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LESSON 1: CREATING EMAIL CONTENT
Effective Email Marketing

So let’s talk about content. Let’s talk about effective marketing emails. What are the attributes of these effective marketing emails? And obviously, at the core, we’ve got what we hope is an effective marketing email. It can include things like relevant content. Is it relevant to your audience? Is it timely? Is it informative? Is it user-centric? Does it sort of make the reader feel as if it’s personalized to them, targeting them specifically? Does it demonstrate the value of your company? Does it demonstrate the ethos, what you’re trying to do, what you’re all about? Your email is representing your company. It’s representing your brand every single time at the personal level, at the corporate level. It’s representing you and your company. What message does it convey? Ideally, it conveys some sort of message that comes across. Maybe it’s a story, maybe it’s an action, but at least it conveys something to the reader.

Lastly, does it engage the recipient with great design? You know, great design really does matter. It used to be you could probably send an email, and it wouldn’t necessarily have to look that good. But now, graphic design has caught up with quality content. And so your emails are going to include a wide array of features, things like animated GIFs, static images, compelling text, and the graphical interface or a user experience that actually looks really good from a design perspective. So those are some of the key elements to an effective marketing email.

A few more of the features of an effective marketing email. One, compelling subject line. Once again, the subject line of your email matters so much. Because, at the end of the day, that’s almost the first thing that a reader sees. They usually see who sent them the message and what’s it all about. And the ‘what’s it all about’ question is answered in your compelling subject line.

Second is concise, relevant copy. Keep it short, keep it sweet, keep it compelling, keep it interesting. Don’t overdo it. Don’t think that you have to give everything to your audience with one email. You have an opportunity with an email, and an email marketing campaign, and plan to slowly build community, to sort of generate connection. You don’t have to have everything in one single message. Because if you try to do that, what often happens is people won’t pay attention. Keep it concise, and keep it relevant. Number three, clear calls to action. Let people know what it is that you’re trying to get them to do in this email in a very clear, concise way. What’s the call to action? What’re you trying to get people to do? If it is confusing to the reader what you’re trying to accomplish, then you’re not going to get a lot of calls to action. You’re not going to get people to do what you want. You’re not going to have a lot of open rates in the future. Because, guess what? Goes back to number two, number one.

Now, number four. Number four’s probably one of the neatest things that’s happened or emerged over the years when it comes to email marketing. Because we’ve enabled this sense of greater and greater personalization. You remember the first time you got a piece of direct mail, right? A physical, snail mail. And it had, depending on when you watch this – if we’re in the far future and mail is totally gone, disregard this point. However, remember when you had the piece of mail, and it had your name on it, and it was very... it had a sense of personalization to it. It made you feel as if someone in an office somewhere had sent you this piece of mail. And it made you feel something because it made you feel special. It made you feel that this was actually personalized to you. The same thing goes with email. Emails that make you feel as if the sender actually is just sending it to you and not a million people, that makes the reader much more interested. It’s compelling content in a way. Because, guess what? It’s just to them. It’s not to a bunch of different people. So personalization does matter.
Of course, personalization is one of those things that... You don’t want to mess up on personalization too. Just as a little side note, how many of you have received emails that say, “Dear, “and it has an underscore? Or it has some blank insert-copy-here language where someone’s forgot to input the personalization field in the database or in the email service provider software. So remember, personalization is great, but make sure you double-check to make sure that it is actually personalized to each reader.

**Subject Lines**

Okay. Effective subject lines, what are some of the attributes of effective subject lines? It’s important to use explicit, actionable language. Don’t be vague. Keep it clear. What do you want people to do? Ideally, open it up, take a read through, maybe click on some links, share some stories, share some content.

Actively avoid those spam trigger words that we talked about in the previous module. We didn’t mention words specifically, but you can use your common sense to know which words might be the words to avoid. Because clearly, you don’t want to trigger those spam junk filters. You know, the filters that will say, “Nope, your message isn’t getting through. You’re hitting a wall.” So again, clear, concise subject lines, actionable, and use explicit language just to let people know this is what it’s all about. Inform them, catch their eye, give them a hook. Those are some of the effective subject line attributes.

**Email Content**

The more personalized an email, the higher your chances for increased click rates, getting more people to click on your email and to click within the content of your email. Because, again, it is tailored, it is bespoke, it is customized for those individuals. That sense of greater relevancy, as point number two says, you know. Is it relevant to me? I only have a certain amount of time during the day, the week, the month, the year, and relevant content is what I’m looking for. Don’t waste my time. You don’t want to waste the reader’s time. You want to make sure that things are tailored to them. When you do this, when it’s more personalized, you’re going to have a lower incidence of spam, right, spam complaints. People won’t be saying, “Hey, this is spam.” And you don’t complain that something is spam when it’s relevant to you. And then last, but not least, and perhaps one of the more important aspects of this, is greater customer acquisition. If people see content that is more personalized to them via email, as I said in my previous example of the fashion, my wife and myself, you know, you would acquire me as a customer if you provide me with material, and information, and products, and services that are relevant to the things that I might want to buy, and acquire, and engage with.

So segmentation from an aligning content perspective. Here are three different individuals, Christina, Dave, and Amanda. These are sort of our case studies, right, of how you segment, how you align, because again, Christina, Dave, and Amanda are three different people, three different, unique individuals with interests, likes, dislikes, preferences, etc. You’ve got Christina. She’s 21 years old, she lives in a rural location, she likes sports, and she’s a student. Dave, on the other hand, is a 35-year-old, he’s a parent, he works a part-time job, and he likes craft and home improvement, kind of his hobbies, right? And then Amanda. Amanda is 40 years old, she’s career-driven, she’s single, no children, she likes travel and motoring.

These are three disparate individuals who have very different likes and dislikes. When you segment their content from your email lists, you’re going to provide them with much more relevant, much more personalized information. Because that’s what we do in every context. We always segment, so remember this with your email marketing. Align your content to the individuals you’re trying to reach.
If you send content to Dave that was tailor-made for Amanda, it’s not going to work. If you send an email to Christina and it’s about craft and home improvement, when she wants to know about sports in a rural context, no. You send that content to Dave. Dave is your craft and home improvement guy. Or you know what? Travel. Amanda likes to go around the world, so you send her information relevant to travel, if that’s the industry, if that’s the list that she’s on.

Now, my mom studied English at university. She’s a stickler for well-formatted copy. Now, she might not have said that when I was a kid growing up, but she was all over me when it came to grammar and spelling. And so here’s the thing. What are some of the qualities of well-formatted copy? Well, one, use of headings. You’ve got to break your email down into digestible components. Make it almost like a miniature blog post. If you look at what makes blogs successful, it’s been the way they enable people to digest content in ways that are just easier to read and easier to segment out. So you think about a single-paragraph style.

If you look at most journalistic entities on the web, they’re using a single-paragraph style. Not because it necessarily aligns with the old sort of copy rules of the day, but because it’s far easier for people to read and digest a single-paragraph style. Keep uniform link color across the board. Don’t use a rainbow of colors for your links. Every link should be the same color, letting the reader know, “This is a link that I should click on or that I can click on,” and then leaves them no room for confusion. Lastly, create a balance or a harmony between imagery and text. You always want to have this balance, right? You don’t want to have too much imagery and keep, like, a few lines of text because your text will get lost amid all these images. And vice versa, if you’re going to use important imagery, don’t just bury it under mountains of text. So think about how you segment your content, how you chunk it together.

What is well-formatted copy? Well, it is these four different things, and so always keep these things in mind. And a great way, though, if you want to sort of see who’s doing it well and great examples, look at blogs, look at industry, look at the sectors in which you work, and you’ll see countless examples, on the web and on mobile, of easily digestible content.

So headings. What makes for a compelling heading, getting people to read and sort of look through your content within your email? Well, also via your subject line, not just the body of the copy in the email. So the first thing will be the question. These are the subject lines that ask a question, hinting at the fact that there’s an answer in the actual email. So you hook people in by asking a question, but not providing the answer. And the answer, of course, is in your email, which is a great way to engage and compel someone to click through and open up your email.

Number two is similar, and it’s says, “How To.” And it’s almost asking a question, how to do this, how to do that. Well, if you want to learn more, you have to click the email, you have to go in, you have to dive deeper. Number three is the announcement subject line. The announcement subject line is the kind of subject line that says, “Hey, guess what? This just happened. Celebrate, celebrate with us.” Or, “Here, here’s something new we’re launching. It’s something never before seen.” And then it’s kind of like, “What’s happening behind the curtain? We’d like to announce it to you. We’d like to show it to you.”

Another subject line, which kind of goes hand in hand with the popular format of making lists in blog posts is the number subject line. The number subject line basically says, “Hey, we’re going to create a subject line that says seven things that something, something, something, etc.” Most people want to know, “Well, what are those seven things? I’d like to know.” The number subject line is another way to hook the reader into going into your content, right? Because that’s the number one challenge, is
getting through all the static, and all the emails, and all the messaging that everybody’s getting. So the number subject line is a great way for you to hook people, get their attention.

Number five is the curiosity gap. Create a gap, create some curiosity, right? Sort of tease the reader with something and then say, “Want to fill in the gap? It’s in the email.” That’s the curiosity gap. Again, anytime you can compel someone into thinking, “I wish I knew more about this,” that’s going to lead to a successful subject line. And then there’s the personalized subject line. The personalized subject line, I will say, that doesn’t get used as often, not yet, anyway. The personalized subject line, though, gives the reader something about themselves in the subject line.

Case in point. I’ve seen it on Facebook quite a bit, where there’s a custom T-shirt and it has my name in it. It’ll say, “Stoller” in the name of the shirt. It’s a sort of graphic illustration on the shirt. Now, that’s a great personalization that hooks me in every time in those particular Facebook ads because it’s got my name front and center and it makes me pay attention to it. The same thing goes for an email that goes out. If it has someone’s name in the subject line, like, “Hey, Eric, this post is for you,” there’s a greater chance I’m going to pay attention to it because it feels a little less formal. It feels more personalized. It feels as if it came from a friend, or a colleague, or someone that I already know really well.

So some things to think about when it comes to formatting, specifically, features to avoid in excess. You know, you don’t want to format excessively. It’s really important to sort of, you know, operate under the principle of less is more, and in this case, don’t overdo bold. You know, if everything is bold, then nothing is bold, right? And you want to make sure that you don’t overdo it. The same thing goes with underlining. Don’t underline everything. Underline only those pieces of content that actually should be underlined or are interesting enough to be underlined. The same thing goes with colors. Don’t confuse a reader with too many colors, too much rainbow. You know, we have a lot of colors at our disposal, but keep your colors in your email marketing in line with your brand’s strategy, your brand’s imaging and communications guidelines. That will help you so much.

Same thing goes with italics. If you see a lot of italics, it can turn you off. It’s just not as legible, it’s not easy to read, and all these things from too much boldness, to underlining everything, to issues with colors. And maintain contrast in there as well. I think that’s another important piece. And italics, all these items on this list of excessive formatting, think about how it’s going to look on a small screen. You know, too much formatting can make something almost illegible. You can’t read it on a small screen, so very important to look at.

**Personalization**

What do you do about simple personalization? Well, what are some personalization tags? Now, this is obviously dependent on data that’s collected. You can only personalize if you have data on people that you can use when you create these templates. Most of the time, you’re going to have a first name, you’re going to have a company name, and you’re going to have a job title. So in my case, it would be, “Dear Eric, from Inside Higher Ed, Higher Education Consultant.” It’s a little boring, but, again, you get the idea, right? You could say, “Dear so and so of this company. This is your job.” And guess what? The more detail, the more information you have on someone, the more you can personalize it. And I’ve found that the emails that I tend to open and am consistently captivated by are the ones that show a great amount of personalization.

So, dynamic content. Let’s talk about that. How that really plays into personalization. So, the utilization of dynamic content has been around for a long time in many different facets of marketing. Now, from an email template perspective, there are certain things to think about. One is the purchase cycle. Are
your readers purchasing certain elements or certain items on a regular basis? And you then can put up an ad relevant to those purchases. Or just say, “Hey, we know that you buy this from us every few months, and as part of that, we’re also going to suggest maybe you might be interested in this because we know what you’ve been up to.”

And that kind of plays into subscriber behavior. You know, if a subscriber consistently clicks on the first two stories or the first two items in your email, maybe the stuff at the bottom isn’t as popular, or maybe you should flip it around a little bit. See if... you know, it’s kind of like A/B testing because at the end of the day, it could be the case where people just aren’t getting through your email because it’s too long. Or maybe the graphic at the top is something that’s always been compelling and they just never made it past the bottom. And you just think about that in a mobile context, and it gets even more messy. Because, guess what? That graphic could fill the whole screen, and they may never even realize that you had more text near the bottom of the post or the bottom of the email.

Gender, obviously, again, this kind of goes into purchase cycles, purchase behavior, subscriber behavior. Date of birth. You know, if you have someone’s birthday, you can input that into your dynamic content and personalization. And so, every year, for example, I’ll get an email from Starbucks saying, “Hey, happy birthday. Have you gone to Starbucks today to celebrate your birthday?” It will give you a certain discount or a free drink, that type of thing. Another piece of dynamic content as regards to the kind of auto-responders especially, is this idea of cart abandonment. If you don’t know what cart abandonment is, that’s okay. It’s just a fancy way of saying you went to a website, you thought about purchasing something or buying something or engaging in some transaction, and then you got distracted, or you had too many tabs open, or your computer crashed. Or you just stepped away for a little while, or you just decided not to get something, or maybe you wanted to think it over.

Well, cart abandonment in regards to dynamic content means that you’ll get an email saying, “Hey. Haven’t heard from you for a little while. Are you still interested in purchasing this airline ticket?” Or, “This new thing?” “This piece of electronics?” Or, “This service? Because we know you were looking at it based on your activity.” And then, geolocation too. In terms of dynamic content, you don’t want to wish someone, you know, a bright, sunny, warm day when they’re located in a cold, gray, wintry country. It’s just not going to play very well. First and foremost, I, for one, would rather be in the sunny country.

And so, geolocation matters. You know, if you’re sending out emails to a bunch of people in Iceland, you want to talk about relevant things to say to people in Reykjavik as opposed to what’s going on in Des Moines, Iowa. I know, seemingly disparate examples, but that’s where geolocation plays a major part in the dynamic content and personalization play that you make in your email marketing efforts. So, some considerations. More targeted, increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases, and customers like personalized content.

Here’s an example of Amazon. Amazon is probably one of the greatest examples of personalized email content on the web that I’ve ever seen. They do a great job with cart abandonment. They do a great job of sending you relevant emails based on your previous purchasing history and your behavior, and they’re also very contextualized to your location and to where you are.

**Call to Action**

So, some calls to action. Some approaches. One is a single offer with one call to action. One day only. Click here. You can do this. It’s very simple. It can be very powerful though because it’s not
confusing. It’s not overwhelming to the user. It gives the user one thing to do. One thing only, saying this is what you can do in order to receive this, that, and the other.

Alternatively, multiple stories, each with their own calls to action. I think sometimes this can be very appealing especially to the big brands who are trying to get you engaged with various elements, be it content, be it product, be it service. But I find sometimes those emails can be a bit more complex to handle because what happens is that the user, you know, has so many different things that they could potentially be doing. It’s hard for them to know which one to pick. And so, not that either a single offer or multiple story is better than the other – I think they both can have their applicability – but it’s just important to realize that at the end of the day, as we’ve said many, many times, the user experience is everything when it comes to your email marketing efforts.

And calls to action, you only get so many chances with a reader. You want to get people to do something. You want to sort of take an email and make it turn into an action. You’re not going to get that opportunity all the time, so think very tactically, think very strategically when you do that.

The hero message. Well, the hero message is all about garnering attention. A hero message emphasizes the main goal of an email marketing campaign. Here in this particular example, it says, “Products to Power Your Online Visibility.” Bam. It just says what you need, what they do, no questions asked. There’s nothing vague about this. It tells you why you would interact with them, why you would engage, what’s the value to you as a consumer. The hero message is one of those things where it’s all about the attention, right? And you want to get as much attention because attention is everything, as we know in this industry. And email marketing is competing for eyeballs. You are competing for people’s attention, and so remember that the hero message can be a great way for you to garner attention.

Another different way for a call to action. It’s all about gaining clicks. Now, think about a few different things here. Think about placement. Where do you put the call to action in the context of the user experience? This is where marketers and communicators and strategists really need to align with user experience and graphic designers, UX/UI individuals, because, again, where you place things, how you place it, the design does matter. Now, at the top here, you can see that it says who’s calling who to what? Right? Basically, clearly identifying this is who’s asking for the call to action. Hopefully, you as the reader will go ahead and do it.

And again, it’s good to have clearly identified calls to action and to always ask yourself, what is in your CTA? What is in your call to action? What are you trying to accomplish? What are you trying to do? How are you going to measure it? And then think just about the design overall. And I know I keep saying this over and over again, but mobile is important. Now, use your data. For your company, maybe mobile isn’t as important. Maybe your stats say that people are going on a desktop and that’s how they’re accessing your content. That’s cool. Keep doing that. Focus on that, but always be ready to evolve and to grow with your audience. So, if your audience, your customers are going into more mobile and mobile transactions, then you too should be going with them.
LESSON 2: DESIGNING EMAILS
Professional Email Design

So a few components of professional email design. What are the qualities? What are the sort of makeup of a professional email design?

One, strong branding. Does your email convey the brand? Does it convey the sense of, “This is our company? This is who we are. These are the elements, the design components that you have seen throughout your encounters with our brand from the store, the website, you know, the poster, the banner, the actual product itself?” Does it all mesh up to a strong brand experience? Take Apple, for example. Apple’s a great company in terms of their branding. Everything that they put out via email, in their signage, online, their website, has the Apple logo. And it has a certain aesthetic to it, every single thing that they do. In fact, I would highly recommend just signing up for some of Apple’s emails because, again, they will give you a great example or examples of how you can use email marketing.

Two, what else makes up a professional email design? Concise content, short and sweet. Three, calls to action. Get people to do something, not just putting content out there for the world, but actually put information and ads and marketing materials that gets your users, your readers, to actually do something. Because at the end of the day, you’re not just sending emails out. You’re sending emails out to gain something, right, to benefit your company, to benefit your brand.

And that’s where number four comes in, links back to the website. You always want to let people have the chance to say, “I want more. I want to read more, I want to engage more, I want more of your content. And where do I go? I go back to your website.”

A few variations within email display, and these are just a couple of options. But one, HTML images can be disabled. Now, HTML images, if you’re not aware of what those are, that’s when an image is actually not loaded into the email as an attachment. It’s not sent along with the email itself. It’s actually loading from a location or a URL on the web, right? And so what happens sometimes is those HTML images can be disabled, and this is because if there’s a history, a long history, actually, of people doing nefarious things with HTML images, things like hacking and replacing those images with bad images, that type of thing, and so a lot of times those can be disabled. So remember that. Remember that when you’re testing, don’t just test in-house on a closed server because it could look perfect in-house. The same thing goes with forms. Forms can be stripped from an email because, again, there are security protocols in place with most email clients that will strip away things that they think have the potential to do harm to the reader, right, to the user. Because the email clients, they don’t care about our emails. They care about the clients themselves, the person at the desk or on the phone.

So think about, if you’re going to use HTML-based images, is that URL white-listed, that IP address white-listed? And if you’re going to put forms in an email, as an alternative way to do it, maybe where you have someone click as a call to action, saying, “Click here,” then takes them to a website where there’s forms that they can fill out, so you don’t worry about forms getting stripped from an email.

So what are some preview software tools? How do you preview? How do you sort of look at your content before it goes out the door? Well, if you’re a MailChimp client, MailChimp’s Inbox Inspector is a great way to preview your messaging before it goes out. Same thing, there’s a Campaign Monitor. You know, you want to preview, and you want to test. The same goes with every type of digital engagement that we do, you know, be it a blog post, a video, etc. You always preview. You always take a look. And email marketing, there’s no exception there. You always check. You always test. For a variety of devices, you test outside of your company’s server, outside of your company’s IP
because, again, you never know what’s going to be stripped out, what’s going to be filtered, that type of thing. And so, again, MailChimp, their Inbox Inspector thing to look into.

**Email Templates**

Email templates, there are so many different kinds of email templates out there. Basically, if you can think it up, there’s probably, like, a template for that. A couple of different ways you can do an email template. They can be text-only, and they can also be HTML and text. Now, it depends on your newsletter, it depends on your email, it depends on what you’re trying to do. If you look at big brands and you look at companies that have very graphical branding, they’re going to use a lot of HTML and text because it makes sense for them. If you’re doing something that’s a bit stripped-down that you want to feel more like a personalized email and less of a commercial or an ad, then you might do text-only. Of course, the benefits of text-only is that it’s a bit thinner in terms of the broadband that it takes, and again, if you personalize it, it can look like an email sent from a friend or a colleague.

A great example of this is that, a lot of times politicians will do this, where they do a text-only email, and it looks like it came from someone that you know, when it’s actually a politician saying, “Hey, would you like to donate some money to us? Here’s our call to action.” As opposed to the more glitzy, branded, more graphically intense HTML/text offering.

What are the benefits for your email templates? Well, first of all, if you work with an email service provider and/or another company that allows you to create templates, you know, these pre-designed templates can be really good. They’re easy to use. They’ve been around for a while. You know, you don’t have to, like, reinvent the wheel. They’re cost-efficient. Again, you don’t have to pay for any design work. And they’re time-efficient. They’re already there, you put in your content, send it out the door, and there you go.

However, I would highly recommend looking into custom design templates, if you can, because, again, custom, bespoke, tailored, these are all words that make things much more personalized. And in this case, brand awareness really does matter, professionalism. You know, your own template that is bespoke to you, there’s a greater chance of it looking far more professional than if you use a template that your neighbor could use.

And so, you know, someone sends out an email and someone else sends out an email and they both look identical, it doesn’t look like you really tried that hard. Now, with a custom design template, the other aspect is no re-formatting. You know, you don’t have to change around anything. Because, why? It’s made specifically for you, for your company, for your content. And last, but not least, and perhaps, even, like, more important than all is custom design templates facilitate dynamic data because they are created in such a way that enables you to sort of plug and play various bits of dynamic data, which will mean that your template is far more agile with the things that you’re trying to do than an off-the-shelf solution.

Flexible email templates. What are some methods, what are some things to think about? Well, first of all, mobile optimization. I’m not going to still read through everything on this slide because, again, you can read it at your own leisure. But, thinking about reducing image file size. That’s important because, again, what looks good on a big screen and might be okay with load times that take a while, might not be okay for a mobile device. The other thing of course is thinking about responsive design. Think about design that sort of accordions in and out depending on screen size. That can be really, really important. Also, make sure that your design, in terms of clicking, where do I click? This isn’t a mouse cursor. This is a thumb or an index finger that people are using. So you got to think about your design in the context of mobile, on-the-go readers. Think about creating a responsive grid system.
Again, responsive email templates are not the way of the future, they are the way of the now, and so if your email only looks good on a desktop, we've got to change that immediately. It's kind of like go back to the office immediately and work on that because, again, that screen size proportion does really matter, and more and more we've got screen sizes all across the board. Now, the call to action on a mobile optimized email template might be located in a different place than, say, on a desktop and that is important because, again, that call to action on desktop, you could put it somewhere... Let's see if it'll fit really well with design as opposed to if it's on mobile, you might need to put it right away so that the reader doesn't miss that call to action.

**Bespoke Email Design**

So advantages to bespoke email designs. One, these bespoke designs, they are structured to fulfill specific marketing goals. They are tailor-made to help you achieve your objectives. They're also structured to fit the email clients your users use most commonly. That is really important and I love that because that is based on data. That structured design, it fits the client emails, not your emails, not the one you use in your office, but the ones that your readers use and that is so important to think about. Bespoke email designs are unique; hence the name bespoke. They fit to you, they're tailored to you, and those unique designs give you far greater flexibility and promote your brand.

There's also a greater consideration of text in images. Text in images, they have to be used in a very joined-up intentional way with email design and so again, if it's bespoke it's far easier to achieve. You're going to see higher click-through rates. You can do some A and B testing, but I guarantee you that you're going to see higher click-through rates when you have a bespoke or custom email design.

And lastly, as I mentioned, your brand will be far better represented with a custom-made email design that says, “This is our brand, this is our company, we've cared enough to create something that is tailor-made for you that has our graphics, our imagery, our look and feel, and our vibe, our tone.” All that matters and that kind of goes into that persona that we talked about in the previous module.

**Text in Emails**

So what are the benefits of real text, with regards to images? Well, real text in images are beneficial because of the following: it can be seen even when images don't display.

Emails, they load faster when it's just text. And less frustrated customers. Not that customers will be frustrated if messages have images that don't load, but I guarantee you again, if you use real text, people have a chance to just look at your content, regardless of whether or not an image loads and that's important because... I've said this over and over again, but you want to make the user experience, the reader experience, the subscriber experience easy and tailor-made and personalized.

**Images**

So in all-image email, I see a lot of all-image emails. Now, there's some considerations to think about when we think about all-image emails.

Now, you only send an all-image email to readers who can open those messages. You only send it to people who you know, based on your data and your open rates, who can open this because again,
you don’t want to send it to people who are just looking at real-text versions because they won’t get your message.

Check your work before you send it to your list. Check to make sure the images are all loading, check to make sure that they’re not being blocked, because these are usually HTML-specific images that are loading on a server somewhere else. They’re not accompanying the email. Now, you can use things like CSS with a cascading style sheets, which are going to format your Alt text. Now, ask your developers… I don’t want to get too technical here, but CSS essentially says if an image doesn’t show up in an all-image email, CSS will modify and format the Alt text that is accompanying or describing those images that aren’t appearing. So they’ll basically say, “Okay, the text isn’t going to just appear black and white and boring and not formatted.” CSS will allow you to kind of have a backup in place in case that image doesn’t show up in the email. Balancing images with a copy.

Optimization. This is where your graphic designer should play a huge part in the creation of your email template. It’s about contrast, it’s about layout. In the example on this slide, you’ve got a lot of centering, you’ve got a lot of black and white. What works best? You’re going to do a bit of A and B testing. You’re also going to check, “Okay, people tended to click more often on this particular message than this one.” You also want to have some consistency across the themes, but again, it’s okay to balance it out. Put the images here, bit of text there, but take a look. There’s a lot of graphic design books out there. One of the things that I would do, when it comes to email marketing and your templates and your design, is go forward and look at design inspiration from other areas. Web design, presentation slide-deck design, for example. They can give you a sense of layout and contrast and color because again, these are formats that are designed for a quick read. A slide-deck, for example, has to look good and be compelling. A web page or web content or a blog post has to be compelling. It’s similar to an email template.

So image downloads. Determining open rates. Basically, image downloads are essential in helping to determine open rates. These are part of your tracking. This is part of your statistics. You see, when an email is sent, there’s a small piece of code that is automatically added and that request happens. When that tiny piece of code happens, there’s this invisible image from the hosting web server, and that invisible image that gets loaded, every time it loads, the reader opens the email, that image gets downloaded to their computer, and that user engagement is recorded, and that user engagement gives you a lot of data and analytics you can then use in just your data enrichment scheme. So always remember, that’s kind of how we track open rates these days is, via image downloads.

**Alt Text**

What are the considerations for Alt text? Well, first and foremost, not all email clients show images and that’s important to remember. Also, excessive text can detract from headings and content. So it’s really important to, again, remember if you have a lot of Alt text, maybe pare it down. Think about what it is you’re trying to convey with an image and if that image has so much content in it, that if it wasn’t appearing and it was just Alt text, would that bump into the other body copy that’s present on your email? So you don’t want it to be excessive because, again, it cannot just detract, but it can distract and you want to make sure that, again, the reader and the user experience of the reader is such that, it’s very clear to them, it’s concise, and it’s clearly defined.

So, what are some best practices when it comes to alt text, also known as the alt attribute on an image? Well, what’s it for? Well, as I said earlier, it’s a description of an image for people with visual impairment. And it’s not just that. It can be really helpful for people who are using email clients where they’ve stripped out images. Where should it be placed? Well, alt text is not, you know, in the heading
or off our text. It's actually kind of behind the scenes. And they're short, concise descriptions and they're used to communicate an image clearly to the reader.
LESSON 3: INTEGRATING EMAIL FEATURES
Email Links

So, first up, linking. What are some of the purposes of linking?

Well, linking should be used concisely to send traffic to a website. Again, concisely. Keep it short, keep it simple. Don’t overwhelm your reader with too many links, with too many pieces of content that make them jump around. For example, if you have a short really well-written email, you want to have maybe one or two links. Not a lot, right? You want to filter your reader into the most important things in your email. You know, beware of this concept called link stuffing which sort of I’m going to put every single link in the email as possible. It confuses the reader. It makes it harder for them to know where to click, what’s the most important thing to click on and you see this happening in other areas too. Thinking like blog posts where people put too many links in a blog post, then it just becomes a big link farm. Again,hone it down, focus specifically on just a few links within your email.

Now, lastly, purposes of linking. Optimize for particular goals such as call to action or conversion. You optimize the email. You hone this thing down. You get it to a place where it is sharp and sweet and concise and targeted so it provides a value add for your reader.

Link formatting does matter. It is important to think about how you format a link so that it’s clearly identified to a reader. So that they know that, “Hey, this is something I should click on.” They know what it is. So, for example, underlining of text has long been the tradition and sort of the technology of linking things on the web. It’s underline and it’s a different color, generally it’s a link. Now, that has changed quite a bit with regards to things like CSS or cascading style sheets. However sometimes it’s good to continue those same conventions because they are familiar to a reader. And if all your technology kind of gets stripped away if you’re formatting your CSS etc., the link behavior of being, you know, of one color like blue text or underlined or a little bit of embolden will show up. And so, here’s a few of the link formatting ideas you know, underlining it. The size does matter although, you know, you don’t want to make it too big. You don’t want to make this sort of like massive link text and everything else around it is kind of small. You want to have it fit with the design that you’re trying to go for. And then emboldened of course. You bold it a little bit or it’s just naturally bold because it’s a link that could be helpful. And then blue text. Long history of web links being blue. And so, people will recognize that. If you look at your email client right now, I guarantee you there are links in your email client that are blue. That goes back to the history of the web back in the day. And people still recognize that and it’s one of those sort of universally known style or formatting conventions that people automatically know that blue underlined text is a link.

What are the benefits to strategic linking? Well, first of all it all starts with your strategy. You know, why are we including this link? What’s the outcome? What are we trying to accomplish? You know, do we have a specific, unique URL? Is this something that’s going to be measurable in addition to our other URLs so that you know, that people actually went from the email to this particular web page.

You can track that, it’s actionable. And that goes to the next point of actionable. You know, you’re tracking, you’ve picked the reasons why. And now you’re saying, okay, you’ve got your call to action, you get people to link, and there’s a dynamic segmentation aspect which again, that means showing links to specific people, specific readers. So, to remember the earlier example of the different individuals and their hobbies and interests. Dynamic segmentation means that you’re willing to provide them with links and content that fits exactly with their interests so that they get links and content that fits with what they want to be reading and why they subscribed in the first place.
For example, travel companies, right? If you fly on an airline they’re going to send you emails all the time. It’s kind of what they do because they have to sell airline tickets. However, if you go to a certain place all the time, this place to that place and you do round trip you know, round trip tickets and trips to that all the time, they’re going to know that. They’re going to realize that and they’re going to say, “Hey, guess what? We have special benefits for you because you keep going back and forth between these two hubs. Or, have you tried looking at these other places?” The dynamic segmentation and strategic linking means that they’re trying to target me as a reader or as a flyer so that they can provide me with things that are actionable and customized to my experience.

**Email CTAs**

So, some calls to action. How to utilize. Here’s an example from Priceline and the example really is, you know, here in this case it’s up 70% off on express deals. They’re basically giving me the immediate call to action saying, “Hey, do this.”

And the other example as well, it’s very clearly identified and marked via a button with lots of contrast. If you look at the design, the design really does matter because the design gives me enough contrast even from, you know, a great distance. If you were to look at this slide deck from a great distance, you could see that there are calls to action buttons right there. You don’t even have to read the body copy in these examples because visually they’ve given you a very clear-cut call to action visual that you could then click on and I guarantee you, some people might even click on it just because they’re curious because it’s so clearly defined via the graphic design. In addition to, as the Priceline example says, you know, obviously, a lot of people are going to be excited by up to 70% off on their express deals.

So, A/B testing. Now, A/B testing is really important because again it can teach you a lot about your readers. It can teach you a lot about your email list and can help you to create a more dynamic email list because you know more about your readers. And so, here’s a sort of hypothetical, right? Where you’ve got test group A and test group B and 6.2% of group A actually did something and only 1.4% of test group B did the same thing. So, of course you’re going to say to yourself, campaign A is the winning campaign because, again, that user testing it does matter because it helps you measure what works, what doesn’t and it helps you figure out the behavior of the people who are on your email list. And when you figure out their behavior, it can help you in delivering content that is much more customized and tailored to their likes and dislikes. Make sure you’re giving them what they want. And then further, connect that to your strategic goals and your outcomes and you see the beauty of email marketing really come to shine in that sense.

**Social Sharing**

So, social sharing. This example here talks about average email click-through rates. It’s amazing without social sharing that click throughs are kind of low, you know, in this sense it’s 2.4% and with social sharing it’s 6.2%. Social has allowed email marketers a chance to leverage the crowd, to leverage experience and to leverage readership in a grassroots way because, think about it, your email goes out to a set number of people. They may forward that email, they may share some of the stuff that’s in the email to other people, but if they’re shared on Facebook, if they’re shared on Twitter, if they’re shared on LinkedIn, if they share your content elsewhere, it populates your content all over the web, all over the social web, all over mobile devices and apps. And it’s kind of like bees and pollen, right? If your email is the flower, social media are the bees flying around and cross-pollinating your content all over the web, all over the social space. And as you see here with this percentage it gives you a greater reach of your content.
So, how do you encourage social sharing? What are some of the methods? Well, first and foremost, you want to add shareable HTML in your copy. You know, you want to have links, that say, “Tweet this, share this, add this.” There’s a lot of plug-ins that are out there, but you know, you definitely want to have that. You want to have the buttons if you can. A lot of times the buttons are going to load via HTML or server-side includes. They’re not going to have to be part of the email. And then also, you can encourage subscribers to share content. Most of my favorite newsletters, they’ve constructed their calls to action or their links for social sharing in such a way that it says, “Hey, do me a favor, or if you like this a lot, it’d be great if you shared it with your friends. Be great if you tweeted it out. Be great if you post it on your Facebook page. Or your profile. Be great if you shared this on your LinkedIn account.” You know, those are the ways in which you encourage social sharing. I mean I will say this, you can encourage as much as you want, but if you put high-quality content in your email, people will just do it naturally. It will just happen organically because people like to share and curate and post and see other people do the same.

And so, all of a sudden, your email subscriber list has a much greater reach, has much greater impressions and a lot of people who see your content via social shares will then go back and re-subscribe because they want to see your content too. And those are the people who then add to your overall subscriber list and it just keeps going.

So, what are the social sharing buttons that you should look at? Well, clearly there are certain social media sites that are more successful than others. And in the context of email you have to think about which apps work really well, which sites might work well in terms of the content.

If you’re sending out an email to your subscribers list and it’s really you know, image intensive, obviously, Instagram might a site that works really well. There’s an image that can be shared on Instagram you know, a short thing that can be posted on Tumblr. Facebook as I said before, has 1.8 billion active users. It’s massive. You’re going to get a lot of reach whenever anybody shares on Facebook, so if you can do that, awesome.

YouTube and Vimeo are video sharing sites. It depends. It depends on your content. But if you create a video that’s, say, hosted on Vimeo or it’s hosted on YouTube, but then the links or some of that content is shared in your email. It’s natural for it to be shared socially because YouTube obviously has social media sharing capability, so does Vimeo. Twitter, always put tweet this or share this on Twitter in the content of your email if it’s applicable and if it’s relevant because Twitter is a great way to amplify your content to get it out in front of more people. And same thing goes with LinkedIn. In a very similar way especially if it’s a professional context.

Now, Snapchat, right in the middle, dead center in this slide it’s one of those ephemeral social networks. It’s app-based, and so think about your content. If I’m opening an email is there a way for me to engage with it or share it in a way on Snapchat? And it could just be you read something very captivating about a brand in an email, you then flip open Snapchat and you talk about that in your Snapchat story and it gets shared. And that’s a way that brands can engage in social sharing, at least on Snapchat. So again, keep in mind this list of social networks and apps is going to change. It’s going to always be evolving. There’s always going to be a new site, a new app. And it’s up to you to kind of keep your finger on the pulse to make sure that you’re aware which apps, which sites are out there that would best serve your organization.

What are some of the alternatives to social sharing without buttons? And this is actually a way that can be quite useful because not everybody wants to click a button to share something. I mean I think sometimes users can be almost intimidated by the idea of clicking a button. We’ll talk about that another day. But you know what you can do is you can ensure that there’s a text link alternative that
basically prepopulates a sharing field. So, in this example, you know, it says, “share this on Twitter as a tweet,” and it’ll prepopulate a tweet automatically. And then they can just share it on Twitter without having to click a button. It’s just clicking on a link. And this is a great way for you to do certain things.

And so again, just think about the many different ways in which you can incorporate social sharing into your email template. Because here’s another example. For example, it doesn’t have to be Twitter, it doesn’t have to be Facebook. You could even auto link that prepopulates to post or share something that you read on Reddit. There’s all kinds of ways in which you can incorporate social media into email marketing. And so, the sky’s the limit. It kind of is up to your imagination but again, feel free to use tech space links, because again if you’re a Facebook developer or a Twitter developer sites, they’ll give you exactly sort of the URL structure for how you can create these pre-populated links so that if someone clicks the link, it’ll then pop open a window. And it’ll have some of this information already incorporated into the tweet or the post or the share, and it’s just up to the user or the reader to then say share or post. And it’ll automatically post a link or something of your content, and idea, a comment that type of thing onto, you know, their Facebook account, Twitter or Reddit, etc.

So, what are some of the metrics for social sharing? A lot of the data when it comes to social sharing and because social sharing gives you a lot of data. A lot of analytics to look at. First and foremost, of course, would be the heavy hitter in the room: Facebook likes. Facebook is gigantic. Facebook owns Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, Oculus Rift. Facebook owns a lot of these massive properties that then allow you to track usage and whatnot. So, likes are becoming extremely popular. Look at Instagram. Instagram now has likes on comments. So, there’s a lot of different ways in which likes are being measured.

But likes of course on Facebook are just one of the ways in which you can measure social sharing. Mentions, which is on Twitter. And so, if there are mentions of your account or mentions of your content you could track this fairly easily. You can track the URLs. If you have custom URLs you can track, those are inbound from Twitter. Look at forwards. Look at comments. Social sharing can be really useful. Think about comments in the context of an email goes out to a reader and they share it with their friends, and their friends might not even be on your subscriber list, but they found your blog post via your email, and then they go on and they comment on your blog. So, automatically you’re increasing your reach and you’re increasing your comments. And you can track that because you’re tracking that piece of code that’s shared in the email. Alright. That piece of code we talked about earlier.
LESSON 4: TESTING EMAIL CAMPAIGNS
Email Testing

Elements, metrics, of email testing. You can look at your subject lines, tracking what works, what doesn’t.

Certain subject lines, as we talked about before, there’s a variety of ways of doing subjects. Which ones work? Which ones didn’t? Which ones do you want to try again? The offer or the email content. Again, you’re testing this out, seeing does the offer sound good? Does it work? Does the email content actually have a creative layout? HTML versus text. Looking at the code. Looking at plain text. What works really well? Have your people look at your email on the most bare-bones device they can get their hands on and take a look at it. Your email headlines. Take a look at those. Go into different clients and take a look. Your testing is such a massive part of this because it’s where you get to fix things. You get to correct mistakes. You get to iterate. You get to build. You get to see, “Okay, this is what we did before. What can we do again this time in a new way?”

Speaking of which, personalization and the from address. So many different elements to email testing. But again, how do you track, how you measure? And how you use those measurements and metrics to iterate and build and evolve your email marketing strategy really says a lot about the work you’re going to be doing when you’re using email for marketing.

And this gets into spam testing, why it’s important. I mean, spam testing is so important because one thing is that your email service providers will help you out with this, but the email clients and the spam folders and junk folders and those gates that you have to get through. Sometimes the rules may change on you. So you’re going to be sending, creating, testing, sending. You know, it’s going to be this whole process that’s a cycle where you’re going to be creating content, sending it out, testing it, seeing if it goes in spam folders. Because what worked in the past may or may not work in the future. And it’s important to understand that. And it’s important to just be okay with that because, at the end of the day, spam filters are just trying to help make everybody’s experience with email better. And it’s your job to test, send, create and just keep going through that cycle.

A/B Testing

Bit more on A/B testing. What are some of the best practices? Well, you know, test early and often. Don’t wait until the end of the process. Test this thing out. You’re not actually sending it live to your list yet, so you can test as often and as early as you want. That’s really important. Use a random email list. If you want, you can do some A/B testing with a random list to see how it works. And that can be an interesting way to test your email. And then, as with any A/B testing, you only test one element at a time because that enables you to figure out what works and what didn’t. You know, we changed something in this email, and it wasn’t changed in this email, and that enabled us to know what worked and what didn’t. If you change a lot of elements, it’s really hard to measure, and it’s really hard to almost... it’s like testing a hypothesis. You don’t want to change a lot of things. You just want to have one thing. You’ve got kind of a control group on one hand and then the change on the other.

So what are some email elements when you’re thinking about this whole thing, building it out? And this goes into your open rate optimization. Of course, there’s your subject line. There’s the time you send the message; the day you send the message. As I’ve said in the past in previous modules, if you send a message out on a Friday afternoon when everybody is gone or off work or they aren’t necessarily thinking about the most recent, relevant sector news, they might not read it if it’s a professional-context, industry-level message. However, if you’re trying to sell someone something around, “Hey, 10 Best Places to Go Out for Dinner,” in their city, then maybe it’s actually better to send
it sort of nearer to the time when they might be going out. You're also going to have sender details. You're going to have preview text and body copy. But these are the elements which will help you in determining things like open rate. But these are the testable elements, or just a few, actually.

### Split Testing

So split testing. Split testing can help you with your open rates. It can help you increase them, actually, because again, you're evolving, you're growing, you're figuring out what works and what doesn't. It helps you determine a more targeted and relevant content mix. There's also this idea of increased subscriber engagement. And increased subscriber engagement, it's all about getting the people who subscribe on your list to actually engage with your content, to do something with it.

And then again, as with any data-driven initiative, your actions are going to be based on data, and they're not necessarily on assumption. Your gut can only get you so far. Data will be the thing that drives your actions, will be the thing that helps you figure things out. That's where split testing can be very useful as a marketer, again, because you get to sort of play a little bit. You get to figure out what works, what doesn't, and you're making subtle tweaks, small changes, one at a time to help you figure out what works, again, like I said, and what may not work so well. A bit more on split testing. How do you glean insights from this? Now, in this particular example, you've got Variation A, Variation B, and you can look at conversions.

And again, when you think about testing, this again is how you figure it out. You have to sort of look at your metrics, look at audience, and look at were there conversions at a higher level with A or with B, and you just go from there. And again, you split it up. I think a lot of testing that takes place these days, in addition to email marketers doing their testing, is via social media and apps. I see a lot of testing on things like Twitter or Facebook where you'll have friends who are on Facebook or Twitter, and they see a bit of a different interface. They see a subtle interface change, and that design change is clearly A/B testing. There's a lot of split testing going on in that social media space. And the same thing goes with email. You're going to be able to split it up. And that isn't to say that you're going to favor Group A or Group B. You're just going to be using the various splits as a way of figuring out what works the best.

And then eventually it's going to let you hone in so that everybody's getting the same message based on measurable data and measurable results.

### Responsive Design

Always remember that responsive design is important. Responsive design is design that on the web, on your phone, on a desktop, whatever platform, it will literally do just that. It will respond. Which means that it, essentially, in layman's terms, will accordion in terms of the stretching of the design. And everything will kind of get a little bit smaller and smaller and smaller, and the design will shift, especially when you're looking at a mobile device. And it gives you a chance, responsive design does, to provide content to an audience that fits the device that they're on. And that is extremely important. If you give me content via an email that only looks good on a phone, and I'm on a massive desktop display, it's going to look a little weird, a little funny. But if you give me content, vice versa, that was made to look good on the big screen but not on the small screen, what's going to happen is I'm going to have to do a lot of swiping horizontally and vertically. And it's just not going to be as pleasant of an experience, and it's going to give me more of a negative experience, which isn't what you want.
So always think about responsive design. Almost a mobile first-design, that's also responsive to bigger screens. Now, with regards to email experience, you really want to increase mobile engagement. You could use something like a CSS animation, cascading style sheet, or an animated GIF. Animated GIFs are everywhere, popularized on sites like Tumblr or Reddit. However, animated GIFs are great because they give you a sense of animation. And if they’re loaded on an outside server and not within your email, they don’t take up any space on your email.

The same thing goes with CSS. CSS loads very quickly on a mobile device. And again, it’s friendly to people that don’t have high-speed internet, if they don’t have it on their phones. And so you can also be very creative. It’s kind of like saying, in the absence of video, we’re going to give CSS animation or GIFs as a way to provide accents or information or humor or product views to the user via email.

Email Reporting

Email reporting is another important aspect of optimization because, again, you want to look at your data. You want to look at your metrics. Email reporting is just crucial and reviewing it is really important. Every single email service provider offers, essentially, a similar reporting feature which is going to give you things like open rates and a lot of data, user profiles, geographic information, device and browser information. All the details that we’ve had previously on modern website statistics. Things like Google web stats, that type of thing, Google Analytics.

But we now have it with the mobile web, with the email reporting as well. It’s really vital that you take a look at those stats because stats will tell you user behavior. It will tell you what people are doing, and it will help guide the content that you’re creating, and guide a lot of other actions that you’re doing when, at the end of the day, it will help you with your segmentation, for sure.

Reporting sources. These are other sources for email analytics, email stats, things like Litmus, AWeber, SendGrid, Campaign Monitor, and MailChimp. And as I said previously, every single email service provider is going to provide you with a plethora of statistics, analytics, metrics, with regards to your email campaigns. And so take a look, work through different vendors. See who provides you with the relevant amount of reports that you’re looking for, the ease of use that you’re looking for, and also, you know, even things like account managers, people on the other end, if you need to call and say, “Hey. I’m having a question about our email campaign and our stats.” Is there someone you can connect with and ask a question? Another way, too, is I like to go onto social media, and I like to see are people talking about this company in a positive way, in a negative way. I like to see if there’s any chatter on the social web that can help inform my decision when it comes to these reporting sources.

So key statistics for email reporting. What are they? Which ones to sort of pay attention to? Bounce. Clicked. Was it delivered? All these different things, you know, click-to-open rate, open rates, unique opens, the unsubscribes. Unique opens are important. I’ll just make mention of this because if you have 100 opens on your email, but you only have 20 unique opens, that means you’re only really reaching 20 people. They just happen to, let’s say, open it... Each one of them opened it maybe five times. So those unique stats are really useful to take a look at. Bounce is important. How long did people stay on your message before they left? How many people unsubscribed? You know, what content works? You know, as I’m blogging and sharing on the social web, I’m always looking at the number of people who unsubscribe, because I want to see. Was it this piece of content that I shared? Am I posting too often, you know?

Sometimes you make intuitive guesses as to why people do the things they do. And other times, you look at the data to inform you as to why they’re up to doing the things they’re doing. Few other
things, as related to email reporting, with regards to click rates, have to do with message, and content, and relevancy. Kind of as I mentioned in my last slide, you know? What is the message? Was it relevant? Was it too much content? Was it not enough content? The segmentation quality, you know? Did this message... Did it reach the people that I really wanted it to reach? Always a great question to ask because, again, you know, your lists are only as good as the people who have subscribed to it, and you want to make sure they’re interested in your content. And that segmentation quality does matter so much.

The same thing goes with targeting quality, you know? Are you targeting an audience that is, in terms of your content, that’s relevant? I mean, I... You want to make sure that your content actually resonates and compels the individuals on your list. And that’s vital. You don’t want to waste their time. You want to be intentional. You want to be strategic with that.

So other key metrics for email reporting. The unsubscribes. I remember, it was quite a sad day for myself when my brother and my mother actually both unsubscribed from my blog, from my email list. And they just finally told me that it was because they were getting too many messages. And they had sort of subscribed because they, you know, were family members, not because they were interested in higher education social media. And I completely understood as to why they unsubscribed, but it is important to take a look at your unsubscribes.

Also, look at your delivered emails. You know, if you’re sending out a lot of emails from your list, but maybe only a few are actually getting through and being fully delivered, or you’ve got some bad emails in there, you know, take a look at your data. Take a look at those emails. I’m always going through my own email list and deleting people who maybe their emails never seem to work, because, again, maybe it’s an old email address, or they’ve changed jobs, and their institution has gotten rid of their address.

Then also, look at bounced emails, those messages that came back, undelivered. Why’d they come back undelivered? Well, it’s hard to know. But at the same time, bounced emails are emails that aren’t really good for your list because you want your list to be of active readers who will pay attention to your emails when you send them out, not people who are bounced. So take a look at those metrics. Very informative, I have found, in building out and curating and really having a segmented email list.

**Optimization**

Optimizing open rates. What are some of the methods? Well, well-targeted subscriber lists really will help you optimize your open rates. Again, over and over, we have certain themes that are kind of woven together in this presentation and targeted to subscriber lists, curated, you know, intentionally grown and nurtured over time, will definitely help you with open rates. Familiar sender name. Make sure that people know that this is the person who’s always sending the email, or this is the account that’s always sending an email.

If, for example, I subscribe to a social media marketer from Harvard University, and if all of a sudden, the emails from that person were coming through with a different name, it might confuse me, or it might think, “Is this real? Is this spam? Is this not a legitimate email?” You know, there’s certain things, like familiarity. And then effective subject lines. You know, in the case of my friend who writes this newsletter from Harvard, their subject line is always the same every week. “Here are the five things email that you need to read.” And it gives you this sense of regularity, comfort, right, it’s routine. The routines matter when it comes to email subscriptions, and people want to get kind of tucked into those routines, that communal routine.
So your effective subject line really does matter, and we’ve gone over subject lines previously, but subject lines are the hook. They’re the thing that most people see, in addition to the sender name, and you have those two chances to get people to open your email. And so this one, two, three... These are probably some of the more important aspects of this whole slide deck, in terms of the well-targeted subscriber list, definitely making sure the audience is correct, making sure that the audience recognizes the sender’s name, and that the subject line is such that people will see it and go, “I want to read more. I want to know more.”

Optimizing click rates. What are the methods? Well, clearly, simple and explicit calls to action. They do work. Keep it simple. Keep it explicit. Don’t confuse people. Keep things simple, and they will figure it out.

Multiple links for the same action. That can be helpful. Little bit of repetition, but it directs people to the same place. If you put a lot of links in your email, and they all go to the same place, then you’re kind of guaranteeing yourself that, “Hey. No matter what link my reader clicks on, they’re going to get to that place of action, no matter what.” So you might have a lot of links, but it’s all going to the same place. Another way to optimize click rates, offering deals for a limited time. Today only, we’re offering this. You’re going to get people to click it because, guess what, people are incentivized to click it. And then testing different colors. You’re going to be changing your template around, modifying it, tweaking the design. Find out what works. And if, you know, you change something, and then, all of a sudden, everything in terms of your metrics take a precipitous drop, then you might be able to say, “Okay. We’re not going to do that anymore. We’re going to go back to the original color, the original design, because that’s what people like.” And you always want to cater to your readers.

Minimizing unsubscribes is important because, again, you’ve got a list full of people. You want to make sure you keep them there. You’ve got their attention, initially. You want to sustain their attention. So what do you do? Well, you keep things timely. You give them information. You give them content that is timely. Relevant to why they subscribed in the first place. You then target and segment out that content, so that it fits. The person that you’re sending it to gets content that is relevant to them, so that they don’t feel as if they’re being bombarded with content that doesn’t add any value to them, doesn’t bring anything unique or special to them.

And similarly, relevant content to engage recipients. Keep it relevant. As I said previously, the example of my mother and my brother, the content that I was sending them, it was not relevant to them. Therefore, it didn’t engage them. Therefore, they unsubscribed. However, my other readers on my blog have stayed subscribed because most of them work within the industry or the sector of higher education, which is predominantly where my consulting efforts lie, which means that I’m providing content that is relevant to my readers because it’s industry-specific.

Now, a few other things about minimizing bounce rates. What are the methods? Well, first and foremost, and I kind of touched upon this a little bit earlier, but it’s removing bounced emails from lists. If they’re a bad email, remove it. Cull that email from your list, and it’s okay to get rid of it.

Also, use real-time email validation services, you know? You’re kind of like real-time curating and culling. Make sure that people know that your email is good and that it’s valid, so that it’s not going to maybe get black-listed, or you’re going to have a bounce-back simply because your email is seen now as being a spam email. Check your list for typos. Some of those basics around grammar and typos can be very important. People make typos when they join your email list. They might mis-type gmail.com. It’s really easy to transpose a letter. So sometimes you may have to go in and make intuitive jumps or guesses around what someone might have meant to type and help them with that, especially if you’re getting a bounce, repeated bouncing on that particular email.
Also, provide a way for recipients to update their email addresses. That is one of the smartest things that a marketer can do, is provide their audience a way to move with them. So for example, as I've gone throughout my career, I've had a number of different email addresses, prior to getting my sort of one-size-fits-all Gmail account. Because of that, it would be great if when I subscribed to an email list when I worked at, say, the University of Illinois Chicago, that I was then able to log in and say, “I want to update, so that I can change it to my Oregon State email,” or then when I left Oregon State, to say, “I want to keep being a subscriber, but I now want to receive emails on my Gmail account.”