

2018

STATE OF EMAIL REPORT

The data, trends, and innovations that shape successful email programs in 2018

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Introduction

The 2018 edition of the Litmus State of Email Report analyzes the biggest email developments in email client news, market share insights, and key industry updates. We dive into what those changes mean for your email team and provide hands-on advice to help you stay in the forefront of email innovation.

Here's a sample of what you'll find in this year's report:

- The spotlight is on subscriber engagement at both ends of the relationship spectrum, from acquisition methods to unsubscribe functions posted front and center in the inbox itself.
- New phones from Apple, Google, and Samsung launched, as did new mobile operating systems for Apple and Android. We explain what those updates mean for your team.
- Gmail now claims the second-largest share of the email client market and is closing in on the reigning champion, Apple.

How to use this report

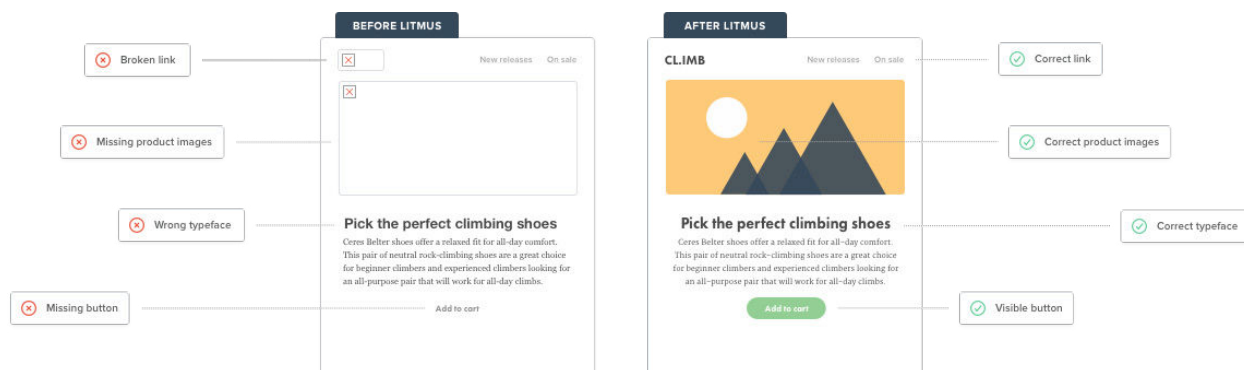
We designed this ebook to give you a comprehensive look at the data, trends, and innovations that shape the email industry and translate those into actionable advice to help you build a successful email program in 2018. Share it with your team members. Get inspired to try new and innovative techniques in your email program. Ensure your messages reach the inbox—all while continuing to delight your customers along the way.

Who is Litmus?

Litmus is passionate about email marketing research, because our mission is to help brands get access to the knowledge and tools they need to send better email. Through our industry-leading [blog](#), [Litmus Live conferences](#), [ebooks](#), [webinars](#), [Email Design Podcast](#), and more, we discuss best practices and explore trends to help your team stay on the forefront of the industry.

We are also passionate about software that makes creating high-performing email easy. Marketers use the Litmus Email Creative Platform alongside their existing email service provider to ensure a consistently great brand experience for every subscriber, work more efficiently, accelerate campaign performance, reduce errors, and stay out of the spam folder.

Email marketing is complex. But through hands-on advice and software you can trust, we enable your team to do their best work—creating innovative, on-brand campaigns that engage and delight audiences. With the Litmus Email Creative Platform, you'll have the tools and insights you need to provide your customers with an incredible email experience—and get the best results in return.



Never send a broken email again

Join over 250,000 other companies and use Litmus alongside your existing email tools to send email with confidence, every time.

[Learn more →](#)

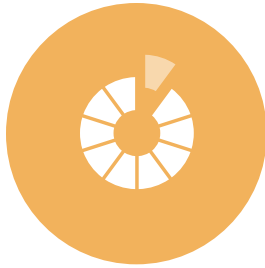
Already have an account? [Log in](#).



Key takeaways & action items

The email landscape shifts a little every day. New clients and operating systems appear. Legacy platforms change or disappear. New laws, changing customer expectations, and evolving industry standards mean your work as an email marketer shouldn't be the same today as it was a year ago—or even a few months ago.

Stay ahead in an ever-changing email world with these takeaways from the 2018 State of Email Report.



1. When email clients change support without warning, your brand reputation and customer experience are at risk.

The email client ecosystem continues to be fragmented and dynamic. Email clients drop and add support for critical email elements without warning. All of these affect how your email looks to your subscribers and performs for your brand. A thorough quality assurance and testing process will help you prevent costly errors, protect your brand reputation, and ensure a consistently great brand experience for every subscriber. Read more on [page 17](#).



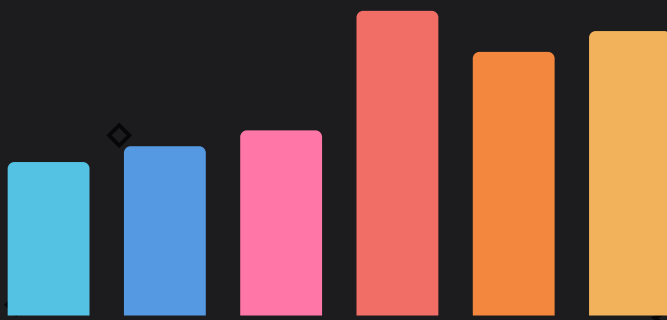
2. Subscriber engagement has never been more crucial.

Inbox providers are spotlighting the email unsubscribe function to help their customers opt out of email they seldom or never open. Although this move might not trigger a mass exodus of subscribers, your job is to make your emails so relevant and valuable to your subscribers that they ignore any inbox provider urgings to opt out. Read more about what's happening in the inbox and how to respond on [page 34](#).



3. Global privacy laws are changing your relationship with your subscribers.

Even if your business is not based in the European Union, you could be affected by new rules that govern data transparency and privacy if you have subscribers in the EU. Studying up on these and other regulations will help you stay on the right side of the law and avoid hefty fines. Read more on [page 43](#).



CHAPTER 1

Email client market share & trends

We tracked 15 billion email opens in 2017. If each email was a letter, and we stacked them on top of each other, the pile would be 28,000 miles high! That's farther than the International Space Station (254 miles above Earth), the Hubble Telescope (353 miles) and most satellites flying through High Earth Orbit (22,000 miles).

What did we learn? That there was a lot of volatility in the email client landscape compared to 2016.

Highlights

2016

1	🍏 Apple iPhone	33%
2	✉️ Gmail	20%
3	🍏 Apple iPad	13%
4	🤖 Google Android*	9%
5	🍏 Apple Mail	7%
5	📧 Outlook	6%
7	📧 Outlook.com	5%
8	📧 Yahoo! Mail	2%
9	🪟 Window Mail	1%
10	🪟 Windows Live Mail	1%

2017

1	🍏 Apple iPhone	28%
2	✉️ Gmail	26%
3	🍏 Apple iPad	11%
4	🍏 Apple Mail	7%
5	📧 Outlook	6%
6	🤖 Samsung Mail	5%
7	📧 Outlook.com	4%
8	🤖 Google Android	3%
9	📧 Yahoo! Mail	2%
10	🪟 Windows Live Mail	1%

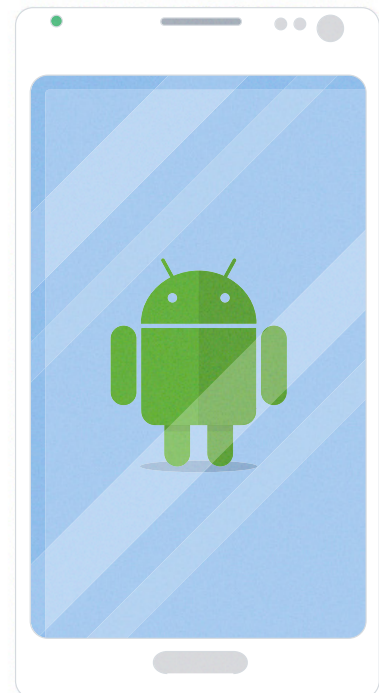
Note: *Google Android in 2016 was split up into Samsung Mail and Google Android in 2017. You can always see real-time stats showing the top 10 email clients on the [Email Client Market Share](#) site.

Samsung Mail ranks #6

At first glance, the email client market share looks relatively stable. The top three most popular clients remain iPhone's native app, Gmail, and iPad's native app.

However, we were able to break out Samsung Mail from other Android mail apps this year. And look where it landed—at #6 in our top 10 in 2017. We shouldn't be too surprised by that strong showing because Samsung grabbed a [22.3%](#) share of the global mobile-device market in the third quarter of 2017. Samsung devices also hold roughly 47% of the heavily fragmented Android market.

How does Samsung Mail affect your design and strategy? We've added Samsung Mail to Litmus Email Previews to make it easy to find out. And, we've rounded up everything you need to know about Samsung Mail on [page 10](#).

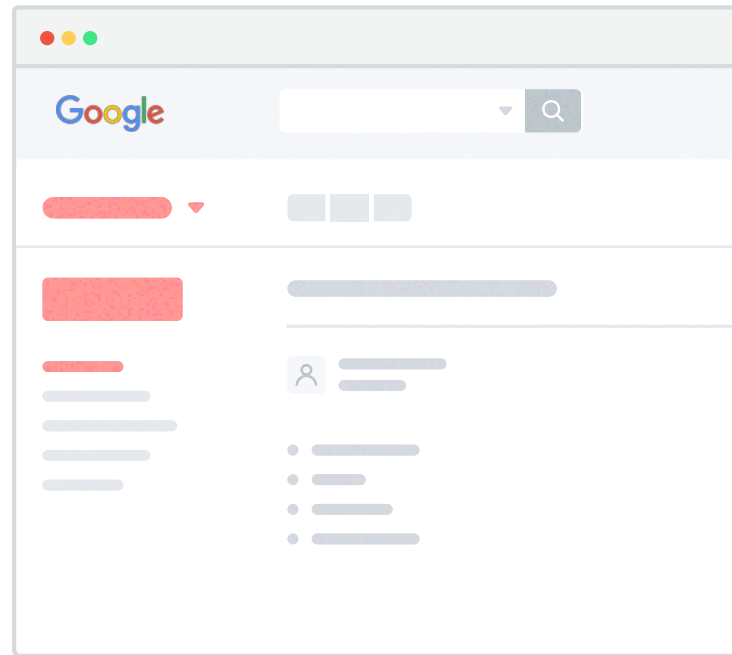


Gmail closes the gap

Gmail picked up six percentage points, most likely at the expense of legacy webmail clients like Yahoo! Mail (down one slot), desktop clients like Windows Mail (which vanished from the top 10 altogether), and native apps on smartphones and tablets.

Because Gmail downloads images to a proxy server and serves those images from that proxy instead of the original server, it limits the ability to detect whether a Gmail open happened on the mobile app or the webmail client. As a result, web and mobile opens are reported together. [Learn more about Gmail's image caching.](#)

Even with that caveat, it's still clear that Gmail continues to rise and to claim some of the market from the champ—Apple's iOS Mail app.



iPhone stays #1 – barely

Apple's iPhone remains the undisputed leader of the top 10. But in a surprise development, the year-long market share leader dropped five percentage points, while the #3 iPad lost two percentage points. You can see this decline by looking more broadly at Apple's total share of opens.

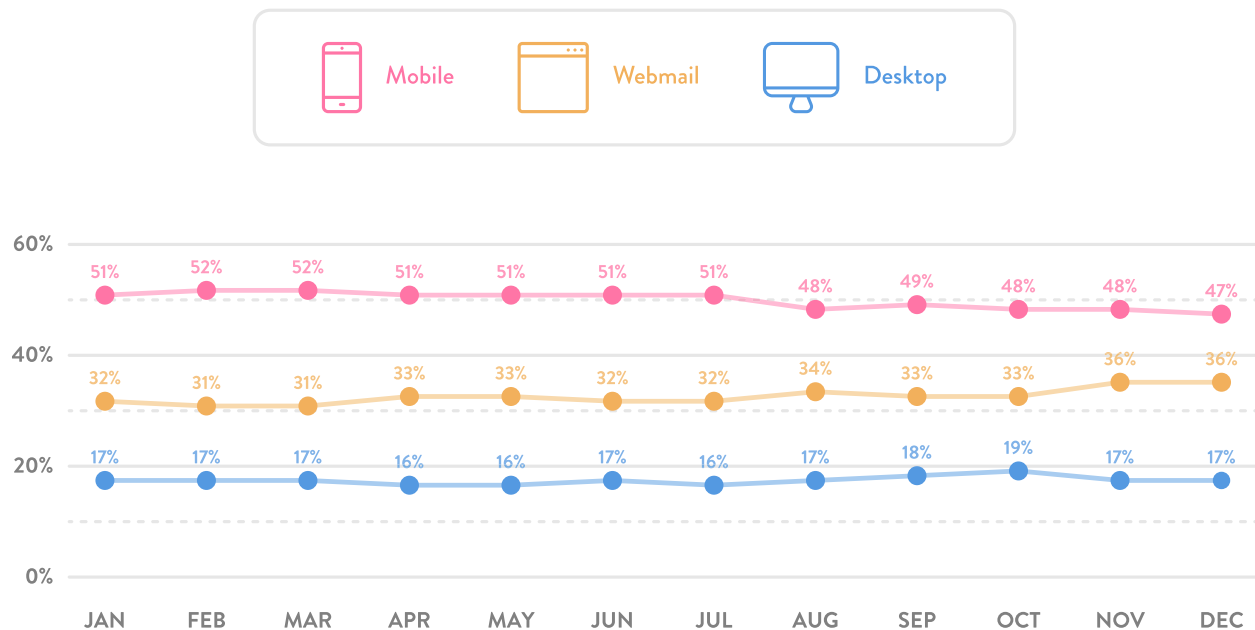
In 2016, opens on Apple's mobile devices totaled 46% of all email opens. In 2017, total opens on both iPhones and iPads receded to 39% of the market.

Apple might have given up some market share to Android-powered clients like Samsung Mail. However, this could also be the result of a software decision by Apple.

Beginning with the launch of iOS 10 in 2016, Apple devices allow users to delete native apps, including the Mail app that comes installed on every iPhone and iPad. Users moving from Apple's pre-installed email clients to the iOS Gmail app might have contributed to the iOS decline—and the rise of opens in Gmail.

Mobile opens dipped in 2017

Gmail's increasing share of the market also helped webmail clients pick up a larger share of total opens in 2017.



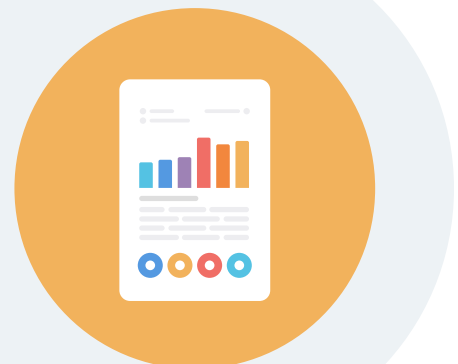
Mobile continued to claim more than half of all email opens through the first seven months of 2017. In August, mobile dipped by 3 percentage points while webmail rose by two points and desktop opens crept up one percentage point.

Get to know your audience

Email client usage differs by industry—and from brand to brand. Understand what email clients and devices are popular with your audience with Litmus Email Analytics.

[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Log in.](#)



Webmail continued to increase its share throughout the rest of 2017, finishing out the year at 36%, up four percentage points. Mobile ended 2017 lower than it started at 47%, while desktop opens stayed largely the same throughout the year.



ACTION ITEM

✓ **Don't cut that "view on web" link**

Even with improved email rendering across clients and devices, about 3% of all emails are viewed in the "view on web" version. Check your own stats to see whether your subscribers are clicking on that link. If you need the space for other links or a content-rich preheader, move your "view on web" link lower in the email to make room.

What you need to know about Samsung Mail

At 5% of the email client market share, Samsung Mail is one of the better rendering email clients. Despite excellent CSS support, it has plenty of quirks that can give designers and developers headaches and limit creative decisions:

- **No HTML5 video support:** Samsung Mail does not support HTML5 video, which is par for the course for email clients running on Android.
- **Limited interactivity:** Forget interactive checkouts and slideshows. Samsung Mail doesn't support interactivity. For any animation, you'll have to rely on animated GIFs, which are supported.

Samsung rendering quirks

Testing in Litmus Email Previews turned up some peculiar and inconsistent rendering issues, such as extra padding around emails in the inbox view and on the left side of the email screen.

- Margins work on elements like the <p> tag and headings but not on divs or tables. Margins are commonly used to create space around elements in email. As an alternative, you could use the
 tag to create space between elements in which the margin property doesn't work.
- Max-width works across divs and tables but not on individual table cells. Avoid using the max-width property on these elements. Workaround: use a <div> inside an individual table cell and set the max-width on that element.
- CSS transitions work in Samsung Mail! However, CSS keyframe animation isn't supported. If you want to include CSS animation in your emails, stick to CSS transitions.

The Samsung app sometimes adds padding around emails, resulting in white borders around an entire campaign.

- Some emails also display smaller than the viewport and aligned to the left of the screen.
- Samsung automatically links addresses and phone numbers, and applies a default link styling to them—underlined and blue. This is handy for users who want to tap an address and instantly have that address open in Google Maps, but it can conflict with your email's design.

Override the default link styling by adding this Samsung-specific style declaration to your <style> block:

```
#MessageViewBody a {  
  color: inherit;  
  text-decoration: none;  
  font-size: inherit;  
  font-family: inherit;  
  font-weight: inherit;  
  line-height: inherit;  
}
```



ACTION ITEM

✓ **Make your emails bulletproof**

If you use media queries to change the layout of your message at specific screen sizes for specific devices, you might want to change your approach. With the vast range of Samsung devices—not just mobile devices but tablets and even phablets, all with different screen sizes—there aren't just a few mobile device screen sizes to support.

The solution is to use device-agnostic media queries, which change the email layout based on where that design breaks instead of specific screen sizes. (We use this technique with our emails at Litmus.)

✓ **Target Samsung's email client using CSS**

Email developer Mark Robbins noticed that on the Samsung Galaxy S6 the ID MessageViewBody is added to the <body> tag followed by a <div> with the ID MessageWebViewDiv. To target the Samsung Mail client, simply add the following CSS to your email:

```
#MessageViewBody .yourclassnamehere { }
```

And in the HTML, for any element that needs this CSS applied to it, add the class name defined to the element:

```
<div class="yourclassnamehere"></div>
```

Make your emails look great on Samsung

See how your email renders on Samsung phones and fix errors before you send with Litmus Email Previews for Samsung.

[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Start testing.](#)



How email teams are responding to mobile dominance in market shifts

“Mobile email” is no longer the alternative to desktop and webmail, as this year’s top 10 email clients and all the shake-ups it represents should make clear. For email users, mobile is where they read and, increasingly, act on email. Desktops and webmail clients have become a secondary choice.

Given the prominence that mobile has assumed for users, how are email teams adapting their practices to accommodate subscriber preferences?

Responsive email has become the status quo

In our [2017 State of Email Creative Report](#) we said about responsive design, “If you’re not using it, you should be planning on adopting it.”

Email teams have three basic approaches to email design:

- 1. Desktop-centric:** a cursor-friendly design that uses 2+ columns, small text and images, and tightly clustered buttons and links.
- 2. Mobile-aware:** a finger-friendly design that accounts for the unique needs of smartphone and tablet viewers with a single-column layout, large text and images, and large, well-spaced buttons and links.
- 3. Responsive:** a design approach optimized for both desktop and smartphone viewing by using media queries and other techniques to adjust email content and layout to a subscriber’s screen size.

Whether it’s adaptive, hybrid, or a traditional responsive design, more than two-thirds of brands use responsive design for their broadcast and segmented emails. This is appropriate because the largest percentage of emails are read on mobile devices.

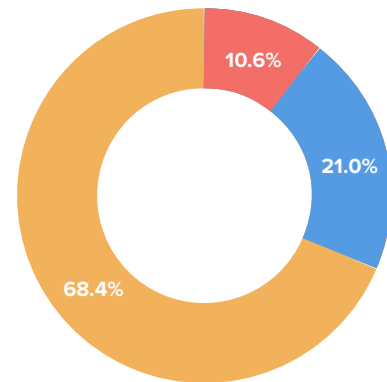
Responsive design was once a complex process to learn and use, but the move away from static, desktop-first design isn’t as daunting, thanks to [free templates](#), online learning, and supporting communities offering advice and troubleshooting.

How email decision makers use responsive design in their email marketing programs

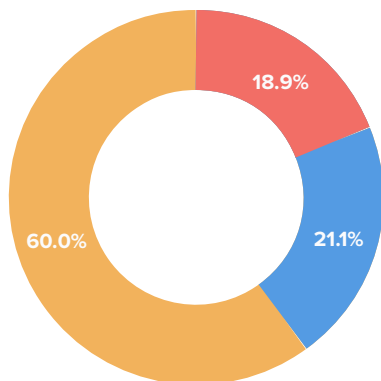
Broadcast and segmented emails

Which email design approach does your company typically use for its broadcast and segmented emails?

2,326 respondents



Desktop-Centric Mobile-Aware Responsive

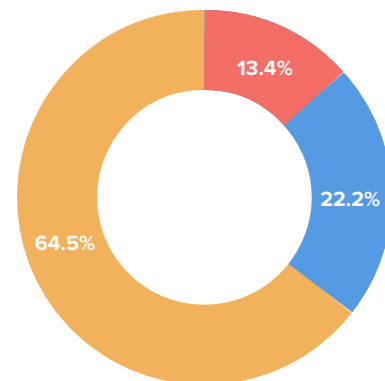


Desktop-Centric Mobile-Aware Responsive

Transactional emails

Which email design approach does your company typically use for its transactional emails?

1,957 respondents



Desktop-Centric Mobile-Aware Responsive

Automated and triggered emails

Which email design approach does your company typically use for its automated and triggered emails?

2,096 respondents



How does your email look on mobile?

Preview your emails in popular mobile, desktop, and webmail clients and ensure a consistent brand experience across all environments.

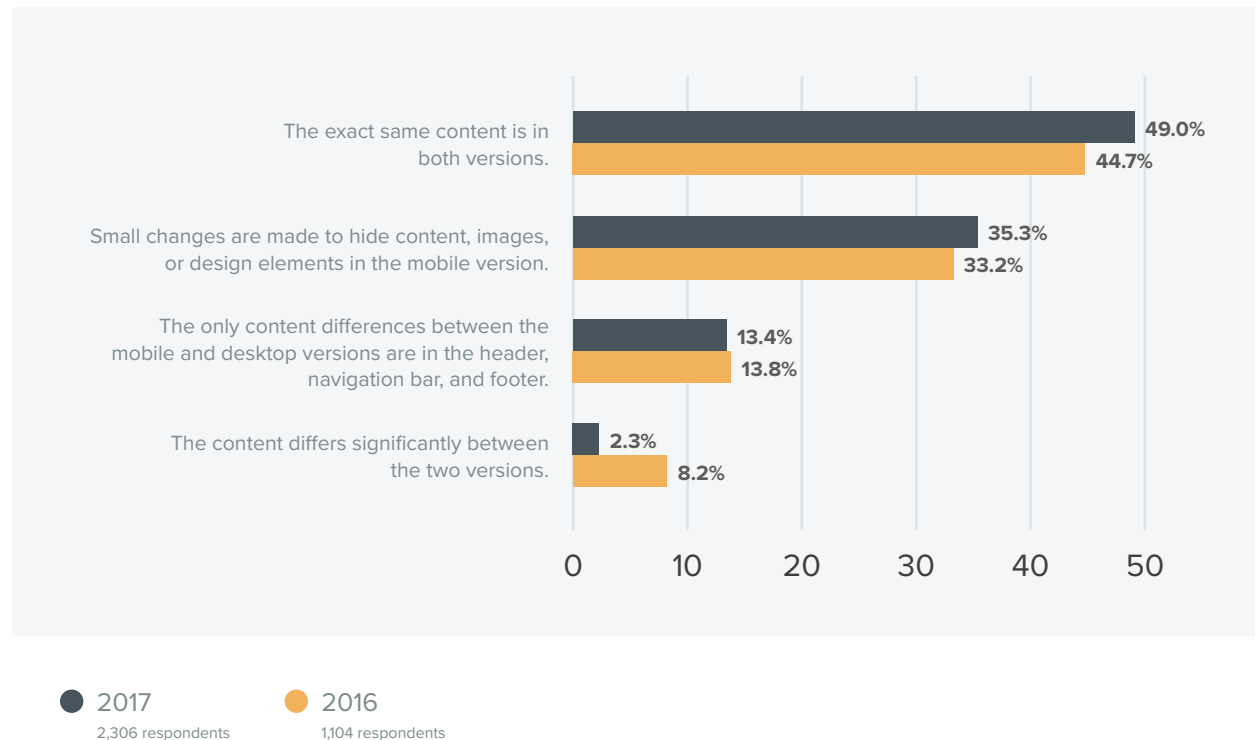
[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Run a checklist.](#)

Responsive design philosophy

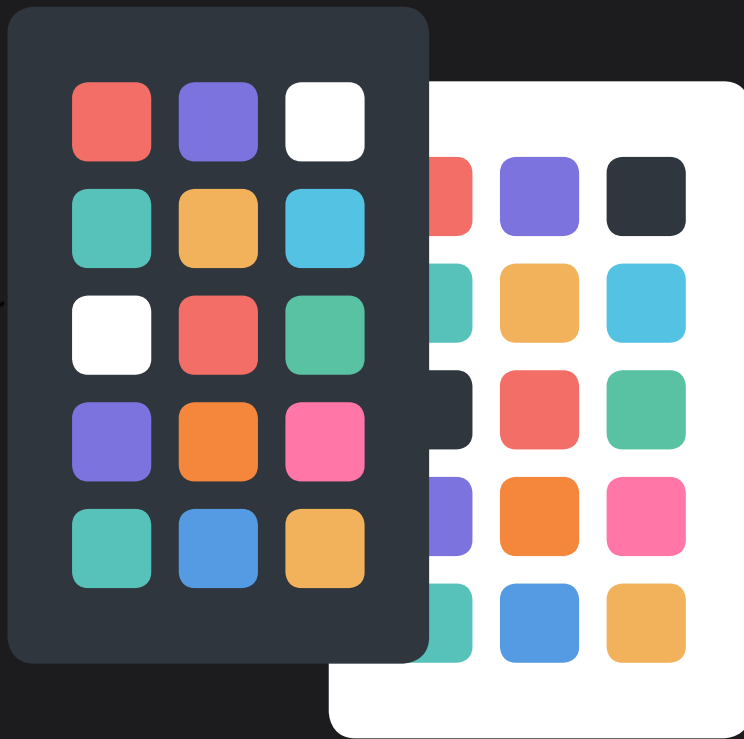
Likely because of time and efficiency pressures, marketers are simplifying their use of responsive design. The number of marketers using responsive design to make significant changes between desktop and mobile versions fell by more than two-thirds since 2016.

When using responsive email design at your company, to what degree does the content in the desktop and mobile versions need to match?



ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Read our guide, [Understanding Responsive and Hybrid Email Design](#), or watch our [Responsive Email 101 webinar](#) (both are free).
- ✓ Access free responsive email templates from [Litmus Community Templates](#), modify them with our HTML editor, [Litmus Builder](#), and dig into the code to better understand responsive coding.
- ✓ Still hesitant to make the jump to responsive design? Consider adopting [responsive-aware design](#), which uses responsive design for only the header and footer.



CHAPTER 2

New clients, apps, and operating systems

These brand new clients, apps, and operating systems have their own quirks email professionals must look out for. Here's what you need to know.

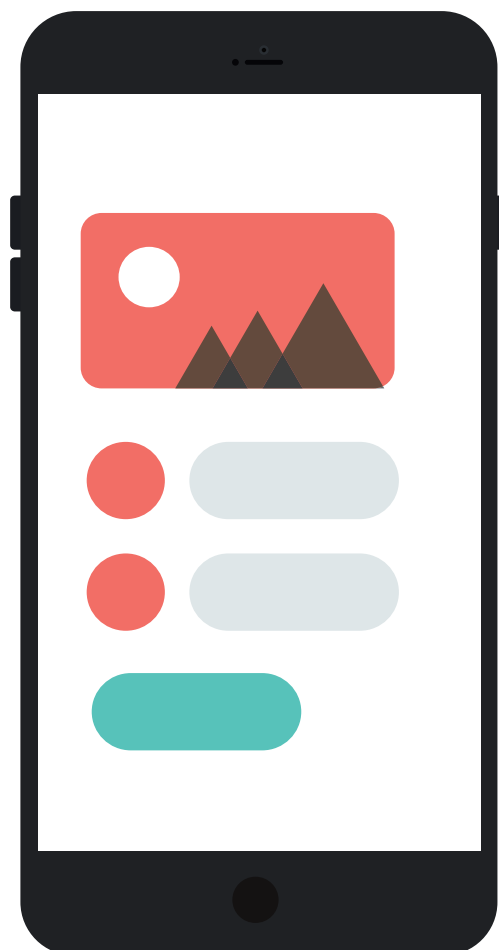
iOS 11, iPhone 8, and iPhone X

Every September, we can anticipate another round of iPhone and operating system announcements. Here are the highlights:

1. iOS 11 still supports HTML5 video—with one caveat

This is good news for developers who have been watching Apple change its mind over and over regarding video support for iPhones and iPads. Although an early beta version of iOS 11 released in spring 2017 did not support HTML5, the release version we examined in September retained support.

If you're an email marketer who relies on video for its selling authority or creative flexibility, you can go on your merry way. But—and there's always a "but" with any iOS update—make sure your email developer is aware of one change in iOS: the need to use the poster attribute (poster=" ") on the <video> tag.



ACTION ITEM

✓ Add the poster attribute to your <video> tags

The poster attribute (poster=" ") is required to display a preview image of your video in the email. In previous iOS versions, the first frame of your video would render automatically in the email. In iOS 11, though, the video would appear blank.

2. iPhone 8/8 Plus screen sizes, resolutions remain the same

The good news for developers is that screen sizes and resolutions have not changed from the iPhone 7/7 Plus.

	iPhone 8	iPhone 8 Plus
Screen sizes	4.7 inches	5.5 inches
Resolution	1334x750	1920x1080
Pixel density	326ppi	401ppi
Pixel density ratio	2	3

All media queries designed for iPhone 7/7 Plus also remain the same.

iPhone 8 (Zoom View):

```
@media screen and (max-device-width: 320px) and (max-device-height: 568px) { /* Insert styles here */ }
```

iPhone 8 (Standard View) and iPhone 8 Plus (Zoom View):

```
@media screen and (max-device-width: 375px) and (max-device-height: 667px) { /* Insert styles here */ }
```

iPhone 8 Plus (Standard View):

```
@media screen and (max-device-width: 414px) and (max-device-height: 776px) { /* Insert styles here */ }
```

	iPhone X
Screen sizes	5.8 inches
Resolution	2436x1125
Pixel density	458ppi
Pixel density ratio	3

3. iPhone X brings new screen sizes, resolutions—and a familiar scaling issue

This was the big device news for Apple in 2017—literally. The iPhone X debuted with a taller screen and higher pixel density. But developers won't have to scrap everything to work with the new specs. Although the X's screen is longer on the diagonal—5.8 inches compared with 4.7 for the 8 and 5.5 inches for the 8 Plus—the width is the same.

As always, a new iPhone release has good news as well as challenges for marketers and developers.



Upside: More display space.

You now have an additional 20% vertical display space. This means the inbox will display more emails and more of your content will be visible once your subscriber opens your message.



Upside: High pixel density.

Did you see that 458ppi density in the X's specs above? The X comes equipped with Apple's Super Retina Display and the highest pixel density ever seen on an iPhone display.

Pixel density is key for image quality. Your emails, especially your images, will appear more crisp and clear if you optimize them for high-density screens.



Downside: Scaling. We continue to see this bug, which surfaced first in the 2016 release of iOS 10. Here, scaling means emails don't span the full width of the screen. Instead, they appear zoomed out and off-center.



(Image from Apple's [Human Interface Guidelines for iPhone X](#))



ACTION ITEMS

✓ Prevent auto-scaling on iOS 11

Prevent iOS 11 from automatically scaling your email by adding the following bit of code to the head of your emails:

```
<meta name="x-apple-disable-message-reformatting">
```

(Thanks to Remi Parmentier for this tip, one of many he has shared in the Litmus Community.)

✓ Optimize for high pixel density

For clear, crisp images, multiply the number of pixels in each image by a specific scale factor. In other words, create your images in larger formats so that there are more pixels for Retina screens to display. For the iPhone X and all Plus versions of the iPhone family, [Apple recommends a scale factor of 3x. For all other displays, it's 2x.](#)

How do your emails render in iOS 11?

Preview your campaigns in iOS 11 with Litmus Email Previews for iPhone X, iPhone 8, and iPhone 8 Plus.

[Learn more →](#)

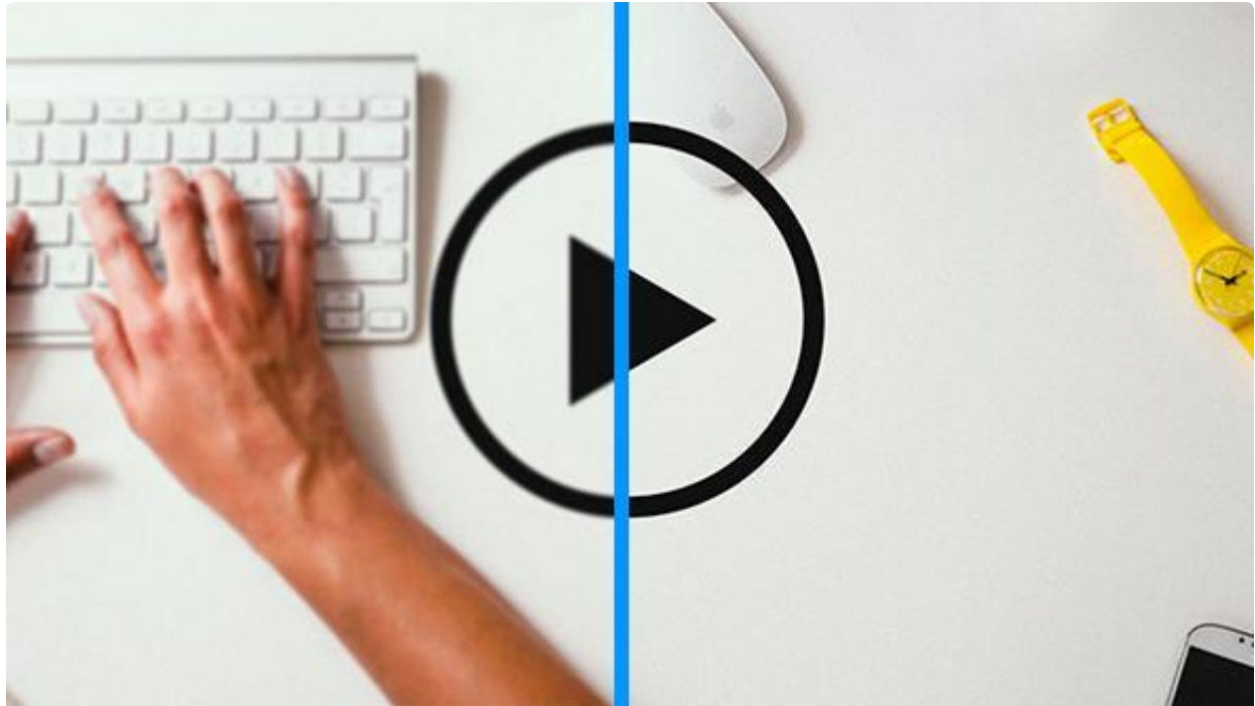
Already have an account? [Run a checklist.](#)



Why optimization is important

Product images must render their best in email. With the iPhone X's bigger display screen, combined with its high pixel density, your visuals can be more powerful than ever—if you optimize them for high-DPI screens.

Non-optimized images look blurry and pixelated on retina screens. Note the image below. On the left is a non-optimized version. On the right, the crisper, optimized version.



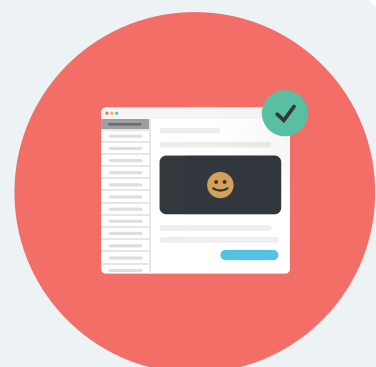
As the dimensions of an image increase, however, so does file size. That increased size cuts into a subscriber's data plan and can slow down load time. Both issues create a less-than-friendly user experience. Image optimization tools can [help compress your images to reduce file size](#) while at the same time ensuring your emails look great on high-DPI displays.

Test your image load speed

Use Litmus Checklist to see how long it takes your images to load.

[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Run a checklist.](#)

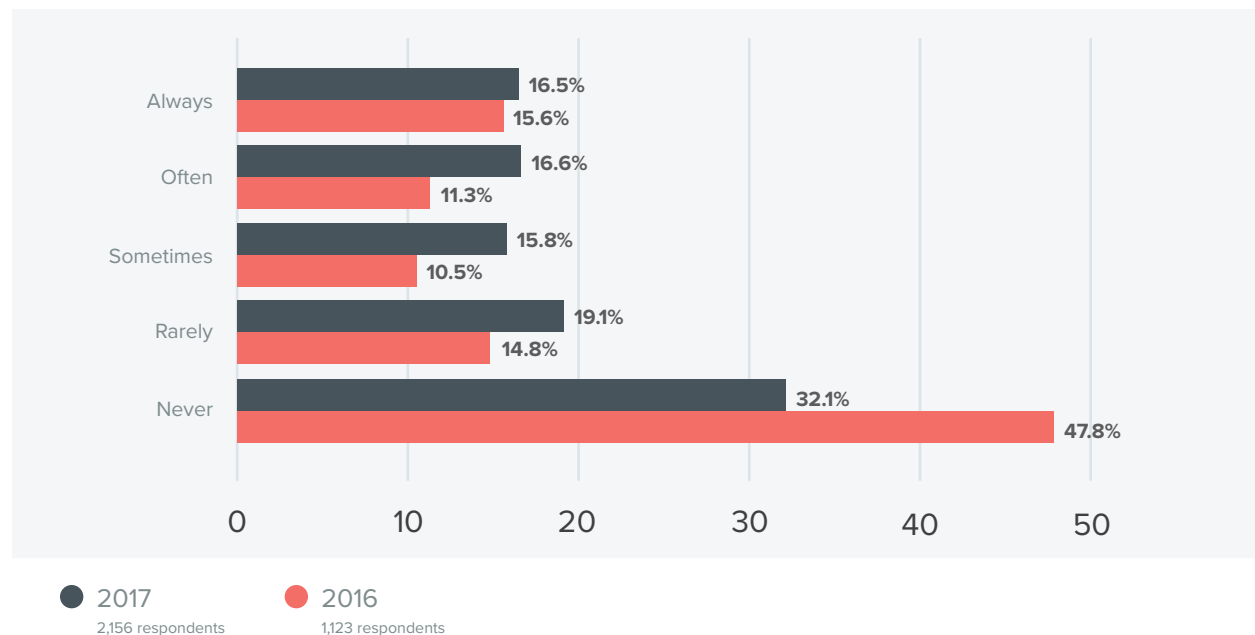


Even though more brands have adopted retina-optimized images in 2017, almost one third of all email marketers still say they never use retina-optimized images in their emails, according to our [2017 State of Email Creative report](#).

Retina-optimized images

How frequently does your company use retina-optimized or high-DPI images in its marketing emails?

2,333 respondents



Our guide, [Understanding Retina Images in HTML Email](#), explains what you need to know to use retina images to their best effect in your emails.

Google Pixel 2/2 XL

Apple wasn't the only big-name smartphone manufacturer to debut new devices in 2017. In October, Google brought out the Pixel 2 and its bigger-screen sibling, the Pixel 2 XL.

Both devices are larger than their iPhone equivalents. The Pixel 2 has a 5.7-inch screen, resolution of 1920x1880 and 441ppi. The Pixel 2 XL screen clocks in at 6.2 inches and a comparatively staggering 538ppi.

As Kevin Mandeville and Jason Rodriguez say on the [Email Design Podcast](#), "Pixel density is starting to get crazy!"

Although we don't expect the Pixel 2 models will overtake the iPhone, designers must overcome the twin challenges of coding for Android: the need to optimize images for high pixel density and strike a balance in the fragmented Android environment.



ACTION ITEM

✓ Adapting to high pixel density

We don't expect either the Pixel 2 or Pixel 2 XL will outsell the iPhone, but they pose the same challenge for email teams: making sure images are optimized for the staggeringly high pixel densities on both phones, but especially on the Pixel 2 XL.

Android 8.0

Anybody want an Oreo? That's the nickname given to the latest Android OS, released in October 2017.

Although our testing hasn't called out any major improvements or challenges that email teams need to heed, Android 8.0 does offer one enhancement to the user experience: "picture-in-picture" mode.

Picture-in-picture will look familiar to anyone who has used picture-in-picture on a TV set. But it is a first on smartphones and Android-powered tablets. It allows users to multi-task (or, depending on your take, splinters attention spans even further). Users who are watching videos on their phones can perform other tasks like sending messages or flipping to Chrome without pausing playback.

If videos feature prominently in your email strategy, picture-in-picture could give you longer viewing times and potentially higher completion rates.

Android fragmentation remains a challenge

Android remains the world's most popular mobile operating system thanks to its proliferation over hundreds of devices, with many still clinging to older versions of its OS. This heavy fragmentation makes optimizing emails for Android environments a special challenge.

You must get email right for subscribers who use their device's Android-powered native email app because there are so many of them. [The Ultimate Guide to Email on Android](#) has deep background and detailed advice on optimizing emails for Android, whether in the native email or Gmail apps. The tips on [page 25](#) will help you get started.



ACTION ITEMS

✓ Understand Android usage in your audience

Use Litmus [Email Analytics](#) to better understand your audience: Do your subscribers open email on mobile, and if so, are they opening on Android devices? Looking at this data helps you set priorities to make sure you're only spending time and effort on the Android versions, clients, and screen sizes that matter to your audience.

✓ Build mobile-first with methods such as [hybrid coding](#)

Both hybrid coding and the [Fab Four Technique](#) are flexible development techniques that do not rely on media queries to resize and change the email width for different device sizes—a perfect approach if you have to support a broad range of Android device dimensions.

✓ Have fallbacks in place when using progressive enhancement

Almost all Android clients lack support for advanced enhancements like [web fonts](#) or interactivity. When using those techniques, make sure you have appropriate fallbacks in place to ensure that your email looks great when opened on Android.

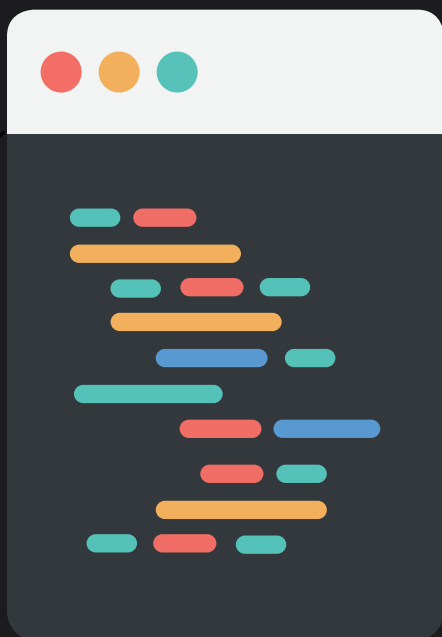
How does your email look on Android?

Litmus offers the most extensive set of Android clients for email testing. Preview your emails in the most popular Android environments, and catch errors before you send.

[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Start testing.](#)





CHAPTER 3

Email client updates, changes, and farewells

Volatility ruled the marketplace in 2017, marked by updates, farewells, and the emergence of Oath.

Updates

[Litmus' 2016 partnership with Microsoft](#) to identify and correct rendering issues bore its first fruits last year. We're excited to report the following:

1. Media query support returns for Outlook apps

Email designers jumped for joy in September 2017 when Microsoft and Litmus announced that media query support had returned to Outlook's iOS and Android apps. A few weeks later, however, Microsoft had to temporarily turn off support again:

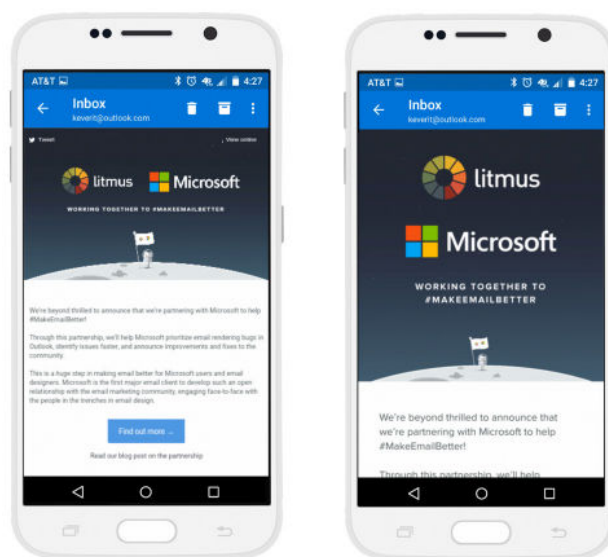
"After release, we identified some edge cases where incorrectly formatted emails were not rendering properly. We have temporarily turned off media query support to ensure that these emails get rendered correctly while we release an update to become more tolerant of minor coding errors."

– **Kate Everitt**, Outlook Program Manager, Microsoft

As this report went to press, media query support had returned to Outlook on iOS. The Outlook team is working on bringing media query support back into the Outlook Android app.

Having media query support back will help solve a recurring headache for email developers and designers, mainly because they won't have to rely on a toolbox full of tricks, workaround and hacks to have their emails render correctly in mobile environments.

You can see from the image to the right what a difference media query support can make. Given that you only have a second or two of viewer attention, and viewers won't pay attention to emails that look funky or hard to read, it's easy to understand why this is a nagging issue for email creators.





ACTION ITEMS

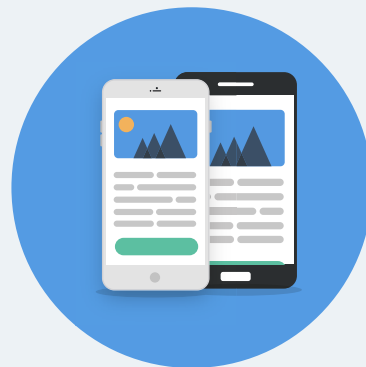
- ✓ Continue to monitor how your emails render on Outlook's Android app. Ensure your emails are easy to read, even though media queries are currently not supported in this email client.
- ✓ Stay on top of Outlook changes throughout the year with Litmus. Keep an eye on the [Litmus Blog](#), sign up for [Litmus Weekly](#), or follow the [Email Design Podcast](#) for updates on this and other support issues that affect email design, performance, and rendering.

Preview your email in Outlook for Android and iPhone

With Litmus Email Previews, you can see how your email renders in Outlook's Android and iPhone app and dozens of other popular email clients and devices so you can spot and fix issues before you send.

[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Start testing.](#)



2. Outlook.com now supports background images

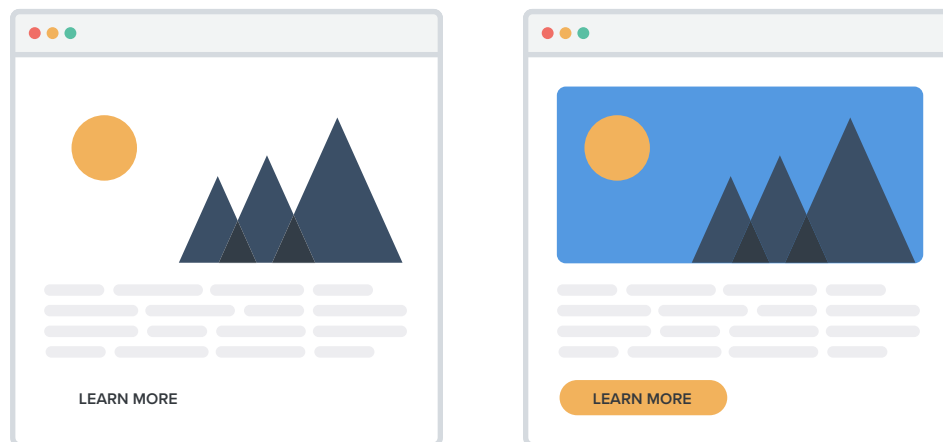
Adding CSS background image support to Outlook was the #1 feature request the email community submitted via the [Litmus-Microsoft feedback loop](#). We're excited to share that both Outlook.com and Office 365 now support CSS background images.

Email designers often find themselves needing to use actual text on top of an image. While many bake the text right into the image itself, enlightened designers understand that many email clients block images by default.

They need to ensure that—regardless of images being disabled—their message contained in that text will be visible to subscribers. Background images solve that challenge as they allow designers to display an image with live text on top.

With CSS background image support coming to Outlook's webmail clients, email designers no longer have to worry about fallbacks for these clients. Now, 86% of the overall email client market share support CSS background images, bringing us one step closer to universal support.

This makes Outlook's desktop clients for Windows (Outlook 2007-2016 and Windows 10 Mail) the last major email clients that don't support CSS backgrounds.



ACTION ITEMS

- ☒ Use background images and live text to replace image-based text in your emails. [Campaign Monitor's bulletproof background images tool](#) makes adding background images to your full email body or single table cells a breeze.
- ☒ **Report Outlook bugs.** Help us make Outlook better by reporting Outlook rendering and support bugs to the Litmus and Microsoft teams. Send HTML samples and screenshots to outlook@litmus.com.

3. Animated GIF support comes to Windows 10 Mail

The latest version of Windows 10 Mail now supports animated GIFs—a timely move given how popular animated GIFs have become. It's a big boost for users, who used to see only the first frame of the animated GIF, and for email senders who use animated GIFs to add creative oomph to their messages.

“We’re pleased to announce that Windows 10 Mail now supports animated GIF rendering! Our partnership with Litmus gives us valuable insight into the top rendering priorities, allowing us to focus on the most important new features.”

– Kate Everitt, Outlook Program Manager, Microsoft

The change applies only to the most current version of Windows 10 Mail and doesn't apply to other desktop Outlook clients.



ACTION ITEM

☒ Experiment with animated GIFs

With another major email client now supporting animated GIFs, it's time to see if animated GIFs can move the needle for your emails' performance. Learn the steps you need to take to set up animated GIFs for your next campaigns—and see powerful use cases for this technique—with our [Ultimate Guide to Animated GIFs in Email](#).

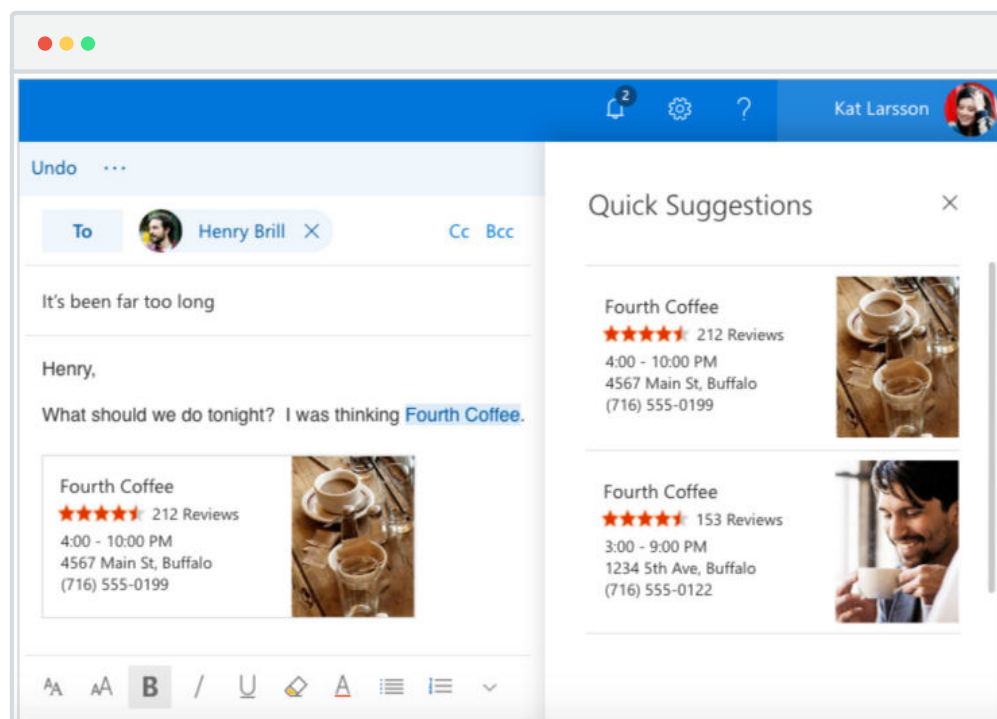
4. Outlook.com unveils new user interface

Microsoft began rolling out a beta version of its [new UI](#) for Outlook.com in late summer 2017. Users can opt in to the beta version by toggling a switch in the upper right corner of the inbox near their account settings icons and then toggle back for the earlier version.

The new version features a clean, responsive design and additional features which will look familiar to anyone versed in Yahoo! Mail and other webmail clients:

- Faster access to contacts
- A “Quick Suggestions” feature that uses search to add links for places whose names you type in conversation-style emails
- Quick access to emojis and GIFs as you type
- Better search and personalization to find contacts, files, and email conversations quickly

Good news: So far, the new UI hasn’t produced any rendering challenges.



What an email conversation using Quick Suggestions looks like in the Outlook.com beta.

5. Yahoo! Mail UI gets a refresh

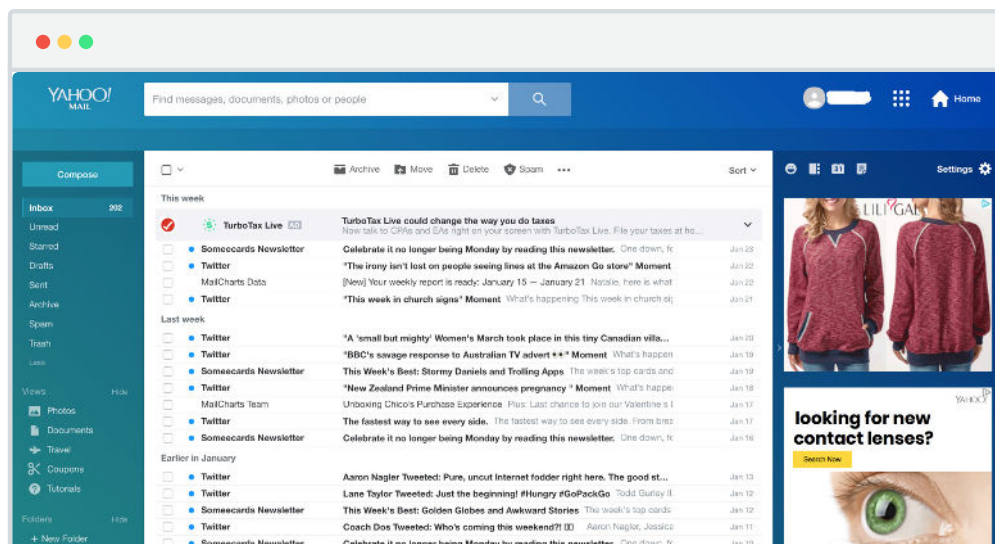
Users of Yahoo! Mail's free client got a pleasant surprise in 2017 with a new look for the inbox. As with the Outlook.com revamp, the look is cleaner and more user-friendly, with more space between elements, especially the folders in the left pane.

Although the look is a long-overdue update for the UI, it now looks more like Yahoo!'s ad-free paid product, which has been rebranded as Yahoo! Mail Pro. Among the UI changes, free users now have more options to customize the inbox appearance.

No immediate rendering issues: So far, nothing that would affect rendering has surfaced in testing. A couple of subtle changes have been noted, both of which improve the email experience:

- The possibility of display:none being supported inline, which Yahoo! Mail had not done previously.
- Older overflow bugs Yahoo! Mail had added onto tables apparently no longer affect email layouts.

Accessibility features: One significant change is that Yahoo! Mail now includes accessibility tools. It supports low-vision users with NonVisual Desktop Access (NVDA), high-magnification layouts, and full keyboard navigation, plus VoiceOver screen readers for hearing-impaired users.



The updated UI for Yahoo! Mail's ad-supported version.



ACTION ITEM

✓ **Make your emails more accessible**

With inbox providers putting more effort into optimizing their services for consumers with visual, physical, or cognitive and neurological disabilities, your emails must, too. Improve the accessibility of your emails by following the tips in our [Ultimate Guide to Accessible Emails](#).

6. POP/IMAP email support expands to Gmail's iOS app

Google has begun beta-testing support for third-party POP/IMAP accounts (Yahoo! Mail, Hotmail, Outlook, etc.) in the Gmail iOS app. The service has been available on the Android Gmail app and the Gmail webmail client.

To participate, you need a device running iOS 10 or newer, the Gmail app, and a non-Google POP/IMAP account. A page explaining the [beta test](#) also includes a form to sign up to become a tester.

In our own tests, we could install and access a Yahoo! Mail account before receiving official confirmation of our application.

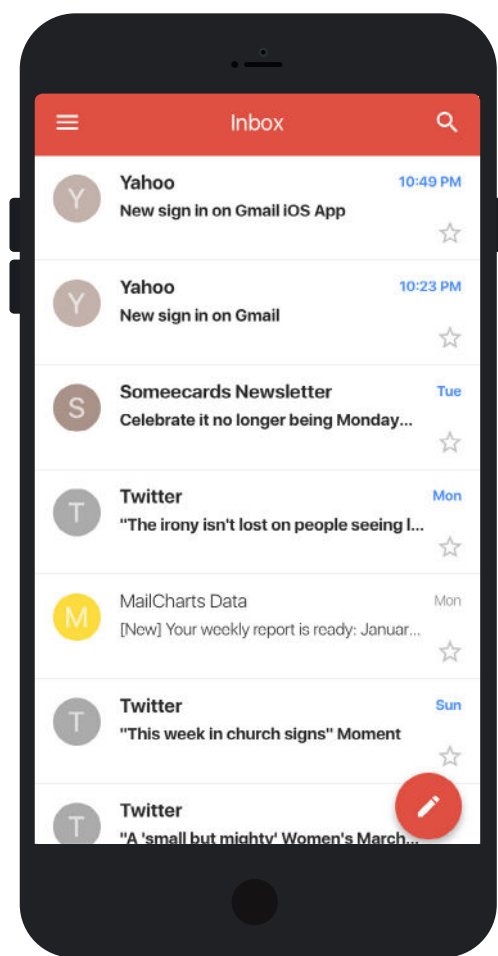


Inbox experience: The Gmail app makes it easy to toggle among different email accounts. Just click on the icon associated with each account, and the app moves you directly to the inbox.



Rendering issues: As always, our concern has been whether an expansion like this will have underlying problems with rendering.

We know from experience that POP/IMAP on Android don't support embedded CSS, and we expect that will keep happening on iOS. However, we have encountered no other unpleasant rendering surprises.



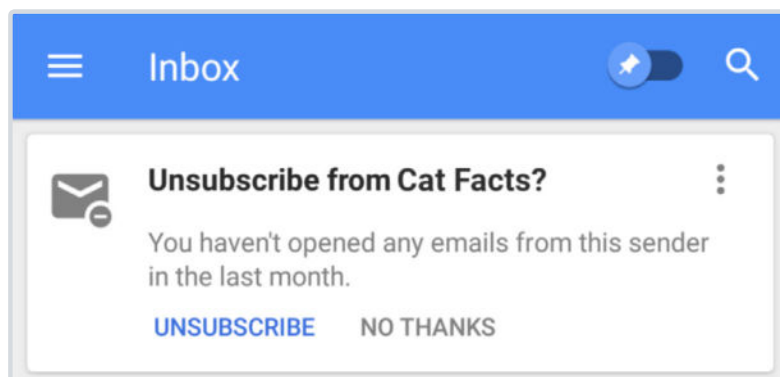
A Yahoo! Mail account in the Gmail app inbox.

7. Yahoo! Mail and Inbox by Gmail debut unsubscribe suggestions

Late in 2017, Inbox by Google began rolling out a [new quick-unsubscribe service](#) for the productivity-oriented Gmail client. These unsubscribe cards appear on emails Gmail classifies as promotional as an “Inbox Tip.”

How it works in Inbox by Gmail: Users will see the Inbox Tip card on promotional emails from senders that they rarely or never open, based on their inbox behavior data. They can either click to unsubscribe or hit the “No Thanks” link to stay on the list.

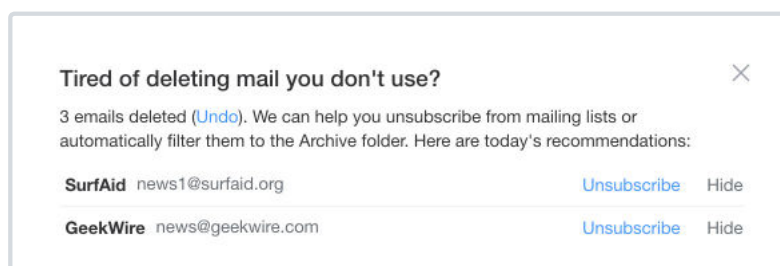
Although we haven’t seen an official explanation from Google, the unsubscribe card is likely aimed at improving the Gmail user experience by helping cut down on unwanted email.



Source: [Android Police](#)

How it works in Yahoo! Mail: Yahoo! Mail is experimenting with a similar suggestion for unsubscribing. Unlike Inbox Tip, which uses subscriber inactivity to suggest unsubscribe candidates, Yahoo! Mail’s trigger is based on user activity.

Subscribers on a deleting spree could trigger a pop-up that recommends mailing lists to unsubscribe from.



Don’t be lulled into a false sense of security if you have relatively few users of Inbox by Gmail or Yahoo! Mail. If unsubscribe suggestions turn out to be a popular feature, it’s likely that we’ll see more inbox providers following their lead.

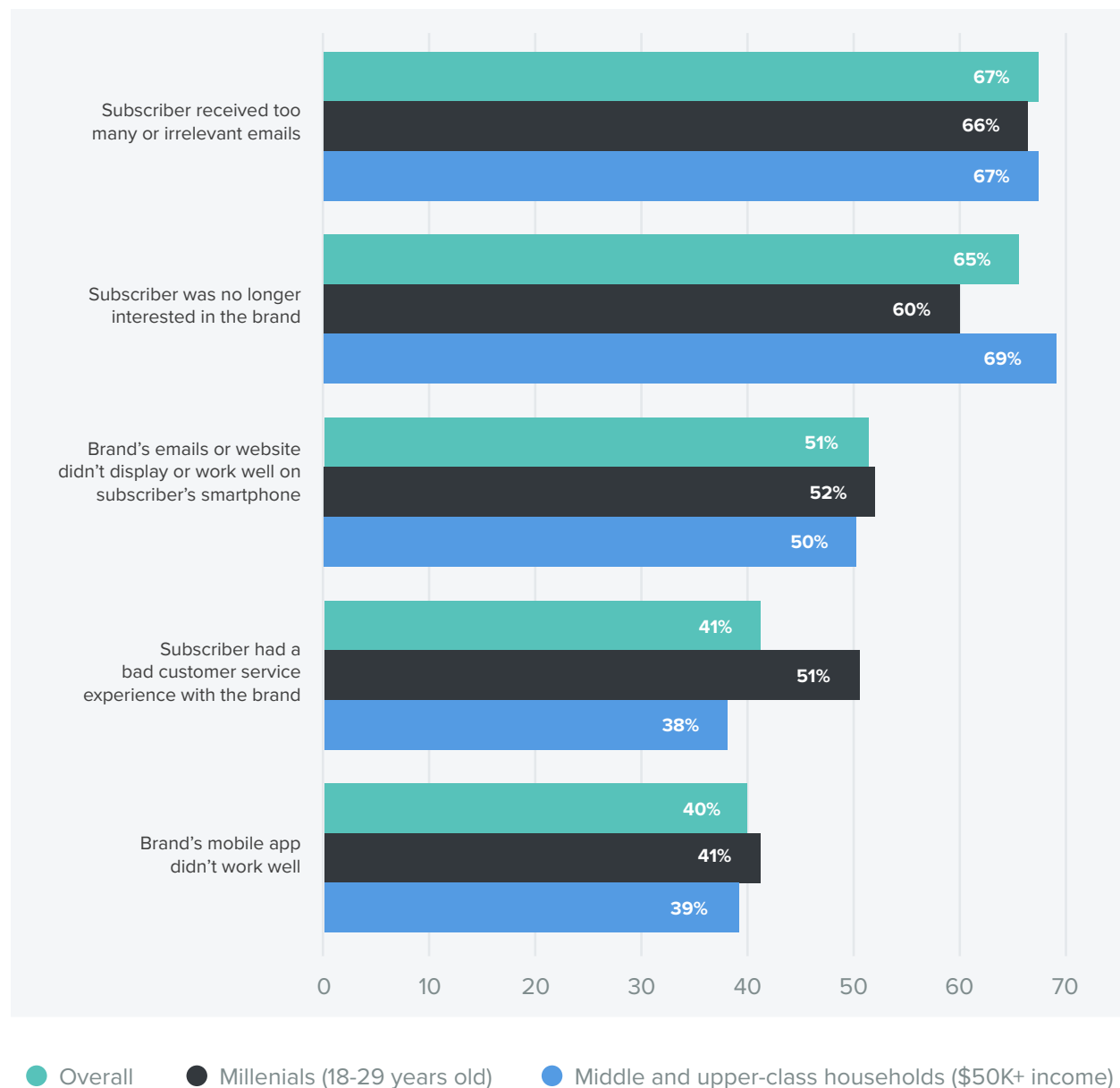
Why are inbox providers spotlighting the unsubscribe function? Two reasons:

- **Too many senders make it too hard to unsubscribe.** They use shady tactics like burying the unsubscribe link in large blocks of type, camouflaging it with low-contrast colors, or hiding the unsubscribe link behind a misleading description.
- **Consumers' inboxes are simply becoming too cluttered.** About 67% of people unsubscribe because they receive too many emails, and 66% do so because they're no longer interested in the brand's content, [research from Litmus and Fluent](#) shows.

Top reasons consumers unsubscribe

Percentage of consumers who have unsubscribed from a brand's promotional emails for the following reasons

1,212 respondents



With that, it's no surprise that the latest wave of inbox functionality has focused on helping consumers unsubscribe from unwanted emails. Leveraging [list-unsubscribe](#) functionality, Google, Apple, and other inbox providers have added native unsubscribe links to supplement those provided by senders. Inbox by Gmail and Yahoo! Mail are now taking it a step further. Subscribers don't even have to open an email to unsubscribe from a mailing list.

Time for email marketers to panic?

It's unclear if Inbox by Gmail provides unsubscribe suggestions for every email that the consumer hasn't engaged with in four weeks. That approach seems extreme and out of sync with how consumers use email. One month is too short of a window for most brands to try to re-engage inactive subscribers before the unsubscribe suggestion pops up. There are many variables at play in an email re-engagement strategy: Specific consumer needs, send frequency, length of sales cycle, etc. Unsubscribe suggestions that trigger after four weeks of inactivity consider none of it.

Since unsubscribe suggestions are a very recent addition to inbox providers' toolkits, it's hard to gauge the impact this can have on email programs. Brands will need to closely monitor unsubscribe behaviors as more consumers get exposed to these features.

But unsubscribe suggestions shouldn't make marketers panic. Unsubscribes are infinitely better than spam complaints. Brands have made unsubscribing too difficult and don't honor opt-outs fast enough—and that leads to frustrated subscribers and increases the risk of spam complaints. Enabling list-unsubscribe reduces spam complaints, which helps to improve deliverability.

You'll get more details and practical guidance on the new unsubscribe suggestion features in our guide, [Is Your Inbox Asking You to Unsubscribe? Don't Panic](#) on the Litmus blog.



ACTION ITEM

☒ Audit your unsubscribe path

Examine your typical unsubscribe link placement and styling. If you can check any of the boxes below, it's time to update your unsubscribe process:

- Your unsubscribe link is buried in administrative details at the bottom of your email template.
- The link is at least 10 points smaller than the body copy point size.
- You call it something other than an unsubscribe.
- The link goes to your homepage or an interior page that isn't an unsubscribe or preference page.
- The link's type color blends in with the message background.

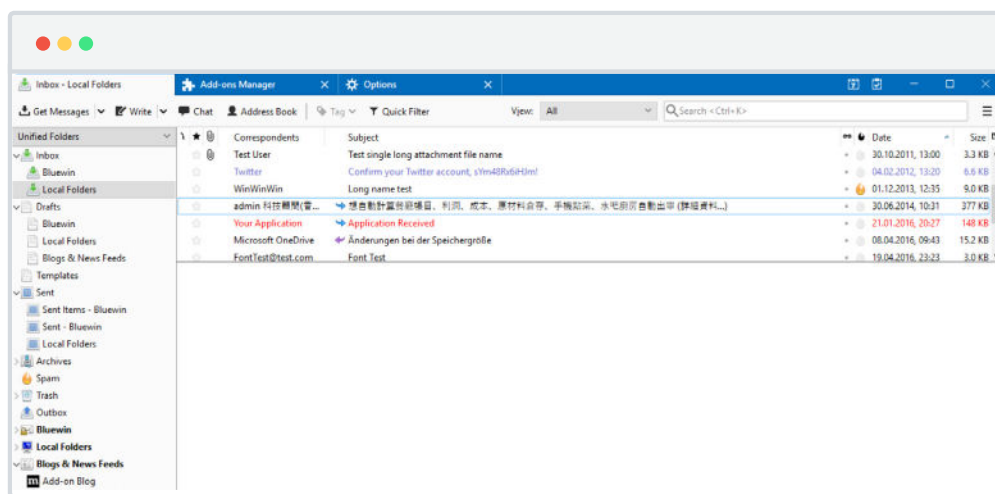
8. Thunderbird still flying with Version 58

Late in 2017, Mozilla launched the beta of its Thunderbird email client, Version 58. The move followed Mozilla's launch of its refreshed and re-engineered Firefox web browser.

The beta launch is great news for the email community because Thunderbird has historically been one of the best rendering email clients in the market and has a devoted following. The nonprofit Mozilla also [added four new staff members](#) to work full time on updating the technology, updating add-ons, and fixing bugs.

The result should be a speedier, more stable client and a new, updated visual design based on Firefox's Photon visual approach.

Although Litmus doesn't have any major rendering issues to report yet in the latest versions of Thunderbird (stable version 52 and beta launches 57 and 58), developers who created add-ons for earlier versions are having the same compatibility struggles as those who had to redo their browser add-ons to work with the re-engineered Firefox platform.



The UI in Thunderbird's 58 beta version.



ACTION ITEM

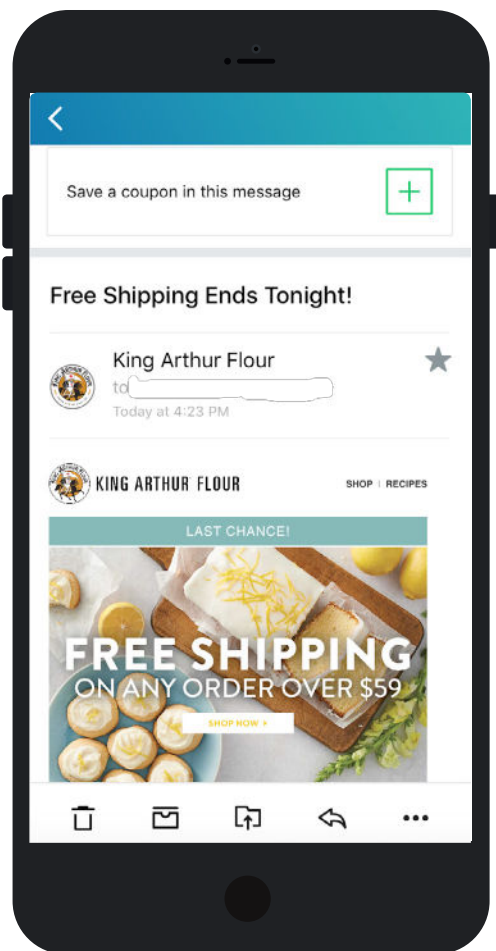
✓ Keep your eye on Thunderbird in 2018

With less than 1% of the email market, why pay attention to this client? Because Thunderbird could win back some of the market share it gave up to other clients now that Mozilla has dedicated more support and resources to refresh and improve it.

9. Outlook/Office 365 fixes image gap bug

Also in 2017, Microsoft updated Outlook.com and Office 365 to allow users to click on and view non-linked images in emails, similar to the experience in Gmail. Soon after, though, sharp-eyed members of the Litmus Community noticed an outbreak of rendering issues, mainly unwanted gaps and spacing issues around unlinked images that ended up breaking layouts.

Thanks to fast action through proposed fixes in the Litmus Community and bug reports submitted through the [Litmus-Microsoft feedback loop](#), the issue was identified and fixed quickly. While this action was more of a fix than an update, it shows how valuable the Litmus-Microsoft partnership is in reporting and fixing problems.



Yahoo! Mail message with coupon alert

10. Yahoo! Mail turns the inbox into a coupon clearinghouse

Yahoo! Mail launched a new [coupon-clipping feature](#) during the holiday 2017 shopping season for users who connect other email services to their Yahoo! Mail accounts.

Laura Booth, Yahoo! Mail product manager, said in a post on Yahoo!'s Tumblr blog that the new service would gather relevant coupons from subscribed emails across all of the user's connected email accounts and then display them in a dedicated location in the inbox.

On the mobile app, for example, the option to save the coupon appears at the top of the message.

The system uses machine learning to figure out which coupons are most relevant to users and includes an alert service to notify them when a coupon is about to expire.

Farewells

1. Oath retires Alto Mail

AOL's feature-filled, attractively designed mobile email app Alto Mail has been retired, perhaps as a step toward consolidating Yahoo! and AOL email services into the umbrella brand Oath following Verizon's acquisition of Yahoo! earlier in 2017.

The app is no longer available to download in the Google Play or Apple App stores, and support was turned off on December 10. AOL gave no official explanation for discontinuing the app.

However, Alto never cornered a sizable share of market after it was launched in 2012. Issues around AOL's absorption into Oath might also have played into the shutdown decision.

Something better coming? Alto's development team is staying on under Oath and posted this comment as part of its [goodbye message](#): "On December 10th, we will discontinue support for all existing Alto apps as we take our love of creating new and innovative experiences to new projects at our parent company, Oath."

2. Microsoft gives up on Windows 10 Mobile

With an estimated market share of 0.03%, we're not surprised that [Microsoft gave up on its grand plan to unite Windows 10 desktop and mobile](#). Even Joe Belfiore, the Windows 10 Mobile team leader, admitted the company had a hard time getting devices to run the OS or developers to come up with apps.

"Of course we'll continue to support the platform ... bug fixes, security updates, et cetera. But building new features or hardware is not the focus."

— [Joe Belfiore](#)

Now we hope Microsoft will reroute those development resources into its Outlook, Office 365, and webmail clients.

3. Google will stop scanning Gmail content for ads for all users

Goodbye to Google's practice of scanning email content to serve inbox ads.

Google Cloud Senior Vice President Diane Greene announced in a June [blog post](#) that the company will stop scanning its roughly 1.2 billion free Gmail accounts. The change won't affect users of Gmail for Business as part of the fee-based G Suite set of web apps, which had never been subject to scanning or ads.

The decision to end content scanning was a popular move for Google, which had been criticized and even taken to court over the practice.

Free users will still see ads, but Google will use targeting data based on user settings.



CHAPTER 4

Email industry movers and shakers

It's not just email clients that change without notice. The industry does, too. We've got the scoop on major partnerships, acquisitions, and industry updates that affect how email marketers do business—and we'll be keeping an eye out for what comes next.



January

[Return Path acquires ThreatWave](#), a Colorado email intelligence company, including its data and technology assets, talent, and business portfolio.



February

Email delivery service [Mailgun Technologies Inc. spins itself off](#) from Rackspace Hosting Inc. for \$50 million.

AOL announces [it will begin managing Verizon's customer email service](#) over the next 90 days as part of the rollup with Yahoo. AOL says it would delete email addresses for customers who don't migrate their accounts within 30 days.



March

Cloud-based email delivery platform [SendGrid acquires Bizzy](#), a marketing automation startup.



April

[AOL and Yahoo! will merge into one company called "Oath"](#) within Verizon. AOL Chief Tim Armstrong confirmed the new name on Twitter using #taketheoath.



June

[Women of Email](#), a professional association advocating leadership among women in email marketing, celebrates its first anniversary with a membership of 1,370+ members in 30+ countries on six continents.

Google announces [it will no longer scan email content](#) to serve advertisements in the consumer version of Gmail. Instead, the company said it would use search and other signals from users.

Experian Marketing Services revives its earlier CheetahMail identity in its rebrand as [Cheetah Digital](#). The move came after Experian PLC sold 75% of its cross-channel and email marketing business to Vector Capital.

Interactive email platform [RebelMail](#) renames itself Rebel and introduces its one-step checkout within an email.



July

U.S. Senators Mike Lee and Patrick Leahy introduce the [ECPA Modernization Act of 2017](#), a bipartisan effort to improve digital privacy laws. The bill would require law enforcement and government authorities to get a warrant before accessing Americans' digital communications.

AUG

August

Marketing platform [Marketo announces a multiyear partnership with Google](#) in which it will move its products from independent data providers to the Google Cloud platform. The move sparks [speculation](#) that Google might be getting ready to buy Marketo.

Rapportive Founder Rahul Vohra launches a new email service, [Superhuman](#), designed to speed up email use and management with a bundle of features including snooze, scheduling, read status, undo, and integrated contacts and social networks.

OCT

October

[Email-Mentor.com](#) debuts as a mentoring service for members of the email marketing community, organized by Todd Fraser after a session at Litmus Live.

Nashville email marketing provider [Emma is sold to investor group Insight Venture Partners](#), with Cofounder Clint Smith stepping down as CEO.

Avi Goldman of [SparkPost](#) launches [HEML](#), an open-source markup language specifically for creating responsive email.

NOV

November

Email marketing and delivery provider [SendGrid raises \\$132 million](#) in its first day on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE:SEND) and later closes its IPO of 9.43 million shares. The Denver company had filed for an IPO in October.

DEC

December

Atlanta-based [ESP MailChimp is named Inc.'s Company of the Year](#).

The U.S. [Federal Communications Commission voted to repeal rules, known as Net Neutrality](#), that prohibit broadband providers from blocking or throttling traffic and charging higher fees for prioritized delivery.



CHAPTER 5

Spam laws, email security and privacy news

Data security, privacy, and transparency have become flashpoints for consumers, businesses, and governments thanks to both high-profile breaches and strict new laws that affect marketers worldwide. See what happened and learn how it affects your business.

Anti-spam legislation

May 25 deadline looms for GDPR

The greatest topic of conversation among email marketers and privacy experts has been the European Union's new privacy law, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The law is scheduled to go into effect on May 25 and will affect marketers in and beyond the EU.

A Litmus roundtable with three experts in email and privacy law discussed in detail how GDPR will affect email marketers. You can read the [highlights](#) and resource list, then download your own [copy of the law](#).

In the meantime, here are the highlights every email marketer should understand:

- GDPR will affect every company that uses personal data from EU citizens. If you collect email addresses from and send email to subscribers in the EU, you must comply with GDPR no matter where you're based.
- GDPR has stricter regulations around consent and the use of personal data. It also carries higher-than-ever penalties for businesses that don't play by the rules. Non-compliance can lead to fines of up to €20 million or 4% of a brand's total global revenue, whichever is higher.
- Marketers who want to send email to EU citizens must review their email processes. Two options are creating separate sign-up processes for EU and non-EU subscribers and changing all opt-in practices to comply with GDPR.



ACTION ITEM

✓ Review your permission practices to align with new consent requirements

Ensure your opt-in processes comply with five changes mandated by GDPR:

- Consent requires a positive opt-in. Don't use pre-ticked boxes.
- Keep consent requests separate from other terms & conditions.
- Make it easy for people to withdraw consent—and tell them how to do it.
- Keep evidence of consent—who, when, how.
- Check your consent practices and your existing consents.

Learn more in our guide, [5 Things You Must Know about Email Consent Under GDPR](#).

Canada suspends private right of action on CASL

In June 2017, the Canadian government suspended several provisions of its strict set of digital regulations known as [Canada's Anti-Spam Law, or CASL](#). One of these was the controversial “private right of action” or PRA, which would have allowed individuals to sue an email sender for damages under the law.

Commercial email senders said the PRA would open the door to costly class-action lawsuits over even trivial violations and was not needed to encourage senders to comply with the law. In comparison, the U.S. CAN-SPAM regulations don't carry a PRA. Only a government official—a state attorney general or regulating agency—can bring an action against a sender under CAN-SPAM.

The Canadian Parliament is expected to begin a review of other CASL provisions, but none had been launched at press time.

No changes in CAN-SPAM after Federal Trade Commission review

In September 2017, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) called for comments on the set of email regulations commonly called CAN-SPAM during its review of the 14-year-old law.

Although it solicited, and received, comments on “the efficiency, costs, benefits, and regulatory impact of the Rule,” no changes resulted from the review.

That lack of action was unfortunate because CAN-SPAM's lax regulations have done U.S. businesses much more harm than good. We advocated for [five potential changes](#) that would have strengthened the law and made it better for both brands and subscribers:

- Clarify that businesses should honor opt-outs as soon as possible and reduce the window for honoring opt-outs from ten business days to three.
- Specify unsubscribe practices.
- Include non-promotional post-purchase emails in the definition of transactional emails.
- Require CAPTCHA use on all open email signup forms.
- Mandate authentication and in-transit encryption.

Federal Communications Commission votes to repeal net neutrality

In a controversial move, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission voted to repeal Obama-era regulations that prohibit broadband providers from blocking or throttling traffic and charging higher fees for prioritized delivery.

Proponents said the rollback of regulations would allow broadband providers more flexibility to offer service options and incentives to expand broadband service throughout the country. Opponents said the move would create inequality between larger or wealthier sites and smaller sites, as well as drive up costs.

Because of legal challenges, it's unlikely that internet service providers (ISPs) will make any big changes in 2018. However, if the repeal stands, consumers will likely see higher prices for access to certain sites, especially video and music streaming services.

Legal action

Craigslist awarded \$31 million judgment against CAN-SPAM violator

[Craigslist won a \\$31 million judgment against Instamotor](#), an online used-car retailer, for allegedly scraping email addresses on the online classified-ads site and then sending thousands of unsolicited email messages to Craigslist users.

Instamotor agreed to stop scraping the site and destroy all the data it had collected. The lesson for email marketers: Cheap, shady data and shoddy permission practices will cost far more than their value.



Email security and authentication

Russian hackers targeted thousands of Gmail accounts

The Associated Press reported in November that hackers backed by the Russian government tried over several years to break into the inboxes of nearly 5,000 Gmail users. Besides members of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, the Gmail accounts belonged to "Ukrainian officers, Russian opposition figures, U.S. defense contractors and thousands of others of interest to the Kremlin," the AP said.

Yahoo! 2013 data breach included all 3 billion accounts

In October 2017, Yahoo revealed that all 3 billion of its accounts had been compromised in a 2013 data breach, not the 1 billion number the company had previously claimed.

The announcement came after Verizon completed its acquisition of Yahoo! and AOL properties, combining them into a new property called Oath. More than 40 class action lawsuits were active at the time Yahoo! announced the expanded breach, and it was expected that the news could spur more filings.

BIMI emerges as authentication standard

Authentication remained a hot topic in 2017. One development is the work being done on [Brand Indicators for Message Identification](#), an email authentication standard that could be a major boost for brands' deliverability.

Using BIMI, email senders authenticated by participating inbox providers would be able to display brand-specific images next to their sender names in the recipient's inbox. The images would replace default images like a user photo or initial letter next to the sender's name.

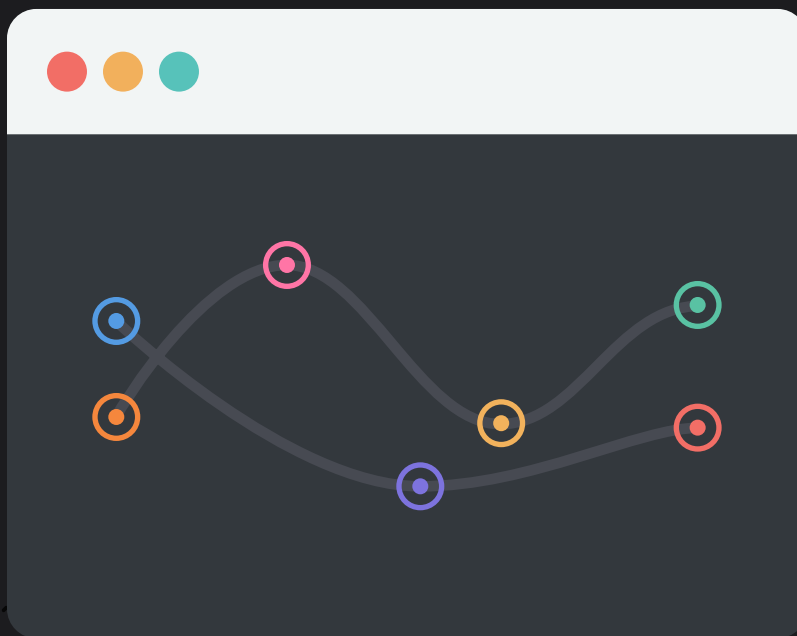
Ensure your authentication is set up correctly

Validate that your email is being properly authenticated using DKIM, SPF, and DMARC and protect your brand with Litmus Spam Testing.

[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Run a spam test.](#)





CHAPTER 6

Email marketing trends and challenges for 2018

Marketers will push the envelope on interactive and personalization in the months ahead. But, even as they explore making email more relevant and useful, institutional challenges such as inter-department coordination and staffing hold back their efforts.

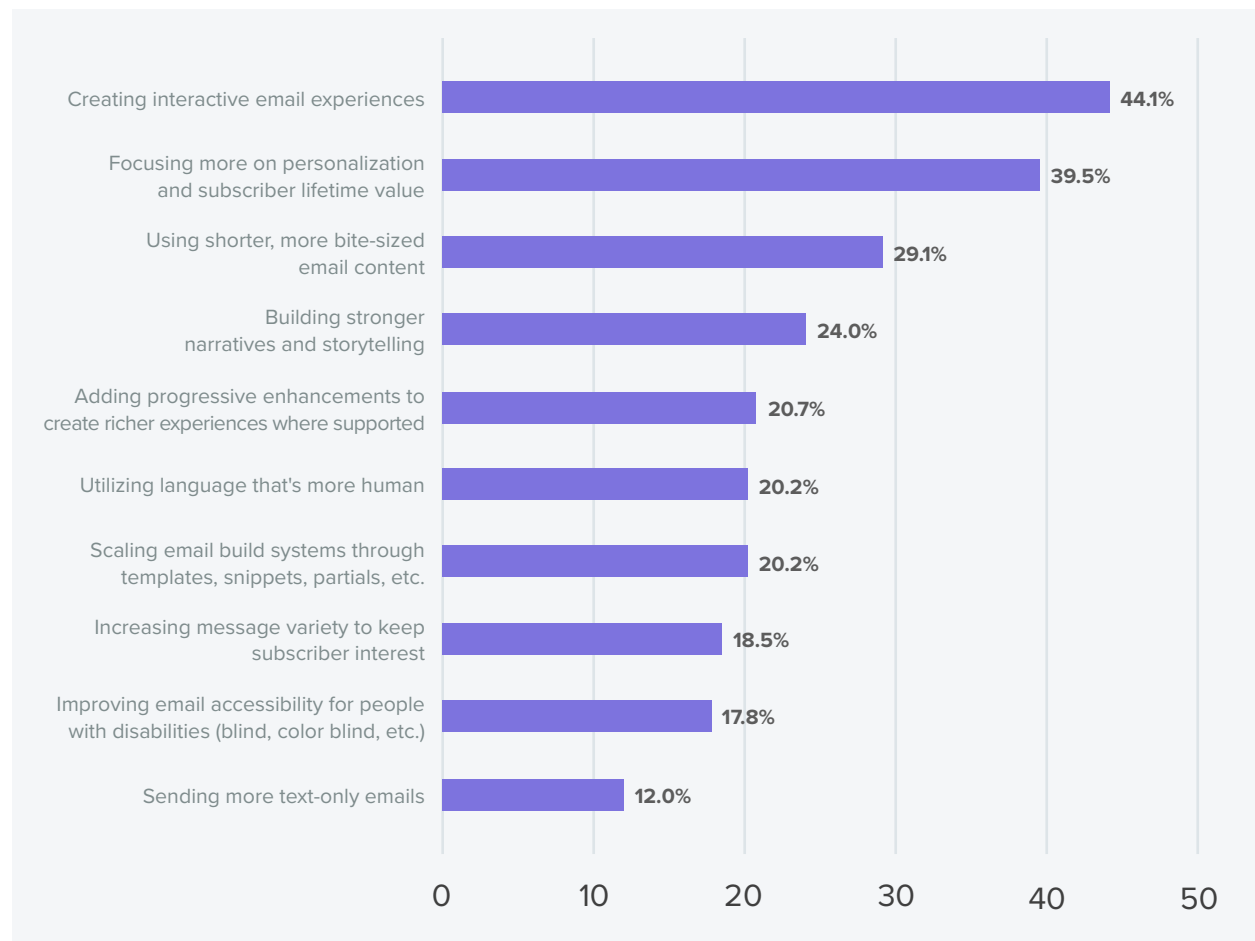
Email design trends for 2018

Hundreds of marketers told us about the trends that will dominate the email landscape this year.

Top email design trends for 2018

Which of these will be big email design trends in 2018? (Select all that apply.)

Source: Litmus poll of 524 visitors to its blog between Nov. 15 and Dec. 4, 2017



1. Creating interactive email experiences

Just before we published this report, we learned [Gmail will add support for dynamic content and interactive email](#) through Google's AMP technology. Although the move will have its own limitations and challenges, it's the strongest sign we've seen so far that interactive email is going mainstream.

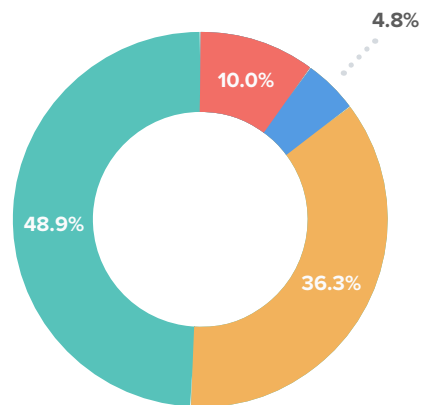
This chart from our [2017 State of Email Creative](#) shows how marketers are taking up interactive email.

Interactive email usage

Has your company ever used interactive elements in its marketing emails (e.g., using hamburger menus, email carousels, etc.)?

2,273 respondents

- Yes, and we plan on using it again soon.
- Yes, but we don't have any plans to use it again soon.
- No, but we plan on trying it soon.
- No, and we don't have any plans to try it anytime soon.

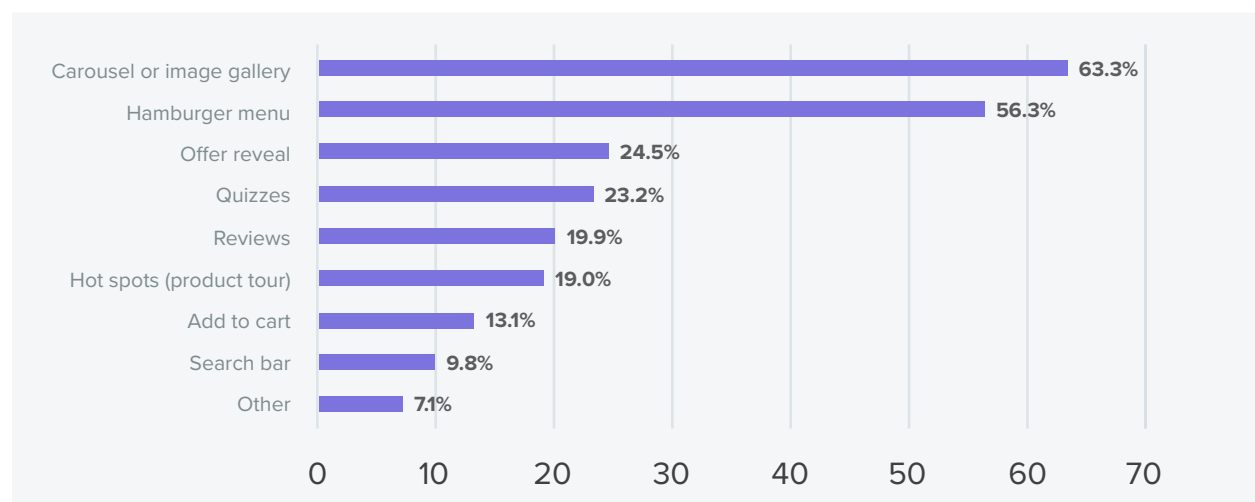


Interactive emails allow subscribers to interact with an email directly in their inbox—opening a dropdown menu, revealing hidden images or text, or adding an item promoted in the email to a cart and then clicking directly to the checkout page.

Interactive email elements used

Which interactive elements has your company used in its marketing emails? (Select all that apply.)

324 respondents



This trend promises to bring some new excitement and wow moments to inboxes, but it's not just for show. Interactive elements can make email more useful and efficient for users and increase its value as a communication channel.

Want to know more? Check out these guides:

- [How to Get Buy-In for Interactive Email](#)
- [Interactive Email for Beginners: 6 Interactive Elements You Can Add to Your Emails Today](#)
- [Interactive Email's Opportunities and Challenges](#)

2. Focusing more on personalization and subscriber lifetime value

In this age of big data and machine learning, brands have many opportunities to use dynamic content to pipe individually personalized product, content, and other recommendations into their emails.

Marketers must be cautious about incorporating data and personalized content, though.

“From a messaging standpoint, we need to do a better job of balancing personalization and discovery. You need a balanced strategy on the past and the future.”

– Alex Williams, VP and Creative Director, [Trendline Interactive](#)

3. Using shorter, more bite-sized email content

Short-form content has been trending for several years, partly for easier reading, especially on mobile devices. Even though [attention spans are increasing](#) gradually, subscribers generally spend only a few seconds deciding whether to open, read, and act on your email.

“You only have 3 to 5 seconds to connect in email. You need to grab their attention and get them prepped and excited for the next stage in their journey.”

– Katya Hoogerhuis, Associate Creative Director, [Shaw + Scott](#)

4. Building stronger narratives and storytelling

Content might be getting shorter, but it's also getting richer. That means putting information in context by telling a story in a single email or across a series of triggered or themed emails.

Some retailers take a page from Pinterest and create mini-mood boards showing a collection of complementary products—an entire outfit from hat to handbag to shoes or a dinner party from table décor to the music playlist.

“You need to take a customer on a journey, whether it’s through an onboarding, a new product induction, or simply presenting their own data back to them in an interesting and insightful way.”

– DeeDee Flagg, Director Digital Development, Shaw + Scott

5. Adding progressive enhancements to create richer experiences where supported

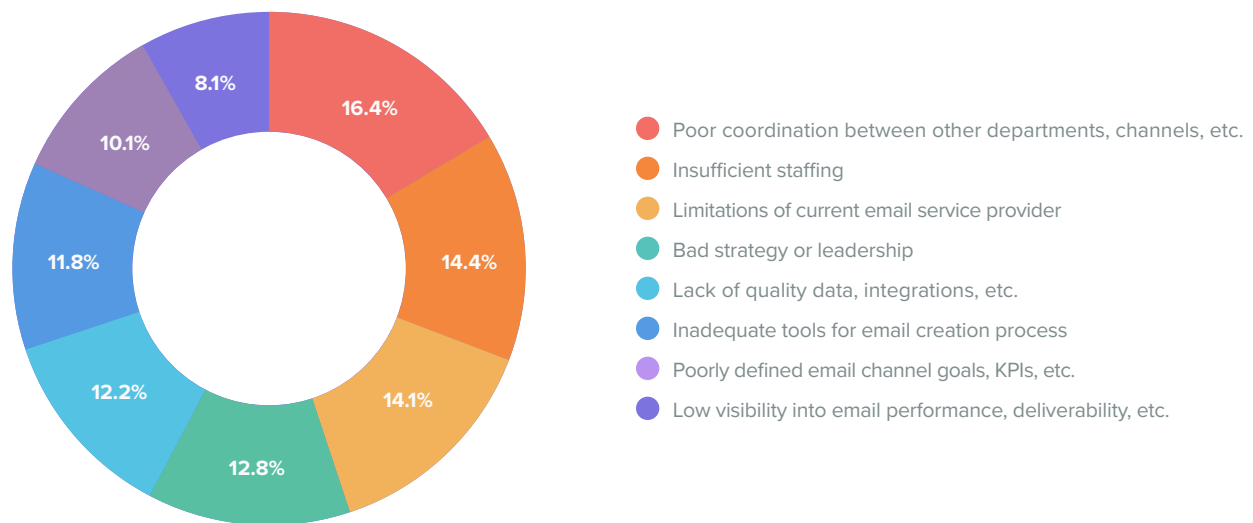
Today’s designers aim to create “platform-perfect” emails that play up to the capability of the most popular email clients. That means leaning into the functionality supported by WebKit-powered email clients, for instance, and providing graceful fallbacks for subscribers on other platforms.

For more details on those trends, and for an in-depth look at five more email design trends, read [Top Email Design Trends for 2018](#).

The biggest email marketing challenges of 2018

Although marketers are excited about the possibilities that interactive and personalized email offer them, along with opportunities to create richer and more accessible messages, they also deal with a complex set of challenges.

We asked hundreds of marketers about the biggest challenges that their email program faces. Here's what they told us:



Source: Litmus poll of 603 visitors to its blog between Dec. 4, 2017 and Jan. 4, 2018

Below, we'll break down the top challenges and suggest ways to overcome or work around them.

1. Poor coordination between other departments and channels

Your customer is omnichannel. So, brands must be omnichannel. Email marketing can no longer afford to operate as a silo. Nor can your other channels.

Litmus and Fluent's [Adapting to Consumers' New Definition of Spam Research](#) found that experiences outside the email channel also affected whether customers stay subscribed.

For instance, 41% of consumers say they've unsubscribed from brand's emails because of a poor customer service experience, and 40% have because the brand's mobile app didn't work well. Those same pain points also drove spam complaints.

How to overcome this challenge: Find common goals and key performance indicators across channels and departments to create alignment. Work together to create and unite a clear value proposition that puts the customer first.

2. Insufficient staffing

It's a perpetual problem—too many duties and not enough people—so it's no surprise that 14.4% of marketers picked it as a major challenge. But inadequate staffing also directly affects program success.

Marketers who describe their email programs as “very well-resourced” are seven times more likely than those with “adequately resourced” programs to say their programs are “very successful,” according to our [Staffing for Email Marketing Success executive summary](#).

How to overcome this challenge: Enlist outside help, beginning with your service providers, such as your ESP or automation platforms. Many have in-house experts and libraries of resources. Your success is their success, so many are eager to lend you their expertise.

If your budget supports it, bring in an agency whose expertise matches your needs. If you must ask for money, make your case by showing how the expense can pay for itself in increased revenue or by meeting other business KPIs.

Finally, review all the demands on your department and find a way to focus only on those that align with your objectives.

3. Limitations of current email service provider

If you're feeling limited by your current provider, it may be because you've outgrown their capabilities. Or perhaps you were a mismatch from the beginning.

How to overcome this challenge: Switching ESPs is a major time commitment and a risky one, too. You must decide whether the risks of staying with your current provider are greater or less than the risks that come in the transition to a new platform.

Consider taking on a second ESP that has the missing features you need. Our [2017 State of Email Workflows report](#) found 46% of brands use two or more ESPs.

Finally, review how you use your email platform. Email vendors say many of their clients use 20% or less of their services. Does yours offer things that you haven't checked out yet because you lack training or because they would cost extra?

Go beyond your ESP's tracking capabilities with Litmus Email Analytics

See where your subscribers open and if they read, skimmed, or deleted your email. Track forwards and prints, compare engagement by device, and more with Litmus Email Analytics.

[Learn more →](#)

Already have an account? [Create a new tracking code](#).



4. Bad strategy or leadership

Execution doesn't mean much if you have a poor strategy. Too often, a company's email program is focused on the brand's needs, with the customer's needs a distant second.

This approach drives brands to "send another email" to meet the week's or month's goal, not to truly serve the subscriber.

Also, lack of leadership can make people feel rudderless and less inclined to explore strategies that would help it achieve more.

How to overcome this challenge: Get better at building business cases and getting buy-in. Consider this part of your job now.

Helping marketers get buy-in has become a major theme on the Litmus blog. These posts can help you map out a plan:

- [8 Ways to Get Executive Buy-In for Larger Email Marketing Budgets, Besides ROI](#)
- [How to Use Email Previews to Get Buy-In for Your Next Email Project](#)
- [How to Get Buy-In for Interactive Email](#)
- [Need Help Getting Buy-in for Litmus? We've Got Your Back](#)

For more details on each of those challenges, and for a deep dive into four more challenges, check out [The Biggest Email Marketing Challenges of 2018](#).

Closing the gap between email marketers and executives

Company leadership doesn't always understand email marketing well. We help bring everyone on the same page with our leadership series. Get summaries of critical email marketing issues that you can share with the leadership at your company.

[Download the free executive summaries →](#)





Make email better

There's never been a better time to be an email marketer, designer, or developer. Yes, the landscape keeps shifting. New laws and regulations, inbox provider inscrutability, and changing customer expectations make our jobs more challenging every day.

But, we also know more than we ever have about creating emails that subscribers will welcome and act on, emails that reach the inbox instead of the junk folder, emails that look gorgeous and behave exactly the way they're supposed to no matter when, where or how recipients view them.

This report has the data, news, best practices, and hands-on how-tos you need to create, send, and manage great emails. Now it's time to put it all into practice.

Here's to a positive and profitable email year!

New laws, email client updates & changing customer expectations make our jobs challenging every day. Keep up with the ever-changing email industry with @litmusapp's 2018 State of Email Report.



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