

An Exercise in E-mail Design

By Regina Brady

If you have an e-mail design in place and want to improve results, here is a short exercise that may tell you very quickly what is and what isn't working for your campaigns.

1. Print out your past e-mail campaigns to actual size.
2. Measure two inches from the top of the e-mail body and draw a line. This is the preview pane area and what the typical recipient might see prior to opening your e-mail.
3. Draw a "fold" line that demarcates the visible area of your e-mail when opened.
4. Overlay the click through rate for each link.
5. Color code all links that perform higher than average for the e-mail. Use different colors for average and below average performing links.
6. Disconnect from the Internet and print additional copies of your e-mails. This will show you how your messages will appear if images are blocked.

Now, here are some questions you should ask yourself:

- Does the preview pane area present marketing content? If it consists mainly of your logo and navigation, you are missing an opportunity to drive additional opens and clicks.
- Is the first call to action and link not only above the fold, but also as high up in the e-mail as possible?
- Do your e-mails have hot spots where you see above-average clicks, and is this consistent across your e-mails? If you see a pattern, capitalize on this real estate in future campaigns.
- Do you have consistent cold spots? If so, determine how to make these areas work harder for you.
- Is your e-mail compelling and readable without images? If it isn't, revamp your approach to image size and supporting headlines and text.

In a recent, under performing weekly e-mail campaign, the click through percentages on a small side bar were gaining higher results than those for the featured item. This was counterintuitive because the featured item was allotted the most space and consisted of a beautiful photograph with sell copy underneath.

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Using the above exercise, we quickly realized the sell copy for the main item was below the preview pane fold and that, if images were blocked, there was nothing for recipients to see in that area.

We reconfigured the design, and now overall click throughs have shot up, and the featured item is garnering much more attention. Try this exercise and see if it makes a difference for your campaigns.

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