

*“This is a ‘must read’ for all e-marketers - screenshots, tips and plain talking. Reading this report will increase sales for you.”*

Dominic Yeadon, e-marketing masterclass blog

# Hitting the Mark 2011

dotMailer's annual benchmark study of the retail industry's email marketing performance

→ 45 best and worst, household name email marketing campaigns - exposed

→ Over 50 best practice guidelines and tips

# Contents

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	Page
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Executive summary and results	6
Section A – Signup, unsubscribe and legal requirements	8
Section B – Technical	12
Section C – Email effectiveness	15
Section D – Design and branding	22
Section E – Social media and viral marketing	26
Section F – Post-sale email marketing	28
Conclusion	30
Appendix 1 – Full results	31
Appendix 2 – Email marketing best practice checklist	32
About dotMailer	33

# Introduction

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In its 4th year of publication, Hitting the Mark is the one of the digital marketing industry's favourite and most anticipated annual benchmarking reports.

Researched and compiled by dotMailer, this report dissects the email marketing campaigns sent by 45 named high street retail brands. The resulting insight attracts great levels of interest amongst marketers and the press. Readers find it allows them to gain a rare insight into the way household brands are using email marketing - and to learn from both their successes and their mistakes, in very practical terms.

Email is one the most widely used marketing channels. But despite this, some of the UK's most-loved brands still aren't fully exploiting the opportunities it presents.

Always constructive and often controversial, 'Hitting the Mark' aims to inspire email marketers to create, more targeted, compelling and effective email campaigns, encouraging the evolution of email marketing.

This year we have raised the bar – by exploring the change in retailers' messaging after an online sale. We wanted to know if and how retailers are exploiting their sales intelligence and targeting their pre and post sales email content based on the recipient's purchase behaviour. Our findings were extraordinary.

## Who is the report for?

Anyone involved with email marketing will find this study of interest and use. Whether working in a B2C, B2B or not for profit organisation, marketers, designers, developers and technicians will find both inspiration and hands-on guidance in the results and recommendations it provides. All tips, guidance and best practice recommendations are applicable for both B2C and B2B organisations.

The last 12 months saw online sales provide critical support for high street retailers. For many, email marketing is a key, if not the major sales driver - smart email marketing has enormous potential to drive sales both on and offline.

Now the high street is taking tentative steps back into growth, this report asks:

- ✓ Which retailers have risen to the challenge and learnt how to maximise returns from their email campaigns?
- ✓ Which high street brands are embracing the sales and marketing opportunities offered by social networking and smart phones in their email marketing?
- ✓ Who has moved up the benchmark league table, and who has slipped down?
- ✓ And new this year, which retailers are using online sales data to create targeted post-sale campaigns to drive repeat purchase and retention?

'Hitting the Mark' 2011 answers all these questions and more, and offers over 50 best practice guidelines, hints and tips that all email marketers can learn from.

# Methodology

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Based on 12 years' experience as a leading Email Service Provider (ESP), dotMailer devised a set of proven criteria against which campaigns could be judged.

dotMailer then analysed one of the marketing emails sent in February 2011 by 45 of the UK's leading retailers.

The emails received from each retailer were evaluated and assigned a series of scores based on the weighting of each criterion. With 197 points available in total, a leaderboard was created showing the total score for each retailer's campaign.

## Criteria

### Section A. Signup, unsubscribe and legal requirements

1. Signup – it's easy to sign up to a newsletter from the homepage and the form collects relevant data and triggers a confirmation email.
2. Unsubscribing – the email includes an obvious unsubscribe link and the user can unsubscribe clearly and simply
3. Legal requirements – email includes both registered company name, address and company registration number

### Section B. Technical

4. Coding – the HTML code conforms to best practice and is written to maximise renderability
5. Rendering – the email renders correctly and consistently across different email clients' inboxes

### Section C. Email effectiveness

6. The email is sent from a branded domain with a 'friendly' from address
7. Subject line – summarises the key message within the first 20 - 40 characters and entices the reader to open
8. Offers and calls to action – there is a compelling offer with a clear and obvious call to action
9. Email content – a balanced ratio of links to content, content is well structured, focussed, appropriate and relevant
10. Email is personalised by recipient's name, and tailored with dynamic content where relevant data was collected at signup
11. Email is readable and effective when viewed on smartphones

### Section D. Design and branding

12. Effective branding and good email design – the email design is consistent with the brand identity and enhances brand value
13. Landing page design and branding – a dedicated landing page looks and feels like the email campaign and has an obvious call to action

# Methodology

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## Section E. Social media and viral

14. Email includes an effective 'forward to friend' link, renders on forward and contains a 'subscribe to this newsletter' link.
15. Email includes 'share on social network' links and links to relevant blogs and social media pages.

## Section F. Post-sale email marketing

16. Was data collection attempted at checkout? Were confirmation and dispatch emails sent out? Were post sale marketing emails sent, and how targeted were they, based on purchase behaviour?

# Executive summary and results

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The world of email marketing is certainly fast moving. Technologies, techniques and possibilities are constantly changing and developing, with those that take the mental leap to embrace them and integrate them really reaping the benefits.

These are the pioneers this report is designed to highlight. Every year, we raise the bar by adding criteria which reflect the changes pushing our discipline forward. This year is no exception.

This fourth edition of Hitting the Mark sees the biggest change to scoring criteria we have ever made. Having introduced a new section examining social media ties last year, we now also take a much closer look at how retailers change the way they email customers after an order has been placed. We feel there is no excuse for these top retailers not to be including this advanced technique in their sending.

It will always be tempting to compare the results to previous years. But with the changes to the scoring this year, it does become tricky. For example, the average total score this year was 65%, dropping 2 points from 67% in the two previous years. Of the 45 retailers assessed, 29% scored 70% or over, down from 33% in 2010. It's clear that our new scoring criteria have raised the bar and fewer retailers are bringing home points for these more complex, advanced requirements.

## The good and the bad

Interestingly, and perhaps driven by this, the leader board this year is almost incomparable to last.

Previous victor HMV has fallen to 17th place, with only a handful of previous top ten holding steady, including Game in 7th place.

Topping the table this year, we find Boots (78%) in first place, followed by Marks & Spencer in second (77%) and New Look taking third (76%).

At the other end of the scoreboard, the bottom ten brands are all new entrants. Remarkably, two of the brands (Abel & Cole and House of Fraser) didn't deliver any email campaigns to us, even after we re-registered our email addresses and called them to enquire about our subscription. We were unable to score these retailers and they do not appear in the leader board.

## Post-sale email marketing

When we look down the various categories investigated, the average score was just 57% for the new post-sale email marketing section, contrasting with 91% for design and 70% for signups and subscriptions.

The key missed opportunity here was customisation of post-purchase email marketing to include more relevant offers. Only Amazon secured top points here while a mere 27% of retailers encouraged customers to sign-up to the newsletter during checkout.

The average for the social media section (39%) was low, but an improvement on 15% from 2010. Over half (67%) of retailers included links to their social channels in the email but only 27% also had buttons giving recipients the option to easily share content with their peers on social networks.

# Executive summary and results

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## Get personal

Personalisation remains a largely neglected area of email marketing amongst the retailers examined with only ten (21%) making any attempt. We also looked to see whether retailers targeted their email messages based on the information we provided at signup (e.g. sex, interests etc.), but only 13% used this information to improve the messages they sent.

So, once again, the findings of Hitting the Mark reveal that while some of the UK's top retailers are ticking the boxes when it comes to the basics of email marketing activity, they are repeatedly failing to cover off more advanced techniques that could improve return on investment. The rest of this report will go into each of these sections in more detail to provide an in-depth overview and suggested best practice advice.

## Notes

*The examples used throughout this whitepaper refer to the criteria being discussed and do not necessarily constitute best practice in other areas. This report analyses success factors on a general best practice basis and not on a basis individual to each retailer. The study includes a snap shot of websites and landing pages featured in the report, as at 18th February 2011. It is acknowledged that the websites featured may have changed since that date.*

## 1. Signup

Collecting opted-in, permission based contact data is a cornerstone of successful email marketing – whether your target audience is B2C or B2B. Permission based data is highly efficient: up to ten times more effective at generating responses than direct mail, and other traditional marketing activities.

A website's homepage is a key customer touchpoint and a critical channel for collecting customer and prospect contact data for opted-in communications, using a web signup link. The web signup call to action should be highly visible, sell the benefits of registering, easy to complete and collect enough relevant details to enable some initial targeting – without causing visitors to abandon the form.

A visible signup button on every page throughout the website will really help boost opportunities for data collection.

### Average score: 6 out of 10

Some retailers were let down in this section when it came to the ease of signing up. In some cases we found it was difficult to find the signup links – we recommend a link be placed on the homepage. Many retailers seemed to collect opt-in at registration and not separately – potentially missing out on valuable data. Play.com even required users to register with their credit card details before they could sign up to emails!

Some retailers have begun to offer an incentive for subscribers to provide supplementary data, such as a voucher or offer, indicating these retailers appreciate the tangible value of the data given by their customers.

60% of retailers sent a triggered email following sign up - a great opportunity to begin developing their relationship and engagement with their subscribers.

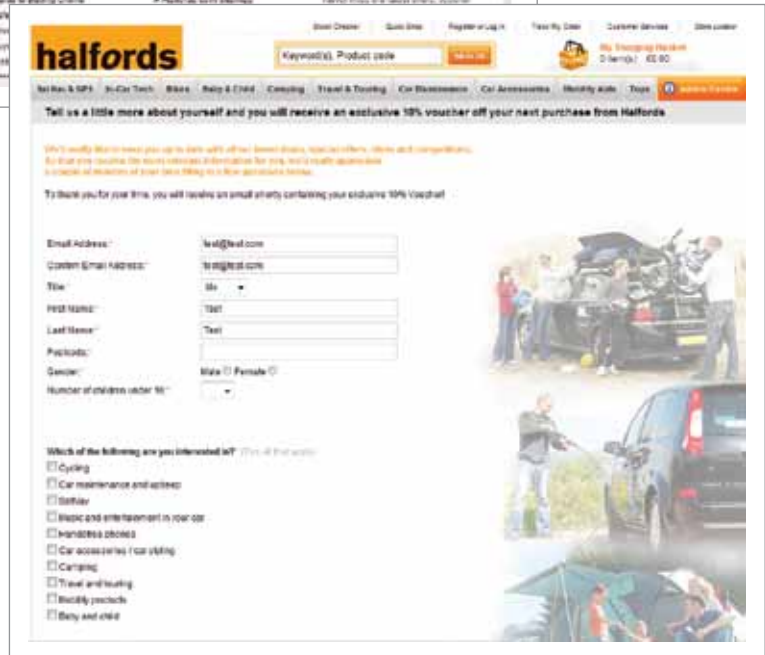
### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Getting the maximum number of visitors to signup to your email communications takes more than just a form. Spell out the benefits of subscribing, e.g. special offers, new releases, subscriber privileges – make signing up to your newsletter a 'no-brainer'
- ✓ Let recipients know how frequently they can expect to receive your communications (and stick to these commitments)
- ✓ Where possible invite visitors to signup to the different campaigns you run, e.g. newsletters, new products, promotions, competitions, categories or ranges
- ✓ Look to capture details such as 'gender' and purchase timescale, to help you target your messages
- ✓ Consider using 'double opt-in' whereby the contact is required to validate their email address by clicking a link in a validation email you have sent to them
- ✓ Send an automatically triggered email to your new signups, thanking them for subscribing and re-affirming the benefits they will enjoy from their subscription

1 Halfords not only enters new subscribers into a free prize draw, but also offers a 10% off voucher to those supplying extra information. They then promptly follow up with a triggered email, delivering on their promise.



address you have entered. We'd like to make sure that we receive an exclusive 10% voucher for you. We appreciate a couple of minutes of your time to tell us more about yourself.



**Top tip**

Incentivise users to provide more information, on gender, interests, etc. with a special offer – this will help you be more targeted and catalyse sales while the buyer is still engaged with your brand.

## 2. Unsubscribing

Including an unsubscribe address in marketing emails is a legal requirement in the UK. But unsubscribing is not just a question of legal compliance. Marketers who make it easy and straightforward for a recipient to unsubscribe are taking an important step to keep their own database clean, cost effective and targeted, and helping to build trust and integrity with all their recipients.

The danger in making the unsubscribe process complex or hard to find is that it may generate complaints to ISPs – which can ultimately cause the sender to be blacklisted.

### Average score 7 out of 10

In the unsubscribe process, almost all those surveyed are performing well in this area, with as few clicks as possible to unsubscribe and unsubscribe links being visible and working.

There were some glaring anomalies with difficult processes, such as Sainsbury's, who didn't provide an unsubscribe link - the reader must visit the website and log-in in order to unsubscribe.

**1** HMV offers the user 5 email topics with frequency levels for each topic. Email 'notifications' can also be toggled on or off when unsubscribing. This is a great way to reduce the number of total unsubscribes – they have empowered their reader, turning what could be a negative into a positive.

**1**

The screenshot shows the 'my hmv' preference center for user 'sophie.test@test.com'. It features a navigation bar with links like 'coming soon', 'exclusive offers', 'pure online guide', 'social media', 'contact deals', 'grove', 'help deals', 'about', 'compare', 'my apps', 'reviews', and 'wider'. The main content area has a heading 'my hmv' and a sub-heading 'sophie.test@test.com'. A message states: 'To provide our customers with the best service, hmv will send you emails with tailored product offers & deals based on your preferences below, your browsing behaviour and the purchases you make with hmv, its branded and affiliated websites and companies'. Below this is a toggle switch for 'I want to receive notifications as shown below' which is currently 'ON'. There are five category sliders, each with a 'more' link and a 'done' link: 'music, MP3s and live music concerts', 'Blu-ray and DVD', 'games and consoles', 'technology', and 'tickets - music, comedy and theatre events'. At the bottom, it says 'You may receive up to a total of 3 marketing emails per week based on your above selections. To view our privacy policy please [click here](#).' and a 'submit' button.

### Top tip

Include unsubscribe links at the top and bottom of your emails – this ensures list quality, establishes trust and means your users are less likely to label your messages 'junk' – improving deliverability rates too.

### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Ensure your unsubscribe process is a single-click action that either unsubscribes the recipient, or takes them to a 'preference centre' page
- ✓ Don't lose the opportunity to ask users why they are unsubscribing, or to retain the subscriber by offering an option to reduce frequency. By identifying the underlying reasons for your unsubscribe rate you can take action to address the issues.

### 3. Legal Requirements

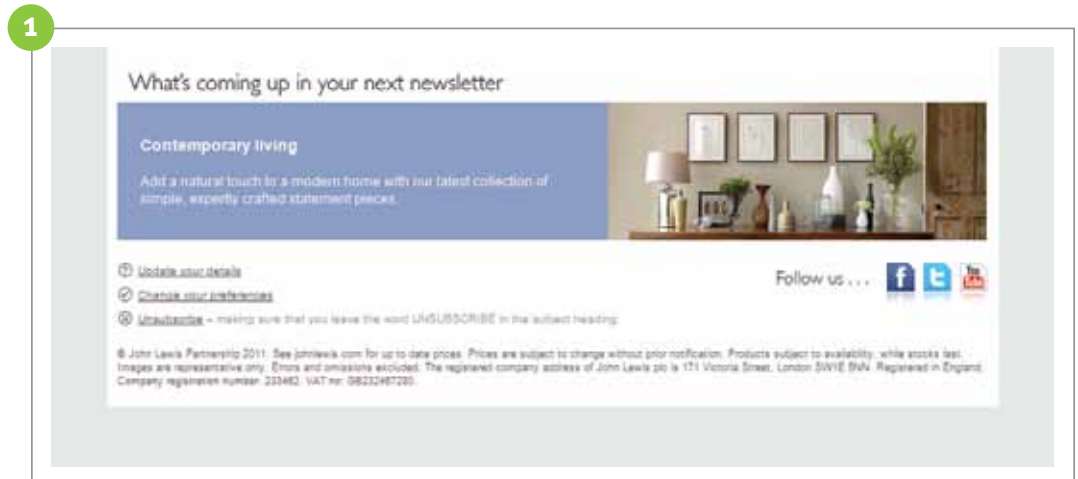
UK company law requires all email marketing communications to include the registered company name, address and registration number.

#### Average score 2 out of 3

24% of the emails we examined this year failed to comply with this basic legal requirement, compared with 16% in last year's report.

It may seem minor, but failure to provide basic company information does not inspire consumer confidence. In an age where phishing scams and identity fraud are rife, online retailers should not risk their legitimate marketing emails being confused with illegal activity.

**1** John Lewis includes all required information without allowing it to clutter the sleek design of their newsletter.



#### Top tip

Why not go over and above the minimum legal requirements, and provide your contact telephone number and even a contact name. This level of information will really help to build recipients' confidence.

What happens ‘behind the scenes’ of an email is just as important as the messaging and visuals. The technical elements of an email are critical to the success of the campaign as they will determine two key factors – deliverability and renderability.

### 4. Coding

In terms of coding, designing an email is different to designing a web page or PDF. Following best practice in the use of coding is important to ensure your email isn’t mistaken for spam, and is displayed in the inbox the way you intended.

#### Average score 15 out of 24

78% of the campaigns researched failed to get top marks in best practice for coding. Designs failed in several areas including the use of table styles, encoding, and cascading style sheets. An email using style sheets to define the fonts, font sizes and text alignment will lose all of that formatting when it’s displayed in certain email clients, e.g. Outlook, causing it to ‘break’.

Use of best practice in coding will ensure consistency of rendering across email clients.

#### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Avoid using cascading style sheets (CSS) and table styles in your code – not all email clients support them and your email may not render correctly
- ✓ If you include URL links within your email and are using a tracking system to track click throughs, be aware that your tracking URLs may be flagged as phishing links
- ✓ Use background colours as an alternative to background images behind text - not all email clients support background images and your email may not render correctly
- ✓ Always make sure your images have Alt text – users relying on screen readers may struggle to engage with your email without them. (NB, Outlook 2007 and above automatically changes Alt text rendering it useless for accessibility)
- ✓ Avoid using image mapping, as it can be prone to problems in some email clients. A better solution is to slice your images up – particularly as single image emails are more likely to be delivered to the junk box
- ✓ Employ a specialised email template designer to ensure these coding issues are not overlooked

1 The Fragrance Store's email breaks in several places when opened in Outlook 2007



## 5. Renderability – how does it look?

As many as 19% of email recipients will not open an email that hasn't rendered properly, as they assume it is spam. So it's critical for email marketers to design and code their templates to ensure they render correctly in all relevant email clients.

### Average score 2 out of 4

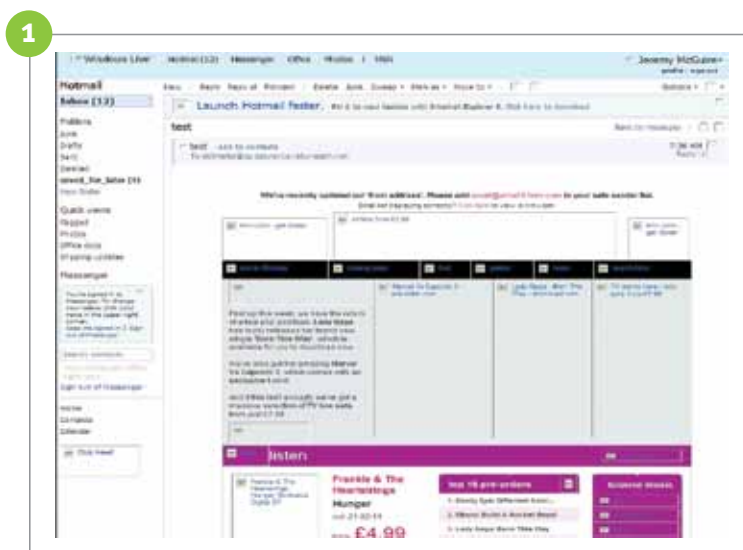
A clear increase in performance here over last year: almost half of the retailers scored full marks for having perfect coding. Half still risk triggering unsubscribes and frustrating recipients by using less-than-perfect coding, however.

As a default, emails are delivered with images turned off by many email clients. So it's also important for marketers to include a balance of text with any imagery used so the template is still legible and meaningful when viewed with the images turned off.

Only 60% of retailers had a suitable balance, ensuring the message 'made sense' without images turned on. That means 40% of our retailers are risking their emails being deleted, unopened or unread because of this issue.

89% of emails included a 'view in browser' link. In 2009, 100% of retailers included a link. Retailers who failed to include 'view in browser' links included: Amazon, Natoora and Very.

1 *HMV's email has plenty of copy to encourage the reader to 'download images', and if they don't – the message still makes sense.*



### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Ensure images are imported into your template at the correct size you want them to render – do not rely on the HTML height and width settings as some email clients may not support these
- ✓ Make sure your HTML height and width settings match the actual dimensions of the image
- ✓ Ensure an equal balance between text and images – image heavy emails may attract high spam scores and are less effective when images are switched off
- ✓ Design your template with preview panes in mind – ensure your brand, key message and/or call to action are visible and above the fold
- ✓ Include a link to a web version of the email to help solve rendering issues for the recipient
- ✓ Use an 'Inbox Preview' tool (provided by many leading Email Service Providers) to test quickly and easily how your email template renders with and without images switched on in all relevant email clients and through different preview panes
- ✓ Focus on the relevant email clients for your database when inbox preview testing, depending on whether the email is B2B or B2C
- ✓ Make sure your designers are experienced and qualified in email design and are aware of the issues of designing for the inbox

### Top tip

Email marketers should set their own default setting to 'images turned off', so they are always reminded of the impact of their message (and can learn from others) when testing.

## 6. Who is it from?

In an ever busier inbox, it is critical that opted-in commercial emails are recognisable as having been sent from a known and trusted sender, in order to maximise their chances of being opened and read. For this reason, it's important that email campaigns are sent using a 'friendly from' name and a fully branded 'sent from' address.

### The 'friendly from'

This is the name that your recipients will see in their inbox as the name of the email sender.

### The 'sent from' address

This is the domain that the email is sent from, for example: customer\_care@e.johnlewis.com

Sending from a branded domain – in this case 'e.johnlewis.com' ensures John Lewis maintains its online branding and its recognition in the inbox.

### Average score: 5 out of 6

Overall, the retailers surveyed scored highly in this category, with only 3 out of the 45 brands not sending from a fully-branded domain. These senders are risking degrading their online brand and damaging their open rates.

**1** GAME sends from newsletter@mailers1.game.co.uk – a long domain that could affect brand recognition and open rates.



## Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Ensure you send from an address that is fully configured for authentication – (SPF, Sender ID, Domain Keys) – confirming to the ISPs that you are who you say you are and are authorised to send. This is essential for getting more of your emails directly into inboxes
- ✓ Ensure your recipients see only your brand in the 'sent from' address, with no mention of your ESP or webmail provider. This can help to improve your open rates.
- ✓ Don't use your normal company domain as your 'sent from' address. It can take just a few spam complaints from an unhappy recipients to get your domain blacklisted, risking your firm's business and transactional email going down
- ✓ Make sure the sending domain you use for your email campaigns points to your website if a user types it into their browser
- ✓ Ensure your email service provider allows you to include tracking links in your email that match your 'sent from' domain, for consistency of online branding

### Top tip

Long email addresses look suspect to the user. Refrain from using brand names they won't recognise (like your ESP), and numbers or acronyms.

## 7. Subject line effectiveness

The subject line of an email is like the headline of a newspaper's front page – and headlines sell papers. A study by Jupiter Research showed that 35% of recipients will open an email specifically because of the content of the subject line.

Effective email subject lines summarise within the first 20 - 40 characters, and in clear and single-minded terms the key message or benefit contained in the email, and compel the recipient to open and read more. Getting this right can have significant impact on open rates.

### Average score: 12 out of 16

Retailers in our survey performed well in this section, scoring highly against our criteria of sending subject lines that were clear, concise, focussed, single-minded and compelling.

Senders that fell down in this area missed the opportunity of getting their key message within the first 40 characters of their subject line or by diluting the key message with other 'waffle'.

**1** Dorothy Perkins highlights an offer with this clever subject line. Although lengthy, the key offer is in the first few characters.

**1**

Inbox Get it for the weekend with free next day delivery! Shop your perfect Valentine's date ... -

### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Be clear about the key offer, benefit or proposition in your email content and communicate that and only that in your subject line
- ✓ There are no hard and fast rules that your subject lines should be short or should be long - but make sure they deliver the key message or proposition within the first 20 - 40 characters, and aren't more than 60 - 70 characters in total.
- ✓ Avoid 'mysterious and oblique' subjects. Specific, relevant subject lines are more likely to generate not only opens, but click throughs and conversions too
- ✓ Tell - don't sell. If you are quoting an offer then keep the wording factual and steer clear of those 'Power Adjectives'. If the offer is '20% off' then state it, but avoid the 'amazing 20% off' in your subject line
- ✓ Use split testing to identify the most effective subject lines for a campaign, and be sure to define the best metric for measuring success.

### Top tip

Write your subject line AFTER you've written your message. Many marketers do this the wrong way around. This is not a chicken and egg story - your content should come first.

## 8. Offers and calls to action

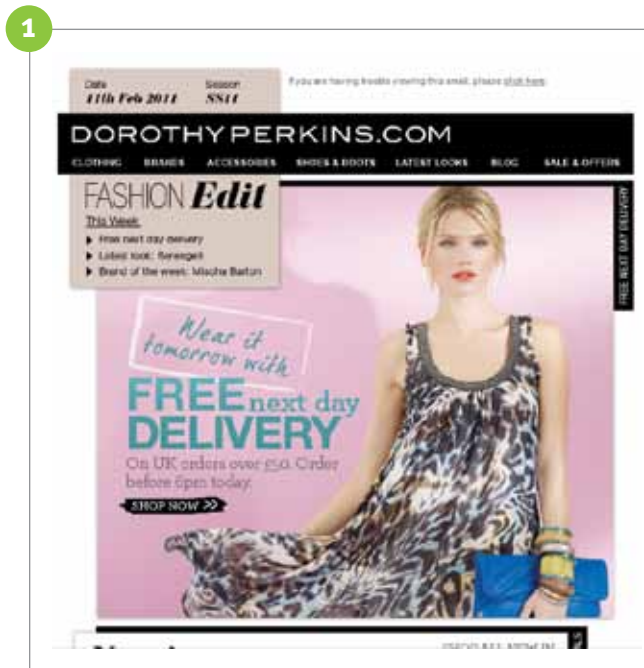
The two driving factors of any direct marketing campaign are the ‘offer’ and the ‘call to action’ – and email is no exception. A call to action is the part of the message that encourages the recipient to take the next step, i.e. click through to a landing page, call your sales team, or download a voucher. Email campaigns with compelling offers and clear, obvious calls to action are those that will deliver ROI.

### Average score 5 out of 7

Given the importance of including a clear and compelling call to action it was a surprise to see 20% of the retailers surveyed still scoring less than half marks in this section.

In some cases it simply wasn’t clear to the recipients what they were supposed to do next. There was a danger that many of the calls to action were confusing – bearing no relevance to the key message in the subject line and content, or hidden well ‘below the fold’ or, in some cases completely absent.

**1** Dorothy Perkins delivers a clear and compelling offer: ‘wear it tomorrow’, and follows up a clear ‘shop now’ call to action.



### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Offers needn’t be discounts or sales promotions, but time-limited offers will help to create a sense of urgency and drive your recipients to take action
- ✓ Ensure your brand name and the call to action are obvious and clear to see – both above and below the fold
- ✓ Relate your call to action directly to your main offer or proposition, and to your subject line

### Top tip

The key to the success of your email at this stage is to get your recipients to actually do something – to take action, there and then while you still have their attention. Don’t leave them in any doubt as to:

- Who it’s from
- What’s in it for them
- What to do next

## 9. Email content

The structure, layout and content of an effective email campaign needs to be in line with the expectations and actions of the reader. If the recipient expects a piece of text or an image to be a clickable link, then it should be. If the eye expects to track the page in a certain way then the structure should follow that. If the subject line or proposition is focussed then the content, tone and language should reflect it.

### Average score 6 out of 9

38% of retailers scored 7 or more marks in this section. Conversely, other retailers were let down by leading with an offer in their subject line that was then buried or lost in the structure of the content.

The lead offer or proposition in the subject line should be immediately clear in the email content, as the opening header or paragraph. Lead offers below the fold will be read by fewer recipients, who can be quickly confused as to the key message they need to digest, so clarity is key.

**1** PC World had a 'tips' section which added value to the newsletter. If a user doesn't need or want to buy any products, providing valuable, relevant content can be the difference between an unsubscribing recipient and an engaged reader.



### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Include hyperlinks in key hot-spot areas of the page, both above and below the fold and in places where a reader might logically expect to click through or undertake an action
- ✓ Strike a balance between links and content – too many links may confuse the recipient
- ✓ Include a relevant strapline to reinforce your campaign or brand proposition
- ✓ Structure your content logically and clearly so your recipients know where to read next and what action to take
- ✓ Keep the single-minded offer or proposition consistent - from the subject line to the content through to the call to action
- ✓ Consider the tone, language and length of the copy in the context of the target audience – be sure you know who you are writing the email to and what makes them tick

### Top tip

Eye tracking analysis can provide an enlightening picture of how your recipients read and interact with your emails. This enables you to identify which content is compelling and structure the layout and content for maximum response.

10. Personalisation

Personalised email communications help to instantly engage recipients. Simply starting your email “Dear Bob” as opposed to “Dear customer” can dramatically improve click-through rates and boost ROI, and helps to build a 1-2-1 relationship between the recipient and the brand.

Marketers who collect more information about their email recipients, such as their location, their gender or their product preferences and interests can go on to personalise the content of their email campaigns further, including highly targeted and relevant offers that will boost campaign ROI and reduce the unsubscribe rate.

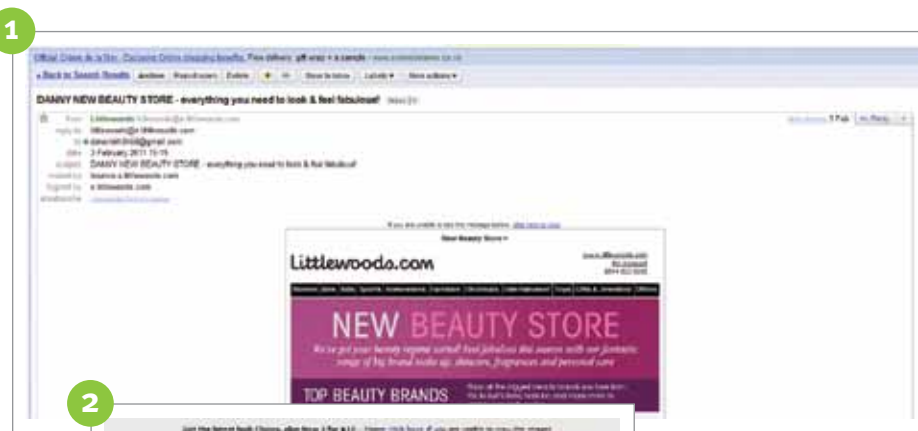
Average score 1 out of 10

Some astonishingly bad performances were evident in this section of the research. Just 21% of the retailers we surveyed included any personalisation at all in their emails! These numbers are worse than those in last year’s report, and show that retailers are simply not taking on the importance of personalising and targeting their content to the individual.

A good ESP should make personalising your emails extremely easy to do. In fact, readers are up to ten times more likely to respond to personalised direct marketing than non-personalised messages.\*

We advise including personalisation above the fold on every message sent. If your data isn’t clean enough for this, then make a business case for investing in data cleaning.

1 Littlewoods has used personalisation within their subject line. Unfortunately they have not considered the impact of putting the message in capital letters or failing to use grammar.



2 Republic sent varying content and subject lines to our male and female researchers, and included personalisation within the first two lines of copy.



\*Source: GI Solutions Group, 2009

### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Collect at least the first name of your recipient when they signup to your newsletter, so you have the information you need to personalise the salutation
- ✓ If your database isn't fully populated with the contact names you need for your campaign then ensure you set a default, e.g. 'Dear subscriber'. Broken personalisation is worse than none at all
- ✓ Make sure your data is checked for quality. Recipients may enter their initials in the first name field of your signup form, which will again lead to broken personalisation
- ✓ Put a strategy in place for collecting further customer data on an ongoing basis using surveys and competitions, for example. Profiling your customers will enable you to go beyond basic personalisation and begin using dynamic content to tailor the messages and offers you deliver
- ✓ If you collect data for further content personalisation, then don't forget to use it!



#### Top tip

Personalising your email's subject line might seem like a good idea; but this should be tested for effectiveness. Even if the ISPs' spam filters allow your email into the inbox, recipients' perceptions of personalised subject lines mean they are likely to assume it is spam.

### 11. Mobile marketing

The proliferation of smart phones in the UK over the last 18 months means your recipients are able to check their emails on the go, as well as at home or at their desk. Marketers need to understand how the use of smart phones has penetrated their own target market and contact database.

The first step is to find out what percentage of your emails are being delivered to and/or opened on mobiles. Once you know the relative importance of mobiles to your delivery numbers you can decide how much attention to focus on optimising your templates for mobiles.

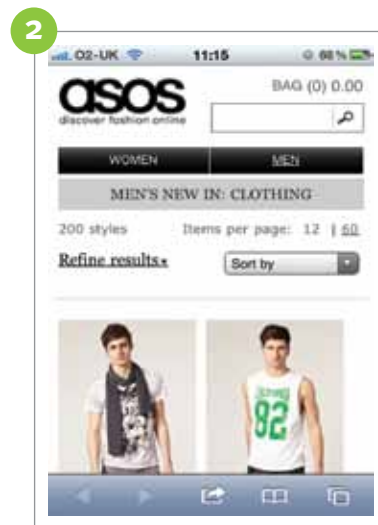
#### Average score 12 out of 14

Perhaps unsurprisingly, none of the retailers achieved top marks in this section. Although all the emails we studied did render effectively on both iPhones and Blackberries, we found little evidence of the templates and content having been optimised for recipients reading the emails on a small, mobile screen.

Over 90% of the retailers' emails rendered effectively on a selection of mobile devices, however, only 3 of the emails included a 'view in mobile browser' link – suggesting the improvement may be attributed to mobile email clients becoming more sophisticated, together with retailers' work on optimising emails for mobile. Marketers who move early to cater for the growing needs of smart phone users are sure to enjoy early mover advantages. Some retailers are beginning to link mobile-optimised emails to mobile versions of their ecommerce site.

1 Asda's email is breaking on an iPhone screen. This is in danger of damaging their brand.

2 ASOS hadn't sent a mobile version of their email, but they do have an excellent mobile optimised site – they sent our male recipient to the Men's homepage, and our female to the Women's homepage.



#### Top tip

Ask your ESP if they can provide email client analysis and reporting to show what percentage of your emails are being delivered to and/or opened on mobiles. Alternatively, you can ask your contacts themselves through surveys, links in your email or in your preference centre.

#### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Include your brand name in the subject line to encourage engagement with mobile users
- ✓ Send a multi-part email so your campaign will display as text if the mobile is unable to render HTML
- ✓ Using an inbox/rendering preview tool to see how your email will look in different mobile platforms and email clients
- ✓ Provide a 'view in browser' link in the email and consider offering an additional 'view on a mobile' link to display a webpage specifically optimised for mobiles
- ✓ Keep the message short; make the calls to action clear, prominent and above the fold; and keep the page weight light (below 20Kb)

## 12. Effective branding and good email design

Email marketing should not be seen as a series of ‘shots’ to generate sales, but as an ongoing relationship and brand building tool as well as a direct response channel.

Establishing and maintaining the online brand – including its design values – is a vital element of successful email marketing. A user’s experience of a brand should be consistent offline, in marketing emails and on the website. This allows the brand to build trust, confidence and engagement with the target audience.

### Average score 12 out of 13

Consistently good scores in this section show that retailers are increasingly aware of the importance of their online brand experience. All but one of the retailers scored top marks for clear branding and logo placement, but almost half had branding inconsistent with their website brand identity. This contributes to a less than smooth experience for recipients, and can even suggest a fraudulent sender identity.

Problems also arose when designs were too fussy. Often, navigation on emails didn’t match that on the website, and in the case of Superdrug, the logo was pixelated and appeared to have been ‘cut out’ from another source.

**1** George at Asda had an entirely different identity on their email to the linked webpage. The George logo was barely featured on the landing page. The email appears to come from George.com, which redirects to the ASDA direct site with no explanation.

**2** In addition, the email focussed on trends and designers, and seems to separate itself from the ASDA brand, whereas the landing page focuses on product categories, and has bold ASDA branding.

The image shows two screenshots side-by-side. The top screenshot is an email from George, featuring a red and white design with the 'George.' logo and a 'HALF PRICE SALE' banner. The bottom screenshot is the ASDA direct website landing page, featuring a green and white design with the 'ASDA direct' logo and various product categories like 'OUTDOOR LIVING' and 'Baby items of baby'.

### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Use your brand mark or logo consistently in all email, website and offline materials. Be consistent about where the logo is positioned on both your web pages and your email templates
- ✓ Where possible, keep fonts, colours, graphics, images, navigation and layouts consistent on your email campaigns, your website and your printed collateral
- ✓ Make sure your email campaign design presents any sales promotions or discounts in a way that compliments your brand values and identity



#### Top tip

Email is seen as a cost effective form of direct marketing, but it's worth investing in a professionally designed email template to echo web and offline branding. Apply the same level of design values to your emails as you do to your website.

### 13. Landing page design and branding

Landing pages can have a tremendous impact on the success rate of an email marketing campaign. A website homepage is often designed to be all things to all people, so it won't convert click-throughs into actions in the way that a dedicated landing page can.

The challenge for marketers is to grab and focus a visitor's attention in a matter of seconds or risk missing the opportunity. Because the offer and the call to action that the email initiated has to be immediately obvious, the homepage can be a confusing place to land.

What's more, getting content changed and updated on homepages can be a slow and bureaucratic process.

Avoid these issues by creating a landing page that is unique to the email campaign, so you can tweak offers and copy as your emails evolve and the campaign progresses.

#### Average score 14 out of 17

Scores in this section were either perfect – the organisation has a great approach to landing page design and most probably uses a designer to create them, or very poor – indicating a lack of unison between work done by website managers and email marketing managers.

Improving significantly from last year, it seems retailers are placing more importance on the recipient's journey from email to landing page. In previous years retailers scored less than half marks because our researchers found themselves lost on the site, or struggled to find the relevant products or offers when clicking through from the email. Some retailers are still making that mistake, which is frustrating for the user and a negative reflection on the brand.

Look at your landing page's bounce rate after an email campaign. Are you missing out on conversions?

**1** John Lewis groups products in trends as well as type: this allows them to create corresponding email campaigns that already have landing pages that take you not only to products of interest, but also show alternative products in a similar style.



### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ The landing page should be all about follow-through. If you have a special promotion, proposition or 'hook' in your email, this should form the basis of the headline on your landing page
- ✓ Don't drown the landing page with text and information – focus the visitor's attention on the core message, links and calls to action
- ✓ Ensure the look and feel of the email campaign is consistent with that of the landing page and that both are in keeping with the brand and the main website



#### Top tip

Landing pages should feel consistent with the corresponding email - the products and offer promoted should always feature prominently to reduce your page bounce rate.

### 14. Forwarding to a friend

With every email you send you have the opportunity to expand your message reach and your subscriber base by encouraging your recipients to pass the message on to friends and colleagues using a 'forward to friend' link or button.

Retailers who are enabling these 'friends' to sign up to their email communications are effectively using viral to help build an opted-in, highly engaged and responsive marketing database, and drive more business, both online and on the high street.

#### Average score 7 out of 13

Retailers were good at encouraging users to forward messages, but most failed to include 'signup to newsletter' links, missing out on the opportunity to capture more data.

**1** Comet provide a clear forward to a friend link with a custom landing page.



### 15. Social media marketing

The last 12 months have seen social media play an increasingly significant role in the marketing mix.

Today the popularity and influence of social media on web shoppers and their purchase decisions continues to soar. The stats speak for themselves:

- ✓ 25% of all time spent on the internet is now spent on social media sites
- ✓ Facebook has more than 350m active users with the average user creating 90 pieces of content a month
- ✓ LinkedIn now has over 100m users worldwide
- ✓ 77% of all active internet users regularly read blogs
- ✓ 24 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute
- ✓ Around one in every 300 web visits is to Twitter, whose user base is growing 1,000% every year.

#### Top tip

Give your recipients a reason to share. Ask yourself, why would someone want to share your email? Does your message add value to the recipient and their friends or colleagues?

Will posting your email give them kudos? Or do you have a competition or promotion for people to enter? If there's no value to share, then you're starting out on a weak footing.

Retailers who are using key social media networks including blogging sites, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have the opportunity to engage with their audience, build their brand and drive web traffic through a whole new channel that is led by the customer and can promote powerful advocacy.

By integrating these social media channels with their email marketing, the potential becomes even greater. Email enables marketers to raise the visibility of their social media presence and content, drive traffic to their social media and blog pages, and encourage recipients to share marketing messages on their own social media sites.

### Average score 6 out of 15

Whilst almost all of our retailers are present on social media sites such as Facebook, almost 40% failed to include a 'share on social networks' link. These should not be overlooked – the power of social recommendations is great enough that it's worth persisting with this. It's a very simple way to gain further exposure – often to a highly targeted group.

Surprisingly, only 24% of our retailers included a link to Twitter. This was lower than our researchers' expectations for this B2C group. Could it be that a 10% UK population penetration isn't enough to be considered relevant?

Some retailers had used Flickr and YouTube links – evidence of carefully thought-out social strategy. As expected, the majority who did include a share link, included Facebook.

It is impossible to ignore the ubiquitousness of social channels – these retailers are missing a rare opportunity to engage with more users. Some retailers had carefully selected channels and used them well. Debenhams, for example also highlighted their Flickr page, their iPhone app and text alerts.

Avon, Play.com, and Littlewoods all failed to include any social media links at all, whereas Look Fantastic included a competition incentivising Facebook Likes. It clearly works for them; they have almost triple the number of Likes as their largest competitor.

**1** Argos's email invited users to 'check in' to one of their stores using Facebook Places in return for a charity donation. Innovation, incentivisation, social sharing and CSR rolled into one – top marks for this.



### Top tip

Combine an incentive, great design, accessibility and compelling content for the ultimate in 'shareability'. Make your customers proud to talk about you.

More retailers are blogging than in previous years – rising from 11% in 2010 to 38% this year, but that leaves almost two thirds of the UK's largest retailers not mentioning their blogs through email.

Blogs are a great way for businesses to show their human side, and to give a voice to their brand and to their customers. Relevant blog content is highly valued from an SEO perspective, helping with search engine visibility. All the retailers in our survey should be using their email campaigns to drive traffic and readership to their blog.

## 16. Post-sale email marketing

Persuading a website user to visit your site and make a purchase isn't the end of the email marketing cycle – it should be just the beginning.

Once the purchase is made, it's time to start using email marketing to reassure the customer, build loyalty and the feel-good factor, and drive repeat purchases, through cross-sells, up-sells and referrals.

We've shown how email marketing can be used as a highly effective tool for harnessing social sharing to engage with and acquire new contacts and customers and drive sales.

But how many of the retailers we studied took this engagement further, following a specific online purchase our researchers made?

How many used triggered emails following a purchase to reassure us and build customer loyalty?

How many kept us informed on the progress of our online order, through the use of timely emails?

And critically – how many sent a targeted, follow up email marketing message within 4 weeks of our online purchase, based on the item we purchased? In fact – how many even emailed us at all?

### Average Score 15 out of 26

Ouch. This is where our high street retailers are really missing tricks.

15 of the retailers we purchased from didn't invite us to sign up to their emails anywhere in the purchase or checkout process. We were buying from them – we were hot prospects and ripe for them to sign up. A missed opportunity!

Retailers fared better when it came to sending order and despatch confirmations, scoring on average 6 out of 8 in this section. However, we were amazed to receive neither an order or despatch confirmation from 3 of the retailers we purchased from.

When it came to sending targeted email marketing messages based on what we had purchased, the results were very, very poor. We allowed points for retailers who sent emails asking us how we had found the purchase experience and inviting product/service reviews and feedback, as these types of emails can be useful in a loyalty and retention strategy.

BUT – only 1 of the 45 retailers we purchased from online, delivered an up sell/cross-sell email to us with content that was targeted based on the specific purchase we had made. That retailer was Amazon.

**1** Amazon uses data from previous sales to offer 'recommendations'. They are really taking advantage of the opportunity to upsell – and being upfront about why they think you might be interested in the products.



### Best practice guidelines

- ✓ Invite website users to sign up to your email marketing/e-newsletters while they are in the checkout process. Users are engaged with your site and your products at this point and likely to want to subscribe to future offers.
- ✓ Use the checkout process to incentive customers to sign up to your email marketing. Offer them loyalty points, discounts off future purchases or exclusive special offers or previews when they subscribe.
- ✓ Send a triggered order confirmation email immediately after an online purchase. This is expected behaviour and failure to do so may result in order cancellations.
- ✓ Send a triggered 'item despatched' email. Keeping customers informed on the status of their order helps to build trust, loyalty, recommendation and repeat purchase.
- ✓ Send targeted post-sale email marketing campaigns, based on the items a recipient ordered. Once you know what a customer has ordered, you have the chance to begin targeting offers that will help drive up-sell, cross-sell and repeat purchases. Don't waste this chance.
- ✓ Use customer surveys as part of your post sale messages to collect valuable data on the customer experience and help build loyalty and trust.



#### Top tip

Your ESP should enable you to import transactional data into your email address books so you can segment post-purchase campaigns based on purchase activity and send different content to different groups of purchasers, e.g. ,male v female, clothing v household goods. Look for an ESP that can also enable you to set up dynamic content based on your customers' transactional data, and automatically target content and offers following purchases.

# Conclusion

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Because online retail is big, big business (worth an estimated £56 billion in the UK in 2010 alone), we look to the big high street online brands as a benchmark for effective email marketing. Exploiting every opportunity that best practice email offers can mean a difference in revenue terms of millions of pounds for these businesses.

But we are still seeing 'schoolboy errors' being made in many of the email campaigns sent out by these big brand names: Inconsistent branding, poor template coding, and a lack of personalisation.

Cracking these basic techniques will not only impact on every email marketer's ROI; it will free marketers up to begin to explore, test and implement more advanced techniques that can reap even greater benefits.

We hoped by now to see the big brands embracing and mastering these techniques: dynamic content, triggered emails, post-sale retention and repeat purchase marketing. But we found the opposite – too few retailers are doing too little in the way of effective pre and post-sale targeting.

Whether this is because marketing data is simply not being collected, or whether it's because the data that these business hold won't support targeted email marketing, the outcome is the same. Opportunities to drive growth, revenue and loyalty are being wasted.

We suggest retailers and all email marketers ask themselves:

- How effective is their email personalisation?
- Are they gathering data and using it effectively to target their messages?
- Are they exploiting the social sharing potential of their email messages?
- Are their messages relevant and compelling enough to share on social networks?

Following the best practices guidelines and examples laid out in this report, and employing a little innovative thinking will help all email marketers to really up their email performance and reap the rewards.

# Appendix 1 Full results

Selection number*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Totals
<b>Maximum Possible Score</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>197</b>
Boots	8	8	3	14	4	6	16	5	6	5	12	12	10	12	15	18	154
M&S	10	9	3	8	4	6	16	4	4	5	14	13	17	8	13	18	152
New Look	8	8	3	16	0	5	14	7	9	7	12	13	14	6	6	21	149
ASOS	7	9	3	16	2	3	16	6	6	5	12	11	14	6	13	18	147
Fragrance Direct	2	10	1	10	0	6	14	5	5	0	12	13	17	10	15	24	144
Dorothy Perkins	10	9	3	18	0	6	15	7	7	0	12	12	4	10	6	24	143
Game	7	8	3	22	4	6	15	4	4	0	12	13	17	10	0	18	143
Waitrose/Ocado	0	7	3	22	4	5	14	4	5	1	12	13	17	6	6	24	143
Boots Medical	8	5	3	14	4	2	16	7	9	5	12	13	16	12	15	0	141
Argos	9	8	3	18	2	6	12	7	7	0	11	12	16	10	4	14	139
PC World	6	10	3	24	2	6	16	7	9	0	12	13	14	3	0	14	139
Republic	7	9	0	14	0	6	8	2	8	10	12	13	14	7	11	18	139
Debenhams	7	8	3	18	4	6	8	7	9	0	12	13	17	10	2	14	138
Bestbuy.co.uk	8	7	3	14	4	6	16	7	5	0	10	13	17	6	4	15	135
Tesco	5	5	3	20	2	6	14	7	7	0	12	13	17	6	0	18	135
Mankind	7	9	1	12	0	6	14	6	9	2	12	11	14	10	0	21	134
CDWow	6	9	0	16	2	6	14	4	6	5	12	11	14	8	9	11	133
Asda	8	8	3	14	4	6	11	7	7	0	10	12	16	6	0	20	132
Dixons	6	10	3	24	4	6	4	5	7	0	12	13	14	3	6	14	131
Fortnum & Mason	8	9	3	20	4	6	14	6	4	0	14	13	13	6	0	10	130
John Lewis	7	5	3	14	4	6	10	0	4	0	12	13	17	10	4	21	130
Sainsburys	6	0	3	12	0	5	8	5	6	0	12	13	14	10	13	21	128
eBuyer	4	6	1	10	0	4	12	7	9	0	12	12	16	6	10	18	127
Natoora	8	9	1	18	0	2	14	4	4	0	10	6	17	10	6	18	127
Very	7	6	3	4	0	5	16	7	9	0	10	13	17	6	10	14	127
Look Fantastic	4	8	3	14	0	6	10	2	7	0	12	10	17	10	11	11	125
River Island	9	7	3	16	0	5	12	0	6	5	11	10	13	6	13	8	124
Superdrug	4	9	3	20	4	5	14	4	4	0	12	10	8	3	6	18	124
HMV	7	8	3	20	4	6	8	2	4	0	12	13	14	3	4	15	123
Blockbuster	8	5	3	14	0	6	14	7	7	0	10	9	13	6	6	14	122
Topshop	5	6	3	18	0	6	12	0	4	0	12	11	14	10	6	15	122
Comet	5	8	3	16	4	6	6	6	6	0	10	12	13	10	4	11	120
Amazon	1	6	3	14	4	6	8	5	4	5	10	13	17	3	0	20	119
Richer Sounds	2	10	0	12	0	6	10	4	4	0	12	13	11	7	9	18	118
Avon	3	6	3	14	4	4	4	4	4	0	14	13	16	10	4	14	117
Currys	6	10	3	20	4	6	16	7	5	0	12	10	0	3	0	14	116
Next	10	8	3	10	0	5	11	0	4	0	12	12	13	6	4	18	116
H&M	8	8	0	10	4	6	14	2	4	5	10	12	10	6	4	11	114
Halfords	10	8	0	18	2	6	14	5	8	2	12	12	11	6	0	0	114
Maplin	10	6	3	22	4	3	4	4	4	0	12	13	6	10	4	8	113
Play.com	0	7	0	8	0	5	16	7	9	0	12	12	16	6	4	11	113
Asda - George Clothing	10	8	0	18	4	5	15	4	5	0	12	4	12	6	7	0	110
Tesco Direct	5	3	3	18	2	5	14	4	4	0	10	13	14	6	0	8	109
The Fragrance Shop	2	6	2	8	0	1	14	7	4	0	12	13	17	3	6	14	109
Littlewoods	10	5	3	0	0	6	4	0	2	1	10	11	14	6	0	11	83

\* See page 4 for criteria descriptions

# Appendix 2 Email marketing best practice checklist

## Account management

- Sign up – make it as easy as possible
- Collect contact details for personalisation on sign up
- Collect data for segmentation on sign up

## Legal requirements

- Unsubscribing – it is clear, simple and straightforward for the user to unsubscribe
- The email includes company registration number, name and address

## Personalisation

- Salutation is personalised to the recipient's name

## Design – technical

- Code conforms to best practice
- Code does not use cascading style sheets
- Images include alt text
- Beware link tracking URLs being flagged as phishing links

## Renderability

- Renders correctly across most popular email clients
- Includes a link to a web version of the email
- Balance of web text to images – an equal balance and informative web text is available when images are turned off
- Renders effectively on smartphones

## 'Sent from' address

- Email is sent using a 'friendly from' address and using a branded domain

## Design (visual) and content

- Subject line - enticing and informative but less than 70 characters long
- Spam proof - subject line and content free from spam words
- Content contains compelling, easy to find offer
- A compelling call to action is clearly conveyed
- Content is appropriate, focused and well structured
- Balance of links to content – number of links appropriate to amount of content

## Effective branding and landing pages

- Use of logo and brand identity is consistent with that of the website
- The email enhances the brand values
- The email links to a dedicated, campaign specific landing page with a consistent look and feel
- There is a compelling and obvious call to action on the landing page

## Social media marketing

- Includes a 'forward to a friend' link and sign up link
- Includes 'share on social network' links
- Includes links to your social media pages

## Post-sale email marketing

- Checkout captures email address and opt-in
- Offers targeted where the data is available

# About dotMailer

dotMailer is part of the dotDigital Group plc – one of the UK's leading full-service digital marketing agencies.

One of the top three email service providers in the UK, dotMailer is THE intuitive, user-friendly but extremely powerful email marketing platform designed specifically to empower marketers to:

- ✓ Increase email deliverability rates
- ✓ Increase open and click-through rates
- ✓ Boost online revenue generation
- ✓ Maximise e-marketing ROI

Start your dotMailer Freemium account and send up to 500 emails a month free of charge with no sign up fee.

Go to [www.dotMailer.co.uk](http://www.dotMailer.co.uk) or call 0845 337 9170.

Speak to us if you'd like to have your email campaigns run through our 'Hitting the Mark' assessment process and receive a detailed report provided on our findings.

## dotDigital's tool kit for marketers includes:

- Email marketing
- Websites
- CMS
- E-commerce
- SEO
- Digital strategy
- Survey tools
- White label solutions

To find out more about the dotMailer email marketing packages we offer, or any of the digital marketing services provided by the dotDigital Group, visit our website at [www.dotmailer.com](http://www.dotmailer.com)

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