

TRUTH

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Length and your call  
to action

When talking with clients and prospects, I get asked many of the same questions about what works best for email marketing. What works well for others may not work for you. However, one general rule can be applied for most email marketing campaigns: Keep your emails concise and to the point.

With plenty of competition in the inbox, on the web, and elsewhere, it is wise to assume you have a limited opportunity to catch and keep a recipient's attention.

**Keep your emails concise and to the point.**

Clients often ask me to weigh in on whether I think their emails are too long and content heavy. I want to discuss two different examples of how length and a clear call to action within the content play an important role in determining your email message's chance for success. These are based on promotional emails, but the general rules apply to any type of email communication. Let's look at a fictional scenario of two different emails with the same goal but different approaches to length and call to action.

A well-known magazine publisher is hosting an upcoming event aimed at gathering thousands of industry vendors, subscribers, and thought leaders. This is the publisher's biggest event of the year and generates substantial revenue. There is a lot of pressure on the marketing team to increase registration, and email is the team's main strategy for reaching potential registrants. The team decides to send two different emails and see which one performs better. Let's compare the two.

### **Email 1: long copy**

In the first email, the marketing team decided on long copy. The marketing team members had so much information to share with potential attendees and wanted to make sure that key points on the purpose of the event, location, speakers, workshops, and date were included. Hoping to capitalize on the attention of the recipients who opened the email, the marketing team decided to put everything about the conference directly in the message body. This would mean less work and effort for the recipients who wanted to register or learn

more. The email also contained an image that, upon clicking, would direct recipients directly to the registration page.

**The verdict:**

Hopefully, you are cringing by reading this. I know I did while writing it. The problem with this message is that the copy was so long that the recipients likely got lost and didn't see the clear purpose of the email. Trying to give the recipients too much information backfired. In addition, the call to action (registration link) was buried deep in the email. To top it off, the fact that the link was an image meant that it probably didn't show up for many of the recipients whose email filters block images.

**Email 2: short copy**

The second email tested by the team had much shorter copy. The recipients were separated by size of company, and a targeted message was sent to each list segment. Above the fold were key pieces of information on the conference and a link to a website that would allow recipients to register. The call to action and purpose of the email were clearly stated above the fold. In addition, the team decided to try placing the call to action in a few different places, hopefully increasing the chance it would get some attention.

**The verdict:**

Obviously, the second email was the smarter choice. By keeping the email simple, clearly stating the purpose, offering multiple call-to-action links, and, most importantly, segmenting for higher relevancy, the marketing team was on its way to increasing registrations and revenue.

Here are the key takeaways.

- Keep your emails succinct and your message on target to achieve your goals.
- If you have a lot of content, put it on the website and link to it from the email.
- You have a limited window of recipients scanning your email—design accordingly.

- Provide incentive for recipients to click through such as a creative call to action beyond the standard “Click Here.” An example would be, on a holiday email, “Get Your Christmas Cheer Here (not to mention free shipping).” Doesn’t that stand out and compel you to act more than a Click Here button?
- Clearly define your internal goal. (If it is revenue, determine which link is the driver and ensure proper and prime placement.)
- Make the layout of the email easy for recipients to quickly act upon.
- Create an engaging Subject line that clues recipients in to the purpose of the email.
- Think about what shows up “above the fold.” If recipients only view your email in their preview pane, can they see the call to action?
- Whether newsletter or promotional email, test it with some nonstakeholders to see how they view and respond to the email.
- Use the same call-to-action link in multiple places in the email (text and image).
- Prevent overwhelming the email with nonessential content by minimizing distractions (images, corporate marketing, and the like) that don’t further your goal.
- Measure and compare the results. Don’t just focus on the aggregate stats (opens and click-throughs) for the email, but which links were clicked. When analyzing the data, use that information for the next campaign. This means if most of the people clicked on a graphic promoting a separate product or service that wasn’t the feature of the email, 1) your call to action wasn’t clear and 2) the heavily clicked-on secondary image deserves its own email focused solely on that product/service.

