Designing for the Mobile Inbox

When the majority of emails are viewed on mobile devices, marketers must accommodate mobile devices and behaviors.

The reality is that subscribers will likely view your messages on a wide variety of devices – desktop computers, laptops, smart phones, tablets, and even watches.

Repeat after me: *my email will not look the same on every device, and that’s OK.*

Today, content from all digital channels has to be easy to consume on any device. The mobile email experience is just one step on the path to conversion – don’t let email create a barrier in getting to the next step.

First, focus on the open

The mobile experience is highly interactive – readers decide to continue or abandon at each viewing stage, so we must entice them throughout the process. Guide your subscriber past the barrier of the inbox – time spent designing your email is useless if no one opens to see it.

![Image of email interface](image)

- **From Name**
  - Ensure it’s recognizable, trustworthy
  - Keep it under 25 characters

- **Subject Line**
  - Biggest influence on open rates
  - Keep impactful words within the first 35 characters

- **Preheader**
  - Use at least 85 characters
  - Use this space to work with & expand on your subject line, not repeat it
Designing for Small Screens

1. Plan your Content

The rise of the small screen has forced us to re-think content strategy. You can no longer expect an email with a website worth of content in it to perform well – this strategy is unusable and illegible on small screens.

Your message, when opened on a mobile device, could be competing with many distractions: a small data plan, a business meeting, spotty Wi-Fi connections, or a long line at the grocery store. Tailor your messages accordingly:

- Keep copy simple and direct.
- Be clear about what you want to the reader to do.
- Be brutal with your editing; find a better and shorter way to say it.
- Put most important content first – a small, vertical screen forces the viewer to read top to bottom.

2. Design for Your Unique Audience

Know your audience—if your brand's mobile audience is at or above 10%, it's time to start optimizing for mobile. Weigh the effort required against your content and production timeline, then choose an approach that makes sense for your team.

For a more advanced approach, use Litmus Analytics or ReturnPath to find a detailed report of the top email clients your consumers are using to open your emails. An audience of iPad users will warrant a different approach than an audience of Android users.
3. Design for Touch

The finger is the new mouse. Accommodate the finger’s size in your approach:

- Make buttons and links large enough to tap with a finger, at least 44px
- Space out links so your subscriber doesn’t accidentally tap the wrong link
- Avoid click-centric language like ‘click here’ - we’re tapping
- Design for scrolling: it’s OK for your email to be several screens deep – a touch interface is easier and more fun to use than a scroll bar.

4. Design for Legibility

Consider these factors to ensure your message is legible:

**Contrast:** Users alter brightness settings often on mobile devices to save battery life, so carefully consider your color choices to ensure the text and images stand out properly against the background. Avoid light, small text on a dark background.

**Text size:** We recommend using text of at least 13px for body copy. In order to avoid having to zoom in, try starting at 15-16px. Save a jpg or take a screenshot of your email, and open it on your mobile device to see its legibility. Be generous with margins and whitespace to ensure text is readable.

**Imagery:** Bold, beautiful imagery is slowly taking over our inboxes, as we take cues from Pinterest and social hubs like Facebook and Twitter. Images help tell your brand’s story, so consider taking the time to choose artful shots that complement your message.

**Layout:** A one-column layout works best on small screens. If you are using the responsive approach, use a multi-column layout and stack content into one column when viewed on small screens.
A Phased Approach to the Mobile Inbox

It’s safe to assume that technology, devices, and user behavior will continue to evolve over time, but two proven approaches have persisted over the last few years: Mobile aware and mobile responsive.

1. Mobile Aware: Simple Design Improvements

This approach uses design-only tactics, making simple improvements to enhance both the desktop and mobile experience. The goal is to create a single, mobile-friendly layout that works in all viewing environments.

- Use big pictures, headlines, and buttons.
- Reduce email width to approximately 475-550px
- Single column layout & hero - no sidebars
- Navigation at the bottom
- Key info & CTA on the left or middle
- Increased text sizes, 14pt +
- Large buttons for easy tapping
- Separate links to avoid accidental taps
- Add whitespace and contrast for legibility
- Avoid saying click here – we are tapping!

A mobile-aware email from Skillshare – one static layout that works well on both iPhone and iPad.
2. Responsive Design: A Customized Experience

Responsive design is a set of techniques used to adjust a message's layout to be more legible on a small screen. Specifically, CSS3 media queries are added to the website or email to detect screen size, then overwrite styles to adjust image size, width and other elements, for a more usable experience. Percent-based fluid width are used to let text and images scale to the size of the device instead of a hard set width.

With responsive design, the key is to avoid creating multiple versions of your email.

Three common techniques for responsive design are:

1. **Shrinking** – shrink the container of the email – live text could increase in size and wrap more tightly, and images will scale down.

2. **Column drop** – when two columns stack into a single column on a small screen

3. **Hide/show** – content can be hidden on small screens, typically used to hide top navigation, and show a more robust, single-column navigation in the footer of the email.

A common approach to mobile-optimized email is to phase in responsive elements, such as a header and footer, and keep the body content mobile aware. This can be a very successful way to get early gains and buy-in on the approach with little effort.

Please contact your Account Executive or khuffman@salesforce.com to learn more about how Salesforce Creative Services can partner with you to create best in class emails and landing pages.