of about 150px wide, you'll see very small file sizes.

Images downloaded off the internet tend to be optimized for speedy loading already. It's when using images from your camera that this becomes an issue since your camera is probably taking pictures at a high resolution. That means big visually and big in file size too.

So think about it like this: **When your reader opens your email, the images need to download.** How soon that happens is up to you! **The smaller the file size, the quicker it downloads.**

Now, don't worry too much about adjusting size. If you're already adjusting the visual size like we discussed above, 9 times out of 10, the file size will be adjusted too. So if your image width is sized at 590px or smaller, your file size will most likely be totally fine. Easy!

By keeping this all in mind before uploading them to Mad Mimi, you'll be retaining the control of how your images render. In most cases, by sizing them visually to a reasonable size to fit in your email - between 60px and 600px wide - the file size will be totally fine.

Sending and Subject Lines



Your email is done and designed. You've proofread it (please proofread!) and clicked on every link in the promotion to be 100% sure it goes to the right place.

The Philosophy



Forget about the ideal time to send or which day gets the most opens. That way lies madness! When driving people to open your emails, subject line is the champ! **Nothing entices or informs your readers quite like subject lines.**

There's no such thing as the perfect subject line but some are certainly more powerful than others. There are "rules" and if you follow them, you're going to do just fine. For the philosophical aspect:

Be honest

If there's no cat video, don't say, "Hilarious Cat Video Inside!"

Be descriptive

It's hard to describe the content of an email in under 10 words but try. If your email is all about the latest in international politics then go with something like "North Korea At It Again and US China Relations Strained." See? In a few words it captures what the email is about and your readers will know there's good stuff inside!

Funny helps

Humorous subject lines do drive more opens but it's a fine line. Only be funny if you can also still follow rules 1. and 2.

The Technical



There are a few rules here too but they're simple. Well, they're more like guidelines but worth keeping in mind before hitting that send button.

Keep it under 10 words

Nothing bad will happen if your subject line is 11 words but in general, concise is better.

Avoid all CAPS!

No one likes being yelled at and it may even trigger some spam filters.

Avoid excessive punctuation

A comma or a period is fine but there's really no need for 5 exclamation marks.

And that's it really. One last thing though before you send...

From Who? From You!

I'm talking about the name that appears in your readers' inbox. This matters more than you think. I'm going to dive straight into the philosophy...

More Philosophy



As a recipient, you probably like receiving emails from Dean, not "Do Not Reply." So make sure the email is dean@madmimi.com not noreply@faceless.com. See the difference? You can reply to Dean but you're never gonna start up a conversation with a computer. It's like trying to discuss life with an automated phone system. The only words I ever say to those machines aren't fit to print.

It's really lovely to send your emails to your readers from "you." **You'll create connections that way.** I even recommend avoiding addresses like `newsletter@` or `news@`. They're nicer but still non-human.

Now, we come to the *name* you're gonna be using. Sending as Dean Levitt might be a logical conclusion but not all your customers know your full name. For that reason I like to send as

Mad Mimi <dean@madmimi.com>

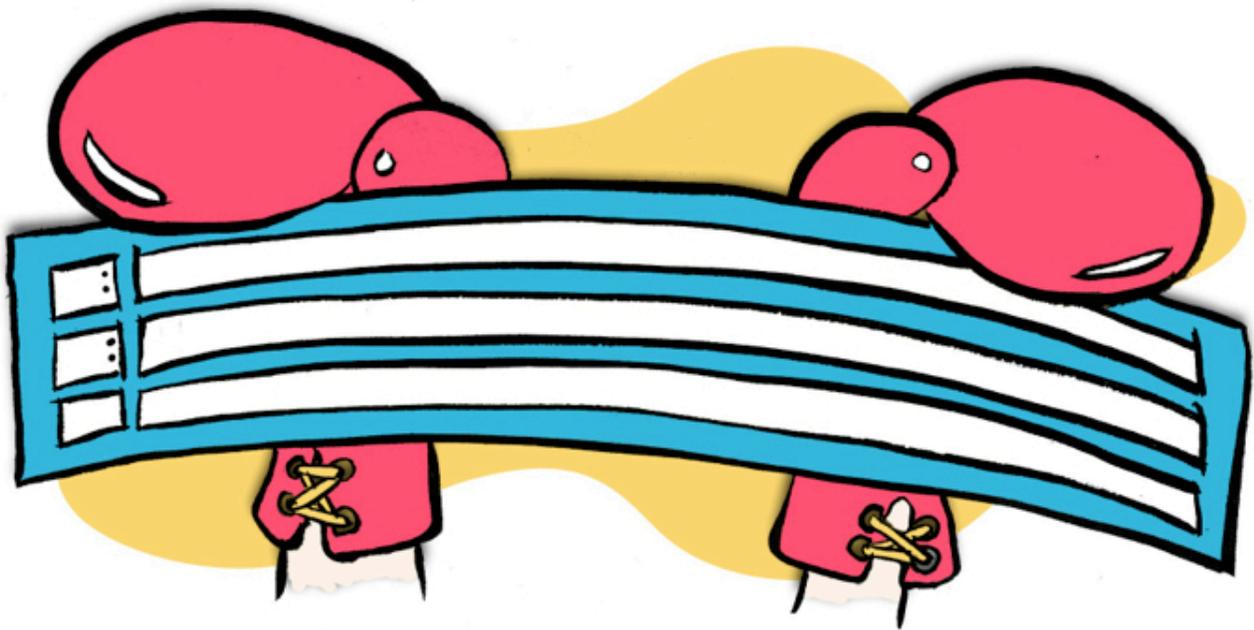
or

Dean - Mad Mimi <dean@madmimi.com>.

It's both clear who the company is and that it's a person.

So send a couple more tests to yourself until your "from" and subject line feel right, proofread again, triple check your links and then hit send! Go get a cup of coffee, relax after a job well done and then we'll be ready to look at stats.

Subject Lines Redux



If you'd like to really dig into what makes a subject line a winner, read on! The goal here is to write a subject line to really drive higher engagement (open rates). That's a fancy way of saying "good subject lines = more people reading your email."

Open rates depend on multiple factors like collection practices, list age and your particular industry. The average rate ranges from 10% to 25% (at the high end of the spectrum). The team at Mad Mimi analyzed thousands of subject lines to find those with the highest open rates and the most impact.

We looked at emails sent to lists between 1000 and 100,000 contacts. Emails with smaller list sizes (ie. 500 contacts or less) tend to have even higher open rates but when factored into a study, can wreck the curve and lead to unrealistic expectations for folks with larger email lists.

Here's what we learned:

The Technical



Be specific

We touched on this in the previous chapter but it's worth repeating. The subject line should tell readers what they're going to find inside.

Here's an example that garnered an open rate of 37%:

Only Three Days Left for this Great Offer for [Company Name] Readers!

The subject line is straight to the point. The reader knows exactly what the content will be when they open up the email. Also, **note the "call to action" and a sense of urgency**. However, it's worth avoiding overwrought proclamations.

It's definitely not ok to say "This News Will Save Your Life!!!" They may be fun to write but if it's not true to the email, you'll turn off your readers.

Split-second impressions

The first words matter! When the email is being previewed, your first few words are the one's that will be seen so make them count. [Litmus](#) has a neat tool to preview how your subject lines will appear across multiple email clients.

Here's a subject line that grabbed my attention:

This Deal's a Crime! The Murder Mystery Repeat Offender Deal!

For a business that deals with murder mysteries, that's a super strong opening that netted them a 32% open rate.

Who are you?

While analyzing our top performing subject lines, I began to notice a trend. Of Mad Mimi emails that had the highest open rates, 76% of them had either their business name or the product name mentioned in their subject lines.

That's more than a coincidence, that's a pro tip: **the top subject line writers use either their company name, the product name or both.**

This one had a view rate of 44%:

Nursery Flannel from Cloud 9 Organics is Now Available at [Company Name]

Utilize Google Trends for search

If you're unsure which words are best suited to your subject line, try comparing them with [Google Trends](#). While it's technically a tool to help improve search engine optimization (SEO) and help you understand what people are searching for on Google, Google Trends offers great insight into online interests in general.

I find it's most useful for my subject lines when I want to compare which words will be more powerful or whether to lead with a certain timely topic over another.

The Philosophy



Be true to the purpose of a subject line

The purpose is a preview of the email: a handful of words that capture the essence of the subject matter.

Here's a winner:

Boeing expanding footprint of S.C. facilities

That subject line got a 30% view rate! It taps directly into what that company's readers are interested in and it's exactly what the email is about, distilled into 9 words.

Words with friends

I've always found feedback to be extremely constructive and with subject lines, getting some outside perspective is vital.

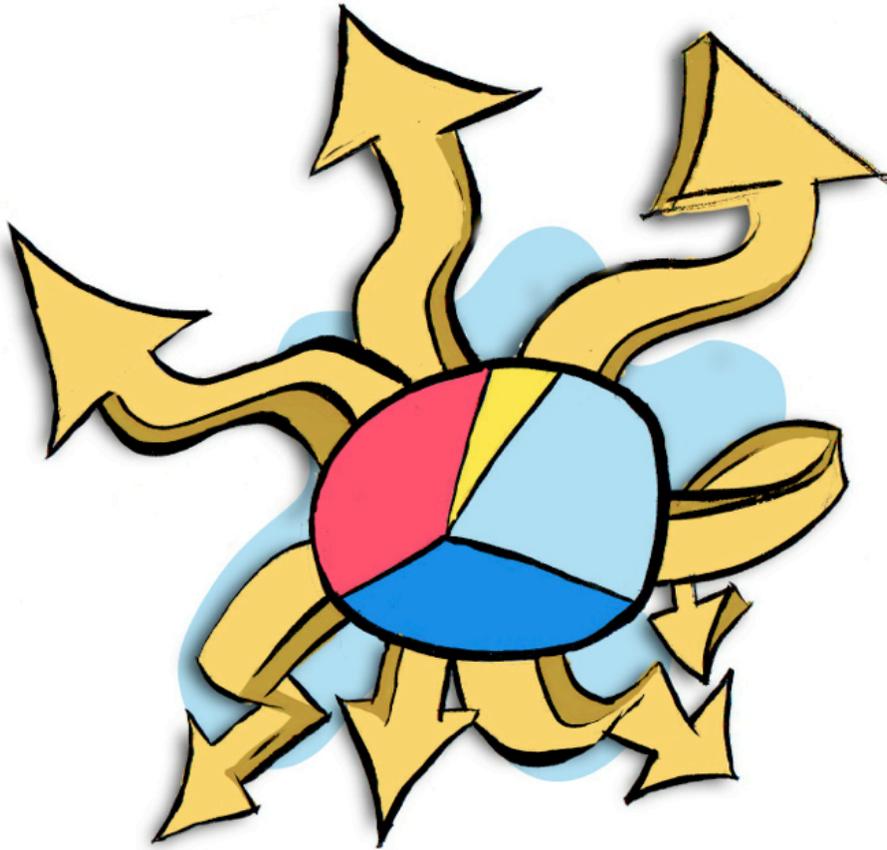
Ask your friends and colleagues what they think the subject line should be or have them edit your subject lines. Better yet, come up with a few options and ask them to come up with some themselves. Then see which ones are best. You'll be surprised at how often this results in the perfect subject line.

Content is king

Subject lines are a major factor in generating healthy open rates. It's the first step to engagement and as such, it's worth looking at how your content inspires your subject line rather than viewing the subject line as an afterthought.

A compelling subject line can only be built on a strong foundation of content, so make sure that your newsletter itself offers value. Thinking holistically, if you want to drive higher open rates, write content that generates great subject lines.

Email Analytics



Once you've sent your first email newsletter out, the excitement really begins. It's time to see the results of all your hard work. You'll naturally see some of the impact in your inbox (from replies) or on your website (orders or comments or traffic) but the real insight to be gained is in your email service's send statistics.

Statistics can either be helpful or misleading, so it's vital you understand the basics. It's also easy to get so wrapped up in analyzing your results that you lose sight of what really matters. Let's dig deeper into what it all means.

Email stats are almost universally broken up into:

- Views (or "opened")
- Clicks
- Unsubscribes

There are other stats that matter like bounces, forwards and abuse rates but let's keep it simple for now.

Views

This stat refers to the folks who opened your email. When a reader sees your email in their inbox and clicks on it, there's still one more step before it tracks as a view. They need to load images. When the image is loaded from [Mad Mimi](#)'s server, we know they viewed the email and your viewed stat updates. Pretty straightforward. If no images are loaded, there's nothing to reach out to the ESP (Mad Mimi is the **E**mail **S**ervice **P**rovider) to let them know that someone viewed the email (unless they click a link).

The thing is, many email clients like Gmail and Yahoo don't load images right away unless the sender is in the reader's address book or marked as trusted.

With this in mind, the average view rates for bulk sending tends to be between 10% to 25%. So, if only a quarter of your contacts opened the email, don't worry, that's normal. You're doing fine!

If less than 10% read your email, well, it's time to make some changes. Of course there are other factors involved: your list, sender frequency, subject lines, content and your relationship with your readers.

Clicks

These are the readers who clicked on a link in your email. Click-through rates tend to be lower than views. Many emailers tend to think of clicks as the most important statistic and the end goal of any effective email.

Personally speaking, I find the viewed statistic to be the more indicative statistic as to whether you're reaching your readers or not and how engaged they are with your emails in general.

Where the clicked stat can be valuable however, is in telling you how cleverly you're placing your links or if you're placing enough links. If it's easy to click, people will. It's a good idea to make all your images clickable as well as offer multiple active links in your content to make it easy for readers to visit your site.

Unsubscribes

Sometimes people just don't want to receive your emails any more. Unsubscribing doesn't mean they hate you or that they're no longer customers. Only that they don't want to receive emails from you right now. It's no more worth worrying about than if a dinner guest didn't ask for seconds.

It's time to start worrying if more than 1% of your list unsubscribe each time. Mad Mimi's delivery guru, Sally, wanted me to suggest that if you consistently see above 0.5% in unsubscribes, review your list and content. While that's a low threshold, Sally has a good point. Unsubscribes should not be a noticeable trend.

Don't worry though! Unsubscribes on your very first send may be higher (if you haven't been consistent with staying in touch) but **if you respect your readers and are adding value to their day with your emails, it's unlikely you'll see very many unsubscribes.**

What about the others?

A quick summary is in order.

A **Bounce** is when the email is successfully sent by your email service but not accepted by the recipient. This could be because the email address is defunct, their IT department set up a filter, or the mailbox is full.

Abuse stats occur when the recipient flags your email as spam, i.e., they actively click the "spam" button. This is reported to the email service by the Internet Service Provider via a "feedback loop" (but not all ISP's do this).

If you stick to email best practices, stay respectful of your readers and avoid purchased or shared lists, you'll rarely have issues.

Other stats, like **Shares**, can encompass forward-to-a-friend links, shares on social media, etc. The following info in the Philosophy section of this chapter applies to these metrics.

The Philosophy



Many marketers obsess about stats. They do things like A/B testing, juggle link placement, create graphs and reports and just generally treat email marketing like a balancing act that needs constant adjusting. For sophisticated marketers, this information is important but is it important to you?

I would say no.

Stats are something to enjoy: it's wonderful to know that today 20% of the folks you emailed read your thoughts and some even clicked through or purchased some stuff. Email isn't about science and analytics.

Email marketing is about connecting to your readers and customers. Statistics are a way to affirm that the connection is being made. Take the long view and relax.

It's tons of fun to watch the stats update after a send but if you sit there worrying about whether 3 more people will open the email tonight and if they don't you've failed somehow, then stats lose their charm. And so will email marketing.

Here are few analyses that will be beneficial:

Stats can show you your most engaged readers and help you keep your list up to date. Over about 15 sends (or 6 months), you'll see that much more than 25% of your readers viewed at least one email. The views add up, usually to a nice, high number. These are your fans; let them know you love and appreciate their loyalty!

Conversely, someone who never viewed an email in 6 months probably isn't interested in the next email either. Isolate them from your main list and send them a special email asking them to re-opt in or remind them why they signed up in the first place. Try to get their attention (review the Subject Lines Redux chapter) and if that doesn't work, move on. Remove these email addresses from your list. It's no loss to you. You'll probably save money and keep your list healthy and up to date.

Stats can help you **learn about yourself**; if a particular theme or subject line consistently gets considerably high stats, well, knowledge is power. They can help you find out what your readers really love about you.

All in all though, just make sure your views are healthy and you're not seeing too many unsubscribes each send. Enjoy your stats and don't sweat the little things. Leave that headache to data analysts and actuaries.

The Technical



Stats can benefit from some time and management and it's a good idea to use Mad Mimi's tools to, well, manage them.

I like to periodically combine the contacts who viewed my emails into one big list, so I can easily target them. I do the same with the "non viewers," so I can regularly remove them.

To get a more accurate picture of your email's efficacy, try this experiment:

Watch the cumulative views list when sending 4 to 10 email newsletters (say a weekly email over a couple of months). What Mad Mimi allows you to do is grab the folks who viewed the newsletter and place them all into one list in your audience area. Do just that.

What you'll begin to see is that even though your view rates are say 15% for each send, over a number of emails you're reaching a far greater population. That's what email marketing is! While you can't reach everyone every time, with consistent sending, you'll reach most of your audience. Be patient and be positive!

Stats are so heavily related to every other aspect I've mentioned and will mention (seriously, the next chapter about your list is so related they're practically Siamese twins), that if you take care of everything else, your stats will most likely be just fine on their own!

Mostly, I love looking at my stats in graphs or pie charts simply because it's fun!

Your List



Whew, I could write an entire thesis on list management but let's look at the most important aspects.

Right off the bat, let's get some terminology out the way. You'll often hear of "opt-in" and "permission-based" email marketing. Both of these mean that your subscribers gave you **permission** to email them.

Permission can come in different ways, from being an active customer who gave you their email address to signing up on your website.

The key thing is that they gave you permission and that means you specifically. Purchasing or renting a list from a seller isn't opt-in, no matter what the list seller says. Also, if a reader signed up at mycoffeeshop.com then it's probably not a good idea to email them from myclothingstore.com.

While it's super important for you to grow your list, look at it like a recipient would. How do you feel when you receive marketing emails from businesses you don't recognize? Do you buy things via emails you didn't sign up for? Probably not and neither will the folks you send to if they didn't sign up.

With lists, bigger is not better. It's common to see companies base their marketing worth on their massive lists. They're totally comfortable with high abuse rates (i.e., folks marking them as spam) and low read rates and they're worried about potentially losing out on a few readers. It's tempting to hold on to contacts who signed up 8 years ago even though they haven't bought anything in 6. It's hard to relinquish email addresses even if they've never viewed a single email and probably signed up with a throwaway address.

There's a lot of benefit to frequently "cleaning" your list.

From a purely monetary standpoint, the bigger your list, the bigger the costs. If 30% of your list is utterly unresponsive, why pay for it?

There's a more compelling reason to keep your list healthy...

Delivery!

Your delivery is affected more by your list health than anything else. I'm going to assume that you're not sending emails about illicit pharmaceuticals and "adult" services and so you're probably not going to run afoul of spam filters. If you're already sending via a reputable ESP like Mad Mimi, you're probably okay content-wise.

If your recipients have no idea who you are, they'll start calling shenanigans and marking your emails as spam. If your list contains "spam traps" or old email addresses from accounts that haven't been logged into in years, ISP's like Gmail, AOL and Hotmail pay attention to that. They start assuming the worst and then, they start sending your emails to the dreaded spam folder. There are no warnings or second chances so, you need to be aware of this from the start.

Like anything in life, there are no shortcuts and if you start things right, you'll build the right foundation. Starting your list off small and opt-in is far better than buying lists or using dubious practices. There are some hefty benefits - great delivery and saved \$\$'s!

The Technical



The most common way to grow your list (healthily) is to add a form on your website for visitors to sign up. Mad Mimi calls this a webform and you can add it anywhere on your website but I'd recommend placing it somewhere obvious on your front page.

Many people collect info beyond just the email address like name, city, state and more. Depending on what you do, this info may or may not be pertinent. Resist the urge to ask for too much info. Consider what you usually are comfortable providing as a customer yourself.

If you don't rely on additional info then don't ask for it! It can often lead to over-complicating your own life and wasting time sorting people by zip code when it doesn't actually matter.

If you're interacting with people in person, have a sign-up sheet handy and ask all your visitors and customers to give you their email addresses and other info.

It's worth noting that you can always sort your contacts by any criteria. You can isolate everyone in South Dakota from your National list if you have that info. You can send emails to those folks in the zip code 10011 if they gave you that info. It's worth noting but it's not always worth doing. It depends on you; a band on tour might need this, but a web-based service might not. **If you're not sure whether you need lots of info, you probably don't.**

The Philosophy



Here's the simple truth; your list isn't 10,000 email addresses. **Your list is 10,000 individual human beings** with faces and loves and lives and preferences and moods and all that good stuff that makes us, us.

We all want to be respected. We don't like being taken for granted and we love being appreciated. Keep that in mind!

How much this matters is really up to you, but, if you constantly **remind yourself that behind every email address is a person just like you, hopefully it'll result in both you and the reader being happy.**

Outro

This has been a simple little guide to email marketing. It's by no means all you'll ever need to know but it's certainly everything you need to send emails successfully and responsibly, while, at the same time, enjoying yourself.

If sending emails ever feels like a chore, then it's time to focus on what you love about it. Remember to connect to your readers and let them connect to you. Everything else is just gravy.

Love,

Dean